ODDA No. 24 UP-TO-DATE

Give Monica Bonvicini a space and she will fill it with something magical... or disturbing, or provocative. The Italian sculptor, now a citizen of Germany, is a virtuoso when it comes to shaping her work to the environment in which it will be exhibited. Visitors to her latest exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin are greeted with a massive placard emblazoned with its title -"I do you." Leaning casually against the facade of the Ludwig Mies van der Rohe-designed structure, the sign mirrors Bonvicini's own posture toward institutional art—respectful but also casual and unconcerned with decorum. As she tells Richard Pallardy for ODDA Magazine, she knows that some of her creations are aggressive and critical. But many are also strangely beautiful and magnetic. "She lies," a mass of glass and metal, suggesting an iceberg, a fallen skyscraper, a sinking ship, as it twists and turns in the currents of the Oslo fjord. And some manage to be both. "Light me Black", an assemblage of 144 fluorescent lights, is both intimidating and inviting. Here, Bonvicini lays out her artistic philosophy—why she is fascinated by movement, what draws her to her materials and what she wants to say with each piece.

> "Each work has its own materiality and each material has different character traits." —Monica Bonvicini

IN CONVERSATION WITH RICHARD PALLARDY BONVICINI



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RICHARD PALLARDY. I'm sure your surroundings have played a very important part in your life and inspiration. Tell me a bit about your background. Where did you grow up? Under what circumstances did your passion grow? MONICA BONVICINI. I grew up in Venice and in Brescia, two very different cities in Italy. If one is romantic I believe the other is the best example of industrial northern Italy. What was the same was the fog in the winter. My passion, if you mean art, came out of a need to do something else than what everybody else around me was doing. Isn't that the reason to do what you want to do in life? R.P. Was your family artistic? Did they support your early artistic endeavors? M.B. My family was extremely supportive of me. They gave me the feeling la could do anything I wanted. I am sure I also somehow convinced them that there was no other way to deal with me other than supporting me. R.P. Did you go to art school? M.B. I went to art college, if that is what you mean. I studied painting in Berlin and art (I have to say it like this) in Los Angeles at Cal Arts. R.P. Did your education inform your artistic endeavors? Or did you find the constraints and formality to be frustrating? M.B. Both. I learnt a lot going to university. Art history, how to do things and why, to talk with colleagues about art and life, politics and all the rest, the parties, what to read, how to be better... all of that was extremely important. I also always had great teachers. R.P. You teach at the Academy of Fine Arts

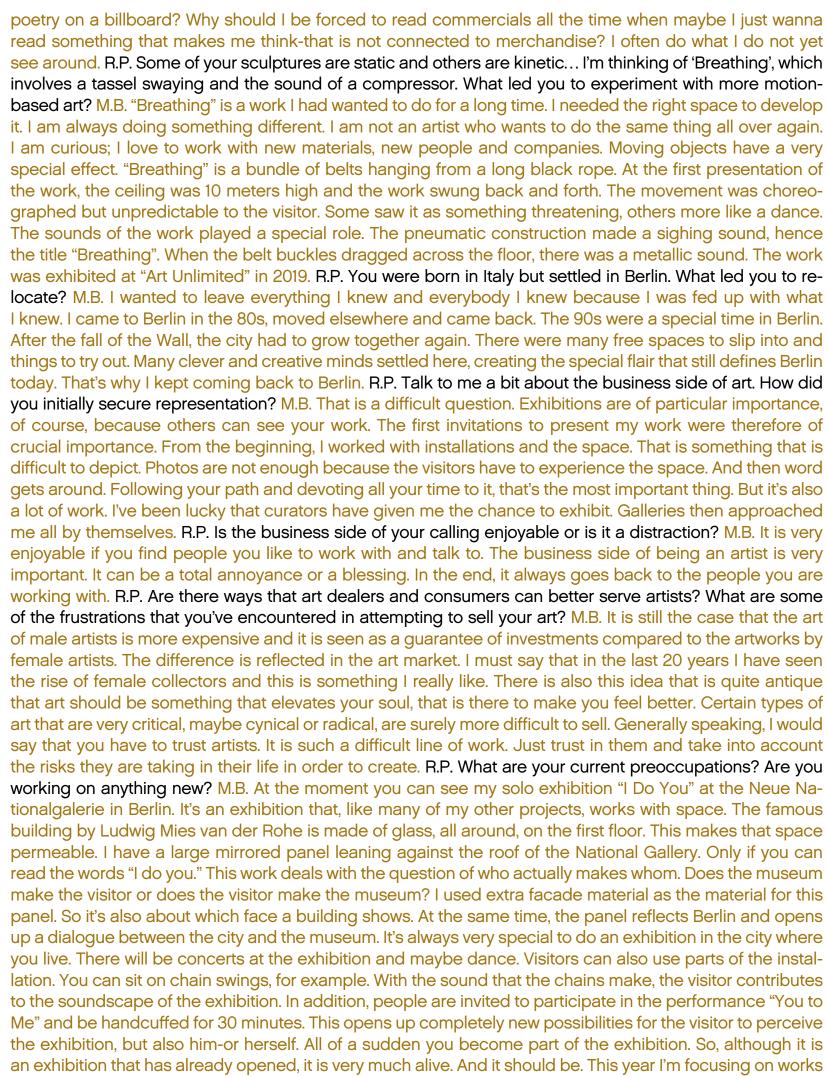
in Vienna. What do you students? Are there techteachers of art should avoid? for 15 years up until the point too good there and so I started teaching when I was now. At the end of the day teach art. On a formal level, and European system and the works of the students should give you the best going to work with, talk about about ideas because you cabulary during the years of you to sculpture? Did you before deciding that this I was young, I envisioned the nun. That would have been because it was a lonely I never get bored. But I think with people. To do sculpture that. R.P. You use a wide



attempt to convey to your niques or approaches that M.B. I was teaching in Vienna I thought I was feeling almost I moved to teach in Berlin. quite young. It is different there is not a good way to I try to combine the American I like to listen and talk about a lot. I think any art school friends in life. People you are art, discuss and have fights have formed a similar voart school. R.P. What drew experiment with other media was your calling? M.B. When possibility of becoming a quite a calling! I quit painting activity. I like to be alone. it is better to do things in life alone is impossible. I like variety of materials in your

sculptures. Tell me about your choices... what draws you to a particular material? M.B. Ideas. Each work has its own materiality and each material has different character traits. It depends on what kind of work it is. Black leather is something other than an aluminum cast. I have worked a lot with building materials that anyone can buy at the hardware store. So a lot of times, they're not special materials but each material has to fit the work. In a lot of my installations, you can also see the construction. That's also part of the materiality of the works. Like in the installation "I Cannot Hide My Anger" (2019) at Belvedere 21 in Vienna, where I put a cube of metal panels in the center of the room. Yet from the second floor, you could look down and see the back of the walls and their construction. R.P. Some of your installations are text-based... they are graphic representations of a certain message. What leads you to choose a certain phrase or word? M.B. I remember when I was a child or a teenager sometimes talking back to the television during commercials. I really disliked the imperative form of commercials back in those days-the security in the voice and in the message: you will like this: buy this; you have a headache: take this; you are not easy: we are here for you. I find the language of commercials quite annoying and fascinating. If you think about it, commercials don't have a very long history. Nor does the ability to make a career of sellings products via the use of language. Why not have

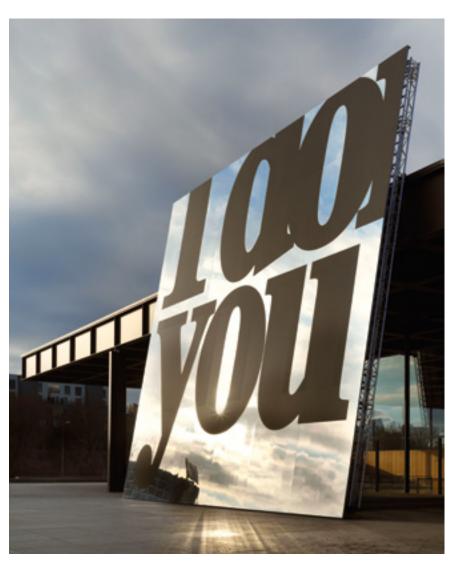








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"I Do You" 2022, © Monica Bonvicini and VG-Bild Kunst, Bonn 2023 Photo by Jens Ziehe

"Gasping" 2022, © Monica Bonvicini and VG-Bild Kunst, Bonn 2023

"There is also this idea that is quite antique that art should be something that elevates your soul, that is there to make you feel better. Certain types of art that are very critical, maybe cynical or radical, are surely more difficult to sell." —Monica Bonvicini







"Breathing" 2017, © Monica Bonvicini and VG-Bild Kunst, Bonn 2023

"Breathing, detail" 2017, © Monica Bonvicini and VG-Bild Kunst, Bonn 2023 *Photo by Jens Ziehe*

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MONICA BONVICINI



in public space. The locations play a very crucial role. Right now I'm making designs for Belgium, temporary designs for a light festival in Germany, and a large outdoor work in Italy. I won a competition in Canada, and planning is continuing here as well as for a large sculpture in Denmark. Public works play a big role for me. Consider "She Lies" on the fjord in front of the Opera House in Oslo. Sometimes they take years of planning before they finally stand. We'll see when these works are all inaugurated. I also have another project planned this year with the original glass panels that I secured during the renovation of the Neue Nationalgalerie and which are currently integrated into the exhibition. R.P. Is there anything you'd like the world to know about your art that might not be self-evident? M.B. What you see is what you get but you have no idea of it yet.

