

Sarah Caillard

Concrete Sweethearts

27.02 - 23.05.26 CC STROMBEEK



In myth, woman's boundaries are pliant, porous, mutable. [...] Deformation attends her. She swells, she shrinks, she leaks, she is penetrated, she suffers metamorphoses. The women of mythology regularly lose their form in monstrosity.

– Anne Carson, *Men in the Off Hours*

Sarah Caillard's multidisciplinary practice draws inspiration from film history and visual culture to explore how feminine archetypes are articulated, sustained, and subverted across art history, popular culture, and myth. In *Concrete Sweethearts*, her first solo institutional exhibition in Belgium, Caillard transforms the labyrinthine, subterranean spaces of CC Strombeek into an immersive environment of video, sculpture, and miniatures that resonate with the conditions of pliancy and deformation historically ascribed to mythical female figures.

The exhibition's scenography suggests the shifts in scale, form, and materiality implied by Anne Carson's description of mutable female bodies. Structured as a slumber party suspended between reality and fiction, life-sized reclining concrete figures with faintly glimmering surfaces share space with fragile, miniature models of girlish bedrooms. These intimate, scaled environments—saturated by bygone gestures, dreams, desires, and fantasy—set the stage for Caillard's broader understanding of myth, which she conceives not as a distant inheritance but as an imprint: something that molds bodies and behaviors through repetition, contact, and circulation, accumulating affect as it passes among individuals and historical contexts.

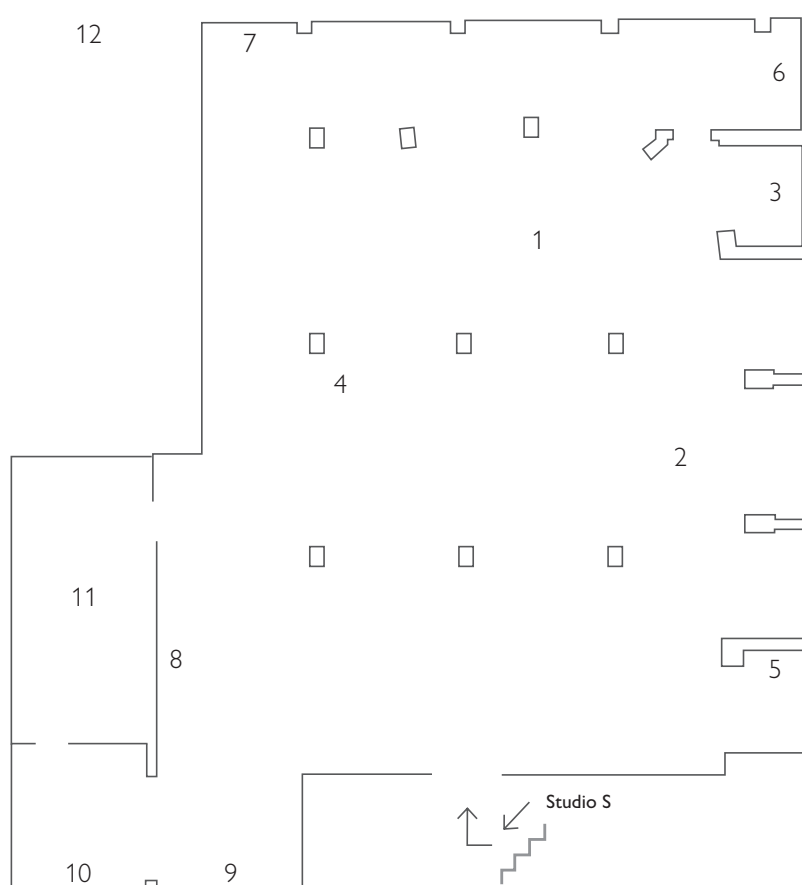
This accumulation is particularly evident in the video work *Britney Paradox, the medusa effect*, which opens with a close-up of a young woman narrating the story of Medusa. Illuminated from beneath by a flashlight, she adopts a ritualized, performative form of storytelling, like a ghost story shared at sleepovers or camping trips. "The story," she tells us, "comes from time immemorial. It is about a gaze, that of a young girl. [...] At first the girl was called Medusa, then Britney." One of the most formidable pop stars of the early aughts, Britney Spears captivated audiences

by embodying archetypes such as the Girl Next Door, Lolita, and Pop Princess, exuding a mix of relatability, vulnerability, aspirational fantasy, and intimacy. Fans were drawn into this affective orbit, participating in her work through covers, dance routines, and social media imitation—even before platforms like Instagram or TikTok made such circulation ubiquitous. Caillard integrates a number of such webcam tributes into her video, recasting these tributes as a dispersed chorus—both in the sense of choral form and the chorus of Greek tragedy. Intercut with snippets from old interviews and paparazzi footage, *Britney Paradox* witnesses how the singer's visibility contributed to her undoing, exposing her to intense ridicule and media scrutiny, her public unraveling captured in the cool, unblinking eye of the telephoto lens. Just as Britney's visibility reflects broader cultural anxieties about femininity, Medusa in mythology has long embodied the tension between female power, vulnerability, and monstrosity. She is at once feared and objectified, rendered dangerous by the gaze, yet her excess and deformity also mark her as a site of fascination and projection. If the myth of the Gorgon whose gaze turned men to stone appears here as a whispered story—first as a monologue and then as a casual pyjama-party exchange between girlfriends, full of digressions and laughter—it is because Caillard understands how myths and feminine archetypes operate less as fixed narratives than as residues: impressions that linger, resurface, and adhere to new bodies, gestures, and cultural contexts across time.

Caillard's understanding of myth as something that clings rather than simply repeats resonates with Sara Ahmed's theorization of "stickiness," in which affects are not inherent properties of objects or bodies but a relational quality. For Ahmed, what sticks is what has been touched many times before:

objects and bodies accrue emotional charge their histories of contact, leaving impressions that shape how they are encountered again. In *Britney Paradox, the medusa effect*, Medusa operates precisely in this sticky register—not as a static mythological persona, but an accumulation of stories and anxieties that have adhered, over time, to other feminine bodies deemed excessive, vulnerable, or spectacular. The popstar appears here less as an individual subject than as a contemporary surface of inscription, onto which older mythological anxieties about female visibility and sexuality continue to press. The saccharine textures of pop music and performative webcam YouTube videos that Caillard gleans from YouTube do not dilute this mythic charge; instead, they function as conduits through which it is transmitted, softened, distorted, and made intimate. The myth of Medusa, in Caillard's hands, appears as an emotional residue—sticky, sentimental, persistent—yet, in her recuperation, somehow pliable, capable of giving us more.

Text by Jesi Khadivi



1. **Concrete sweetheart 1**, 2026
inox, armed concrete, glitter, pigments, steel, retro-reflective microbeads, carborundum
200 x 60 x 30 cm
2. **Concrete sweetheart 2**, 2026
inox, armed concrete, glitter, pigments, steel, retro-reflective microbeads, carborundum
100 x 50 x 30 cm
3. **Concrete sweetheart 3**, 2026
armed concrete, glitter, pigments, steel, retro-reflective microbeads, carborundum
180 x 60 x 25 cm
4. **Midnight**, 2026
steel, cristal, blue screen
90 x 90 x 90 cm
5. **The medusa**, 2026
acrylic, oil pencil, pastel and alcohol ink on silk
18 x 24 cm
6. **The flash**, 2026
acrylic, oil pencil, pastel and alcohol ink on silk
18 x 24 cm
7. **The fan**, 2026
acrylic, oil pencil, pastel and alcohol ink on silk
18 x 24 cm
8. **Room tone 1**, 2026
wood and mixed media
50 x 30 cm
9. **Room tone 2**, 2026
wood and mixed media
50 x 30 cm
10. **Room tone 3**, 2026
wood and mixed media
50 x 30 cm
11. **Britney Paradox, the medusa effect**, 2026
Single-channel video, 25:00
12. **The escape**, 2025
reinforced concrete, fiber, steel, retro-reflective microbeads, carborundum, resin, pigments, glitter, 186 x 60 x 43 cm

In front of the cultural centre: