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PORTO

**TOUCH AS A CREATIVE GESTURE:**  
**Sensory Exploration in Audiovisual Artistic Creation**

Internship with Laetitia Farellacci at her studio  
in the context of  
artistic, photographic and audiovisual creation

Internship Report submitted to the Catholic University of Portugal  
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Cinema

*Chiara Pinesi*

Porto/Milan, June 2025





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*To Amélia,  
my portuguese little sister  
who found the time to seat beside me  
and teach me things.*



Figure 1. Project *Fossili*, 2022. Photography by Laetitia Farellacci.



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I would like to thank my family,  
who have always supported the path we chose together,  
helping me become who I am today.

My heartfelt thanks go to Laetitia,  
who welcomed me into her world and inspired me with it.

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to help me interpret this fulfilling experience to the fullest.

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in both Italy and Portugal, those who have always believed in me.



## **Abstract**

The internship took place between October 2024 and March 2025 in Milan, in the studio of Laetitia Farellacci, a photographer whose work is deeply rooted in the themes of maternity, newborn, childhood and womanhood.

Working closely with her on a daily basis, the student had the opportunity to truly understand and experience Laetitia's unique, sensorial approach to photography, one that blends technical skill with emotional depth and artistic sensitivity. These themes resonate strongly with the student's own artistic interests, making the internship not just a professional experience, but also a meaningful space for personal exploration and creative growth.

Throughout the internship, the student was involved in a wide variety of professional and creative activities: assisting in photo sessions, preparing and managing equipment and lighting, contributing to post-production processes and maintaining communication with clients. The student was also in charge of producing all backstage video content for photo sessions, workshops, and masterclasses, and collaborated on the creation of content for social media and online promotion. Additionally, she participated actively in Laetitia Farellacci's workshops and masterclasses, and engaged in daily one-on-one exchanges with the photographer, allowing for continuous learning and feedback. A strong emphasis was placed on the artistic and human aspects of the work, with special attention to the role of touch and presence, both central elements in Laetitia's methodology.

This consistent and immersive experience led the student to develop not only strong technical and organizational skills, but also a deeper understanding of the photographer's unique and sensorially rich approach. This has sparked a new area of theoretical research focused on the importance of tactile experience in the creation of audiovisual work—an aspect that emerged as crucial during the internship and that connects audiovisual production, physical presence, and artistic sensitivity. The internship provided a meaningful and transformative experience, enriching both the student's practical knowledge and her ongoing artistic inquiry.

**Keywords:** Embodiment, Tactile aesthetics, Self-representation, Intermediality, Affective engagement, Spectatorial agency, Artistic Mentorship



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## Introduction

During my internship at Laetitia Farellacci's photography studio in Milan, Italy, from October 2024 to March 2025, I experienced profound artistic and personal growth. The small and welcoming world that Laetitia has built, quickly became part of my daily rhythm—a space that I felt not just like a workplace, but as a constellation of conscious, intentional choices. It resonated deeply with the values that have guided me since I first committed to a path in the arts and creative practice.

Laetitia, who made that same choice years ago, has dedicated her entire life to photography. She has learned to navigate a field that is as demanding as it is beautiful, filled with both inspiration and uncertainty. Having always worked independently, Laetitia has shaped her studio as a tangible result of perseverance and vision—a space earned entirely through her own hands, energy, and creativity. Though modest in scale, the studio reflects the depth of her dedication and became an ideal setting for my learning. It offered me both the time and freedom to contribute meaningfully, and the constant presence of hands-on work allowed me to engage fully with the physical and material dimensions of the creative process.

Together, we printed and experimented with paper, by cutting and gluing; we cleaned and repaired, assembled furniture; we planned structural and organizational improvements. Laetitia taught me what it means to create—not only beginning with an idea and carrying it through to its material realization, but also allowing the material process itself to inspire and generate new meaning. The absence of a pre-structured team meant I could step directly into a space where my presence mattered, where my hands could work alongside hers and become part of the creation.

This experience taught me to materially respect someone else's vision. When you're invited to participate in a creative act, the kind of respect required is different: it moves beyond intention and into the body, into the physical interaction with materials even more than with abstract ideas. It was through this hands-on engagement that I also came into contact with a more spiritual, intangible layer of Laetitia's practice—one that views physical creation as a gateway to subtle, inner understanding.

My most significant discovery was this: to access a deeper, more subtle and more spiritually engaged understanding of life and the world, one must not detach from matter, but move closer to it—increasing the sensitive surface of the body through which we touch the world, training the skin to perceive. Matter is not a barrier between *self* and *other*, but a medium for connection. This heightened tactile sensitivity is essential not only to traditional art forms such as sculpture and painting but also to the creation of media-based works, particularly in a contemporary world where images are often artificially generated.

Although it might seem paradoxical, what I have learned—and what I wish to explore further in this report—is that touch can and should play a fundamental role in audiovisual creation. While screens physically separate viewers from the image, the sensory choices made in crafting audiovisual content can evoke experiences that transcend vision and sound. Touch, therefore, can operate both in the creative act and in the moment of reception.

In Lucio Fontana cut through his canvases, even as we view them, we feel that gesture in our own palms—the sensation of the blade slicing through the surface, and almost, its sound. That tactile memory, though mediated, is deeply real—and it is precisely in that paradox where my inquiry begins. What I aim to demonstrate—drawing on what I learned through Laetitia’s work, which intuitively embodies this principle—is that visual and audiovisual media are born not only from seeing and hearing, but from touching. They are shaped by a sensitivity of the hands, by a form of knowing that resides in the skin as much as in the mind.

## **Short biography of Laetitia Farellacci**

Laetitia Farellacci, born in 1977, has spent the last twenty-five years of her life exploring both herself and the world through photography.

Raised in the silence of the darkroom, she has moved through various forms of photographic expression until finding her true voice in self-portraiture and the forms of nature. In her artistic practice, she explores languages that allow her to delve into themes related to roots, identity, and memory, combining them with an increasingly clear and conscious vision that, in the universe, everything is simply one.

Her Corsican origins have deeply influenced her perception of the world, as the island where she grew up until the age of sixteen continues to exert a significant impact on her art.

The island's history, strong character, unique energy, contradictions, vivid colors and scents, as well as its lights and shadows, all resonate powerfully in her photographic work.

She adopts a highly instinctive approach to self-portraiture, using her body as the primary tool of expression and combining it with ongoing technical experimentation.

Each new project becomes an opportunity to perceive and channel inner energies and emotions, and to share them with the outside world—transforming personal introspection into a visual narrative that extends beyond the self. (Farellacci, 2023).



## Report Structure

This report is organised into four main chapters, each offering a different perspective on the internship experience and collectively forming a coherent narrative that combines practical activities, artistic reflections, and theoretical inquiry. The structure is designed to guide the reader through a gradual unfolding of context, experience, and analysis.

The first chapter introduces the general framework of the internship. It begins with an overview of the working environment and the hosting artist, Laetitia Farellacci, providing essential background for understanding the nature of her practice and the context in which the internship took place. It then outlines the core objectives of the internship and the professional roles I assumed throughout the experience.

The chapter continues with a specific attention on Laetitia's photographic approach to newborns—one of the most distinctive and meaningful aspects of her work—and concludes with a broader insight into her ongoing artistic research.

The second chapter is dedicated to the internship plan and its implementation. It details the schedule and progression of the various activities over time, highlighting the evolution of my responsibilities and my gradual integration into the studio's working environment. It also describes my contributions to Laetitia's projects and discusses the transversal and educational experiences that enriched my training. The chapter concludes with a reflective synthesis of the experiences narrated.

The third chapter shifts the focus towards the theoretical reflections developed during the internship. At its core is an in-depth analysis of *Fossili*, one of Laetitia Farellacci's most intimate and symbolically rich projects. This work provided an opportunity for close study and became a key reference for exploring broader themes related to the body, memory, and artistic process. The chapter ends with a brief conclusion that frames this theoretical exploration within the broader context of my own research trajectory.

The fourth and final chapter draws together the key insights that emerged during the internship, offering final considerations and outlining possible future directions for both my artistic and professional development.

Complementary sections—including the bibliography and the list of figures—provide additional resources and references to support the content of the report and offer a more comprehensive documentation of the work carried out.

## **1. An Overview**

### **1.1 Work Context and Hosting Artist**

The internship took place in the field of artistic photography and audiovisual production, with a particular focus on maternal and childhood. My area of origin is that of cinema and visual arts, with a specific interest in the narrative of childhood and motherhood. The contact with the photographic environment of Laetitia Farellacci represented a valuable opportunity for interdisciplinary exchange, in which my audiovisual perspective as an artist could dialogue with a photographic practice deeply rooted in the gesture of touch and empathic relationship with the subject. These two fields—cinema and visual arts—integrated naturally: my presence enriched the studio with skills related to storytelling through moving images, while I was able to explore the importance of the tactile dimension in audiovisual creation.

The host organisation was Laetitia Farellacci's photography studio in Milan, Italy. The space is independent and entirely managed by the photographer herself, specialised in newborn photography, maternity and family, but it stands out for a deeply artistic and personal approach that goes beyond the traditional photo shoot. It is a small company, both in terms of physical structure and staff: Laetitia works alone, but occasionally collaborates with videomakers, assistants or interns. The structure of the studio, although contained, is well organized and designed to welcome customers in an intimate environment, attentive and respectful of the delicate moments of pregnancy, birth, motherhood and womanhood.

The studio is well integrated in the artistic and professional scene of Milan, distinguishing itself for the aesthetic quality of its imagery, the relational care extended to clients and the originality of the artistic vision. Her presence on social media dedicated to motherhood and photography further reflects a consistent and recognisable positioning within the context in which she operates.

From the daily interaction with Laetitia and the careful observation of her artistic practice, I developed a new awareness of the role of the body—and in particular the sense of touch—in visual creation processes. I have come to see manual engagement not simply as a technical necessity, but as a form of thinking in itself. Through touch—shaping materials,

preparing spaces, arranging details—I discovered a tactile intelligence, a silent language that deepened my connection to the creative process.

Through this experience, I came to understand that attention to materiality, slowness, bodily presence, and sensory awareness is a form of care—one that becomes visible in the very images it helps create, whether photographic or audiovisual. I began to conceive of the creative act not merely as a mental or aesthetic construction, but as an embodied process in which the creator’s body enters into intimate dialogue with both matter and space.

This experience also taught me to slow down, to welcome mistakes as part of the process, and to trust in time and transformation. I began to develop a more attentive, more empathetic gaze—one that can recognize the poetry in everyday gestures. What I carry with me from this internship is not only a technical or professional growth, but a deeper shift in how I inhabit the world and create: a practice that begins in the body, moves through touch, and becomes image—an image capable of transmitting that same sensitivity to others.

## **1.2 Core Objectives and Professional Functions Assumed During the Internship: A Process of Creative Immersion**

The main objectives of my internship were closely tied to gaining direct experience of the daily functioning of an independent photographic studio and to actively participating in its creative, operational, and logistical processes. My responsibilities ranged from preparing photo sets and assisting with technical equipment, to supporting client communication, prints preparation and packaging, documenting sessions with video, and contributing to the physical organization and maintenance of the studio space.

From the very beginning, my integration into the studio environment was immersive. Over the six-month period from October 2024 to March 2025, I maintained a regular and increasingly intense presence. During the first month, I worked approximately three days a week, gradually increasing to four or even five days, especially during December, when the studio experienced peak activity and occasional sessions were scheduled over weekends. On average, my working hours extended from around 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., offering me the opportunity to fully accompany the daily rhythm of Laetitia's work and to observe and participate in each phase of the creative process.

The absence of a formal team structure meant that my role was not rigidly predefined. Rather, it adapted fluidly to the needs of the studio and evolved dynamically as I became more confident and autonomous. This flexibility allowed me to engage in a wide range of tasks—not only logistical and technical, but also conceptual and creative. I was encouraged to offer ideas, participate in artistic discussions, and become part of a workflow where decision-making and intuition coexisted naturally.

The internship followed an experiential learning methodology. Through direct observation, repetition, and collaborative practice, I was introduced to Laetitia's artistic method—a process distinctly shaped by somatic consciousness and a subtle spiritual dimension. Alongside the practical aspects of her profession, she introduced me to subtle but essential components of her work—such as bodily presence, emotional listening, and the role of touch in both photographic and interpersonal relations.

As the internship progressed, our working relationship was increasingly marked by trust and mutual respect. Laetitia eventually entrusted me with the keys to the

studio, allowing me to carry out specific tasks independently in her absence—such as preparing the space before a session, organizing materials, or managing the printing workflow. This autonomy was not only a sign of her confidence in my reliability, but also a formative opportunity to take responsibility for the daily functioning of a creative space.

Occasionally, our collaboration extended beyond the studio walls. When the nature of the work leaned more toward conceptual development than technical execution—such as planning future projects, reviewing past works, or engaging in reflective dialogue—we met and worked in the more intimate setting of her home. These moments, less structured but deeply valuable, offered me the chance to be part of her creative process in its most fluid and intuitive form, where ideas were shared openly and shaped collaboratively. This combination of practical involvement and intellectual exchange defined the immersive and multidimensional character of the internship.

This long-term experience also led me to develop a parallel line of inquiry, which gradually became central to my own theoretical research.

Thanks to a valuable collaboration with a videomaker, Riccardo Piccione, I was able to experiment with forms of visual narration that preserve and convey a sense of tactility, resonance, and sensory involvement—remaining deeply faithful to the photographic language of *Fossili* while translating it into an audiovisual form. Thanks to a valuable collaboration with a videomaker, I was able to experiment with forms of visual narration that preserve and convey a sense of tactility, resonance, and sensory involvement—remaining deeply faithful to the photographic language of *Fossili* while translating it into an audiovisual form.

This idea matured during the internship and now shapes the central hypothesis of this report: that touch, far from being confined to traditional material arts, plays a vital role in the creation and reception of contemporary audiovisual work.

### 1.3 Laetitia's Photographic Approach to Newborn Photography

Observing Laetitia Farellacci's photographic process with newborns during my internship, resembled an entry into a world where time slows down and attention is directed towards what is ordinarily invisible. Her approach diverges significantly from conventional infant portraiture: it does not aim to produce cute, polished images or decorative memories. Instead, Laetitia approaches the newborn as a deeply sensitive being, still partially connected to something ancient, something intangible, which she treats with great care and respect. She often describes that newborns are “bridges”—temporary messengers between different dimensions of experience. Not in a religious sense, but in a way that acknowledges how these very young lives, just recently shaped into body and skin, still carry traces of memories and awarenesses that we, as adults, have forgotten. This in-between state is at the center of her work.

In the studio, her presence is quiet but incredibly grounded. Laetitia doesn't merely photograph babies—she receives them. From the very first moment, she is the one who lifts them from their stroller or their parents' arms. The gesture is neither hurried nor mechanical. It is attentive, intimate, and performed with a kind of certainty that immediately soothes both child and the parents. What follows is not a photo shoot, but an experience of care. She holds the newborn close to her chest, physically containing them in a way that soothes their nervous system. Based on deep observation, she understands that excessive space around a newborn can feel disorienting. So, she becomes a soft, warm boundary—wrapping them in organic fabrics that follow the baby's natural posture, never forcing it, always feeling and listening.

One of the most distinctive parts of her practice is her use of vocal vibration. She produces a soft, low sound—less a melody, more a bodily resonance—by closing her lips and humming a steady note. This sound is felt by the baby more through the body than through the ears. She describes it as a “heart-to-heart” communication. It's not about entertainment or stimulation, but about connection and grounding. The babies often respond by relaxing deeply, sometimes drifting into sleep, sometimes opening their eyes in a moment of curiosity that she values even more than the typical posed portraits.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A backstage video I recorded—showing Laetitia harmonizing to calm the baby—can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DF8WOO5MpUX/>

When the moment comes, Laetitia takes her photographs without interrupting the experience. The image is never the goal—it is a natural outcome. She does not seek perfection but is drawn to authenticity. She loves the unexpected gestures: a yawn, a small hand stretching, a wide-eyed stare straight into the lens. These are the moments that make her eyes light up—she often speaks of them as gifts or rewards, things that cannot be staged or anticipated.

Her hand gently follows the child's movements. She doesn't pose the infant; she responds to the infant, like a spring that adjusts itself moment by moment. It's a silent dialogue made entirely through bodies. If a baby wakes up and needs to feed, the mother is invited to breastfeed, without hesitation or embarrassment. Laetitia never rushes or overrides the baby's rhythm. Her expertise shows in the smallest gestures: changing a diaper on her lap, calming a restless child with a soft touch. And all of this happens while the camera waits—patiently, almost unnoticed.

For Laetitia, the session is first and foremost a moment of wellbeing. The photograph comes after. And this order of priorities transforms everything. It shifts the whole dynamic from performance to presence, from representation to experience, as I think is well depicted in Figure 2. The studio becomes a small, protected world where care and art are inseparable. The silence, the filtered light, the scent of warm fabrics—all contribute to an atmosphere where the image is not constructed, but allowed to emerge.

From my perspective as an intern and observer, witnessing her process was deeply transformative. It challenged my assumptions about photography and reminded me that the most powerful images often arise not from control, but from surrender. Laetitia's work invited me to rethink photography not just as a visual medium, but as a form of embodied relation.

A quiet trace of something that was lived—fully, tenderly, and together.



Figure 2. Backstage photo taken during one of Laetitia's Farellacci newborn photography sessions, november 2024. Photography by Chiara Pinesi.



## 1.4 Laetitia's Personal Artistic Research

Laetitia Farellacci's artistic research presents a fascinating interplay between different facets of photographic practice that, while formally separated, are allowed to coexist within a unified sphere of creative exploration and continuous renewal. Although she differentiates her commercial photographic work, often oriented toward newborns and intimate portraiture, from her personal artistic projects, the underlying approach and methodologies remain deeply intertwined. Both realms share a commitment to sensitivity, presence, and an embodied experience of creation that transcends the mere production of images.

Central to Laetitia's personal research is the practice of self-portraiture, which she regards not simply as a photographic genre but as an intimate dialogue with herself and the medium. The inquiry into the self becomes a space where she navigates identity, vulnerability, and universality, blurring the boundaries between artist, subject, and viewer. Identically, this process is not static but dynamic, resembling a dance in which she is simultaneously the dancer, the choreographer, and the audience. Through this interplay, she explores the ways in which photography can act as a medium of self-discovery and connection to broader human experiences.

Dance itself holds a special place in her work and life. For Laetitia, dancing is both a personal practice of wellbeing and an artistic tool that infuses her photographic process with fluidity and presence. Whether in daily life or within the frame of her self-portraits, movement and rhythm serve as means to dissolve barriers, awaken the body, and open pathways to intuition and emotional resonance. This embodied approach is evident in her use of long exposures and motion blur—as shown in Figure 3—both techniques that capture the ephemeral traces of movement and evoke a poetic sense of time, light, and transformation.



Figure 3. Untitled, 2022. Photography by Laetitia Farellacci.  
Gold Medal in the category “Nude” in the Black And White International Awards.

Key themes emerge consistently throughout her oeuvre: touch, tactile sensitivity, materiality, and the primal echo of the body. Her series *Fossili*—one of whose photographs is shown in Figure 4—exemplifies this focus, engaging with notions of contact and memory, as well as the elemental layers that lie beneath the surface of skin and form. The body—often depicted in its naked, vulnerable state—becomes a landscape of stories, emotions, and universal symbolism. Her attention to skin and flesh is not purely physical but deeply spiritual, embracing non-religious, expanded sense of spirituality. This spirituality is closely linked to ideas of maternity, femininity, and the cyclical nature of life, positioning the female body as a site of creation, transformation, and sacredness.

She frequently employs the technique of double exposure, which can be appreciated in Figures 5 and 6, skillfully integrating it both in-camera during the shooting process and later in post-production. Through this layered approach, Laetitia superimposes meaningful symbols and significant visual elements onto the contours of naked female bodies, creating complex and evocative compositions. These overlapping images generate a dialogue between the physical form and abstract concepts, enriching the narrative with layers of metaphor and emotional depth. The use of double exposure, as seen in Figures 5 and 6, not only enhances the tactile and material quality of her work but also invites the viewer to explore themes of identity, memory, and transformation embedded within the interplay of body and symbol.

Another deeply personal dimension of Laetitia's artistic exploration is embodied in the project *Corsica Meia, L'isola*, one of whose photographs is shown in Figure 4. Having grown up in Corsica and lived there until 1992, Laetitia experienced a sudden and silent departure at the age of sixteen when she and her family moved to Milan. This abrupt transition triggered in her a profound sense of disorientation, loss, and uprooting that shaped her adolescence. For years, she did not return to the island, yet the longing to embrace Corsica again remained a persistent presence in her mind. In 2022, three decades later and with greater awareness, Laetitia undertook a reparative journey, metaphorically taking the hand of her sixteen-year-old self and guiding her back to the island. This project reflects a poignant process of reconnection, memory, and identity, interweaving personal history with broader themes of belonging and homecoming.



Figure 4. *Corsica Meia - L'isola*, 2022. Photography by Laetitia Farellacci.

In this photographic series on the island, the role of touch is fundamental. It is precisely through a heightened sense of corporeality that Laetitia reestablishes her connection with her homeland—not simply as an abstract place or concept, but as a tangible, material earth. This earth, rich in texture and substance, represents the very ground where roots are planted and nurtured. Through this sensorial engagement with the physicality of the land, her work transcends the realm of representation, becoming an embodied dialogue with the natural, maternal essence of Corsica itself.

The use of natural light is central to her photographic work, enhancing the tactile and intimate atmosphere of her compositions., reinforcing the organic and intimate quality of her images. The subtle interplay between light and shadow enhances the materiality of the subjects and evokes a sense of presence and immediacy, inviting the viewer into a quiet, contemplative space.

In sum, Laetitia Farellacci's artistic research weaves together themes of universality, spirituality, corporeality, and movement into a holistic practice. Her work dismantles dichotomies—between commercial and artistic, body and spirit, stillness and motion—to propose a photographic language that is at once deeply personal and profoundly human.



Figure 5. *Incontrare il sé*, 2021/22. Photography by Laetitia Farellacci.



Figure 6. *Incontrare il sé*, 2021/22. Photography by Laetitia Farellacci.

## 2. Internship Plan

My internship at the photographic studio of Laetitia Farellacci was structured over six months of intense daily involvement in an artistic working environment deeply rooted in bodily practice, gesture and awareness. From the very first day, I was welcomed into an intimate and authentic space where the boundaries between work, research, and personal life were intentionally blurred, and where every activity, even the most practical, was imbued with meaning. My integration into this environment happened gradually but naturally: my constant presence allowed the creation of a genuine and ongoing connection with Laetitia and her creative universe, generating a space of trust in which I was able to observe, act, and reflect.

In the early weeks, Laetitia shared with me the main stages of her career, highlighting the most significant steps, the difficulties she encountered, the changes she faced and the vision that drives her work. This moment of openness was crucial in helping me understand the direction of her artistic practice and to align, as much as possible, with her values and objectives. I had the opportunity to explore the visual and conceptual identity of her work, centered on values such as spirituality, presence and tactile perception: in her practice, photography is not only a document, but a ritual gesture, a form of deep relationship between photographer and subject.

One area I explored in depth was Laetitia's approach to newborn photography. As previously noticed, her perspective is radically different from the idealized and stylized imagery we often see; instead, she seeks truth and naturalness, with deep respect for the rhythms and needs of the newborn. Her work fosters a tender, honest, and sensitive vision of life in its earliest days. Through this, I came to understand how essential elements like breath, tone of voice, and touch were in cultivating a space of trust and welcome during photo sessions.

My contributions were initially practical and logistical. I supported the preparation of the space, the care of equipment, set assembly and disassembly, studio cleaning, and the day-to-day organization of activities. I also took part in image selection and post-production, observing and learning the entire workflow—from session preparation to printing and delivery of the final works. Additionally, I collaborated with Laetitia on the project of designing a small handmade darkroom, which allowed me to explore analog photography and

reflect on the material relationship we have with the image. In parallel, I carried out technical and strategic research in the digital field, analyzing e-learning platforms for potential use in her online workshops, and gaining familiarity with tools for communication and promotion.

Although these activities were distinct from the photographic sessions, they were equally formative, offering me insight into the complexity of sustaining an independent artistic practice. Equally important were the moments of theoretical and human exchange with Laetitia. Together, we reflected on how her photographic sensitivity might be translated into audiovisual language, in dialogue with videographers who collaborate with her. These conversations deeply resonated with my own artistic research, prompting me to consider how gesture, the body, and touch can inform media creation.

From these exchanges emerged the central idea behind my theoretical investigation: that visual and audiovisual media not only can, but should, convey tactile sensations—and that to achieve this, creators must begin by perceiving reality not just through their eyes and ears, but through their hands and skin as well. The experience was further enriched by unconventional, yet fundamental, aspects of Laetitia's working method: meditations, conscious walks, practices of inner listening, and personal reflection exercises. I was also invited to explore tools like numerology, the symbolism embedded in photographic composition, and visual observation exercises aimed at training the eye to perceive light, balance, and space more consciously. These moments were essential in shaping a more aware and intentional gaze, and in helping me understand my role as a future author.

In summary, my internship was a multidimensional journey that brought together hands-on work, theoretical inquiry, sensory exploration, and personal development. It left me with a renewed vision of art—as a gesture of care, a pathway to well-being and recognition, both for those who create and for those who observe.

## 2.1 Timeline of Activities

The timeline of activities carried out during my internship reflects the gradual and progressive nature of my integration into the studio and its various phases of work. My inclusion in the team followed a learning process that involved the acquisition of practical, theoretical, and creative skills. The distribution of tasks was designed to support my training and personal development in a balanced and coherent way.

### OCTOBER 2024: INITIAL PHASE OF INTEGRATION AND ACTIVE OBSERVATION

At the beginning of my internship, my main activity was to familiarize myself with the studio environment and working methods. Laetitia introduced me to the various aspects of her work, including space management techniques and photographic equipment, as well as the philosophy that guides her artistic practice. I had the opportunity to closely observe her photo sessions, film backstage content and to begin understanding her practical and sensitive method. One of the most valuable aspects of this phase was being able to assist her during newborn photo sessions. Laetitia patiently guided me through every step of the process, teaching me how to create a calming, safe environment for both the babies and their families. I learned how essential it is to handle newborns gently and with utmost care, ensuring that every move is slow and meant to not disturb their natural state. Her connection with babies is clearly depicted in Figure 7.

In addition to the physical handling of the newborns, I also learned the importance of maintaining a peaceful atmosphere. Laetitia emphasized the need for a quiet and relaxed environment, where both parents and the baby felt secure and comfortable. I observed how every detail, such as the lighting, the positioning of the baby, and even the tone of voice, played a vital role in capturing those tender moments.

Throughout this month, I provided logistical support by helping to prepare the sets, manage tools, and ensure everything was in place for each session. Figure 8 shows notes from my notebook regarding lighting and the preparation of the beanbag. Beyond these tasks, I focused on deeply absorbing the atmosphere and dynamics of the studio. This process allowed me to understand not just the technical aspects of the work, but also the deep sensitivity required to connect with the subjects and to respect their boundaries, especially in such intimate settings.



Figure 7. First newborn photography session I assisted during the internship  
October 5, 2024.

Photograph by Chiara Pinesi.

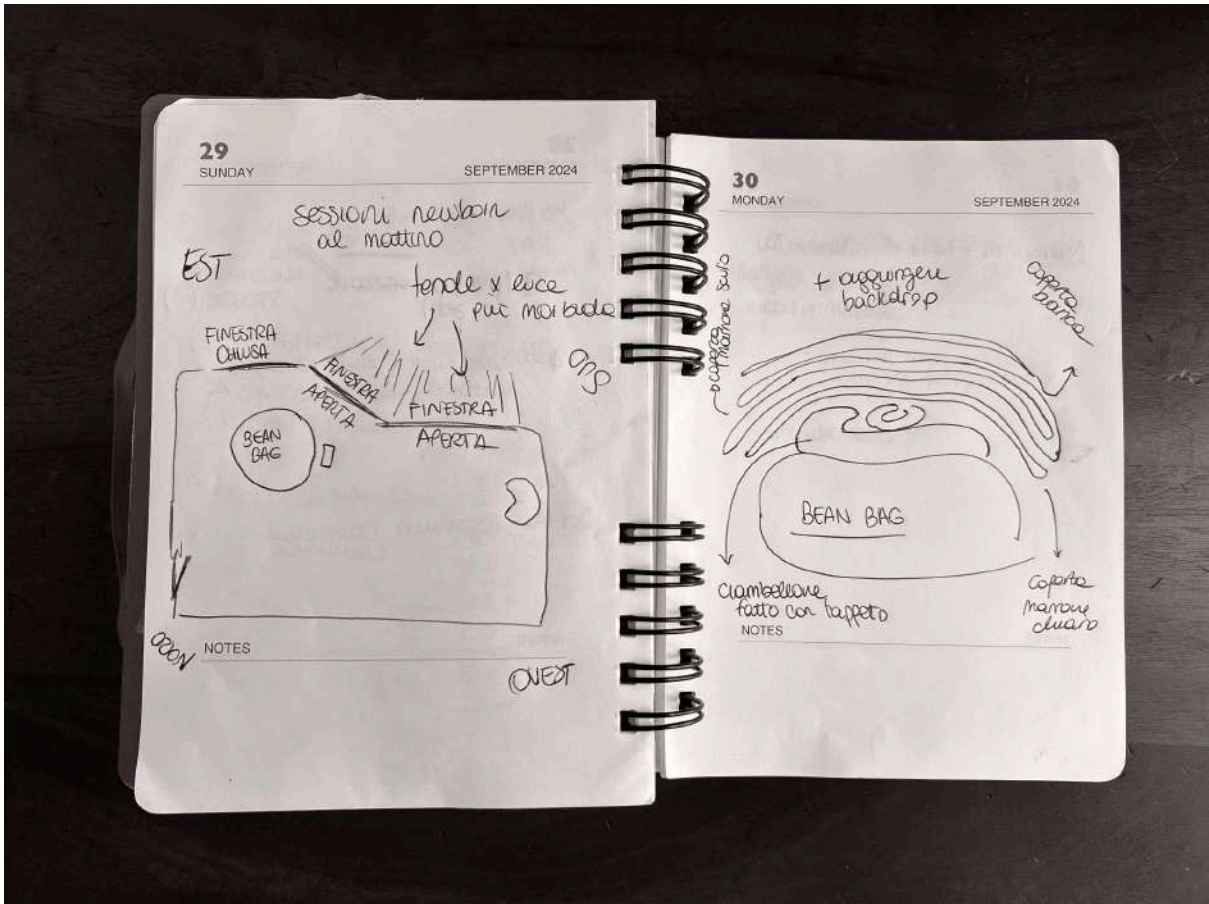


Figure 8. Pages from my notebook: initial notes on natural light management in Laetitia's studio (left) and beanbag preparation for newborn sessions (right).

## NOVEMBER 2024: START OF HANDS-ON COLLABORATION AND INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKFLOW

From the second month, I started to be actively involved in the photo sessions, not only as an assistant but also as an interlocutor in matters of artistic choice. During this time, Laetitia began to involve me in the pre-production phase and equipment setup, explaining the importance of each element in the process of creating the image. It was also at this stage that Laetitia taught me her post-production workflow, so that I could soon take charge of it in preparation for the following month, when her main portraiture project would start to be requested by many clients. Figure 9 shows notes from my notebook regarding studio lighting setup and the post production workflow for portrait sessions..

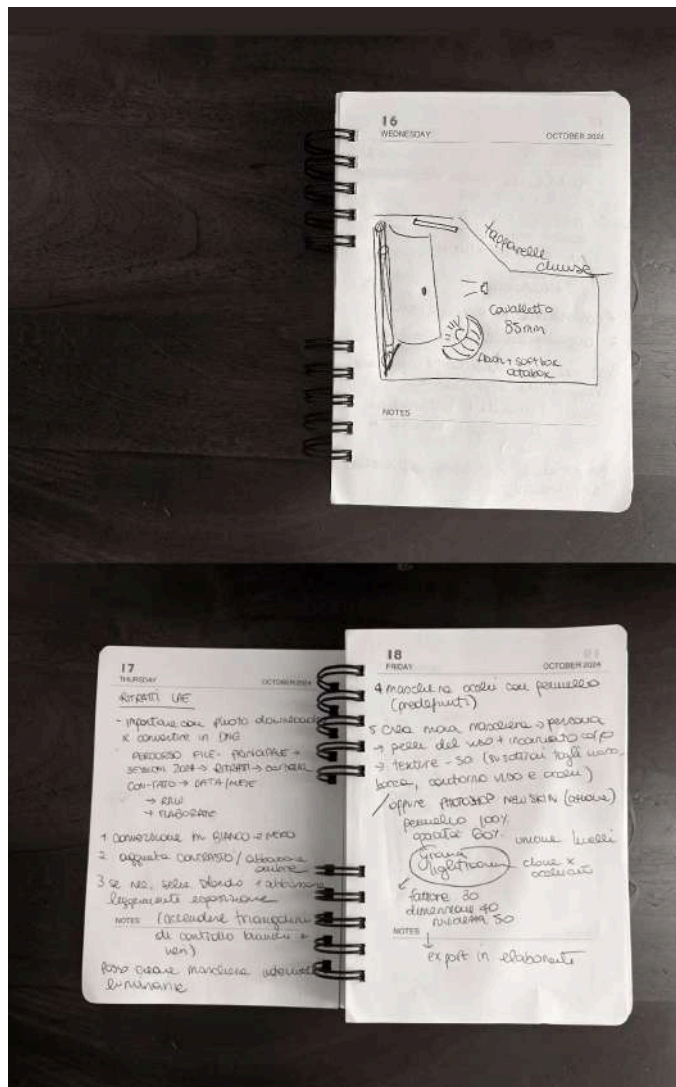


Figure 9. Pages from my notebook: notes on artificial light management for studio portraits (top), and notes on file organization and post-production workflow (bottom).

## DECEMBER 2024: IMMERSION IN STUDIO DYNAMICS AND HUMAN INTERACTION

December was a month of intense work, during which it was necessary to dedicate most of the available time and energy to preparing the sets and the studio to welcome the large number of clients who wished to be portrayed by Laetitia. This month turned out to be very different from the others, but also extremely valuable in terms of the more practical and organizational aspects of working in a studio. Laetitia's portrait project brought a significantly large number of people into the studio, who would often meet and interact while waiting for their turn. My role in these situations was therefore not limited to the creative and preparatory side, but also included shooting video content for the promotion of the project and managing the flow of people—welcoming them and making them feel comfortable while they waited. Some previews of the backstage videos are shown in Figure 10, while Figures 11, 12, and 13 depict a young girl waiting for her family portrait to be printed, Laetitia at work during a portrait session, and the framed prints ready to be delivered. December was thus essential for testing my organizational skills and, above all, my social interaction abilities, which are crucial in this line of work. Moreover, it was a meaningful opportunity for Laetitia to show the trust she had developed in me, which made me feel reliable, valued, and, of course, proud.



Figure 10. Archive of backstage videos taken by me during portrait sessions, December 2024.

+



Figure 11. Young girl waiting for the printed portrait of her and her family to be ready.  
December 2024. Photograph by Chiara Pinesi.



Figure 12. Laetitia in the studio during a portrait session.  
December 2024. Photograph by Chiara Pinesi.



Figure 13. Portrait prints framed, packaged and ready for delivery  
December 2024. Photograph by Chiara Pinesi

## JANUARY 2025: E-LEARNING PRODUCTION AND AUDIENCE ENGAGING

In January, I worked closely with Laetitia to explore and implement digital communication strategies, with a particular focus on e-learning platforms and mailing list management. I researched how to effectively promote the studio's creative content online and engage a broader audience through tailored communication tools. This included learning how to use automation systems for managing digital outreach and creating educational materials. The core of my work, as shown in Figures 14 and 15, was dedicated to filming and producing Laetitia's lessons for her online courses, marking a significant step in translating her in-person teaching into accessible digital formats.



Figure 14. Backstage photograph by Chiara Pinesi, taken during the filming of video content for Laetitia's online photography courses. January 2025

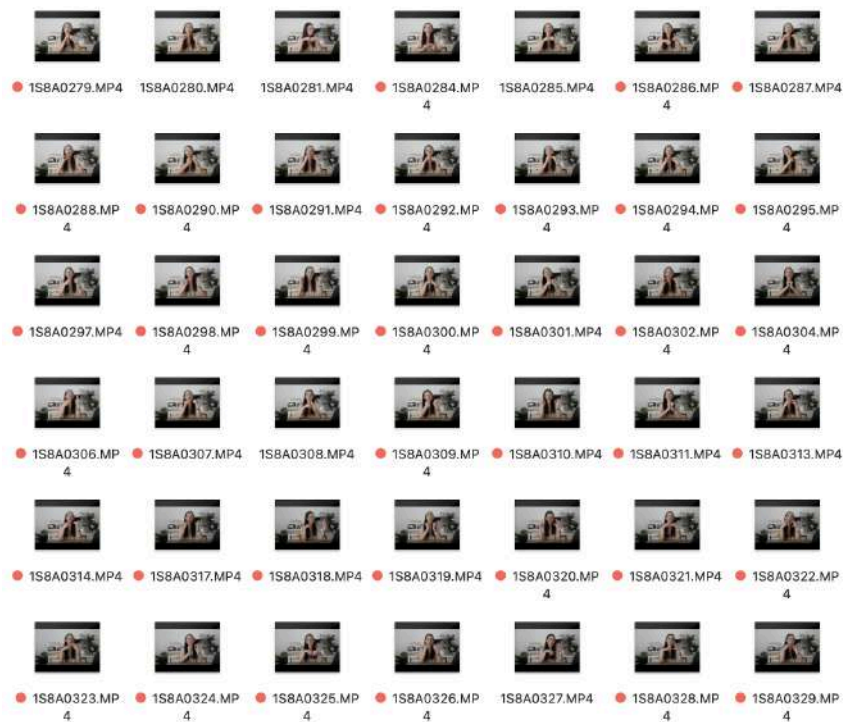


Figure 15. Archive of videos I recorded for Laetitia's online courses for photographers

## FEBRUARY 2025: THE TACTILE APPROACH: TRANSLATING STILL IMAGES TO MOVING PICTURES

In February, I had the opportunity to work closely with a professional videomaker who collaborates with Laetitia. This phase of the internship was dedicated to exploring how photographic sensitivity can be translated into the language of video. The main objective was to adapt two of Laetitia's most significant artistic photography projects, titled *Fossili* and *The Maternity Experience*, into an audiovisual format (here the link with the final version of *The Maternity Experience*<sup>2</sup> and *Fossili*<sup>3</sup> filmed by Riccardo Piccione).

Figure 16 documents the filming process of the audiovisual project *The Maternity Experience*, whereas Figure 17 captures Laetitia testing the set for *Fossili*.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGdnRoTMhvt/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/DG1Tfp8smDI/>

It was during this process that I gained a deeper understanding of Laetitia's unique, tactile approach to creation. This experience marked the beginning of the theoretical reflections that I later developed into the analysis presented in this report.

I took part in brainstorming sessions, creative discussions, and exchanges of ideas about how to carry over visual aesthetics into moving images. Beyond the conceptual work, I was also involved in the production phase, where Laetitia was both the artist and the subject. This gave me the chance to observe her methods in action and to engage directly with the creative process. Working alongside the videomaker allowed me to strengthen my technical videography skills, ask in-depth questions, and above all, begin to truly grasp an approach to artistic creation that originates in the physical gesture of touching and shaping matter.



Figure 16. Laetitia and Riccardo in the studio, working together to adapt Laetitia's project titled *The Maternity Experience* into audiovisual format.

February 2025. Photographs by Chiara Pinesi.



Figure 17. Laetitia testing the set to film *Fossili* with Riccardo Piccione. February 2025.

Photographs by Chiara Pinesi.

#### MARCH 2025: IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF POST-PRODUCTION AND FINAL REFLECTION ON THE CREATIVE GESTURE

In the final month of my internship, I had the opportunity to participate in both a two-day workshop and a two-day mentoring session. Although my role was primarily that of an assistant and video operator, Laetitia fully integrated me into all aspects of the activities, allowing me to experience the process from within. This provided me with the chance to learn directly from her, gaining insights that had previously been absorbed more through observation than explicit instruction. During this period, I deepened my understanding of the creative gesture and its sensory dimension, learning how to translate an idea and the photographic gesture into tangible material reality. Additionally, I explored the relationship between photography and audiovisual work, reflecting on how each medium communicates through body, touch, and how these sensations can be conveyed through digital means.

Figures 18 to 21 document moments from Laetitia's two-day spring workshop in March 2025, capturing her presentations, technical demonstrations, the tactile exercises with participants and her approach with a newborn.



Figure 18. Laetitia presenting her approach to fellow photographers during her two-day spring workshop. March 2025. Photograph by Chiara Pinesi.



Figure 19. Laetitia demonstrating her technical approach in the studio to the participants of the workshop. March 2025. Photograph by Chiara Pinesi.



Figure 20. Participants of the workshop taking part in one of Laetitia's exercises on touch and consciousness.  
March 2025. Photograph by Chiara Pinesi.



Figure 21. Laetitia, during her workshop, demonstrating her tactile approach with a newborn.  
March 2025. Photograph by Chiara Pinesi.

## **2.2 Evolution of Responsibilities and Team Integration**

During the course of my internship, my role evolved within a context of mutual trust and mentoring. From the very beginning, I was not treated as a mere assistant, but as a person to whom Laetitia wished to transmit knowledge—both technical and creative. While my initial tasks included practical aspects such as set preparation, equipment management, and logistical support, I was immediately involved in deeper conversations surrounding the aesthetic and conceptual dimension of her work.

Rather than a gradual progression from assistance to creativity, the two dimensions coexisted from the outset. I was invited to observe closely, to ask questions, and to express ideas, even in the earliest stages of the internship. This approach allowed me to develop confidence and awareness not only in operational tasks but also in the more intangible aspects of photographic creation—such as intuition, rhythm, and presence.

My integration into the studio happened in a natural and organic way. Given the intimate and personal nature of Laetitia's practice, daily work required a high degree of emotional intelligence, relational sensitivity, and attentiveness. Collaboration was not based on hierarchy, but on experience, reciprocity and shared immersion in the process.

Throughout the experience, I was granted the opportunity to be involved in all phases of the workflow: from conceptual development to production and post-production. Laetitia was generous in including me in every step, and this allowed me to deepen not only my technical competencies but also my ability to read and feel an image before making it. I learned how to translate presence into form, and how to approach photography not only as a medium, but as an encounter.



### **2.3 From Support to Trust: Building a Creative Dialogue**

During the internship, I was involved in a wide variety of tasks, ranging from the preparation of photo sets and technical assistance, to the development of structural improvements to the studio space and the production of audiovisual content—such as behind-the-scenes footage and video works for Laetitia’s communication platforms. These activities allowed me to develop both my technical and creative skills, while constantly engaging with the conceptual layers of her artistic process.

One of the moments I found most meaningful came when, after showing me some of her authorial portrait sessions, Laetitia invited me to photograph her. Her request, although framed with great simplicity, carried enormous symbolic weight for me. I remember being initially overcome by a sense of inadequacy: the idea of portraying such a powerful and established artist, using her own studio, her lights, and her deeply personal approach, made me feel fragile and hesitant. I feared not being able to live up to the trust she was placing in me.

Laetitia, however, immediately sensed this internal hesitation. With the sensitivity and clarity that characterize her way of working, she encouraged me to trust myself. She reminded me of the qualities she had often recognized in my personal work, and helped me focus on what I could improve without losing sight of my strengths. That moment was not only an exercise in portraiture, but also a profound act of mentorship and confidence-building, the results of which are illustrated in Figures 22 and 23. Figure 24 presents the caption written by Laetitia for the social media post in which she shared the two studio portraits.

The fact that she later chose to use that photograph in professional and artistic contexts, as a representative image of herself, was a powerful confirmation that my contribution had real value—not only in technical terms, but also as a personal and visual interpretation of her identity. It marked a rare and transformative experience, in which my authorial gaze was invited into her creative world and treated with respect and seriousness.



Figure 22. Studio portrait of Laetitia Farellacci. November 2024.  
Photograph by Chiara Pinesi.



Figure 23. Studio portrait of Laetitia Farellacci. November 2024.  
Photograph by Chiara Pinesi.



laetitiafarellacci ieri, durante un momento di pausa, ho proposto a Chiara, la mia tirocinante, di fare pratica di ritratto usandomi come cavia.

Trovarmi dall'altro lato dell'obiettivo è stata una gran pratica tutt'altro che scontata anche per me.

Nel guardare le mie immagini mi sono sentita messa molto più a nudo di quando tolgo gli abiti per i miei autoritratti.

Nella prima immagine vulnerabilità. Guardare in macchina è potente.

Guardare la propria immagine che guarda in macchina è potente.

Affiora una punta di giudizio. Gli occhi raccontano le esperienze di vita vissute.

Qualche ruga in più, capelli bianchi, pelle meno tonica.

Nella seconda un pò di controllo in più. Ho posato per ottenere un'immagine di me che mi rassicuri, ma va bene anche quello.

Prendo il pacchetto completo della mie multi sfaccettature. Regalarsi un ritratto è un gesto di amore.

Nel dirti di sì, nel dire di sì alla tua immagine, al tuo ritratto, alle tue imperfezioni dici di sì alla vita.

E se affiorano emozioni difficili, va bene così, ci si può stare, dare loro semplicemente il tempo di fare il loro corso e osservare.

Quello che mi affascina del ritratto da studio con flash come questi è che raccontano di un qui e ora infinitesimale.

1/160 di secondo, nessuna verità assoluta, il racconto di un istante che scivola via nel momento stesso in cui accade, irripetibile.

Un viaggio alchemico tra fotografo e soggetto, un atto di fiducia reciproco.

In inglese "shooting".

Una parola che però non amo molto. Nel ritratto se vai solo a caccia e non sei disposto a dare nulla di te, a metterti a nudo anche tu, entri in una zona morta e priva di significato.

Il ritratto è un vero e proprio viaggio esplorativo che richiede indulgenza, sguardo gentile, tanta delicatezza e tanto amore.

Figure 24. Caption by Laetitia for the post she published with the two studio portraits previously attached. Own translation: *Yesterday, during a quiet moment, I suggested to Chiara—my intern—that she practice portrait photography using me as her subject. Finding myself on the other side of the lens was, even for me, a powerful exercise—far from ordinary. Looking at the images she captured, I felt far more exposed than I usually do when undressing for my self-portraits. In the first image: vulnerability. Looking directly into the lens is intense. Looking at your own image staring into the lens—equally so. A flicker of judgment surfaces. The eyes carry the weight of lived experience. A few more wrinkles, some grey hair, skin less firm. In the second image, I allowed myself a bit more control. I posed in a way that would produce an image of myself that felt reassuring. And that's okay too. I accept the full package of my many facets. Gifting yourself a portrait is a gesture of love.*

*In saying yes—to the moment, to your image, to your portrait, to your imperfections—you are, in essence, saying yes to life. And if difficult emotions arise, that's fine too. You can sit with them, allow them to pass in their own time, and simply observe. What fascinates me about studio portraiture using flash, like in this session, is that it captures a fleeting here-and-now. 1/160 of a second. No absolute truth—just the story of an instant, vanishing the moment it's born, never to be repeated. It's an alchemical journey between photographer and subject. A mutual act of trust. In English, it's called "shooting. But honestly, I'm not fond of that word. In portraiture, if you're only there to hunt and take, without offering anything of yourself, without being willing to be vulnerable too, you end up in a dead zone—void of meaning. Portraiture is a true journey of exploration. It calls for gentleness, compassion, patience, and love.*

The immersive journey into Laetitia's approach to portraiture didn't end there. As a Christmas gift, she invited me and my sister to the studio for a personal portrait session.

Beyond the intrinsic value of the final print and the emotional permanence of that memory, what struck me most was the symbolic closure this gesture provided. After weeks of assisting her, and after having had the rare opportunity to photograph her, I then found myself in front of her lens, under the same lights I had helped set up, in the same space I had learned to navigate from behind the scenes. But this time, her gaze was turned toward me. Together with my sister, I had a first-hand experience of Laetitia’s way of seeing, her gentle direction, her attention to subtle gestures, her capacity to translate emotional connection into image. It was as if all the layers of our shared experience—technical, creative, personal—had folded into one moment of stillness and care. That portrait, as shown in Figure 25, now hangs in my living room as a living testimony of a deeply formative exchange. In the span of just two months, I had lived through the full arc to her portrait process: I assisted her, I photographed her, and I was photographed by her. It was a rare triangular experience that crystallized the essence of Laetitia’s practice—not only as a visual language, but as a relational and transformative encounter.



Figure 25. Portrait of me and my sister hanging in my living room.

Portrait in frame by Laetitia Farellacci, december 2024.

Picture taken with phone camera by Chiara Pinesi, june 2025.

This multi-layered experience not only shaped my understanding of portraiture but allowed me to embody, in a very real and reflexive way, the triangulated relationship often discussed in photographic theory—that between the photographer, the subject, and the viewer. As explored in *Photographer, Subject, Viewer: A Triangulated Relationship* (Siegel, 2022)), each of these roles informs and reshapes the others, creating a fluid and complex dynamic that I was fortunate to experience from all angles within a single month.

More broadly, these episodes helped me realize that contributing to another artist's work requires a fine balance between initiative and humility. I learned that a strong creative impulse is not enough; what truly matters is the ability to understand, adapt to, and complement the artistic vision of others—especially when that vision has been shaped over years of research and practice.

Laetitia's approach—especially in the field of newborn photography—is grounded in an ethics of care and embodied listening. Each session begins not from the image, but from the body and presence of the child. This orientation has reshaped my understanding of what it means to produce images. My participation in these sessions went far beyond logistical support: I was involved in creating the spatial and emotional environment in which the photographic encounter could unfold, and in exchanging ideas throughout the process.

In addition to the work we carried out together in the studio, Laetitia consistently encouraged me to share my personal projects with her—whether they were intimate family sessions photographed at home or early experiments in visual storytelling. These exchanges became a fundamental part of my growth during the internship. Her feedback was never limited to technical aspects; rather, it focused on helping me uncover my own narrative direction and recognize what distinguished my gaze. She urged me to listen closely to what moved me, to reflect on recurring themes and gestures, and to develop a visual language that felt authentic and grounded in my lived experience. Through these conversations, I began to understand that developing a style is not about imitating established aesthetics, but about refining a sensibility—learning to recognize one's own rhythm, pace, and point of view. This mentorship was not prescriptive but generative: it helped me feel less like an apprentice following instructions and more like an emerging author in search of her voice.

Being immersed in a practice so rooted in tactile sensitivity and intersubjectivity has expanded my perspective on photography as a whole. It showed me that the principles of

care, presence, and touch—so crucial in working with newborns—can and should inform artistic practice at large. This experience has provided me with a vocabulary, both practical and conceptual, to continue exploring audiovisual production as a relational and sensorial art form.



## 2.4 Complementary and Mentoring Activities

A significant part of my internship was devoted to activities that, although not strictly technical or directly linked to the production of images, had a profound and lasting impact on my artistic and personal development. Laetitia placed great importance on the cultivation of inner presence and perceptive openness, introducing me to a series of practices aimed at refining sensitivity and deepening the relationship between body, emotion and creative intention.

Among these practices were moments of guided or silent meditation, mindful walks in nature, as well as shared reflections on spiritual and existential themes. These were not proposed as abstract or detached exercises, but as integral parts of a broader approach to artistic practice—one that conceives creation not as a purely intellectual or aesthetic gesture, but as the result of a state of expanded awareness. Laetitia's way of integrating these moments into the working day made them feel natural and necessary, rather than superimposed, and taught me that attention, listening, and presence are not separate from the act of creating, but are in fact its foundation.

She also asked me to engage in daily writing for a week, each morning. At the end of that week, as an awareness of my emotional landscape began to emerge, I was asked to frame those feelings in a photograph. Although this exercise took place in November—well before I could grasp the theoretical foundations of Laetitia's tactile approach—the final image I produced already contained traces of that material and embodied method of creation, as shown in Figure 26.

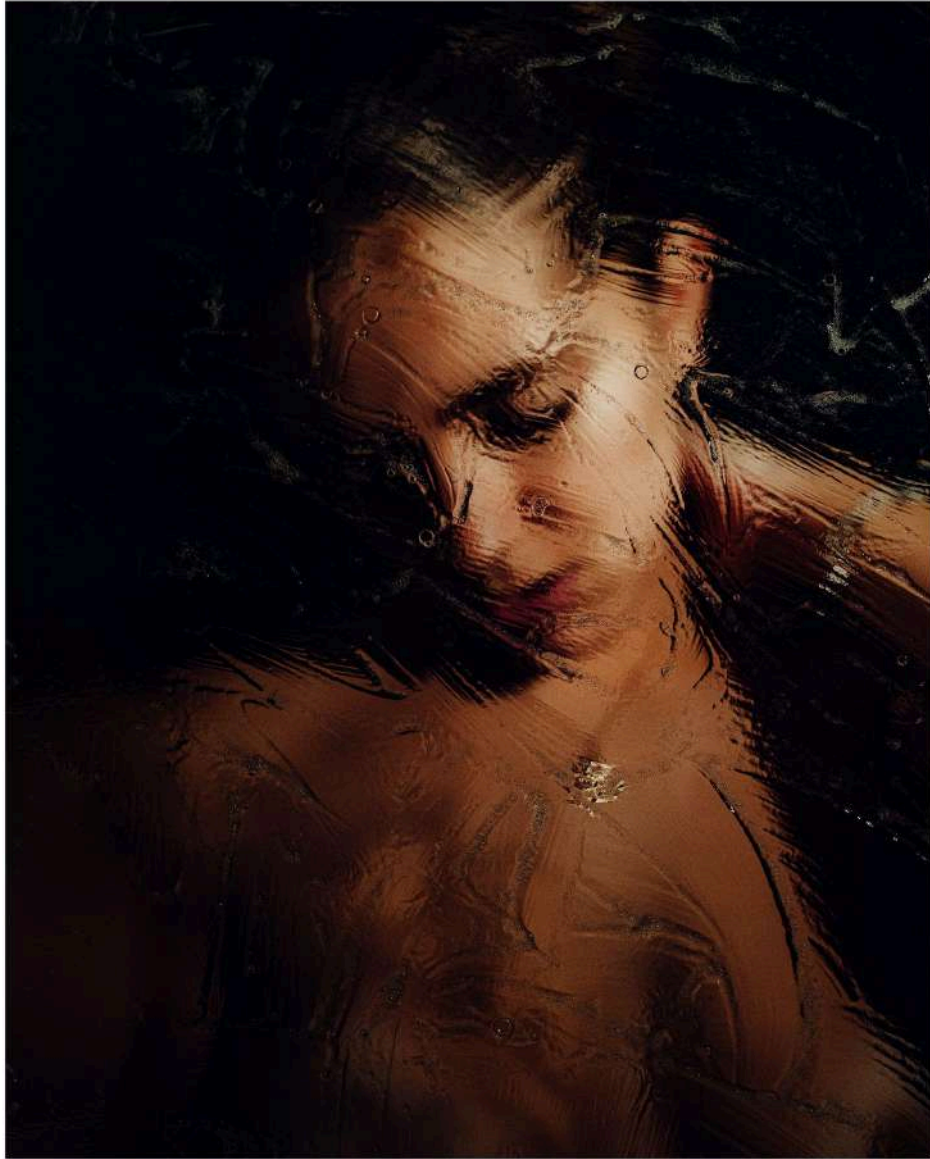


Figure 26. Photograph by Chiara Pinesi. November 2024.

Through these experiences, I began to reconsider the notion of “artistic work.” No longer merely a series of actions leading to a result, it emerged instead as a process of connection—with oneself, with others, with space and time. The boundaries between preparation, inspiration and execution became more fluid. I discovered that a walk through a forest, a shared silence before a session, or a moment of emotional attunement with a subject could be just as significant as choosing the right lens or framing a shot. This perspective helped me develop a more embodied and holistic understanding of photography, where the act of creation is interwoven with physical sensations, emotional resonances and intuitive listening.

Moreover, these formative and transversal activities had the effect of softening the productivity-driven mindset that often shapes artistic and professional paths. I learned to respect slowness, to give value to pauses, to consider doubt and vulnerability not as weaknesses but as fertile terrain for growth and expression. This, in turn, changed my way of relating to the camera, the subject, and even to myself as an artist: less focused on control and more open to reciprocity, transformation, and the unknown.

In this sense, the activities proposed by Laetitia were not just complementary moments, but true tools of research and formation. They accompanied and nourished all other dimensions of the internship, subtly transforming the way I inhabit the artistic gesture. They revealed to me that every image can be the outcome of a relational process—silent, invisible, and intimate—that precedes the click of the shutter. And it is precisely in this invisible part of the work that I now find the most meaningful and generative space for my future practice.



## 2.5 Chapter Conclusion

The path taken during the internship at the Laetitia Farellacci studio was an experience of continuous exchange, where practical learning combined with a deep theoretical reflection, creating a dialogue between artistic doing and theory that enriched my creative process. Laetitia's approach, which fuses photography with an almost spiritual interaction with the subject and the space, formed the basis for my exploration of the relationship between body, touch and audiovisual creation. Every moment I spent in the studio, every activity I did, was an opportunity to refine my perception and to understand how artistic practice is rooted in the materiality of the world, in emotions and senses.

Discussions about creative processes, the approach to the body and artistic vision allowed me to broaden my understanding of art and photography, arriving at reflections that proved fundamental for my personal research.

This experience not only enriched my practical training, but also led me to develop a theoretical research which had a profound resonance in my field of interest: the audiovisual. Although my work started as an observation of the world of photography, during my internship I began to perceive a deeper connection between photography and audiovisual, especially when it comes to transmitting tactile and bodily sensations through visual media. The reflection on physical perception, gesture and touch which underlies Laetitia's photography has become the key to developing a theory that audiovisual media should also convey these physical sensations either explicitly or implicitly.

A pivotal element in this evolution has been the theme of the maternal, which emerged not only as a subject but as an atmosphere, a way of being present in the creative process. In Laetitia's work the maternal is not limited to biological motherhood. It is a force of care, attention, protection, and deep listening. Through her, I began to see the maternal as a generative and creative attitude: one that holds space, that nurtures, and that receives without judgment. This expanded and symbolic understanding of the maternal profoundly changed my own relationship with this theme, which until then I had approached more conceptually.

Now, the maternal has become a key to understanding artistic practice itself—as an act of gestation, of sensitive presence, and of creating with the body. This shift has opened up new possibilities in my theoretical and artistic research, prompting me to reflect on how

maternal gestures can be embedded in form, rhythm, symbols, gaze, and narrative, even within the audiovisual field.

What I learned from Laetitia and experienced during this internship is not only limited to the photographic technique, but also expands in the audiovisual field, as part of a broader reflection on artistic creation. The idea that tactile sensitivity and body awareness can be transmitted through the lens of a video camera was one of the main discoveries of this path. My research has therefore focused on how visual languages can, and should, go beyond the mere representation of the image, and embrace the sensory dimension in a broader way. I have explored how gesture, matter and corporeality can be integrated into the audiovisual creative process, suggesting that audiovisual art should not only tickle sight or hearing, but also evoke a more complete sensory experience, which involves the whole body and its relationship with the world.

In conclusion, my internship at the studio of Laetitia Farellacci was a fundamental experience for my artistic growth, not only from a technical point of view but also theoretical. The reflection that emerged from Laetitia's photographic practices and sensitivity has become the basis of my research on audiovisual, demonstrating that visual art, whether it is photographic or audiovisual, is not only an act of creation, but an act of sensory connection that involves the body in a deep way. This is the aspect that I want to carry forward in my artistic and professional career: an art that is not only to be seen, but to be perceived, an art that springs from the relationship between body, matter and vision.

### 3. Touch as a Creative Gesture: A Theoretical Framework.

Asserting that cinema—and, more broadly, audiovisual production—is concerned solely with sight and hearing is a reductive and amateurish perspective. Such a view would be comparable to suggesting that a musician reading a score engages only the eyes, disregarding the complex interplay of auditory memory, muscular anticipation, and tactile familiarity that underlies performance. While it is true that the final output of audiovisual media is primarily perceived through the eyes and ears, this alone does not define the medium. Firstly, because projection and reception constitute only the final phase of the production process; and secondly, because even these moments cannot be entirely disentangled from the tactile dimension of perception. It is therefore necessary to return to the origins, to better understand how touch might be involved in those artistic expressions composed primarily of sound and light—forms of energy that, although intangible to the touch, are materially rooted in vibration and movement.

As argued by Geoffrey Batchen in *Burning with Desire, The Conception of Photography* (1997), photography was never a neutral recording device, but from its inception a conceptual act—a way to materialize desire and control the intangible. This reinforces the idea that even the earliest photograph was a tactile gesture of inscription. In 1826, for the first time in history, light surrendered its independence, compelled by human ingenuity to leave a mark of its passage on a pewter plate. This was the heliograph by Niépce, considered the first photograph in history, titled *View from the Window at Le Gras* and show in Figure 27.



Figure 27. View from the Window at Le Gras (French: Point de vue du Gras),  
The original plate, year. Héliogravure by Nicéphore Niépce.

One must thus immediately abandon the seemingly obvious notion that only light defines photographic art, or that light and sound alone define the audiovisual. Rather, it is the human intellect—expressed through the action of the hand—that has learned to harness, manipulate, and direct light, making it possible to inscribe with it.

Henri Focillon (1943/2015) eloquently states in the opening of his *Éloge de la main*:

« J’entreprends cet éloge de la main comme on remplit un devoir d’amitié. Au moment où je commence à l’écrire, je vois les miennes qui sollicitent mon esprit, qui l’entraînent. Elles sont là, ces compagnes inlassables, qui, pendant tant d’années, ont fait leur besogne, l’une maintenant en place le papier, l’autre multipliant sur la page blanche ces petits signes pressés, sombres et actifs. Par elles l’homme prend contact avec la dureté de la pensée. Elles dégagent le bloc. Elles lui imposent une forme, un contour et, dans l’écriture même, un style.

Elles sont presque des êtres animés. Des servantes ? Peut-être. Mais douées d’un génie énergétique et libre, d’une physionomie – visages sans yeux et sans voix, mais qui voient et qui parlent. Certains aveugles acquièrent à la longue une telle finesse de tact qu’ils sont capables de discerner, en les touchant, les figures d’un jeu de cartes, à l’épaisseur infinitésimale de l’image. Mais les voyants eux aussi ont besoin de leurs mains pour voir, pour compléter par le tact et par la prise la perception des apparences. »<sup>4</sup> (p. 3)

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<sup>4</sup>Own translation: I undertake this praise of the hand as one fulfills a duty of friendship. As I begin to write it, I see my own hands before me, calling upon my mind, drawing it along. There they are, tireless companions who, for so many years, have done their work—one holding the paper in place, the other scattering across the blank page these small, hurried, dark, and active signs. Through them, man comes into contact with the intransigence of thought. They break the block. They give it shape, contour, and, through writing itself, a style. They are almost living beings. Servants? Perhaps. But endowed with an energetic and free genius, with a physiognomy—faces without eyes and without voice, yet which see and speak. Some blind people acquire, over time, such a refinement of touch that they are capable of distinguishing, by feeling them, the figures on playing cards, through the infinitesimal thickness of the image. But even those who see need their hands in order to see—to complete, through touch and grasp, the perception of appearances.

The digital age makes us forget that it is, in fact, the hand that does everything. Even when the mechanism behind something's functioning is composed of codes, it is the hand that gives the initial input. The act of clicking, swiping, typing—every digital gesture still originates in a physical act. Yet the most insidious error arising from this condition is the tendency to confine the hand to a purely executive role, seeing it only as an instrument involved in the production phase, while the perception of reality is assumed to be the exclusive domain of the eyes and ears, especially in the context of artistic representation. This dualism—separating reception from creation, mind from body, sight from touch—is precisely what this study aims to challenge. Touch plays a crucial role not only in making, but also—profoundly—in the act of perceiving and understanding.

Aesthetic experience does not unfold solely in vision or hearing: it engages the body as a whole, and touch, in particular, serves as a direct bridge between matter and meaning. A striking example of this interpenetration between gesture and tactile perception can be found in Lucio Fontana's slashed canvases, as briefly mentioned in the introduction. The artist does not merely "depict" an idea; he intervenes directly on the surface of the work with an act that is simultaneously physical, conceptual, and sensorial.

To look at one of Fontana's cut canvases—such as the one shown in Figure 28—is not merely to observe it, but to sense it. It is an experience that activates the viewer's tactile memory. The blade sinking into the canvas seems to pierce our own fingertips, our skin. One cannot help but imagine the resistance of the fabric, the pressure of the hand, the tension of the gesture. In this sense, Fontana creates not merely a work for visual contemplation, but a threshold to be crossed with the entire body. His gesture ruptures not only the pictorial but also the perceptual surface: it forces us to reconsider the role of the hand—not merely as the artist's tool, but as a protagonist in reception. This shift reveals a haptic dimension of viewing, in which perception becomes tactile, embodied, and affective, rather than purely optical.

The viewer's hand, though not physically in contact with the work, is nonetheless engaged by the empathic force of the artistic gesture. Through the act of cutting, Fontana restores touch to its rightful centrality—not only in the act of creation, but also in perception. His work shows that the sense of touch is not subordinate to sight, but operates on a different plane—more primal, more embodied—capable of rendering aesthetic experience not only intellectual, but somatic.

Thus, even though the digital era may appear to distance us from the concreteness of the hand, it is precisely through works like Fontana's that we can recognize how touch remains central to our relationship with images, especially when they become abstract or conceptual.



Figure 28. *Concetto spaziale, Attesa, 1960* Work of art by Lucio Fontana.  
Museo del '900 exhibition view, Milano.

Walter Benjamin pointed out that the “aura” of a work of art lies in its unique presence in time and space—the authenticity of the original and its insertion into a ritual and historical context—which mechanical reproduction inevitably reduces or destroys. This reflection highlights the profound ontological difference between an original work and its copies, especially in the era of technical reproducibility. However, while Benjamin focuses mainly on the visual and cultural dimensions of authenticity, leaving the somatic and tactile

aspects partly underexplored, this study—Touch as a Creative Gesture—aims to deepen this thinking by highlighting the essential role of tactile experience, both in the creative and perceptive phase.

The original work is not only unique for its space-time context, but also for the bodily and tactile act of its realization—a direct and physical gesture of the artist’s hand, imprinted in the matter. This bodily gesture, tangibly present in the original, cannot be replicated by the copies, however technologically advanced. Consequently, the imprint of the hand—its physical involvement with the material—constitutes a crucial point of authenticity that supports the singularity of the work beyond mere visual or auditory perception. Moreover, the act of perceiving art is also closely linked to touch, in an embodied sense that activates a somatic understanding rooted in bodily memory. Even in the contemporary digital era, where images multiply endlessly and the materiality of the original seems to be moving away, the persistent centrality of touch—both in creation and fruition—reaffirms the inimitable value of the original.

Walter Benjamin, in his famous essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936/1968), identifies the loss of “aura” in the mass reproducibility of photographic and cinematographic works—that aura understood as a unique presence: unrepeatability and charge of authenticity, linked to the physical original. For Benjamin, audiovisual artistic expressions such as cinema and photography, which can be reproduced endlessly, are therefore emptied of the ritual and ontological dimension that characterized the traditional work of art. However, this analysis, although deeply innovative, leaves open a crucial conceptual space: what do we mean today by “original” in the field of digital audiovisual art?

In a context where the original is no longer necessarily a unique material object—as in the case of analogue film—but a digital file replicable to infinity without loss of quality, the very concept of “originality” may lose meaning if understood exclusively as uniqueness of the physical object. This is the direction in which this reflection unfolds, proposing a new interpretative key: the most authentic “original” does not reside in the material support, but rather in the creative act itself, in the corporeal and intellectual gesture of the artist, which remains a singular, unrepeatability, and deeply tactile event. The creative act made of decisions, manipulations, sensations and perceptions involving the totality of body and mind—represents the true core of originality, the only firm point in a digital world where

reproducibility is total and omnipresent. The intrinsic value of a work of art is therefore no longer measured on the basis of its material rarity, but on its embodied and perceptual genesis, which is rooted in an essential sensory and tactile experience.

This perspective places touch and the materiality of artistic gesture at the center of reflection on contemporary art, even when it is manifested through audiovisual and digital media. The work, although potentially replicable to infinity, thus retains a new "aura", embodied in the very act of its creation. Originality is no longer an attribute of the object, but of the creative experience that generates it. As a result, even in audiovisual use, touch, understood as a sensory and cognitive bridge, remains central to the way we perceive and understand the work, opening new horizons of research on the bodily dimension of seeing and listening.

In her theoretical work on cinema and the visual arts, Laura U. Marks expands a line of thought introduced by André Bazin, who famously argued that photography—and by extension, cinema—possesses an intrinsically indexical nature: it is the direct imprint of the real, a “cast” of the world that captures presence through absence. Bazin likens photography to a death mask, emphasizing its capacity to preserve the trace of what once was—an optical fossil of time. Marks furthers this idea by introducing the concept of cinema’s “fetish” or “fossil quality,” which she describes as a unique tension between presence and loss, between matter and image. Each frame—or in the case of video, each instance of “electronic testimony”—is not just a representation, but a material witness: a residue of contact, a trace of interaction between bodies, lights, gestures, and time (Marks, 2000, pp. 93–94).

From this perspective, Laetitia Farellacci’s photographic project *Fossili* acquires particular theoretical resonance. The very title aligns with this conceptual framework: a fossil is, by definition, a petrified trace—a memory embedded in matter, evidence that something existed, acted upon the world, and left a tangible mark. Farellacci’s images seem to inhabit precisely this liminal space between the visible and the tactile, between memory and form, image and body. Her photographs do not merely depict; they bear witness. They are surfaces layered with time, presence, and touch. The materials she works with—often raw, organic, and evocative—invite not only to be seen, but to be felt, perceived through the skin as much as through the eye.

In this sense, *Fossili* responds directly to the invitation that Marks extends to viewers:

not to merely look at an image, but to “enter into a tactile relationship” with it. The project reintroduces corporeality into photographic practice, pulling the image away from visual abstraction and rooting it in embodied experience. Even though the material base—the paper or digital file—remains still and two-dimensional, what emerges is a sensorial temporality in which each photograph feels like a settled wound, a site marked by gestures, pressure, and presence.

This idea finds strong parallel in Roland Barthes’ concept of the *punctum*, as elaborated in *Camera Lucida*. For Barthes, the *punctum* is the accidental detail in a photograph that “pierces” the viewer—what “bruises” and “wounds” the eye (Barthes, 1980, p. 27). It is not a matter of composition or meaning, but of affect: the photograph becomes compelling precisely because it holds a trace of something irrevocably lost. Through its tactile surface and temporal density, Farellacci’s work evokes that same visceral rupture. Her images don’t just represent; they *touch*. As Barthes notes in relation to the photograph’s *noeme*, its ontological truth lies in its quiet insistence that “that-has-been” (*ça a été*)—an affirmation of presence now turned absence (Barthes, 1980, p. 76).

In line with Georges Didi-Huberman’s reflections, images are never static. They are “surviving images,” as he puts it—fragments that “come back, like a ghost, at a particular historical moment... demonstrat[ing] their latency, their tenacity, their vivacity, and their ‘anthropological adhesion’” (Didi-Huberman, 2005, p. xxii). This idea of adhesion becomes even more powerful when viewed through the lens of touch. To work with photographic matter—to press one’s hands against paper, to observe its fibers and weight—is not only to create an image, but to engage in a dialogue with the time and gesture stored within the surface. In Laetitia’s studio, I learned to read images through my hands as much as through my eyes. Each photograph was no longer a passive result of light, but a tactile residue—an imprint that resists, adheres, and remembers.

This tactile quality also allows us to reframe, through a critical and sensory lens, Walter Benjamin’s reflections on the “aura” of the artwork in the age of mechanical reproduction. While Benjamin associates the loss of aura with the infinite reproducibility of photographs and films—their detachment from a singular origin—Farellacci shifts the focus from medium to gesture: from the technical support to the unrepeatable moment of contact between artist and world, between body and material. The fossil is not a unique object in the traditional sense, but a trace of a gesture that occurred only once. Thus, even in our digital

age—where everything seems infinitely replicable and immaterial—what endures is the irreducibility of the creative act, with all its perceptual and bodily weight. It is in this act that a new kind of aura survives—not as a sacred essence of the object, but as the living intensity of the gesture that gave rise to it.

In *The Skin of the Film* (2000), Marks elaborates her theory of “tactile visuality,” a concept that offers a compelling framework for interpreting certain contemporary photographic and cinematic practices. Drawing once more from Bazin’s idea of photography as an “imprint of reality”—a visual fossil preserving the physical trace of matter and time—Marks emphasizes how audiovisual images, especially those shaped by sensory and affective aesthetics, can evoke profoundly tactile sensations in the viewer. These images activate a form of perception that is not only visual, but also corporeal, epidermal. Cinema, in this light, is not just a transparent window onto the world, but a textured surface charged with the memory of physical contact.

This idea enhances our understanding of why *Fossili* holds such resonance. Its title invokes the material logic of imprinting and the lasting presence of a gesture or body. Yet the project’s strength lies not simply in its subject matter or its documentary value, but in its capacity to evoke a dispersed tactility—a sensory closeness that seems to emanate from the surface of the image itself. In *Fossili*, photography is never pure transparency: it becomes sensitive matter, memory made visible, a kind of photographic skin. These images do not merely show; they allow us to feel, to almost touch what they represent.

Farellacci’s work invites us to rethink the notion of aura, not as a static property of the artistic object, but as something embedded in the act of creation. It is the artist’s hand, her touch, the pressure she exerts—on photosensitive paper or digital screen—that renders the image singular, unrepeatable, and alive. Despite its digital reproducibility, each work retains the intellectual and somatic trace of a real encounter with the world. And so, paradoxically, in an era defined by technological dematerialization, where images are artificially produced without any reference or return to the real, we witness a renewed need to return to the material, to the body, to the hand. The value of the work no longer lies in its status as an original object, but in the unique gesture that produced it. And as Marks reminds us, that gesture is always also a tactile one—an embodied form of thinking.

« Andre Bazin (1967) famously described photography as an imprint of the world, a trace of material presence like a death mask. This is the fetishlike/fossil-like quality that is at work in cinema: it is the trace another material object leaves on the surface of the film (or encodes in video's electronic witness). This fact is what gives film its representational power, just as a fetish (in the religious sense) obtains its power by carrying the trace of another material object. The use made of indexicality varies, to be sure, from evidentiary proof to mere ghostlike trace of the profilmic real. » (Marks, 2000, pp. 92-93)

This line of inquiry invites us to rethink what truly defines the originality of an image: not its material uniqueness, but rather the embodied gesture that generates it. And it is precisely at this intersection—between the sensory, the somatic, and the audiovisual—that the theory of tactile visibility elaborated by Laura Marks proves to be particularly illuminating. Taking up André Bazin's idea that photography is an imprint of the real, Marks emphasizes how audiovisual images can evoke a sense of touch as much as sight, activating a mode of perception that is both affective and bodily. Marks challenges the traditional primacy of vision in film theory, inviting us to approach images as textured surfaces—carrying the memory of contact, pressure, and material interaction.

One of the most iconic anecdotes in the history of cinema is the reaction of the audience to the screening of *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* by the Lumière brothers. It is said that some spectators, seeing a train approach head-on, were so startled they fled the theatre, afraid it might burst through the screen. Whether myth or reality, this episode highlights the powerful sensorial potential of moving images: despite today's medium's naturalization to its public, they can provoke tactile, physical responses and awaken deeply embedded sensory memories. As Marks (2002) states in her book *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*:

“The early-cinema phenomenon of a ‘cinema of attractions’ describes an embodied response, in which the illusion that permits distanced identification with the action onscreen gives way to an immediate bodily response to the screen. As the language of cinema became standardized, cinema appealed more to narrative identification than to body identification” (p. 7).

As cinematic language evolved and viewers grew increasingly accustomed to its conventions, this visceral relationship with the screen began to fade. The cinematic experience has since become codified, with spectators generally surrendering to the illusion of narrative while suspending their awareness of the medium itself. A paradox emerges: the modern viewer chooses, consciously, to forget the screen's materiality in order to immerse themselves more fully in the story. This forgetfulness is, however, illusory—sustained by a sense of control and distance. Today's average viewer sees, feels, and thinks, but often maintains a self-imposed separation from what unfolds on screen, as though the cinematic experience belonged to a parallel world, one that should not and could not affect them physically or emotionally. If the first spectators in cinema history needed reassurance about the solidity of the screen to feel safe, contemporary viewers arguably need the opposite: a reminder of the screen's physicality, to break the illusion that audiovisual experience is purely optical and immaterial.

As Roland Barthes observes in *“Leaving the Movie Theater”* (1975), the cinema operates as a space of absorption and passivity, where the viewer surrenders their body to darkness and becomes, in his words, “gently narcotized.” The cinematic apparatus, with its fixed seat and enveloping screen, creates a dissociative state in which one forgets the material conditions of viewing. If early spectators feared the screen might collapse into reality, contemporary audiences often forget the screen exists at all. In this sense, my reflection about the need to reassert the physicality of the screen echoes Barthes' suggestion that cinema disembodies the spectator. Against this backdrop, works that make the screen “visible” again—opaque, textured, wounded—reclaim the viewer's bodily presence, inviting an active, tactile relationship with the image. This is where a range of artistic and audiovisual works reassert the materiality of the medium's surface, challenging the illusion of transparency—among them, works such as *Outer Space* (1999) by Peter Tscherkassky and Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Broken Mirrors*.

*Outer Space* is a short film entirely composed through analog reworking of found footage, specifically scenes from the 1982 horror film *The Entity*. Tscherkassky manipulates the physical filmstrip—cutting, layering, scratching, and reprocessing it in the darkroom—to generate an overwhelming visual and auditory experience. The narrative content, centered on a woman haunted by an invisible force, is violently fragmented: the image trembles, pulses, implodes, and re-emerges through flashes, distortions, and visual noise. The filmic surface is no longer a transparent window; it becomes opaque, textured, wounded. The viewer cannot

simply dissolve into the story—they are forced into contact with the materiality of the film, constantly reminded of the medium itself. The support asserts itself: the cinematic apparatus no longer hides, but rather interrupts, reveals, resists. Vision becomes tactile, almost painful, as the film turns into a skin—a sensory interface rather than a mere narrative conduit. Some still frames from *Outer Space* are shown in the collage of Figure 29.



Figure 29. Still frames taken from *Outer Space* (1999) by Peter Tscherkassky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxO3PucXg8k>

A parallel strategy emerges in Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Broken Mirrors*, an evolution of his earlier *Mirror Paintings* initiated in 1962. In those works, as seen in Figure 30, Pistoletto applied life-sized photographic images on polished steel surfaces, allowing viewers to see their reflection and thus integrate themselves into the artwork. The mirror became a performative and participatory device, collapsing the distance between image and reality. In the *Broken Mirrors* series, this tension is pushed further: the mirror—traditionally associated with clarity and coherence—is shattered. Cracks, fractures, and irregular shards disrupt the surface, multiplying and disfiguring the viewer's reflection. The smooth visual field is replaced by a fragmented and three-dimensional space. Instead of producing recognition, the mirror produces alienation. The viewer, attempting to locate themselves, finds their image distorted, dislocated, refracted. The artwork no longer passively reflects but actively resists, embodying a rupture that implicates the body and the senses.

This surfacing of the medium—whether as wounded filmstrip or shattered mirror—recalls a broader tendency in contemporary art to foreground the means of reproduction and reflection, particularly in response to the pervasiveness of digital technologies. As artworks become increasingly susceptible to instantaneous replication through smartphones, cameras, and social media, some artists deploy reflective or disrupted surfaces not only to incorporate the viewer but also to unmask the very act of viewing. The mirror, for instance, becomes a double agent: it invites participation but simultaneously exposes the presence of the recording device, confronting the spectator with their own image as mediated.

This mechanism reflects a deeper anxiety about the role of the viewer in the digital age. As noted in earlier reflections, what once was a unique, site-specific encounter with an artwork has become a flattened visual experience, instantly shareable but radically disembodied. In this context, reflective or tactile surfaces reclaim a space for embodied perception and critical distance. They make visible the tension between presence and representation, between the artwork and its reproduced ghost. They compel the viewer to see themselves seeing, and, in doing so, to confront the instability of both image and self.



Figure 30. Twenty-two Less Two, 2009  
[www.pistoletto.it/it/gallerie/divmol\\_aar22.htm](http://www.pistoletto.it/it/gallerie/divmol_aar22.htm)

Both Tscherkassky and Pistoletto propose a return to the surface—not as a neutral medium, but as a site of encounter, friction, and interference. Their works reactivate the material and tactile dimension of perception, reminding us that representation is never pure or disembodied. The rupture—whether cinematic or sculptural—functions as a gesture of reawakening. The transparency of the screen or mirror is replaced by opacity, texture, and noise. These surfaces, once taken for granted, become visible again, even tangible. They force viewers to reconsider their role—not as distant observers, but as physically and affectively involved participants. In this sense, both *Outer Space* and *Broken Mirrors* reassert the presence of the body in the act of seeing, inviting a renewed awareness of the mediating structures that shape visual experience, ...tactile and material origins of the image, offering a direct response to the dematerialization of experience in the digital age. Their works do not merely “represent” reality or tell a story; they stage an encounter with the medium itself, making the act of viewing a corporeal event. By reasserting the physical surface of the image—whether through the violently reworked filmstrip of *Outer Space* or the fractured reflectivity of Pistoletto’s *Broken Mirrors*—these artists challenge the modern spectator to feel again, to re-enter the image with their body as well as their mind.

What unites these seemingly disparate practices—Fontana’s slashes, Farellacci’s fossils, Tscherkassky’s cinematic violence, and Pistoletto’s broken reflections—is a refusal of

the purely visual. Each insists that touch, whether literal or evoked, is essential to both the creation and perception of the artwork. They challenge us to understand images not as transparent windows or flat signs, but as textured, dynamic surfaces that retain the memory of gestures, pressures, and presences. In this sense, the “aura” of the artwork does not disappear in the age of reproduction; rather, it migrates—from the singular object to the embodied process of making and perceiving.

Thus, even in an era dominated by screens and simulations, the hand remains central. Not only in the crafting of images, but in their reception. The screen, when treated as surface rather than illusion, becomes a tactile interface, a place where the viewer can once again experience the world through contact rather than detachment. This shift from the optical to the haptic, from representation to presence, is not simply nostalgic or regressive—it is a radical reclamation of the body in a culture that too often abstracts or erases it.

Ultimately, to speak of touch in audiovisual media is not to deny the importance of sight or sound. It is to recognize that aesthetic experience is fundamentally multisensory—that perception, thought, and emotion are entangled with the body. Touch, as the most primal and immediate of senses, acts as a bridge: between mind and world, between image and viewer, between art and life. By restoring touch to its rightful place, we do not diminish cinema or photography—we deepen them, grounding them in the lived, felt reality from which all art ultimately springs.

### **3.1 Touch Made Visible: Laetitia Farellacci's Art and the Tactile Imagery of *Fossili***

«Fossili was born without premeditation, like almost all of my works. That day, I felt a strong need to undress and take pictures. I simply took a white cloth, fixed it between two autopoles, and started photographing myself. Very few of my works involve complex research or preparation before execution. In self-portraiture, the experience I live emerges both on set and later, when observing the images. What I experienced during the shoot was a physical and symbolic tension. The skin pressed against the cloth—a kind of coming into the light that is never fully completed. The project has resurfaced in recent weeks, and today I interpret it as the expression of something that has never fully come to light, yet exists deeply within. It is not a void to be filled, but a presence that seeks to be recognized.» (Donatiello, 2024, p.40)

One day, Laetitia undressed—both literally and metaphorically. Although she is a photographer, her work refuses to be confined to two dimensions. For her, art begins in the body, because it is the body that first encounters the world—it feels before it sees, it knows before it names.

Even before a newborn's eyes open to the light, their skin is already perceiving. Laetitia knows this intimately. I have seen her hold in her arms more than thirty newborns, each just days old. She always begins from touch.

She asks the mothers—still softened by the exhaustion of childbirth and the fierce, jealous love that binds them to their babies—to place their trust in her, and to release. With a steady, instinctive grace, she gathers those tiny bodies and draws them to her chest, close to her breath, to the rhythm of her heart. Often, she hums a kind of mantra: lips closed, she sustains a single, steady “M,” letting it vibrate through her ribcage. The babies feel it—less with their ears than through their skin—and they settle. Something in them seems to recognize those muffled sounds from the womb.

Laetitia's intention is not to soothe them into stillness for the sake of a photograph. What she seeks to offer is an experience: a final memory of that warm, dark passage that carried them into the world—a passage defined not by sight, but by touch. She speaks of

placing herself entirely at the service of these lives, which she sees as bridges to something beyond. There's no need to invoke faith or doctrine to sense this truth: these are souls newly arrived, still hovering between two realms, only just beginning to inhabit their bodies. They perceive the world not through abstraction, but through flesh—through skin that listens, absorbs, and remembers. We, on the other hand, have long since relegated the act of touching the world to the narrow tips of our fingers.

Our bodies—once our first language—have grown numb.

This is paradoxical, because in contemporary society, the numbing of the body and the distancing from a spiritual dimension seem to be progressing hand in hand. Laetitia has taught me—almost without knowing it—that tactile perception and sensory closeness to materiality are what can truly reconnect us to the immaterial. They allow for a subtler, more spiritual communication with ourselves and with others. Laetitia uses her hands and body throughout her artistic practice. She does so, as described, in her gentle work with newborns, but also with the women she photographs—and above all, with herself, in her ongoing self-portraiture practice. Self-portraiture became central to Laetitia's artistic work four years ago, during a time when she had lost all connection to her body, and thus to herself.

*It was as if I had become invisible*, she says. (Donatiello, 2024, p.35)

The association between a perceived invisibility and the need to reclaim one's body becomes emblematic in the birth of the *Fossili* project. While previously mentioned, *Fossili* is now examined more closely here in relation to the role of touch and embodied presence in artistic production. Though expressed primarily through photography, the project offers an ideal case for analyzing the tactile, corporeal, and physical dimensions of Laetitia's work—including in its audiovisual forms.

It was during the recording of a video for *Fossili* (Figure 16) that I had the opportunity to witness how the project materializes on set. In that moment, after months of internship, all of Laetitia's teachings came into focus. The elements that had long remained latent crystallized into a clear understanding. There, right in front of me, was the essence of her unique approach—one neither she nor I had yet named.

That day, Laetitia undressed—both literally and figuratively. She stretched a semi-transparent white cloth between two poles and, on the other side, removed her clothes.

Wrapped in this white atmosphere, we on this side of the cloth could only glimpse the outlines of her body. That day, *Fossili* was being reborn in audiovisual form<sup>5</sup>.

«What I experienced during the shoot was a physical and symbolic tension. The skin pressed against the cloth, a kind of coming into the light that is never fully completed... Today I interpret it as the expression of something that has never fully come to light, but that exists deep within. It is not a void to be filled, but a presence that seeks to be recognized.»<sup>6</sup> (Donatiello, 2024, pp. 40-41)

Laetitia was no longer herself in that moment—she had become pure body, flesh, and presence. Slowly, she approached the cloth until her skin met its surface. Then, her movements shifted: they became sharper, more erratic, as if guided by an internal pulse. I was witnessing a dance that seemed to emerge not from choreography, but from a place deep within. The fabric stretched and trembled under the pressure of her body, a visible echo of her physicality.

What I was seeing felt like performance art, yet it unfolded privately, unrepeatably, in real time. And still, it would leave behind a trace, a fossil-like imprint, captured by the camera's sensor. That trace would become light, would become pixels, would become, for the first time, image and sound. It would hold within it the memory of movement, the tension of that moment, something ephemeral, now made visible, but that only I had witnessed as it came into being.

This live witnessing of *Fossili* being re-enacted as a video work became, for me, a pivotal moment of realization. What was unfolding before the lens was not only performance, nor merely photography in motion—it was, in a deeper sense, the inscription of an embodied gesture onto a digital medium. And that gesture, rooted in tactility and physical presence, would remain embedded in the image, as if fossilized within its very structure.

Another point of contact between Marks and Fossili, explored in the book *The Skin of the Film*, is the idea of the fossil—as both metaphor and material trace. Marks suggests that film, especially when made through tactile and sensuous approaches, acts as a surface that bears the imprint of lived experience.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/DG1Tfp8smDI/>

<sup>6</sup> Narrazione Visiva, I., & Botero, F. (n.d.). FOTOGRAFIA ARTE e CULTURA 16 (p. 38-41). Retrieved June 5, 2025, from [https://www.moleart.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/MOLEart\\_16-2024.pdf](https://www.moleart.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/MOLEart_16-2024.pdf)

Just as fossils preserve the mark of something once alive, audiovisual works can hold the residue of touch, texture, and presence—sensations that bypass language and enter through the skin, affecting the viewer on a bodily level. In this sense, *Fossili* becomes more than a work of self-portraiture or symbolic expression: it is an imprint. The skin pressing against the cloth, the motion of the body caught in blur, the interplay between exposure and concealment—all these elements come together as haptic traces that carry the viewer beyond the purely visual. The work invites a mode of perception that is not only optical and auditory, but tactile. It asks to be *felt*, not just seen or heard.

Experiencing this process in Laetitia's studio deeply altered my understanding of audiovisual creation. I came to recognize that touch—so often overlooked in discussions of film and media—is not only essential in the act of making art, but also profoundly shapes how it is ultimately perceived. Figure 31 illustrates how Laetitia's exercises enhance the sense of touch in her fellow students. When creation begins with the body, when the hands and skin participate in shaping the image, the resulting work retains a material, tactile memory. This memory does not vanish in post-production or dissolve into abstraction; rather, it survives in the texture of the light, the rhythm of movement, the grain of the sound.

For the viewer, such a work can evoke a haptic response—an echo of the artist's touch that reverberates in the act of watching or listening. In Laetitia's case, her embodied way of working—whether with infants, women, or her own image—imprints a sensual residue onto the image, transforming it into a space of intimate, intersubjective encounter. Through *Fossili*, I learned that in order to make meaningful audiovisual art, one must not only see and hear, but also touch and be touched.

And if the act of creation is steeped in tactile awareness, then the result will carry that sensorial truth—reaching the viewer not only through the eyes and ears, but through the skin.



Figure 31. Backstage photo taken during one of Laetitia's Farellacci photographic workshops. March 2025. Photography by Chiara Pinesi.



### 3.2 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the essential role of touch in the conception, creation, and reception of audiovisual artworks. While cinema and photography have historically been understood as media dominated by sight and sound, a closer examination—through theoretical, historical, and artistic lenses—reveals that tactile experience is deeply embedded in their processes and aesthetic impact.

From the earliest moments of photographic invention, where light was physically inscribed onto metal, to contemporary digital practices, the hand has remained a silent yet active protagonist. Henri Focillon's praise of the hand reminds us that every intellectual gesture is born in physicality, and Lucio Fontana's incisions into the canvas further prove that perception is not confined to the eye. These examples show that artistic acts carry with them the weight of the body, and viewers, in turn, respond not only visually or aurally, but corporeally.

Through the analysis of theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Laura U. Marks, we also come to understand that authenticity, aura, and originality are no longer tethered solely to the uniqueness of the physical object, but to the unrepeatable, somatic gesture of its making. Marks's concept of "tactile visibility" reveals how the visual image can serve as a surface of contact—one that preserves the trace of the artist's body and transmits it through the image to the body of the viewer. This dynamic is particularly visible in the work of Laetitia Farellacci, whose project *Fossili* exemplifies the persistence of the tactile in a digital era. Her work, situated at the intersection of presence and absence, gesture and imprint, offers a living embodiment of Marks's fossil-like image: a trace, a memory, a residue of contact.

Ultimately, this chapter has asserted that touch is not merely a technical step in the process of creation, but a profound epistemological and sensorial mode of knowing. To touch is to come into relation. In re-centering the role of touch in audiovisual practice, we not only expand our understanding of how such works are made and experienced, but we also reclaim the body as a site of meaning. In doing so, we begin to reimagine audiovisual art as something that is not just seen and heard, but also felt—at once visceral, material, and deeply human.



#### **4. Final considerations and future work perspective**

My internship at Laetitia Farellacci's photography studio in Milan was not only an opportunity for artistic growth, but also a profound exercise in rethinking the relationship between the body, matter, and creative practice. Immersed in a space shaped by Laetitia's personal history and sustained by her constant, intentional engagement with materials, I learned that artistic creation is a fundamentally embodied process—one that requires sensitivity, presence, and a deep respect for the physical world. This experience challenged and expanded my understanding of authorship and collaboration. By contributing to the daily activities of the studio—from material experimentation to structural improvements—I came to appreciate the value of invisible labor, the emotional and tactile knowledge embedded in craft, and the silent dialogue between hands and materials. More than any theoretical framework, it was the physical, repetitive, and often humble nature of the work that revealed to me the layered meaning of creation.

Crucially, this internship reaffirmed the importance of touch—both literal and conceptual—in the creation of visual and audiovisual work. The studio became a lens through which I could explore how tactile experience informs and enriches the creative process, even within media traditionally perceived as disembodied, like photography or video. I now see touch not as secondary to vision and sound, but as foundational to how we connect with images, how we produce them, and how we receive them.

One of the most meaningful outcomes of this internship is the continued relationship that Laetitia and I have developed. After the official end of the program, we decided to continue collaborating on both professional and artistic levels. Laetitia often invites me back to the studio to assist with photography sessions, and she generously offers me the use of the space when I need it for my own projects. This ongoing exchange has transformed the internship into a lasting collaboration—rooted in mutual trust, creative alignment, and shared values.

Looking forward, this insight opens up several avenues for future research and practice. I am particularly interested in investigating how tactile knowledge can be consciously integrated into audiovisual creation, and how viewers might be engaged through sensory strategies that go beyond sight and sound. This might involve experimenting with

materials in the pre-production and editing phases, or developing installation formats that invite physical proximity, intimacy, or gesture.

Furthermore, I aim to explore the ethics of touch in collaborative artistic processes—especially when working with others’ stories, bodies, or spaces. Laetitia’s studio taught me that to respect someone else’s vision is also to take care of the matter that carries it. That form of care, rooted in the body, will be central to how I approach future projects.

In conclusion, this internship has shaped not only my skills and artistic language, but also the values that will guide my future work. It offered me a model of creative integrity and material sensitivity that I hope to carry forward—with my eyes open, but above all, with my hands awake.

## Report Conclusion

This internship not only enriched my practical training but also opened a space of reflection that deeply resonates with my academic path in cinema. Although my daily work was rooted in photography, I quickly realized that what I was observing—especially through Laetitia Farellacci’s sensitive and embodied approach—spoke directly to the essence of cinematic practice.

Farellacci’s methodology is grounded in time, in the movements of the bodies, in touch, in the body’s presence within the creative act. Though her artworks are still images, her way of creating is inherently temporal. It follows a rhythm of slowness and attention, a ritualistic pace that mirrors the grammar of cinema. Witnessing her creative process taught me that what appears to be still can in fact be deeply cinematic—because cinema, at its core, is not merely movement through time, but the composition of gestures in time.

Experiencing this first-hand reshaped my understanding of what it means to make images. I came to see that cinema is not only a visual and auditory language—it is also a tactile one. And more importantly, creation does not begin with the lens or the software: it begins in the hand.

The hand is the first tool of creation, the extension of the body’s thought. During this internship, my hands worked beside Laetitia’s: they printed, adjusted light, held fragile fabrics, and filmed. But more than anything, they listened. They remembered. I understood that to create means not only to shape matter, but to let matter shape you back. The hand, in this sense, becomes a womb: a generative space where something takes form slowly, through warmth, attention, containment. Like a maternal gesture, it holds and nourishes the fragile energy of an idea until it can be born into the world.

At first, my attention in writing this report was drawn to the themes of femininity and motherhood—both deeply present in Laetitia’s artistic inquiry. But gradually, and almost imperceptibly, that focus shifted toward the tactile gesture of creation. What might seem like a change in direction now reveals itself as a more universal reading of the same idea.

The creative and generative act emerged as a force that—like the Moon in Jodorowsky’s tarot—is symbolically feminine, yet not confined to women alone. It dwells in

each of us, felt on the surface of the skin, resting in the palm of every hand, expressing itself through the quiet, insistent urge to make, to give form and breath to thought.

This reflection, made possible through close collaboration with a woman-artist deeply attuned to her own feminine dimension and to the shared femininity of many women, becomes an invitation to listen—to them, to ourselves, and to the quiet power of generative presence.

In today's visual culture—where even moving images are increasingly generated through artificial means—this kind of creation becomes quietly radical. It reclaims presence, effort, and patience, much like a pregnancy: a slow, intimate process of growth, vulnerability, and becoming. It reminds us that making art is not about producing endless content, but about embodying a process. I believe this is the deepest connection between my experience in Laetitia's studio and my path in cinema: I have learned that true creation requires contact—not only with materials, but with oneself and with others.

So although my internship unfolded in a photographic space, what I gained was profoundly cinematic. I now carry with me a new vision of cinema: one that includes the hand, the skin, and the gesture—one where images are not only watched, but felt. And it is precisely this tactile, embodied quality that distinguishes such images from those generated by artificial intelligence. What is felt cannot be faked; it carries the weight of presence, of having been touched—by time, by bodies, by intention. This kind of image is not the result of an algorithmic prediction, but of a lived gesture. It resists disembodiment because it is born not just from thought, but from the very matter of being.



Figure 32. Photograph by Laetitia Farellacci, 2023  
Part of *The Pahamamas* series.

*This report has been linguistically revised, partially translated, and formatted according to APA guidelines with the assistance of AI tools (AI-Enhanced Text). All conceptual content, interpretations, and critical positions are entirely original and solely attributable to the author.*

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