

# Monica Bonvicini at Mitchell-Innes & Nash

BY TAYLOR DAFOE | MARCH 23, 2017



Monica Bonvicini, "No More #1," 2016. Aluminum square tubes, white neon tubes, 18 double tube letters, dimmable, 36 1/4 by 157 1/2 by 2 15/16 in. Photo: Jens Ziehe.

The building of a wall meets the crisis of masculinity. Sound familiar?

In Monica Bonvicini's work, "Structural Psychodrama #2," 2017, on view in her show "RE pleasure RUN" at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, the gallery is cut in half by a huge, 3-paneled wall. Underneath each individual panel is a glass cast of a penis — not propping the wall, not even touching it, but perpetually on the verge of being crushed and shattered. The erection of one destroys the erection of another, it seems to suggest. It's also part institutional critique. The wall is big, but not load bearing; its function is purely

aesthetic. Its structural inefficacy calls into question the foundation of the gallery itself.

“RE pleasure RUN” is Bonvicini’s first New York exhibition in 10 years. Fittingly, it could be thought of as a kind of mini-survey, bringing together all the predominant strains of the Italian-born, Berlin-based artist’s varied practice—namely wall-based installations, light and leather sculptures, found photo collages, works on paper, paints, and glass dildos. Over the course of her 30-year career, Bonvicini has explored through these projects issues around identity, structures of power, and the limits of language. And she has done so with her signature mixture of provocation, innuendo, and wit. The resulting message, if there is one, is often ambiguous.

For instance, in the back of the gallery, a 13-foot white neon sign reads, “NO MORE MASTURBATION.” Bonvicini is hardly an artist to promote abstinence, known as she is for her sex-positive work and interest alternative communities. We’re left to wonder: What does the artist mean? Consensual sex over self-pleasure? Stop treating yourself? End hedonism? Opposite the neon sign, on the gallery’s far wall, is a hanging sculpture of made of bright, white LED tubes, titled, “Bent and Winded,” 2017. The work is so bright as to be almost impossible to look at, yet not quite bright enough that we don’t try. It dares us to examine it, inviting a masochistic kind of engagement.

On the other side of the wall, Bonvicini’s sculpture “Belts Ball (double ball),” 2017, features dozens of black leather belts entangled together. Loosely resembling a ball and chain, it invokes the sexual fetishizing of bondage, and, indeed, S&M culture as a whole. It’s a dubious metaphor for power, and maybe even art itself.

## MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

That, ultimately, is the unifying theme behind all of Bonvicini's work in "RE pleasure RUN": the question of control in art. Is good art in control of us, or are we in control of it?

A small, nearly overlookable work near the entrance titled "The Beauty You Offer Under the Electric Light," 2016, comes as close to an answer to this question as we're likely to get from the artist. It's a painted bronze replica of a light switch, hanging on the wall at shoulder level. It, too, is functionless, of course—the switch doesn't move. However, its likeness is so exact that it's likely fooled many a gallery attendant trying to turn off the overhead lights. Look closer and you'll see that, instead of the word "ON," it merely says, "NO."