



Entangled in Motherhood: Analyzing Janine Antoni's *Inhabit*

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Abstract: My research analyzes the 2009 artwork *Inhabit* by the American sculptor and performance artist Janine Antoni. This female artist uses her own body as an object for creating art as well as an object to be viewed. Antoni's work engages with the feminist issues associated with both the depiction of the female form in art as well as the historical roles of women as reproducers rather than makers of art. *Inhabit* weaves together associations from both the past and the present in order to explore the construction of the notion of motherhood. Antoni's postmodern work acknowledges maternity as both empowering and restrictive, allowing viewers to make their own conclusions about the role of the mother in the contemporary world.

Influences on *Inhabit*

Inhabit is influenced by sculpture artist Louise Bourgeois and her spider sculptures. *Inhabit* is also influenced by the Madonna della Misericordia or the Virgin of Mercy.



Other notable works by Janine Antoni

2038 (top) reflects on fertility and the objectification and commodification of essential female anatomy.



Loving Care (bottom) is an example of Janine using her body as a tool. This piece also reflects on the objectification of women.

Analysis: Janine's idea to interact with a spider in this manner relates to ancient mythologies such as Arachne, a weaver of the universe. When Arachne lost to Athena in the competition for the most beautiful tapestry, Arachne was transformed by the goddess into a spider. The association of the spider relates to femininity by the job of weaving, which has been the dominant occupation for women for centuries. This also relates back to working in a home setting as many weavers work their homes, which was the place women in history belonged to most. In her work, Janine becomes that spider woman, being suspended within the web and the home and creating and weaving a home space. You can either interpret her being caught in the net; caught in the role of a mother, bound to her home or you can interpret her being the foundation of the home, a support system that relies on her and what comes between her legs. The house being placed beneath her legs symbolizes her ability to give birth and sustain new life. This a concept that could either be freeing or restraining but living in space between these two emotions is how Janine interprets motherhood. On the topic on motherhood, Janine notes that this work raises the topic of the daughter and mother relationship. Edyta Janiak has stated this while reflecting on Janine's work: "Mother-daughter relationship is seen as one of the most important in a woman's life. Daughter for it is somehow an extension of her mother and her femininity, can be both a source of strength and a sense of community for both, as well as lead to painful and difficult relationships caused by the natural need to move away from the mother and become a mother autonomous unit". Janine's daughter was five at the time of this work, and Janine has noted that "observing her daughter and her full curiosity of communing with objects whose original meaning she did not yet recognize allowed her a fresh look at the matter

Introduction: *Inhabit* focuses on Janine being harnessed and suspended in air with a dollhouse caged in between her legs. Within the dollhouse, a spider begins to weave its web, using both the house and Janine as an anchor. The setting for this performance is within her own child's bedroom. There was much planning that had to go into this performance. She learned, after conversations with many entomologists, that due to spiders unusual sensitivity to movement she had to be immobilized in a harness that would allow the spider to begin its weaving process., Janine states, "I found a model that allowed me to fix it me to the structure with ropes coming out of different points of the caftan covering my torso. I realized that my body could stay suspended in a manner reminiscent of a spider on the web. I would have to build a cage around the legs to keep the spider in this part of the body. It is worth mentioning that from the very beginning in the spider and its web I saw my daughter (the spider) and myself, mother (the web) as a support for her. Suddenly I thought about swapping the cage with a spider for a dollhouse".

