

ARTFORUM

Paris

ANITA MOLINERO

Galerie Thomas Bernard / Cortex Athletico by Lillian Davies

When activating her potent selections of form and color with the cataclysmic force of gas flames, French artist Anita Molinero does not fully know where her experiments with heat and chemical reactions will lead her. The process she employs can be toxic, even aggressive; the poisonous ingredients of industrially produced plastics are released as their molded forms are violently deformed. Each of her sculptures is a palimpsest of particular urban materials. For the works in this show, she incorporated a green plastic trash bin, ubiquitous both across France and in her work, as well as Styrofoam McDonald's containers and, like relics of the Berlin Wall, fragments of Paris's petite ceinture (the ring road that once separated central Paris from its outlying areas). Through Molinero's process of appropriation, juxtaposition, and frequent blasts of heat, each work becomes a sort of contemporary artifact, directly referencing a unique moment and place.

The inexpensive, ready-made materials that have fueled Molinero's work since 1990 almost always remain recognizable. She does not seek formlessness or abstraction. Here, with the selection of materials for many of the works, she seems to have been intentionally conjuring the banlieues of Paris. In Molinero's plastic language, the crumbling divisions between center and periphery take shape, only to betray their fragility. In three wall-mounted sculptures—*Sans titre (vert)* (Untitled [Green]), *Sans titre (orange)*, and *Sans titre (multicolores)*, all 2014—Molinero uses broken chunks of Paris's former ring road to create portraits of a contested, yet enduring, division between inside and out, French and immigrant, affluent and less so. But while these sculptures evoke a real physical and social context, they do not assume a conceptual or political stance. "I am convinced that art must contain politics," Molinero has said, "but not use them."

Le Bayou, 2012–15, the work that gave the exhibition its title, is playfully anthropomorphic. Posed at the entrance to the gallery, it stood like a giant toad, or an alligator with its tail coiled in anticipation. There is humor in this sculptural beast, fashioned out of a stainless-steel gas oven, a plastic trash can

(distorted by heat), four black steering wheels, faux fur, and plastic bags. The swamp creature seemed ready to saunter out the door.

It is worth considering the ways in which Molinero's works function differently whether indoors or out, and the ability of her sculptures to expand or contract in each context. *Sans titre (de la serie Oyonnax)*, 2007, her flame-sculpted red plastic traffic barrier, was presented this summer in the gardens of the Cité de la Céramique, as part of Sèvres Outdoors, an annual exhibition of contemporary sculpture recently established in the Paris suburb famous for its porcelain manufacture. Do Molinero's sculptures erupt with greater force in the landscape or indoors? Do the surrounding enclosures, a gallery's low ceilings and windowless white walls, lend an added layer of tension to these explosive works? The answer, perhaps, is that the presentation of Molinero's art in both contexts is necessary, each setting enabling the artist to conjure the formal and social structures she is dramatically reshaping.



Anita Molinero, *Sans titre (multicolores)*, 2014, concrete, rebar, polystyrene, acrylic, 20 1/2 × 11 × 19 1/4». From the series "Des petits bétons de la petite ceinture" (Small Pieces of Concrete from the Inner Circle Line), 2014–.

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