

ARTUNER

Bea Bonafini

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PREFACE

Bea Bonafini was born in Bonn, Germany, in 1990. She is an Italian, London-based artist working with multiple media. She graduated from Slade School of Fine Art, UCL in 2014, after which she received the Slade Prize and went on to complete an MA in Painting at Royal College of Arts. In 2017, she was featured in a solo show at the leading London institution, Zabludowicz Collection, for their acclaimed exhibition series Zabludowicz Collection Invites.

Bea Bonafini is a sculptor, textile and multimedia artist whose installations combine craftsmanship, functionality and aesthetic. She has been likened to an architect due to her command of how a space is received. The artist is fascinated by environments and their formal and conceptual conventions and celebrates how spaces bring people together. Therefore, she often works with holistic spaces and explores them by subverting their social, cultural and religious connotations.

Bonafini creates immersive environments that influence the viewer's relation to the space and others within it and is interested in how different proximities effect how her artworks relate to one another. Inlaid carpet artworks and quasi-domestic objects test the notion of comfort: decorative surfaces, layers of history and a subtle command of the Art Décor palette subvert otherwise welcoming spaces and are experienced instead as consuming and uneasy. Her works often teeter on the boundaries between playfulness and antiquity, domestic and sacred, and softness and conflict; the juxtapositions in themselves portraying the latter. The play on domesticity, enhanced by warm and gentle colours, draws the viewer in, thereby creating a sense of familiarity that is simultaneously undermined by the absurdity of the artworks whose functionality is compromised. Seemingly domestic objects are instead signs and symbols of larger systems of faith or power.



MEMORIES ARRESTED IN SPACE
Italian Cultural Institute, September 2018

The boundaries and relationships between immateriality and physicality, mathematical principles and nature, reality and fiction, chaos and order are increasingly becoming pressing concerns in everyday life, as our existences are gradually but inexorably shifting towards the predominance of digital realities.

Each of the exhibited artists champions an original and subversive approach to abstraction, or rather 'non-figuration', and art-making. From challenging the status-quo of the paintbrush, to questioning the bi-dimensionality of the canvas as a surface, these artists make us ponder age-old art historical questions of light, time, and landscape through unexpected means.



SHED SHREDS
Lychee One, January 2018

On visiting the National Gallery she would often stand in front of Uccello's 'The Battle of San Romano' (1438-40). She is not sure if she knows the painting well, or is still in a process of being stripped of the thought that such a feeling can be secured.

Sometimes she stands close up but then retreats back as if wanting to grasp the whole. The painting appears to mix different economies and forces: perspectival space, the attention to decoration, design, theatre, abstraction and observation. As a painting it forms an intersection of periods.



DOVETAIL'S NEST
Zabludowicz Collection, June 2017

Through the production of colourful and sensuous objects and environments, London-based Italian artist Bea Bonafini explores how images and material can suggest an intimate connection between people.

Testing the notion of comfort, her installations and performances operate on the boundary between functionality and the aesthetic. Bonafini stretches familiar forms to make welcoming spaces suddenly feel uneasy, as if one is being consumed by rich decorative surfaces and layers of history.



INTERVIEW WITH BEA BONAFINI

Alisei Apollonio: In your works, the balance between figuration and abstraction is very fragile: at any point, the composition might tip over one side or the other, revealing figures or unraveling abstract shapes. What first inspired you to work with this ‘vocabulary’?

Bea Bonafini: I am often drawn to archeological sites and ancient art of great fragility, that have suffered the impact of time. I recognise how they can still be active and present by lingering between form and formlessness. We can attempt to reconstruct and make sense of these fragments of the past, in order to understand the complexities of who we are today, but our best bets are our assumptions, the stories we tell ourselves and what we want to believe. I realised that what excited me most was the washing away of clarity and information to create a new truth or myth, something that bears the scars or changes of time. I think this way of working keeps my own works active, bringing them closer to the sort of way I see life – where there is more complexity and poetry in the unsaid, in the inexplicable, in what is lost and in the resurrection and rethinking of thought or image.

Previous work you exhibited at the Zabłudowicz Collection Invites was inspired by the marble floor of the Siena Duomo, while Slick Submissions, currently featured in Memories Arrested in Space at the Italian Cultural Institute, is inspired by Etruscan tomb paintings. What makes you choose a visual source or narrative over another?



I often take into account site-specificity for a new work – the former was originally a former side chapel of a Methodist church. The show rethought the mechanics of a chapel, which referenced horizontal narratives of conflict found in the Siena Duomo. The latter was based on the tucked-away underground room of Renata Fabbri gallery in Milan, with intimate proportions and low ceilings, much like the Etruscan tombs I visited in Tarquinia. I often reference image material that I have seen in the flesh, and keep photographs I have taken of details lying around my studio. Through drawing I can process the images both visually and mentally; the ones I keep returning to start appearing in new work. I often end up choosing to work with images which have some sort of idiosyncratic intensity, building up to a climax or post-climax, whether it be movement, conflict, euphoria, connection, metamorphosis, chaos or the visceral.

Textile art has often been associated with feminism (think of the iconic Judy Chicago tapestries in the 1970s-80s). Indeed, it's a medium that immediately brings to mind strong 'identity politics' connotations. Being a woman artist, did you consciously choose textiles for this link with Second Wave feminism, or were you guided by other considerations when you first started producing these works?

In my early 20s I consciously made performances and costumes that were in dialogue with Second-wave feminist art practices in order to situate myself in the context of a lineage that felt personal and still urgent. It lay the foundations of my awareness as a female artist. The drive towards textiles came from a love and hate relationship to painting – having to keep up a dialogue with the history of painting felt like a burden, I needed to loosen these ties and step into a domain with fresher connotations. By replacing paint with textiles it felt as though I was carving out my own space. It opened up a fascinating dialogue between painting and everything that textiles represents – clothing, fashion, craft, home-based practices like the Gee's Bend quiltmakers or the traditional handsewn domestic wall-hangings I discovered in Nepal. I could escape the rigidity of the square stretcher, and enter a more fluid realm. Textiles desire to be touched, worn, sat on; they can be draped, hung, laid flat; and most importantly, there is no separation between colour and material – colour is material.

In the past you mentioned that one of the elements that fascinated you about the Etruscan tombs was that, upon burial, they were meant to be sealed forever and never seen again by the living. By contrast, your works really encourage the public to engage – by taking off their shoes, literally stepping inside the work and spending time in close touch with it. How did you negotiate this fundamental difference in aesthetic, but also conceptual terms?

If the tombs had not been found in modern times, we wouldn't be having this conversation; we wouldn't have that shock-impact of suddenly experiencing a chamber painted thousands of years ago for the dead, with so much vitality that it could have been painted yesterday were it not for its crumbling aesthetic. Today they are accessible and are still very intimate, you are still looking at something that is usually kept hidden. My work is seldomly on permanent public display, so when it is reopened for a show, it almost recalls that novelty of experiencing something that is usually inaccessible. Even for myself, there's a rediscovery when the work is reopened. When you do have access to it, I want it to retain that same sense of enveloping vitality.

The dichotomy between public space vs domestic space is something the viewer becomes acutely aware of when interacting with your work (with reactions such as hesitating to take off one's shoes and/or wondering if one is really allowed to step on the artwork). What prompted you to explore and play with these boundaries?



I think of my work as being active. I think of it as having its own rules. I see how people approach the work with caution – initially assessing what the work is demanding from them and how they should behave around it, before relaxing into its softness and subject matter. When entering someone's home for the first time, our movements are more delicate and our body moves with a different consciousness, before understanding the new rules and system of logic, and relaxing into it. Not unlike stepping into a new home, I want my work to construct a space in which you are more aware of your surroundings, which has a sort of specific spirituality, which is composed of layers, details and a safe comfort. The most urgent prompt was to explore ways in which my artworks can themselves desire intimacy, as opposed to merely depicting it.







Bea Bonafini

born	1990	Germany
education	2014	Slade School of Fine Art, UCL - BA Fine Art
	2016	Royal College of Art - MA Painting
exhibitions	2019	Solo Show (forthcoming), Bosse and Baum, London
	2018	Memories Arrested in Space, Italian Cultural Institute curated by ARTUNER, London Giotto's Room, Post_Institute Can Goetz, London Shed Shreds, Lychee One Gallery, London Searching for Myself through Remote Skins, Renata Fabbri Gallery, Milan Et Refaire le Monde, Galerie Bessieres, Chatou, Paris
	2017	Zabludowicz Invites: Dovetail's Nest, Zabludowicz Collection, London La Diabliesse, Tramps Gallery, London Does Your Chewing Gum Lose its Flavour?, J Hammond Projects, London
	2016	Royal College of Art Graduate Show, London
	2014	Slade School of Fine Art Degree Show, London

