

Beatrice Bonino: Time's Shadows Dance Slowly  
by Liberty Adrien



Thoughts can fade in the sands of time. And the art of memory—ah, what a mystery. Legend has it that one fateful evening centuries ago, the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos (ca. 556–468 BCE) was invited to recite a lyric poem at a grand banquet hosted by a nobleman from Thessaly. The night took an unforeseen turn when an argument broke out following Simonides's tribute to the gods. The poet, summoned outside, stepped into the cool night air just as the reception hall roof suddenly collapsed, burying the banquet's guests under its heavy rubble. The devastation was such that the bereaved families were unable even to identify their loved ones. Miraculously spared from this tragic fate, Simonides had vivid memories of the moments before disaster struck. He remembered. He remembered every detail: each individual's position, every item of clothing, every face. And from the ruins of this tragic night, the poet's art of memory was born. But his method wasn't simple. To cultivate a memory, Simonides taught, you must visualize a vast palace, then anchor thoughts and words to objects and characters, to strange and gripping images, and place them spatially in separate chambers. When the time comes to call up these memories, your mind shall roam through each room, looking for the mnemonic notes you have carefully left there. But take caution, the poet warned: memories fade if left untended. Such is the omen that hovers over Beatrice Bonino's work, shaped by the artist's keen interest in ancient languages and the preservation of knowledge and matter seemingly on the brink of disappearance.

Stepping into Bonino's 2024 exhibition *Cosetta* at Bonner Kunstverein brings to mind Simonides's tale. The medium-size, nearly rectangular room is intriguingly sparse, with half the space left empty. To the right, upon entry, several petite assemblage sculptures rest on five waist-high pedestals covered with crumpled tablecloths. The plinths are arranged with an enigmatic irregularity—some a meter apart, others solitary or tightly nestled together. Set at eye level between two socles, *Senza titolo* (2023)—as most of Bonino's works are called—is shielded by glass and framed in wood. The composition reveals the ghostly shadow of a form cast by a squarish piece of brown rubber and a black silk ribbon laid beneath a wrinkled sheeting of dark gray plastic. Hanging discreetly in a corner, another untitled work is a small cardboard box veiled with a cloudy layer concealing a crystal earring-like object pinned into a folded bit of plastic. In stark contrast to the sculptures' subtle shades of white, beige, and gray, the dark-purple floor envelops the voids and assemblages of the artist's meticulously crafted spatial arrangement. But unlike Simonides's call to anchor memories in striking objects, Bonino eschews the extraordinary, the monumental, the dazzling. Rather, her sculptures whisper of the ordinariness of everyday life. With an intuitive attraction to the neglected and the overlooked, the artist attends to serendipities and chance encounters. Haunting the nooks and crannies of hardware and wholesale stores, Bonino gathers her fragments of contrasting textures—hard and soft, thick and thin, translucent and opaque, sticky and slippery. Her practice then unfolds through the assembly of these disparate elements that, by their very nature, were rarely meant to coexist but which, in her hands, form new relationships. The materials are juxtaposed, nailed, taped, hot glued, wrapped, or fastened into compositions that reveal shifting degrees of visibility. To uncover their slightly obscured, half-hidden, or barely perceptible details, viewers are drawn to move, to pause, to bend over, to turn around.

An uncanny presence transcends the material forms of Bonino's sculptures. Existing as bodies held in palpable tension, they convey an unsettling sense of crisis—or perhaps ambivalence, of fleeting moments suspended in

- 180 Beatrice Bonino, *I did, I did, I die* installation view at Jacqueline Sullivan Gallery, New York, 2023. Courtesy: Jacqueline Sullivan Gallery, New York. Photo: William Jess Laird
- 183 (Top) Beatrice Bonino, *Senza titolo* (detail), 2023, *Cosetta* installation view at Bonner Kunstverein, 2024. Courtesy: the artist and Ermes Ermes, Rome. Photo: Mareike Tocha
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time. In the liminal spaces they inhabit, the assemblages appear like the ghosts of characters from a novel, each with its own layered history and distinct personality. Yet the compositions always resist storytelling. Take, for example, the artist's recent works presented in her exhibition *Gallerina* at Galerie Molitor, Berlin (2024). *Two Bed* (2024) sculptures lie bare on the floor, each the shape and size of a single mattress. Made up of hard beige nylon sheets, they are thinly covered with pieces of silicone, plastic, and paper in varying shades of white and levels of transparency, reminiscent of bed linens and pillows. On the walls, rectangular pieces surround the larger sculptures. Crafted in Bonino's signature manner and encased in Plexiglas, the ensembles feature embossed sheets of silicone and paper boxes bonded with fragments of silk and vinyl. Among the monochromatic tones of the works, which range from white to light tan, one singular piece titled *Senza titolo* (2024) catches the eye: an assemblage comprising an unfolded packaging box with a worn pattern, fine black and gray lines, and a small drawing of a red ribbon. The sculptures, seeming to hover like the breath of a memory, evoke the pages of a book whose words have faded, leaving only the blankness of the paper and faint traces of ink as murmurs of a forgotten story.

Intrinsic to the artist's oeuvre is a subtle resistance to the erosion of matter and memory, reflecting her unwavering dedication to preserving disappearing knowledge. Before devoting herself to sculptural work, Bonino studied Greek and Latin linguistics and earned a doctorate in Sanskrit. This ancient language, native to the Indian subcontinent and spoken by around two million people today, holds millennia of cultural heritage, wisdom, and knowledge. Yet much of its vast body of literature and unique philosophy of language remains to be translated. For more than a decade, Bonino has been researching, deciphering, translating, and studying fragments of classical languages, and her enduring fascination with semantics resonates deeply within her artistic practice. Akin to the script and artifacts of a long-lost language, the artist's assemblages appear as constellations of forms and signs that, while enigmatic to most, convey a palpable sense of hidden meaning. They manifest as furtive poems carved in the margins of time, whose verses allude to the complexities of remembering and forgetting, permanence and ephemerality, presence and absence.

#### BEATRICE BONINO

(b. 1992, Turin) is an artist currently based between Paris and Turin. She holds a PhD in Sanskrit from Paris Sorbonne. Her work has been exhibited recently at Galerie Molitor, Berlin (2024, 2023); Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2024); Ermenegildo Zegna, Rome (2024); MMXX, Milan (2023); and Jacqueline Sullivan Gallery, New York (2023). She is included in the ongoing group show *Post Scriptum. A museum forgotten by heart* at MACRO – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma.

#### LIBERTY ADRIEN

is a French curator. Since 2022, she has been co-curator of Portikus, Frankfurt, together with Carina Bukuts, where she has worked on solo exhibitions devoted to Adrian Piper (2024), Philippe Thomas (2024), Simone Fattal (2023), and Lap-See Lam (2023), as well as group shows featuring Thomas Bayrle, Derek Jarman, Sung Tieu, and Cecilia Vicuña, among others. Previously, she curated a series of exhibitions across Europe with video works from the collection of the Centre national des arts plastiques (Cnap), Paris, which awarded her a curatorial research grant in 2016. She cofounded Âme Nue, an independent art space in Hamburg, and co-initiated the exhibition space Les Vitrites at the Institut français Berlin. Alongside these practices, she is a writer and editor of publications and teaches regularly at the Städtelschule, Frankfurt.









