

Anita Molineró

**Sculpture
is not
dead**

Introduction

A major figure on the French art scene, Anita Molinero came to prominence in the early 2000s with powerfully expressive sculptures made from discarded materials that she burns, slashes, breaks, compresses, assembles or distorts. Drawing on wide-ranging and disparate influences (science-fiction films, alternative literature, etc.), Anita Molinero creates a body of work that defies categorisation and, despite her protests to the contrary, can be read as an ironic commentary on decades of unbridled productivism.

Born in Floirac, in the Gironde region, in 1953, Anita Molinero graduated from the École supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Marseille in 1977. From the early 1980s, she used salvaged objects (cardboard, various foams, plastic bottles, cling film, packaging of all kinds, etc.) to reframe the questions raised by sculpture: mass, void, weight, volume, balance, and so on. Alongside her own practice, she became one of France's youngest art school teachers.

Her relationship with objects

The artist has a particularly imaginative relationship with the objects around her: an exhaust pipe can become a twisting limb, a bin can evoke an explosion, a piece of bitumen can seem to harbour a creature. She gathers objects that catch her eye in the cities where she teaches and wherever her artistic career takes her (Poitiers, Valenciennes, Bogotá, Bordeaux, New York, Marseille, etc.). Their shape, material, history and potential for transformation fire her imagination. Sculpture then emerges from the encounter between what the object is and what the artist sees in it.

Her relationship with the present

Anita Molinero works with the materials of her time and asks: *If you want to talk about your own time, how do you avoid the monstrous?* This question could sum up a significant part of her approach. The artist brings the material traces of an industrial, consumerist society into sculpture. Toxicity, pollution, waste

and technological disasters seem to contaminate the works themselves. Plastic melts, polystyrene liquefies, stainless steel twists, bitumen warps.

Yet the violence inflicted on these materials is never solely destructive. It produces new forms, often organic, unsettling or comical. The artist pushes objects to their physical limits, revealing an unexpected form of life in the process.

Borrowed from punk culture, the exhibition title *Sculpture is not dead* thus asserts the vitality of a sculpture that rejects conventions and established categories. A sculpture made from what our age produces, consumes and discards.

Curator

Camille Gouget

Salle Pierre Dupont

1. Les Vénilia

Vénilia is a brand of self-adhesive film used, among other things, to cover furniture. Here, the artist repurposes this household material to create a vast installation, reconfigured each time it is shown according to a relatively flexible set of instructions. The objects covered therefore change from one exhibition to the next; only one element remains constant: the bright, almost garish red that immediately commands attention. Beneath the glossy self-adhesive film, the objects lose their familiar appearance. They are frozen, enveloped, transformed. The Vénilia gives them a new materiality, while sometimes making them difficult to recognise. What, then, lies beneath this surface? What is it for?

This monumental ensemble gives the impression of a scene from a science-fiction film – a constant source of inspiration for the artist: monstrous forms emerge from the wall, while others evoke the remains of a deserted city. The wall becomes a post-apocalyptic landscape: an irradiated city, contaminated by plastic, where everyday objects seem to have undergone a strange mutation.

The title of the work, *Vlami-Maki*, refers directly to the blockbuster *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). The film's deadly antagonist is a shapeshifting cyborg (able to alter its physical appearance, like beings in mythology or fairy tales), a machine made of liquid metal that can take on the form of the people and objects it encounters. In the film, the cyborg conceals itself in a linoleum-covered corridor floor. Merging with the floor, it becomes momentarily invisible before gradually emerging: first its head, then its body.

This scene echoes what is happening on the wall: objects seem to dissolve into a surface, giving the impression of passing from solid to liquid and back again, before emerging in a new form. As in the film, the material becomes at once a covering, a camouflage and a medium of transformation. The work resonates with the piece opposite it, made from the same material and various salvaged objects.

Anita Molinero and recycling

Vlami-Maki was made possible by waste collected at the Ressourcerie du Val de Sambre, a free public service that collects used goods to bring them back into circulation and give them a "second life". Once the exhibition ends, students on the Bachelor's degree in Product Eco-Design at the Haute École Provinciale de Hainaut - Condorcet in Charleroi will endeavour to do the same with the *Vénilia*.

Although it has attracted more attention in recent decades, recycling is an age-old practice that has always existed in our societies, where household objects were reused for as long as possible, even in pieces. It was with the shift to a consumer society after the Second World War that used objects ceased to be reused and were routinely replaced with new products. As a result, the volume of waste produced has continued to grow exponentially, causing, among other things, environmental problems with catastrophic consequences for living things.

Grenier

2. Les Petites Mignonnes [The Little Cuties]

Les Petites Mignonnes is the artist's name for her small-scale sculptures. They often bring together fragments from earlier works: headlights, McDonald's boxes, pieces of bitumen, plastic bags, and so on. On a small scale, these works exemplify the different gestures and techniques that have run through Anita Molinero's practice from the outset:

- **Melting:** One of the artist's principal gestures is to distort the objects she salvages by melting them. Heat thus acts as a sculptural tool: it liquefies, contracts, hollows out and distorts objects until they become shapeless or reach breaking point, so fragile has their constituent material become.
- **Assembly:** The artist often brings materials of different kinds into confrontation. Here, they are not simply juxtaposed, but placed in tension, constrained by one another or even violently opposed.
- **Recycling:** *Les Petites Mignonnes* are shown here on blocks of grey polystyrene that are themselves the last fragments of a work that has since been destroyed. The artist fully accepts that a large proportion of her works have disappeared over time. Her collaborator and the exhibition's curator, Camille Gouget, is working to catalogue them on the artist's website and has chosen to present a photographic inventory of them in the Petit Musée corridor.



Find out more

anitamolinero.com/oeuvres

Cursive

3. Les Petits bétons de la Petite Ceinture [The Small concrete blocks from the Inner ring Road]

Les Petits bétons de la Petite Ceinture is a series made from fragments of concrete pierced by pieces of reinforcing bar, salvaged from the Petite Ceinture, the former railway line encircling Paris. For many years, Anita Molinero worked in a studio in a former station on the Petite Ceinture, in Paris's 20th arrondissement. It was in this urban fringe setting that she salvaged these pieces of concrete to use as improvised plinths, on which she impaled other found objects: fast-food boxes, old enamel signs or fragments of other sculptures left in the studio.

This way of working is characteristic of her practice: rather than seeking materials elsewhere, the artist draws on what she finds around her. She does not seek to create a form from a substance, as a traditional sculptor would, but instead to combine and transform salvaged materials. The objects she salvages are therefore never entirely neutral: they bear the marks of a place and a time. Her sculptures thus become, almost despite themselves, a kind of fragmentary portrait of the places where they take shape.

Anita Molinero and materiality

In *Conversation avec Camille Gouget*, published by Éditions Tandem to coincide with this exhibition, Anita Molinero explains that she distinguishes between "material" and "materiality". For her, the first term refers to a substance that an artist chooses to use and whose final form they determine. Materiality, by contrast, is what emerges from the transformations wrought on a substance by the artist's gestures (melting, assembling, cutting, etc.), without any preconceived idea of form; it then imposes itself on the artist of its own accord.

Mirador

4. Les fauteuils roulants [The wheelchairs]

Handy is the title the artist gives to a series of works based on salvaged wheelchairs. The installation brings together two groups of works: *Handy / Mars*, comprising coloured wheelchairs and polystyrene, and *Handy*, comprising stainless-steel wheelchairs.

The former preside over the remains of a strange battlefield, made up of pieces of polystyrene arranged on the floor, evoking fragments of a devastated landscape. Together with the orange tint of the polystyrene, the title *Handy / Mars* suggests the planet of the same name and the imagery of science fiction. The wheelchairs have had their seats removed; some are folded, others stacked. Rendered useless, they nevertheless seem to retain a trace of the people who once occupied them: a tension, a tightening, like a memory of something that might have happened before the visitors arrived.

Around this scene, the stainless-steel *Handy* seem to continue struggling, rearing up, even trying to escape. The artist is less interested in the wheelchair itself than in the movement she imparts to each one. The stainless-steel sheets are folded, twisted and crumpled; this working of the material gives the sculptures a bodily presence. The metal seems to contract, twist and straighten up. The chairs are empty, yet movement seems to inhabit them. The way the artist stages them almost gives the impression that they are acting: struggling, fleeing or resisting.

In this ensemble, the scenario imagined by the artist guides the sculptural gesture. She begins with a kind of fiction, then seeks to give it form through the material. The film screened in the Entresol at the back of the Grande Halle includes a sequence in which the artist hammers and heats stainless-steel sheets to give them bodily form.

This series occupies a distinctive place in Anita Molinero's work, which rarely invokes the human figure. She is more interested in objects and materials, or indeed in the traces human beings leave behind. In the *Handy*, the body is suggested: it is absent, yet everything evokes it.

Grande Halle

5. Les poubelles [The bins]

Around the turn of the millennium, Anita Molinero witnessed a scene that marked a turning point in her practice: a group of young people setting fire to a bin in the street. As it burnt, the plastic warped, burst and took on an unexpected form. For the artist, this transformation was a profound aesthetic shock: the object was already becoming sculpture before she had even intervened.

Following this experience, the bin became a recurring material in her work. From large containers to neighbourhood bins, Anita Molinero develops a veritable typology of the object. Using a blowtorch, she heats, distorts and stretches the plastic, pushing the material to the brink of destruction. She has since often been described as a "sculptor of fire".

The forms she produces thus oscillate between collapse and resistance. Their distortions sometimes create the illusion of a material still hot, caught in the very instant of its transformation.

My sculpture, she explains, is a torrent you trip over; it is made of holes, hollows, openings through which it gushes out. It really is a matter of solidified substance or materials, of grimacing cavities. She admits: When I made the first bins, I had the Alien series in mind.

Anita Molinero and ecology

The artist has always refused to take on the role of an ecological or environmental activist artist, preferring to focus her statements on her work as a sculptor, driven by questions of form and issues relating to the materiality of her works. This deliberate distance from activist discourse does not prevent the public from interpreting her approach and her works. They may see in them a fierce critique of productivism, a condemnation of the disastrous management of industrial waste, intense anger at the destruction of the environment and the depletion of the planet's resources, and so on.

6. Bouche-moi ce trou [Plug this hole for me]

The imposing cylindrical sculpture suspended in the Grande Halle is made almost entirely of polystyrene sheets, a material usually used as insulation in construction, which the artist extrudes. This verb, emblematic of Anita Molinero's practice, describes a set of gestures that push the material limits of objects. The polystyrene sheets are heated with a blowtorch: under the heat, the plastic liquefies, distorts and stretches, forming long drips and slender plastic stalactites. The sheets are then assembled to form a kind of large cylinder with a hollow centre. The sculpture flirts with the limits of architecture: it is no longer simply an object placed in a space, but seems to occupy it, block sightlines and constrain movement through it.

The title of the work refers directly to the circumstances of its creation. In 2018, the Palais de Tokyo in Paris invited the artist to take part in a group exhibition. The space she was offered was high up, above a mezzanine, with no possibility of support from the floor. Her only option was therefore to conceive a suspended sculpture. With her characteristic humour, the artist saw this space as a "hole to plug". The title thus refers both to the commission and to the very form of the sculpture, with its hollow centre.

Originally, other elements accompanied the sculpture, such as *Tina*, a work that entered the collections of the Province of Hainaut in 2020. With its rusty orange colour, *Tina* also evokes the world of *Mad Max*, an important cinematic reference for the artist, in which the characters inhabit a desert world. The title *Tina* refers directly to Tina Turner, who played Aunty Entity in the third instalment of the trilogy, *Beyond Thunderdome*, released in 1985. Like other sculptures by the artist, *Tina* incorporates faux fur, giving it an almost animal quality, as though a strange creature were nestling within these masses of plastic and metal.

Anita Molinero and titles

For many years, Anita Molinero refused to give her sculptures titles, finding them inelegant, pretentious or even at odds with the nature of her work, which embraces instead the idea of lowering status, or even rejection. This explains the large number of untitled works in the exhibition.

From 2005, however, the artist began to give them titles, initially inspired by science fiction (*Tina*), the materials used or the context (e.g. *Poubelle [Bins]*, *Oyonnax*), then gradually becoming more affectionate (e.g. *Les Petites Mignonnes [The Little Cuties]*, *Louise*), as though the sculptures were becoming the beings that populated her world. So, if sculpture is not dead, as the title of this exhibition suggests, perhaps it takes shape in bodies, with a character of their own, and sometimes even a first name?

7. Les Oyonnax

The *Oyonnax* series brings together sculptures made from traffic bollards, in colours ranging from white and red to various shades of pink. In Oyonnax, in France's plastics industry valley, the artist gained access to a factory specialising in the manufacture of these bollards. She was able to enlist the company's support for an entire day, intervening at the very heart of the manufacturing process: she worked with the still-hot plastic straight from the mould, having air blown into it to create these swollen forms, stretched to bursting point. This is one of the rare works for which the artist did not collect an existing object but intervened directly in its manufacture to alter its materiality.

The colours were determined by dyes introduced directly into the mould, producing different pinks, some very pale, others more intense, alongside distinctly red or white pieces. Here we find the garish red so prominent in the artist's work, but also pink, which holds a special place in it and gives the *Oyonnax* the appearance of chewing gum. This colour introduces a dimension that is both playful and provocative. As Anita Molinero puts it: *Pink, a little glamorous, a little vulgar, like the street.*

Fragments of these plastic objects appear in several sculptures made from tram handrails bent in a hydraulic press. This series evokes *La Fiancée du pirate* (1969), a film by Nelly Kaplan in which the main character triumphs over the hypocrisy of the village notables and, as she flees, leaves behind a tree hung with her victims' clothes.

Anita Molinero and the formless

In *Conversation avec Camille Gouget*, Anita Molinero distances herself from Art Informel, a broad tendency in painting identified in the 1950s by the critic Michel Tapié and characterised by a certain vehemence. By contrast, the notion of the "formless", developed by the writer Georges Bataille, proves useful in assessing the scope of the artist's work. For Bataille, the formless denotes that which resists being given form, and therefore being ordered: viscous matter, decomposition, the body and secretions, for example, but also unstable, animal or monstrous forms. The formless thus stands in opposition to an "elevated" conception of form, based in particular on beauty, nobility, proportion and mastery. More broadly, it is a term (an "action", Bataille says) that strips things of their status and brings them down, outside the accepted categories, hierarchies and idealised forms in which thought seeks to confine them.

8. Le monde de la rue [The world of the street]

Continuing her exploration of materials abandoned in the city or on its outskirts, the artist has created other pieces, such as *La Louise*, made from exhaust pipes and taking the form of a spider, in homage to that of the great sculptor Louise Bourgeois, but invested by Anita Molinero with a more organic, even physiological intent. *If I don't imagine gases passing through these pipes and distorting them like intestines, then coming out in a vulgar, even stinking way through the ends of these openings, these cannulas, I don't want to work with them.*

With this ensemble, the exhibition continues to fill with new monstrous creatures: mechanical, biomechanical or organic. Further on, moving towards a pillar in the Grande Halle, a group of caterpillar tracks from construction machinery, embellished with copper leaf, seem to crawl like processional caterpillars. At the back of the room, a monstrous creature seems to emerge from a shapeless mass of black plastic waste, straight out of a science-fiction B-movie, its development suspended between two upright tyres. This is another defining feature of Anita Molinero's work: she always seems to hold her forms "between two states", between liquid and solid, form and formlessness, emergence and disappearance. She always defers the revelation of a definitive state.

9. Les fers à béton [The reinforcing bars]

The reinforcing bars topped with McDonald's boxes form a series based on the principle of assemblage. Like several others in the exhibition, these sculptures disconcert through the sparseness and simplicity of their composition. Inspired by cinema, this ensemble was conceived as a kind of prequel: a work that comes chronologically before another, already established work. The artist devised these sculptures for an exhibition at MAMCO in Geneva in 2012, reinterpreting the gestures and forms of her earliest works, made in the 1980s and 1990s. At that time, she worked mainly with humble materials.

With this series, Anita Molinero thus returns to the early years of her practice, revisiting in particular her "punk" years, when she took an interest in lowly materials and ordinary objects, seeking to reveal the "tiny beauties" hidden in the material. The simplicity of the reinforcing bars and McDonald's boxes thus appears as a deliberate return to this economy of means: the artist reduces sculpture to a few familiar elements, whose encounter is nevertheless enough to produce a new form and question our habits of perception, both inside and outside museums.

Anita Molinero and humour

Often described as a "punk" sculptor, Anita Molinero is seen as an artist who delights in overturning sculpture's traditional conventions: noble materials, literary inspirations, grandiose plinths, displays of craftsmanship, the creative genius of new forms, and so on. Her various acts of desecration, all of which subvert the qualities listed above, also reveal a healthy dose of humour. This is an important driving force in her work, which she enjoys sharing with those who view it. Indeed, she admits to having a soft spot for comedians and regretting that she cannot make people laugh on stage.

Petit Musée

10. Les Maltaises [The Maltese]

Shown in the Petit Musée, *Les Maltaises* are a group of sculptures made from "Maltaises" orange nets, whose material the artist radically transforms using a heat gun. Under the heat, the nets shrink, contract and fold in on themselves until they form irregular, almost organic volumes. Weakened by fire, the material takes on the appearance of burnt lace, while its cavities and tears evoke a surface attacked by a corrosive substance. What began as simple packaging thus becomes a strange form, at once compact and vulnerable, which seems to retain the memory of the violence that transformed it.

This attention to the fiction inherent in materials is particularly evident in Anita Molinero's work. Rather than seeking to make these sculptures illustrate a discourse on consumption, waste or pollution, the artist seems to give them an autonomous existence. Ultimately, they tell no story other than their own and remain in an unstable state, as though the violence of the making process were still inscribed in their material.

The fragility of the *Maltaises* takes on a particular dimension in this exhibition. The works are displayed out of the public's reach in the Petit Musée, which has been closed to visitors to protect them. The paradox is striking: plastic, a material considered almost indestructible and capable of persisting in the environment for decades, becomes extremely fragile once subjected to the artist's intervention. Heated to the point of transformation, it loses its strength and comes to resemble fabric, or even lace.

11. Les disparues [The lost works]

In the Petit Musée corridor, a wall covered with pasted photographs traces the history of around a hundred sculptures made by Anita Molinero since the 1980s that no longer survive. Like many artists, she has lost some of her works over time: some have been destroyed, particularly for lack of the means to store them, while others have been lost or broken because of their fragility. The photographs thus preserve a record of these sculptures and complement the presentation of the artist's work. Arranged chronologically, they reveal the evolution of her practice through works that can no longer be shown in the museum. This display therefore functions as an archive, placing the exhibited works within a broader history and documenting different stages of her work since the 1980s.

Mezzanine

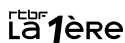
12. Aline Dalbis's film

Directed by Aline Dalbis, the artist's daughter, this film is compiled from videos showing Anita Molinero at work in her studio with her assistants. It offers an insight into the gestures and different stages involved in making her sculptures, particularly the way she handles, transforms and works the materials. Beyond these images of the creative process, the film also offers anecdotes about studio life, as well as the artist's reflections on her practice and her approach to sculpture.

Influences

Cinema, particularly science fiction, has a considerable influence on Anita Molinero's artistic practice. Here is a selection of films that have inspired some of her works.

- ***El cochecito***, 1960, Marco Ferreri
- ***La Fiancée du pirate***, 1969, Nelly Kaplan
- ***Alien***, 1979, Ridley Scott
- ***Mad Max***, 1979, George Miller
- ***Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior***, 1981, George Miller
- ***Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome***, 1985, George Miller & George Ogilvie
- ***Mad Max: Fury Road***, 2015, George Miller
- ***The Terminator***, 1984, James Cameron
- ***Terminator 2: Judgment Day***, 1991, James Cameron
- ***The Fly***, 1986, David Cronenberg



This exhibition, produced by BPS22, is supported by Galerie Christophe Gaillard (Paris, Brussels, La Résidence / Le Tremblay).