
SHANNON BOOL 1:1

Shannon Bool (Canada, b. 1972, lives and works in Berlin, Germany) is renowned for her unconventional use of materials in works that upend authoritative histories by blending elements of art history and popular culture. In this exhibition, Bool presents photo-based tapestries, photograms, and sculptures that probe the history of modernist architecture, often revealing aspects of patriarchal standards and colonialism that underly the legacies of some of architect's most famous practitioners.

The exhibition title, *1:1*, plays off the scale used for architectural drawings and models—representations that match the size of the planned structure in real life—as Bool's works examine equivalencies in the narratives surrounding modernism. In a major new tapestry commission, titled *1:1* (2022), Bool takes inspiration from Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (United States, born Germany 1886–1969), specifically an unrealized golf club planned for Krefeld, Germany, that Mies designed in 1930. In 2013, a temporary 1:1 model of the club was built of wood and metal—a reduced avatar of Mies's design intended to reveal the essence of the architect's vision. In black-and-white photographs, the structure is further abstracted and appears rather finished. Bool appropriates one of these pictures and embellishes it by adding fancy finishes like rosewood and the onyx used in the walls of Mies's legendary Barcelona Pavilion (1929). She then abstracts the photograph into an enormous Jacquard weaving, a transformation that softens and texturizes the image, destabilizing Mies's utopian and austere vision. Meanwhile the shiny boots are rendered at a monstrous scale, infusing their sexy appeal with a dominatrix-like sense of power and bringing the highbrow reputation of modernism in touch with pop-culture sensibilities and consumerism.

1:1 hangs alone in a gallery accompanied by two blown-glass lamps modeled after antiquated, urban gas lanterns. Historically, streetlights were a mechanism for crime prevention, but they also enlivened cities at night and were a boon to the sex industry. Modeled specifically on gas lanterns. Bool's handmade lanterns intend to conjure the term "gaslighting." Originally coined from the title of a 1938 play by Patrick Hamilton (United Kingdom, 1904–1962) called *Gas Light* about a man who abuses and manipulates his wife, the term is a cultural buzzword today that refers to a form of psychological manipulation intended to make a victim question their sanity. Placed together with *1:1*, the seductive, eerie lanterns temper the playfulness of the tapestry and add an ominous edge.

In another large-scale tapestry titled *The Weather* (2019), Bool presents a view from the interior of Farnsworth House, a glass and steel home Mies designed for Dr. Edith Farnsworth in Plano, Illinois, in 1945. Farnsworth asked the architect for a serene escape, but she ultimately found herself feeling exposed in her see-through home. “In this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert,” she explained. Farnsworth’s uneasy feeling in the house lays bare the impracticality of many modernist designs that privilege transparency but still separate the human body from nature in an elemental way. The dissociative effects of modernism are further emphasized in *The Weather* with Bool’s choice of a fall image overlaid with spring-like flowery patterns taken from Roman tiles, a suggested contrast in seasons that inspired the work’s title. In addition, by translating the view from the house into fibers using digital technology and embroidering over the image, Bool interrupts the transparency of the window and hints at her long-standing interest in the writings of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (France, 1908–1961). Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the “Lived Body” contends that external reality and subjective identity are the result of bodily experience and action in a space. Here, Bool not only disrupts photography’s illusion of space, but also heightens our own awareness of space by creating an image that becomes sharper as we back away and rewards us at close range with an immersive sense of complexity and expansiveness.

Bool extends the idea of a body being dislocated in space in two weavings that take as their starting point photographs of designs by Shohei Shigematsu (Japan, b. 1973, lives and works in New York). Sho is with the international architecture firm OMA and created the designs for the exhibition *Dior: From Paris to the World* at the Denver Art Museum in 2018–2019. In *Eastbound Borderline* (2022) and *Li Ze Borderline* (2022) the bodies of mannequins from the exhibition are filled in with architecture—the New York City skyline and Leeza SOHO tower in Beijing (completed in 2019) by Zaha Hadid (United Kingdom, born Iraq, 1950–2016). In these works, mannequins, perhaps the ultimate capitalist symbol of both hyper-idealized body image and rampant consumerism, almost disappear within the angles and patterns of the architecture, further confused by Sho’s grooved, reflective backdrops. As in *1:1*, the female figures are artificial, anonymous, and truncated, suggesting an invisibility of women in celebrated architectural narratives. And like Bool’s other tapestries, the digitally rendered weaving is given a human touch through hand-embroidered embellishments alive with color, the digital and the handmade combining to create an illusion of both flatness and depth.

Bool again draws attention to the subduing of women in a series of photograms titled *Bombshells* (2018). Investigating the oeuvre of Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, France, b. Switzerland, 1887–1965), these works focus specifically on erotic drawings the architect created while he was in Algiers dreaming up his Plan Obus for the city. Le Corbusier was known to have been captivated by the women of Algiers and often likened the city to a female body, creating sketches of female bodies reminiscent of the paintings of Henri Matisse (France, 1869-1954). The *Bombshells* title plays on the French word *obus*, which means both “bomb” and “shell.” Bool cleverly overlays the architect’s plans for the capital city onto “Orientalist” postcards of the time that exoticized North African women as sex objects. In Bool’s work Corbusier’s lines demarcating roads and buildings become entangled with the women’s bodies; the architectural form mirrors the organic in a fusion that suggests an indissoluble link between the architect’s work and his erotic pursuits.

In another collage series, *Horses of Oblivion* (2019), Bool fuses images of horses with image fragments of brutalist and modernist architecture by Jean Renaudie (France, 1925–1981) and Aldo Rossi (Italy, 1931–1997), among others. Bool’s use of a strong equestrian body was inspired by the photomontages of Italian architect, designer, and photographer Carlo Mollino (Italy, 1905–1973), who added large images of horses to photographs of the Equestrian Club of Turin that he designed, most likely to convey ideas of strength and progress that modernism was intended to evoke. As a photographer, Mollino was preoccupied with making highly sexualized surrealist images of women, even keeping a cadre of misogynistic images in a secret apartment. In her riff on Mollino’s practice, Bool subsumes architecture within the body of the horse, subversively and humorously creating fantastic creatures whose absurd amalgam of elements deflates the symbolism and power associated with both animal and architect.

In works that are infused with astute critique and subtle humor, Bool collages motifs from everyday culture, fashion design, and architecture to reexamine history. Wary of the pitfalls of gendering materials and resurrecting overlooked female practitioners, Bool eschews reductive narratives entirely. Instead, she reveals connections between architecture, consumer culture, and feminist concerns, ultimately demonstrating that the history of modernism is factual and fantastical, amusing and problematic, progressive and stifled—all interwoven, all at once.

Karen Irvine

Chief Curator and Deputy Director

-
- 1 “Mies van der Rohe 1:1: Model Golfclubhaus, Krefeld, German,” Robbrecht en Daem architecten, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://robbrechtendaem.com/projects/mies-van-der-rohe-1-1-model-golfclubhaus>.
 - 2 Nora Wendl, “Sex and Real Estate Reconsidered: What Was the True Story Behind Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House?” *ArchDaily*, July 3, 2015, <https://www.archdaily.com/769632/sex-and-real-estate-reconsidered-what-was-the-true-story-behind-mies-van-der-rohes-farnsworth-house>.