

# Monica Bonvicini

## I Don't Like You Very Much

Space01

22.04.–21.08.2022

Like a calculated disaster, the timber construction of a house lies scattered in the exhibition space. What seems to have been thrown down after the passage of a hurricane is the third design of the architectural sculpture *As Walls Keep Shifting*, from which issues such as the construction of identity, relationships, desire and power structures emerge.

The show revolves around themes that have engaged Monica Bonvicini for years: climate crisis, destruction, normativity, domesticity, control, as well as the escape from standardisation processes and gender roles. The works offer a kaleidoscopic view on institutionalised architecture, the private and the public.

*I See a White Building, Pink and Blue*, 2020

Full HD video projection, 16:9, colour, stereo sound

*I See a White Building, Pink and Blue* is a video installation, a wall-high projection of abstract moving images accompanied by loud, monotonous sound.

With rhythmic camera movements, abstract moving images appear, mostly sombre and in shades of grey, occasionally interrupted by recognisable motifs such as an upside-down parked car or protruding beams of light, accompanied by a booming sound or sudden 'light-hearted' birdsong. The title is borrowed from the British neurologist Oliver Sacks talking about a woman's experience of hallucinations. She compared it to a film – one that she didn't want or choose to see. The video was created in spring 2020 and was recorded by the artist with her smartphone during daily bicycle rides to her studio as the Covid-19 pandemic emerged. This is the original sound made by the movement of her body and resembles the rhythm of a heart or blood pumping. *I See a White Building, Pink and Blue* can be interpreted as a shaky vision on current global, social and political issues.

*As Walls Keep Shifting*, 2019–2022

Silver fir timber, pigment colour, screws & nails  
868 × 828 × 870 cm (H × W × D),  
at Kunsthhaus Graz: ground floor:  
317 × 828 × 870 cm, 1st floor:  
340 × 828 × 870 cm, roof:  
175 × 905 × 990 cm

*As Walls Keep Shifting* is a large-scale, site-specific artwork. A wooden structure of half a house, disassembled in three parts. Without walls, without windows, it is built anew and in dialogue with each new institution it encounters. The artwork dominating the exhibition space presents itself as the scaffolding of a one-family residence constructed on a 1 : 1 scale. Bonvicini's appropriation and adaptation of this type of house was first shown in its original version at the OGR in Turin in 2019. In Graz, the sculpture lies scattered around the place, like the remains of a calculated disaster: the upper floor slides upon the ground floor, wedging itself onto it, while the roof leans against the Kunsthhaus traveller, threatening to take over the entire space. The work's title, *As Walls Keep Shifting*, refers to the *House of Leaves* novel by Mark Z. Danielewski, similarly rendering a powerful metaphorical image of the house as a living space.

The timber construction reflects the power dynamics of the family system, the socio-economic periphery and its chaos. The project questions the establishment of private space together with its resulting discontents, such as seclusion, intimate dynamics, disappointment and reactionary feelings.

The architectural sculpture can be considered as a bio construction: with a wooden house you have an energy saving of 40 to 50% on average compared to concrete or brick buildings. Solid wood does not burn, it chars slowly and only on the surface; if matched with specific insulating materials it allows for a very low energy consumption. *As Walls Keep Shifting* is made of about 20 cubic metres of solid fir wood – about 12 tons – and more than 1000 screws.

*Beer Cans*, 2008

Four beer cans, black latex, chromed chain  
24 × 33 × 33 cm

The hanging sculpture *Beer Cans* is composed of reused beer cans and liquid rubber, held together by a golden queer chain. The once fluid black material tightens the aluminium, which becomes a firmer body, like an undefined and incomprehensible fetish object. It resembles a salvaged piece of

trash covered by thick oil, spread out into the ocean and rescued. By taking the beer can as a symbolic element for 'the men that never have to ask', Bonvicini takes an implied critical look at how toxic masculinity is still rampant today. Bonvicini draws a witty connection between the afflicted, drippy status of the beer cans, and decadent aspects of our contemporary society, such as a sticky, outdated and ultimately useless label of manliness, difficult to wash away.

*Beer Cans* presents itself as a carrier of socio-political hierarchies, questioning the cultural artificiality of gender and categories of power.

*Breach of Décor*, 2020–2022

Textile print  
830 × 403 cm

*Breach of Décor* is a colourful, soft overlay that visitors can walk on. Printed on the carpet are images of garments on the floor, taken from above in various places and thus showing different kinds of flooring (tiles, wooden floor, other carpets). The artist took the photographs herself over the course of almost two years both at home and also in hotels while travelling. Monica Bonvicini photographed the garments systematically, at

the end of each day, after taking them off. The gesture of taking one's trousers off is strongly linked to the feeling of being at home and feeling safe in a domestic environment. Through this gesture of immaterial archiving, what seems very private and almost intimate becomes a frozen image of privacy that mutates into décor. Reflecting on the responsibility of domestic labour, the artist redefines the intrinsic value of an act of care towards the household, letting a daily, intimate moment challenge the idea of *order* itself.

*Würth Posters, 2022*  
Different locations within  
*As Walls Keep Shifting*

Reproductions of Würth Calendar images are disseminated around the architectural sculpture *As Walls Keep Shifting*, covering an entire floor or the back of the stairs. The work is a continuation of Bonvicini's photographic series *Nude in the Workshops*, in which the artist took pictures of similar calendars in different workshops she visited while producing her works. There are a large number of calendars like this in which soft-porn images of young women are the theme. Würth distributes its calendars to all of its customers. It is easy to find them on construction sites, car shops, truckers'

cabins, metal workshops or, in general, in a lot of male-dominated workplaces. Scattered around the house, they provide a sense of uncanniness, of desolation and solitude. They stand for a confrontational symbol of gender dis-equality hopefully over by now.

*Make Time for the Sunset, 2022*  
HD colour video, 18:24 min, loop

*Make Time for the Sunset* is a double-edged invitation for the audience both to *look* and to *look away*. The work examines a total of 104 pages of calendars with a video camera, always moving and searching the same way.

As an unsettling voyeuristic collection, the male gaze is exasperated in a crooked exploration and slow dissections of the portrayed bodies: the almost maniacal stare perceived when in front of the collection is initially destabilising, and increasingly suffocating in its persistence.

*Make Time for the Sunset* is presented on a small monitor inside the structure of *As Walls Keep Shifting*: the visitor is lured in to take a peek at the videos, while being prevented from trespassing the boundaries of the allotted location. In this way, *Make Time for the Sunset* plays twice with

the idea of voyeurism, forcing the viewer to embody the voyeur by both looking at the videos and looking at the inaccessible screen.

*Swept Away, 2019*  
Nickel silver casting  
96.5 × 16.5 × 4 cm

A cast broom. Useless. Reminiscent of a metaphorical cleaning, the sculpture stays still, hanging on the wall, as if waiting for someone. After the First World War, Tristan Tzara wrote in the 1918 Dada Manifesto: 'We must sweep and clean. Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness...' What about now? Could this broom sweep away male chauvinistic perspectives, discriminatory policies, the leftovers of unseen domestic labour?

*Love Never Win, 2022*  
Red neon tubes, electric cables  
121 x 67 x 4 cm

*Love Never Win* is a red neon piece. With the three keywords of the light sculpture, Monica Bonvicini draws our attention to the problematic mediation and visual representation of relationships. The light-work reflects upon the feeling of love, its link to failure and violence and its fierce entanglements with the capitalist state.

The artist chose to materialise the three words against the most common and popular trinomial: *Omnia Vincit Amor* (Love wins it all). This is the first part of a famous verse by the poet Virgil. It is a phrase written in his *Bucolics* and part of a verse that reads in full: 'omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amori', that is: love wins it all and we give in to love. By creating a red neon antagonist of the slogan, Bonvicini highlights commodification practices in the exploitation of human feelings in the Capitalocene. The work relies on the same simplicity as Virgil's *Omnia Vincit Amor*, but speaks of the inflation and delusion of love relationships instead, constructed at the crossroads of advertising, psychology and power. Its alarming red colour adds a second critical layer to the artwork, as informed by the lines of Walter Benjamin's *One-Way Street (1928)*: 'What, in the end, makes advertisements so superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon sign says – but the fiery pool reflecting in the asphalt'. The neon sign thus unites important aspects in the work of Monica Bonvicini: a sensitivity for the potential of language, an interest in industrial materials, and a determined questioning of ever evolving power structures.

*Tree of Anger*, 2021

7 printed embossed aluminium sheets, stainless steel buckles and mounting brackets  
60 × 40 × 4 cm

Bonvicini's installation *Tree of Anger* ironises and questions the associations of masculinity and shows of force associated with construction methods. The installations provide confrontations and meditations on determining the nature of architecture – examining how design and established structures inform and affirm gender roles and classist systems. *There are so many roots to the tree of anger that sometimes the branches shatter before they bear.*

(Audre Lorde)

Stemming from the *Who said it was simple* poem's incipit by feminist writer Audre Lorde, 1973, *Tree of Anger* plays on literary order and disorder: red shields of aluminium are attached to the wooden structure of the house. Acting as welcoming (or warning?) signs, these plaques enter critical affiliation with the place itself and with all those they encounter, offering a stark response to the abuse of power and oppression women and minorities face daily.

By opposing the intimate and private action of writing with the experience of public life and space – from city architecture to natural environments – Bonvicini conjures a mixture of fiction and institutional critique which invests the audience word by word, piece by piece, growing with the *tree of anger*.

*Who Uses It Where It Comes From And How To Tie It*, 2022  
Bronze, black patinated  
ca. 108 x 28 x 4.5 cm

The theme of manual work and associated male stereotypes are present in many works by Monica Bonvicini, including *Who Uses It Where It Comes from And How To Tie It*.

A black, patinated cast axe hangs from the same rope that covers – in an untypical way – its handle. As if in a delicate lace, the bronze cast sculpture dangles dangerously from the roof.

The title embeds three questions for which the object discussed, the *it*, remains unknown.

The source of the title is the *Ashley Book of Knots*, an encyclopaedia of knots first published in 1944 by Clifford Warren Ashley, one of the most important and extensive books on knots. With this piece Bonvicini expands her research on sex and violence,

placing them under scrutiny, together with the normative conception of a home. By investigating the arbitrary engendering of things and places, the artwork aims to remind the viewer of how binary gender roles, patriarchal institutions, class distinctions and capitalist mantras can be deconstructed with rigour and humour.

*Ripping*, 2021  
LED, electric cable, leather, Green-TEC

*Ripping* combines two everyday objects: LED lights and ordinary, black leather belts. The neon tubes hang vertically from the ceiling and shine in a brilliant white. Leather belts are bulging from the bottom of the light tubes. The metamorphosis between light and leather is given even more weight by the withdrawn, slender appearance. The belt, both an everyday object and a male marking, is not illuminated but is part of what it contradicts – visibility, specificity and ornament. Besides being part of dressing-up routines, belts are also a cultural symbol of masculinity, order, and discipline. They can be associated with physical abuse, sexual practices, and violence. With its vast dispersion of light, *Ripping* explores how even objects with strong connotations can violently

take apart and split open stereotyped and dominant cultural categories without taking themselves too seriously.

*Pleasant*, 2021  
Asphalt paint on mirror  
150 × 100 cm

The work features a sentence painted in colour directly on the surface of a mirror: a quote by author Diane Williams, as part of *Expectant Motherhood* in *Vicky Swanky is a Beauty*, 2012: “I don't like them or my brother. My children don't like me.” “Why are you so unpleasant?” I answered, “I don't wish you well.” Mirroring the surrounding elements, this piece alone creates a cacophony of overlapping voices capable of transforming the space into a labyrinth of references and situations.

*Pleasant* is part of a new series of mirrors depicting quotes and edited texts by female writers, all centred around the discomfort stemming from relationships and living within domestic walls.

*I Light the Fire, 2018–2022*

Sound file, 1 h 47 min, loop

A sound piece, tracking the song *Our House* written by Graham Nash for Joni Mitchell in 1970, pretty much the same time the houses in the photographs were built, invades the exhibition space annoyingly, dismantling the idyllic idea of the house as a nest for security and love.

*Italian Homes, 2019*

Series of 40 colour photographs,  
Pigment print on paper  
Framed 60.5 × 81 cm

For the series *Italian Homes*, Monica Bonvicini carried out photographic documentation of semi-detached houses in Lombardy, Italy that were designed and built towards the end of the 1960s, beginning of the 1970s, for the 'traditional' family of the time.

Each house differs from the other in how it has been changed by its inhabitants. Once built to be rigorously identical in all their parts, the new diversity of façades contradicts the basic idea of the social claim of this architecture, which should create the same living conditions for homogeneous social groups.

The series *Italian Homes* is composed of photographs depicting

exteriors of initially homogeneous Italian houses from the late 1960s that over the years have revealed themselves to showcase diversity and individual aesthetics.

The project expands on investigating how the reappropriation of architecture and the role of buildings in our society can be a tool for critique and social commentary and identify houses as signifiers of social change and the passage of time.

*You to Me, 2022*

Steel, powder-coated tube,  
18 steel chains, 36 steel handcuffs  
Dimensions variable

Shown for the first time and specifically conceived for the space, *You to Me* dominates the fully glazed top floor, the Needle: hanging from a pipe installed at the ceiling, handcuffs invite and provoke the visitors to make use of them. This setup, a carrier of evident sexual or violent connotations, functions as a reflection on the role of the audience and the objectification of the body in institutional spaces. In an extreme act of displacement, the body of the audience performs on the open stage of the art institution, almost en plein air, overlooking the cityscape.

*You to Me* exposes the threads of a possible failed romance

between the viewers and the institution, and highlights the threshold between a private affair and a public scandal, intertwining emotional relationships with architectural and patriarchal violence.

Monica Bonvicini

Monica Bonvicini (\* 1965 in Venice) studied art in Berlin and at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, CA. She lives and works in Berlin. Bonvicini has received several awards, including the Golden Lion at the Biennale di Venezia (1999) and the Oskar Kokoschka Prize, Vienna (2020). She has participated in many prominent biennials, such as Berlin, Paris, Istanbul and Venice as well as in numerous major exhibitions. Her works are represented in several museum collections and permanent installations in public space. From 2003 until 2017 she was teaching Performative Arts and Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, since 2017, she holds the professorship for Sculpture at the Universität der Künste Berlin.

Guided tours

Saturday 3:30 pm – 4:30 pm (German)

Sunday 11 am – 12 noon (German);

2 pm – 3 pm (English)

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