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## The Rape of the Sabine Women: Eve Sussman and Rufus Corporation at Impronte Art



Eve Sussman | Rufus Corporation, *Marilisa Reflected*, 2005. Photo by Ricoh Gerbl. Courtesy Impronte contemporary art.

The abridged version of the story goes something like this: Shortly after the founding of Rome, the local men noticed a decided lack of ladies with which to start families. They attempted to negotiate a deal for some of the women of neighboring tribes, known as Sabine; however, the patriarchs of those tribes refused. Plan B was to arrange a great feast, invite all the neighbors, and then kidnap the females, which is exactly what happened. Some histories are adamant here that no sexual assault actually took place, that the 'rape' was in fact an abduction. The Sabine women were then offered marriage with Romans, along with civic and property rights and the privilege of mothering free men. Later, as the Sabine tribes confronted Rome in an attempt to reclaim their daughters, the Sabine-Roman wives intervened, begging their fathers and husbands to cease combat, in fear of being orphaned or widowed. And the war was ended, thus sealing the destiny of Western civilization.

Eve Sussman, in collaboration with the improvisational players known as the [Rufus Corporation](#), stages her revision of *The Rape of the Sabine Women* in an idyllic 1960's setting, filmed on location in Greece and Germany. Having been shown, since its release in 2007, at major international exhibitions in New York, London, San Francisco, and Berlin, among other venues, *The Rape...* is now premiering in Italy, screening at [Impronte Contemporary Art](#) in Milan through March 19. This 80-minute ensemble-musical without dialogue, in 5 acts, is filled to overflowing, cinematically. Its slow, sumptuous shots, voluminous and heavily pitched sound, dramatic staging, and densely packed art-historical references lend themselves to a deeply self-conscious and masterful, if overwrought, work of filmmaking. This piece never loses sight of itself.



Eve Sussman | Rufus Corporation, *Annette with Rabbits*, 2005. Photo by Benedikt Parteneheimer. Courtesy of Impronte contemporary art.

The Romans here are costumed in dark business suits and ties, hovering somewhere between the glamour of double-oh-seven spy-culture and the comforting anonymity of the everyday corporate employee. The Sabine women recall Holly Golightly in mod shift dresses and big dark sunglasses, all against an opulent backdrop of sleek mid-century (and at times, ancient) architecture and design. The characteristic representation of Roman-Sabine married life is a drawn-out summer party scene at a lavish mid-century vacation home, in which affections are openly shared, alcohol flows freely, and cigarette smoke obscures our vision. Sussman provides viewers with a re-imagined fantasy of indulgence, affluence, and Roman excess.

But (spoiler alert!) the modern paradise collapses in on itself at the culmination of the film, as a slow, fraught battle ensues between the men and, though the women attempt to intercede, the struggle continues to utter destruction. And in the end, I'm compelled to consider the value of the feminine role in this version. Whereas, in the original legend, the Sabine women were venerated for their heroic halt of the conflict, here they are unwary co-conspirators in bringing forth the decline of a deceptively prosperous dreamworld. This myth of love in the face of adversity, buoying the frenetic rise of a civilization, is recast instead as the final fall, no thanks to the ladies, of an overly idealized utopia.