

Elvire Bonduelle

Selected Press

Artforum - Critic's picks

Kate Sutton | January 2016

Now in its fourth iteration, Elvire Bonduelle's ongoing curatorial project "Waiting Room" transforms gallery spaces into temporary reception areas where visitors can indulge in the kind of concentrated viewing typically only possible when one has time to kill. Bonduelle sets the stage with her own sculptures, black metal benches festooned with Styrofoam in bleached hues of blue, honeydew, and buttercream, attended by oval MDF tables, finished with surfaces suggesting white marble or speckled granite. Amedeo Polazzo's appealingly plain ceramic vessels cluster along the windowsill, while in the far corner, Émile Vappereau's *des fleurs* (some flowers), 2015, stocks an oversize aluminum vase with sprigs of spray-painted wood. When it comes to the wall-mounted work, Bonduelle purposefully avoids prioritizing process over product. The paintings revel in their own simplicity, the method of their making immediately evident, even to an untrained eye. François Morellet's *La chute des angles n° 2* (The fall of angles), 2002, tests simple manipulations of L-shaped strips of black paper, while Bernard Piffaretti's *o.T.*, 2013, is divided down the middle, with the thick swatches of red, yellow, and green paint from one side of the canvas replicated by hand on the other. For his series "Tutti Frutti," 2015, Nicolas Chardon applies a thin coat of white acrylic to gingham fabric, painting in sections of the patterned grid to create monochrome blocks, while Bonduelle echoes the Styrofoam waves of her benches for the diptych *Frise n° 22 A, B*, 2015. While there is something laudable in the attempts to advocate a more substantial engagement with the internal rhythms of seemingly quiet compositions, "Waiting Room" ultimately risks implying that these works require a captive audience.

"The conditions for looking at art are miserable. Shows are often full of people, a few of whom are idiots. You can only stand and look, usually past someone else. No space, no privacy, no sitting or lying down, no drinking or eating, no thinking, no living. It's all a show. It's just information."
Donald Judd, Complete Writings 1959-1975

Waiting room #4 is the fourth installment of an exhibition series based on the idea that waiting rooms offer an ideal situation for the contemplation of artworks.

A text by MARÍA INÉS PLAZA for Reflektor-M, 28. NOV 2015

WAIT AND SEE.

Twenty days ago, Elvire Bonduelle and I had an Espresso in the corner of a bus station in Torino, where she gave me the book she published with her Parisian gallery Laurent Mueller. It inherits fifteen excerpts chosen by friends of the artist, with a portfolio of Salle d'Attente III, to which Waiting Room #4 belongs in a very subjective, personal tradition to which Elvire Bonduelle has been curating her own shows.

A quote by Donald Judd is the first key to enter the concept of the series on the ideal spatio-temporal parenthesis for seeing art; every curator fantasizes with the means and possibilities of this topos. To her, waiting rooms are the ones to end with the dilemma. "We see nothing", she says when we have to force our gaze into the thirty seconds or the few minutes we dedicate to art pieces during a museum- gallery or an off-space visit. But in waiting rooms, we do not control time, and Bonduelle works are to be seen as an invitation to relax; "to exit the relationship of domination that everyone wants to exert on events".

You could tell, Bonduelle's gaze demands slowness and physical inactivity to appreciate the works; because we are easily distracted by other people and our own thoughts, art turns into a negligibility. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has hung a huge banner with a prohibition sign for cameras on Saturdays, so people start drawing what they see. As the majority of spectators now use a smartphone as a compensation for the lack of will to contemplate art, to immerse our thoughts in what we see transforms into the challenge. Bonduelle doesn't force the gallery visitor to put the camera away, but rather to enter the state of simulacrum that a waiting room provokes. The idea of the waiting room as the possible space for comfortable contemplation doesn't reduce itself to the medical context, but the spaces we know we get to only wait: A metro/bus station, the anteroom to the toilettes were we can look ourselves at the mirror, the transit zones at airports.

Oscar Santillán said something at a dinner referring to waiting rooms also as a state of mind. A waiting room can thus be the blue notifications on Whatsapp, the status of the other person while typing, the green/grey dots that tell us on facebook who is online and who isn't. A waiting room in Bonduelle's terms can be compared with the neon installation of Flaka Haliti at Prince of Wales "I see that you have seen that I have seen"(your message), or the platonic and futuristic western scenario at 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' from Konstantin Grcic.

The furniture pieces Bonduelle presents in a way they're an excuse to reevaluate the means of introducing an artwork into a space that is already habited by other objects. The naked foam and the asymmetric chair legs near the vases of Amedeo Polazzo combine the unintentional gesture with conceptual perfectionism, while the so called Tutti-Frutti canvases of Nicolas Chardon converts the abstract use of color surfaces, into extent of body movements as if they would literally dance out of the wall."(...) I would admit that at the origin of the waiting room concept, are two very personal handicaps: A great difficulty in concentrating without being alone, and a fairly poor circulation mean standing-still for long periods of time is uncomfortable."Émile Vappereau's sort of palm tree, out of residual pieces in a huge metal vase and the color field magazine of Olaf Nicolai, mimitize certainly that random situations of watching something unintentionally and suddenly realizing the material masquerade-game the artists play.

Bonduelle's request could be understood as an egoistic act, as the subjectivities of the erratic way things installed at Sperling are subordinated to the artist's stoic pursuits. It could be formulated the other way around: It is actually an exceptional offer to discover something beyond the exhibition by sitting in the chairs she makes, while her canvases can be rotated, putting the genealogy of painting as a certain absurdity, but also creating a very unusual atmosphere in a gallery: The sense to the spectators that whatever we do – sit, stand or hang around - it will influence the space.

introducing : Elvire Bonduelle

Art press N°397

Anaël Pigeat | February 2013

Translation, L-S Torgoff

Elvire Bonduelle is engaged in a demanding quest for happiness that obliges her to use all sorts of media —drawing, sculpture, video and now painting.

Elvire Bonduelle thinks that art should be pretty and light but never frivolous. On the contrary, her work exudes authority. After graduating from fine arts school in 2005 she decided to dedicate her life to a serious quest for happiness, optimism totally in contrast to the cliché of the wretched *artiste maudit*. She likes to talk about “self-sculpture.” This is the source of a studied freshness that could not exist without a consciousness of the difficulty of existence. The seriousness and joy go together.

It’s tempting to see Bonduelle in an art historical light. Her objects sometimes bring to mind Minimalism, as with *Wood is Good* (2012), a hinged wooden armchair that can be unfolded and laid out flat. Among the artists she admires most are Donald Judd, obviously, Sol LeWitt, and Bruce Nauman, whose videos fascinate her because of the way they are built around paradoxes. But at the same time her work displays a fondness for ornamentation, and she readily cites the writings of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. We’re also reminded of the mischievous humor of François Morellet, Taroop & Glabel’s collections of absurd images and the unreal constructions of Andrea Zittel. Bonduelle’s practice is not categorically correct. She works by intuition. Tiptoeing through art history, she plucks out its contradictions.

A DICTATOR OF HAPPINESS

A few years ago, in explaining her project, she proclaimed herself “a dictator of happiness,” illustrated by a representation of herself made up to look like Hitler with a pink moustache. She made instruments of happiness, such as *Sèche-larmes* (Tear Dryer) and *Tire-bouche* (Mouth Puller), meant to resemble instruments of torture, or rather the playful, machines filmed with a mixture of mockery and indulgence by Jacques Tati. Then she invented *Cales* (Wedges), pieces of foam covered with imitation-wood fabric designed to offer a comfortable seat in existence. These armless easy chairs fold out into beds and can be configured to fit the particular body and space. In fact, Bonduelle has made all kinds of chairs, especially *Rocking Chairs* and *Rocking Transats* (Deck Chairs), so that people can have a place to sit while they watch the world. During a residency in Canada, she decided to make a pair of her own version of the rocking chairs found in Quebec suburban front yards. Then she proceeded to make metal and wood variations on this theme, of varying degrees of recognizability and practicality. For a long time she made all her artworks herself because of the “tenderness” she found in wood and the closeness to the materials that comes from working with them yourself. Recently she decided to delegate the work to others. There is something that sets her to dreaming—and sometimes having night-mares—when she drives through suburban landscapes to observe the architectural details of the single-family houses, a bit of caprice in an overly standardized world. One of these frequent aimless excursions resulted in the series *Dessins à la règle* (Ruler Drawings). Since 2007 she has produced works in this series as regularly as breathing in and out,

and even filled a few books with them. Sitting at her worktable she traces a line with a medium-sized ruler, and at one stroke improvises, letting herself be guided by the shapes and colors that emerge from her memory. When she first started, at a time when she didn't have her own studio to work in, she drew interiors, and later, suburban homes (Maison, Voiture, Chien / House, Car, Dog). Sometimes she drew mansions. A few color highlights brought out depth. For her latest series, titled *Les Vertus*, she had the idea of a real estate agent who would ask homeowners to name a virtue to be written on their property. Words like "Calm and serenity" and "Paix/Peace/Friede" can be read on a balcony, shutters or a roof.

A BETTER WORLD

Bonduelle loves words. She writes light-hearted, catchy songs whose lyrics express "the spirit of my work." She has long read *Le Monde* religiously, "as if saying my prayers." Because there was too much violence in this newspaper, she conceived a special edition called *Le meilleur Monde* (The Better World), assembled by cutting out nothing but good news for three months to produce a kind of answer to Aldous Huxley's terrifying *Brave New World*. The Spanish newspaper *El Pais* invited her to do the same. By chance the *Indignados* movement broke out in Madrid just at that moment. She distributed her newspaper full of good news in the streets during a few performances.

In front of the Roman amphitheater in Arles she gave passers-by umbrellas made of survival blankets, little portable modules of happiness for protection from the rain and sun. Bonduelle had invented them for the exhibition *To the Moon via the Beach* organized by Philippe Parreno and Liam Gillick (see art press 395). She called them Individual Lunar Excursion Modules, named after the landing vehicles astronauts used to descend from their rockets and explore the moon's surface. Bonduelle has participated in many collective exhibitions run by artists and at times likes to play the curator to enjoy the shared artistic connivance. Now she has decided to take up oil painting. She started out by having stretchers made in the shapes of arcs, to which she intends to put the finishing touches. Hanging on a wall in her studio is a small altarpiece she's just made of scraps of wood. What interests her about such things is the question of the sacred, not a religious sacredness but a way to get even closer to objects. She says that this is a way to bring together art and the functional—i.e., life.

Domitille d'Orgeval

The starting point of Elvire Bonduelle's « Rotating Paintings » is a visual motif which is as simple and factual as possible: the curved line formed by a curtain blowing out of the rectangle of a window. From this vision, the artist has created a series of ruler drawings that have been characteristic of her production for a few years. She then extracts this motif from its initial context in order to submit it to a set of operations that have led to hard edge abstract paintings, in an accepted filiation with the master of the genre, Ellsworth Kelly.

The result is visually very efficient: the eye gets lost in the abyss of darkness, while the whiteness brings it back to the surface of the artwork. The artist has revealed the impact of this striking contrast through a set of paintings that stand out because of their mode of presentation: their fate is not about being immutably presented as a line on the white wall of the gallery but rather to be arranged in changing shapes (triptych, quadriptych), each combination offering a different vision to the eye. Indeed the gallery owner is commissioned by the artist - just like a performer would be - to operate a rotation of their artworks, preferably unbeknownst to the spectator, in order to defy them, test their attention span but also to let doubt interfere with the whole process.

The aim of the prank being played here is to bring the spectator to think about what they are seeing, to train their eyes. It is an issue that was already tackled by Elvire Bonduelle during her previous exhibition at galerie laurent mueller, « Salle d'attente III », during which the artist said: 'everything is here: quite often we don't see anything. We force our eyes, by absolutely wanting to see here, now, in three minutes or thirty seconds.'

However Elvire Bonduelle's point does not end here and other rotating paintings that abandon the hard edge aesthetic but take on curved motifs extracted from reality are testament to that. These artworks show the gradual wearing out of the paint brushed away on the surface to be painted. The brush is run from the top edge of the canvas towards its bottom right or left edge, until the pictorial substance runs out. Then the brush is being dipped and run again in order to recreate the same movement.

Elvire Bonduelle's « Rotating Paintings » re-establish in a new way the formal practices of some artists from the Concrete Art, BMPT or Support-Surface movements. She uses pertinence and humour but also this false indolence that characterises her so well and triggers a reflection on painting, the act of painting, and the conditions of presentation of the artworks.

Interview with Martin Higgins

November 2011

News production is a highly subjective art. First of all, it is a production. The vast majority of human events go unnoticed by the media lens, and a large proportion of what could quite legitimately be included ends up on the cutting room floor. The French artist, Elvire Bonduelle, has mirrored the selectivity of this process by her creation this year of a special edition of the Spanish newspaper, El País, consisting only of positive news stories, which she has called El mejor País (The best Country). In total, 3,000 copies of the newspaper were printed as part of her 'Pour faire joli' ('To make nice') exhibition and distributed on the streets of Madrid to unsuspecting members of the public.

What inspired your newspaper project? Were there any differences to your Le Monde project of last year?

I was first inspired by the bad energies I realised I was eating everyday just by reading the news. But I didn't want to stop [reading]. I wanted to be aware of what happens in the world. I don't want to be an artist who stays apart of the world and does some crazy things in their studio. Le Monde is 'my' newspaper, I read it almost everyday, so when I did 'Le meilleur Monde' ('The best World') it was something very close to me. El mejor País was a collaboration work as I am not Spanish and needed some clues to understand national politics. So it became more global and mixed various subjectivities, mine, those of my collaborators, and then also El País's as they were deeply involved in the project and asked to remove two articles. How long did it take to fill each newspaper with positive stories? Le meilleur Monde and El mejor País both took me about three and a half months each, which means it takes approximately 100 issues to make a positive one! One per cent! I didn't intend to criticize the media, but in the end it became a real subject. For example, on front pages there is almost never good news. Does it mean good news doesn't sell? So we readers must be partly responsible for it. It was long and hard work as I decided to read each article of each issue during the 100 day period, and then tried to create a paper with exactly the same layout. Sometimes there are some white spaces as I didn't want to put advertisements nor to publish articles that were not so positive. In the end, most choices are conflicts of love and duty. It's a crazy thing!

What sort of response have you had both from both the newspapers and your audience?

Well ... I have to say it has been a great success for both 'best newspapers'. People are very enthusiastic about the concept. They all seem to be suffering from too much bad news that flows day by day. And they want to know more. They want to see it for real and check its positivity. Most of the time they agree with the choices made. Sometimes they ask, "Why this article?" A polemic begins, and people realize that the whole project is very subjective. Then some ask which kind of news is the most difficult to find, and why some articles are so scary

about the actual state of things, even if full of hope. But they all ask for more. They say they would read it each week if only it could be a weekly newspaper!

Can you explain a little about the 'Cravaches' ('Whips') installation in your exhibition, which replaced with whips the shafts that normally protect complementary newspapers in bars and cafes?

Yes, newspapers become a masochistic tool with the whips. I like the idea of increasing one's power by reading daily news. I actually don't want to quit reading it. Reading daily news is the active way of being aware of what happens in the world, it is voluntarily facing the truth of things that happen, including extreme violence. The person who tells you some news will surely, possibly unconsciously, add their subjectivity. And we don't need to add more subjectivity to news as there is already that of the media's. The journalists at the scene have the power, we only have leftovers. But the more power you can get you should take as it makes you stronger to face reality, to choose what you want to be, in which world you want to live, in order to be happy. One has to try hard to take part in democracy. We have to use the little freedom, the little power we still have to choose how we want the world to be. And it's a tough thing to accomplish because to do so you have to be aware of what politics says, and plan and do, or not. I am sure reading the news helps a bit!

How does this work fit into your wider work and the 'Pour faire joli' ('To make nice') exhibition?

Well my work is, from the very beginning, entirely directed by a kind of 'quest for happiness'. It happens to be any kind of pieces, objects, drawings, videos, installations, anything I imagine and create in order to make life more ... pleasant. I often do stuff that fits in at home which can be useful, such as furniture, in order to make life more comfortable. I decided art should be more important and present in our everyday lives, as it can be powerful sometimes! But it should not be too sacred: for example, I'm doing many chairs for a long time because it is our adaptors to Earth, and also because I like the idea that people will first look at it as a piece of art, with respect, admiration - maybe more - and then simply sit on it. I did these two best newspaper to bring more happiness in our lives by sharing good news. The greatest part of these two experiences is the performances: to go on the street and distribute these special issues by shouting "Le meilleur Monde! Or El mejor Pais! Only good news! It's for free!" People take it, take a few steps and turn back, "Only good news? It's not possible!"

I hope I'll be soon shouting in English, "The best ____! Only good news! it 's for free!"



Elvire Bonduelle, *Chocolate*, 2004, Ceramic, 10 x 20 x 1,5 cm

Richard Dailey, **Onestar Press**
February 2010

“Insouciant elegance defines everything Elvire tries her hand at, and what she does deserves the ultimate Good Housekeeping seal of approval: she hits us artists where we live. Furniture, cushions, hot plates, music - her creations in whatever form are meant to be integrated into our lives; she makes things you immediately want to live with. Everyone knows what happens to chocolate (white or dark) when it reaches body temperature on your tongue - but these hot plates in the form of chocolate bars will set your guests' conceptual glands on fire. Don't let anyone break a tooth.”