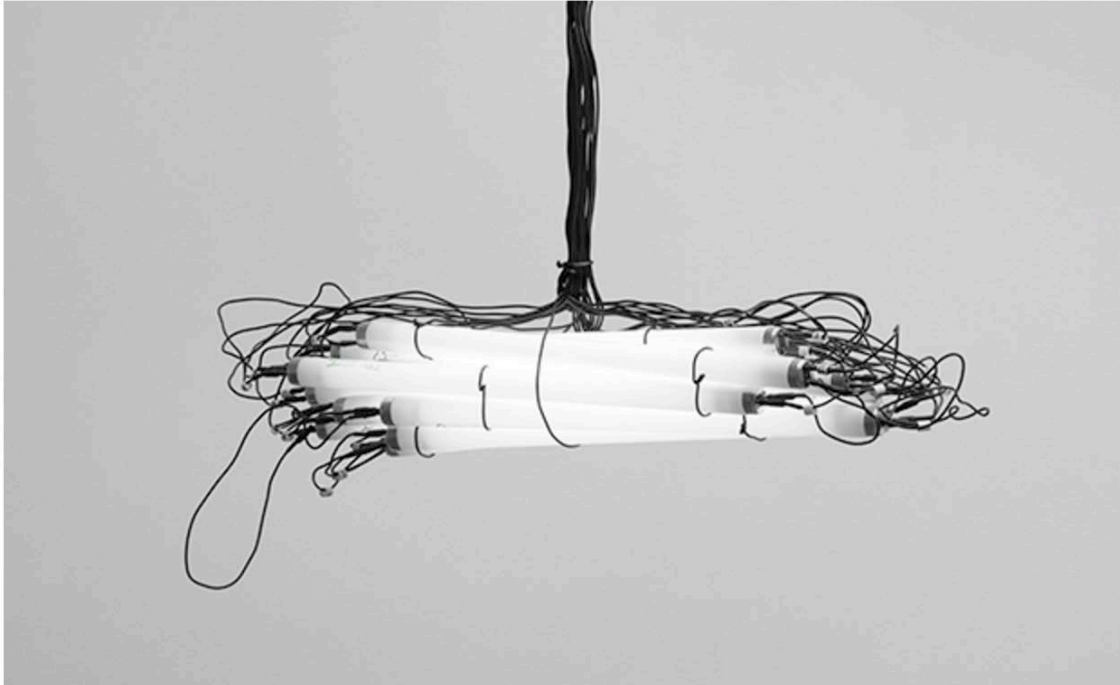


## Six things you need to know about Monica Bonvicini

Fetishism, Freud and transparent toilets - a brief guide to this great Italian artist's work



Kleine Lichtkanone (2009) by Monica Bonvicini

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June 17, 2014

She's one of the most acclaimed artists to have emerged from the contemporary art scene over the past 20 years, yet Monica Bonvicini's work isn't the easiest to understand. The Italian-born sculptor, painter and installation artist deals with sex, power and control, though there's a lot of humour and ambiguity in her work too. Here's a way into it, for those who don't know it, and some understanding and context for those who do. At the end of our presentation there'll be an opportunity to [buy her new book](#) - so keep focused! (as if you wouldn't).

**She learnt about fetishism from her economics teacher** “If one really believes that the personal is political, then the first scene of the crime is the bed,” the 49-year-old artist explains in an interview conducted for our monograph . “I read very early on Freud’s *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Carl Jung, Eric Fromm, Wilhelm Reich. I learned about the Marxist concept of fetishism in high school, where I was lucky enough to have a great economics teacher who had studied sociology with [Red Brigade leader, Renato] Curcio in Trento back in the good old days. I was also interested in Franco Basaglia’s idea of democratic psychiatry, which was still much discussed when I was a teenager. Confining people, defying sicknesses and diseases, are things that I always found rather creepy.”



Belt Couch (2004) by Monica Bonvicini

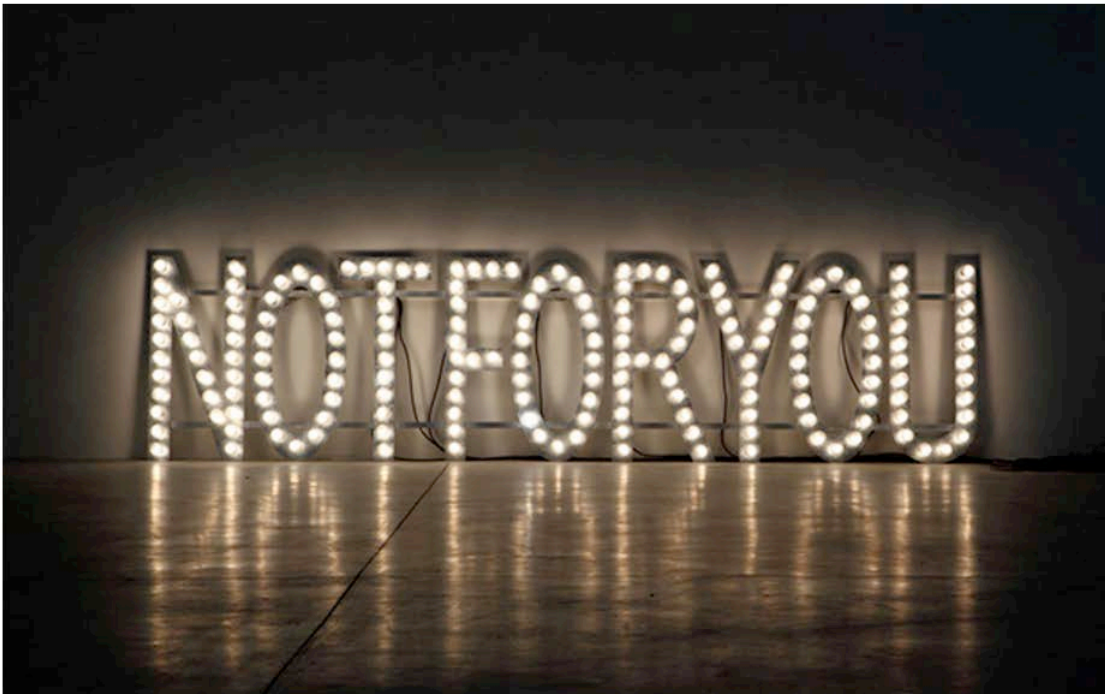
**What she didn't learn at school, she later picked up in sex clubs** "In the 1990s, I went with friends to gay sadomasochism clubs in New York City and London," Bonvicini explains. "I found these places very liberating – even though the first time I visited the police raided and everyone had to leave the premises. Those clubs showed me a world that was less about barriers and limits than the usual heterosexual clubs I knew. Art always has sexual references. My interest in surrealism, literature and music, and my approach to sexuality from a gender point of view in the 1990s, all brought me to read a lot of literature on themes like pornography, masochism and sadism from a female point of view."

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Stairway to Hell (2003) by Monica Bonvicini

**Bruce Nauman is a huge influence** “If one works with sculpture,” she says in the interview section of our new monograph, “then it’s pretty much impossible not to consider Nauman. Nauman’s works at once transcend and acknowledge different materials, different mediums. Much of his work demarcates space. His built sculptures and installations, videos, lights, sounds, languages, performances, drawings, all mark spaces. For me art has a lot to do with the question of what freedom is, or essentially with freedom itself. I always question what the work means, but also what it is? How it is built? For whom? And how to use and/or abuse it? That’s why Nauman is so relevant to me and to so many artists. He once said that he tries to make art that hits you like a punch in the face.”



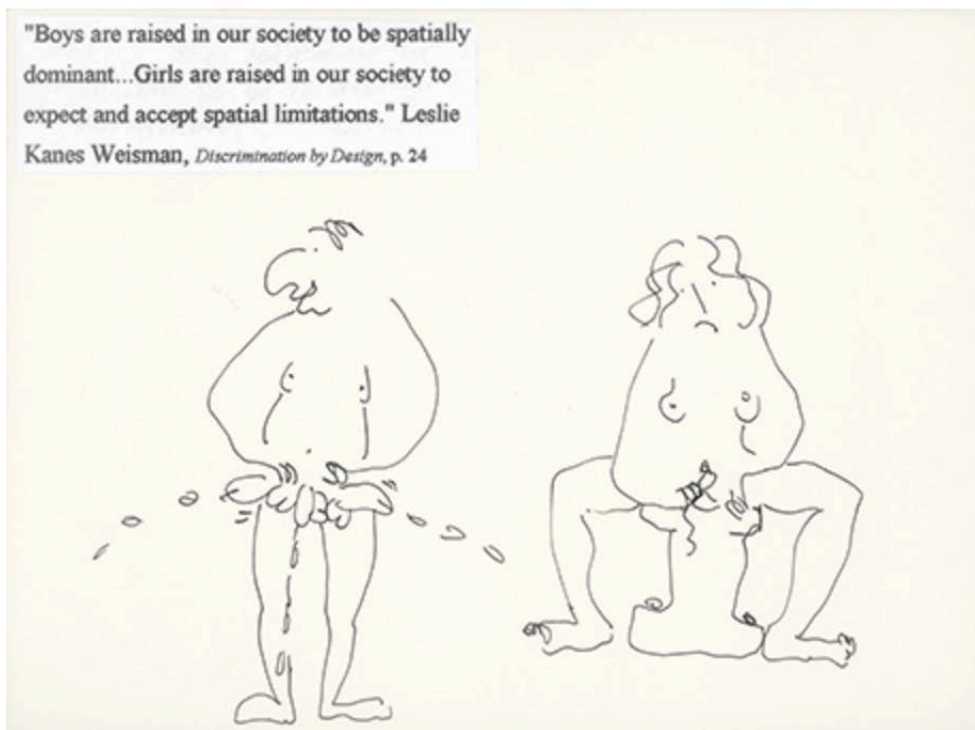
Not For You (2006) by Monica Bonvicini

**She thinks architecture and the art world are all about power, money and corruption** Architecture, as an institution, is “about corruption, dreams, state ambitious, abuse, class power, money, the representation of authority,” she says. “All dictators and magnanimous state presidents use architecture as a way, or as an excuse, to connect politics with culture, and of course to ‘build’ history as well. Architecture best represents ideologies of power.” Moreover, she goes on to add that, “I’ve always considered the systems of architecture and of art to be very similar, or at least to work in similar ways. I think it was Mark Wigley who wrote that architecture creates, via all the magazines, books, symposiums, discussions, and the like, a sort of barricade that at once leaves the non-professionals outside and makes any sort of attack or critique from the inside impossible. I think that the institution of art does much the same thing. You are allowed to do anything as an artist, you can be blind, crazy, or dead serious. The question is really: can you ever expand the boundaries? Who defines them? Who determines them? Where are they actually?”



Don't Miss a Sec (2004) by Monica Bonvicini

**And speaking of buildings, her most famous work, a glass-walled public lavatory, Don't Miss A Sec (2004), references Mies van der Rohe and Apple stores "Don't Miss a Sec'. (2004)"** Bonvicini explains, "relates to Minimalist forms, as well as to Dan Graham's pavilions. Although Graham is not what one would call a traditional Minimal artist, he still addresses modernism via its most common and known architectural material. I put a functioning toilet inside the glass box, which is not a one-way-mirror cube but a combination of different kinds of glass that I tested and put together in order to get a similar effect but with more light transmission. The piece emphasizes in turn the many aspects of the glass architecture that followed on Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion (1929), and Philip Johnson's Glass House (1949), and continues today in the ubiquitous Apple store with the glass facade."



From I Believe in the Skin of Things As in that of Women (1999) by Monica Bonvicini



**And if some of this work makes you smile, you're thinking along the right lines. Bonvicini says humour is really important too** "The humour in my work has a lot do to with teasing, both the audience and myself. It's not about a statement or a joke that's perfect for the weekly news, but about, at least in the good cases, creating a state of timeless instability, or of non-judgment, or even something very close to embarrassment. I believe that humour is important and even necessary in order to avoid art's falling into didacticism or arrogance. When it really comes down to it, all of the artists and artworks that I appreciate have a healthy dose of humour, even if critics often miss it. So, yes, humour is an important component of my work. I find that it enables art to surprise, to twist expectations, to put into question all pre-existing judgments and conventions. And yet, humour isn't something that's very easy to explain. It's probably the most unspeakable, inarticulable thing there is in social interaction."