

Technique- Cartapesta Christine Palamidessi, Artist

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As a recipient of a childhood art scholarship, I spent two handfuls of Saturday mornings drawing dinosaurs, dioramas, and copying masters inside Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum. The Hall of Sculptures was my favorite spot: Egyptian, Near Eastern, Greek, and Roman sculptures displayed in a majestic space communicated a sensation of being very small and alive while being enveloped in the presence of whiteness and time. That experience instilled a love for antiquities.

Background of interest

As an adult, when I stood on the very tip of the heel of Italy, in Puglia, I realized that's where these ancient Mediterranean worlds collided. This led me to study the art and creative techniques—from prehistory and modernity—that are typical to this place where the shapes and forms and markers of time make me feel I found home.

I focused my study in the traditional cartapesta technique--often executing work in a very non-traditional way. Right now I am using life-sized inflatable female balloons and the Lecce paper, water and glues I've been working with for decades to make 'vessels.'

What is cartapesta?

Cartapesta is 'the high art' of papier-mâché. It is an artisan practice typical to the city of Lecce in Puglia, Italy, where there is an abundance of soft buff-colored stone to build baroque buildings but not marble to make religious statuary. Consequently Medieval artisans developed a 'stonemaking' process for religious statuary using glueless brown paper, infused with layers of plaster and organic agents. I studied with a custodian of this technique.

Cartapesta projects

Past projects with cartapesta include my casting of a dozen of the huge cannonballs, from the 1480 Ottoman invasion of Otranto, Italy, that lay like old dragons in the courtyard of Otranto Castle (see [Silent, Silence, Silenced](#)).

During the pandemic, I made two dozen life-sized cartapesta masks that visually chronicled the vocabulary of the coronavirus. Like the virus, it's an ongoing project. (see [The Future Has an Ancient Face](#))

For printmaking, I have made make cartapesta sculptures and flattened them in a printing press. After sealing the flattened sculptures, I ink them and use them as printing plates to make monotypes. I also am creating a collection of miniature one-piece bathing suits. based on Hollywood lure, rock and roll appearances, and images from ancient cultures (see [Sensations of Soaring](#)).

Puglia Region

The cartapesta technique is typical to the Puglia region, where I have followed the trail not only of the materials used in that region of the world to make art--but also the art itself.

In 2017 and 2019, traveling in Magna Grecia, I sought out Crusader hideaways and made interpretive monotypes of the frescos that I found (see [Icons and Talismans](#)).

I am endlessly inspired by the collection of the National Archaeological Museum of Taranto (MArTA), the Matera civilization, and the ancient stories and antics of the Mediterranean culture.