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## Paris. Women House: showcasing the relationship between women and home

In the renovated spaces of the Monnaie building, the relation between home and women is investigated by contemporary artists such as Niki de Saint Phalle and Louise Bourgeois.

[VIEW ARTICLE DETAILS](#)AUTHOR: [Olga Mascolo \(/en/authors/m/mascolo-olga.html\)](/en/authors/m/mascolo-olga.html)

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The house might be a cage, a safe place, a place of memory. "Women House" is curated by Lucia Pesapane and Camille Morineau (co-directors of the [Monnaie de Paris](https://www.domusweb.it/en/Tag.monnaie_de_paris.html) ([https://www.domusweb.it/en/Tag.monnaie\\_de\\_paris.html](https://www.domusweb.it/en/Tag.monnaie_de_paris.html)), the French mint). The event is part of the curators' project to attain gender equality in art history. What makes the show particularly brilliant is that we end up describing it as feminist, true, but this is not the overriding impression. Feminism is mainly "a mindset", says Lucia Pesapane, but the political aim is not the theme of the exhibition - we're no longer in the '70s - so much as a consequence. A collection of artworks related to a clearly defined semantic field - the home - and offering an overview of it in terms of time and space, starting from Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's "Womanhouse".



**Birgit Jurgenssen, Hausfrauen - Küchenschürze (Housewives' Kitchen) Apron, 1975/2003 Tirage argentique noir & blanc**

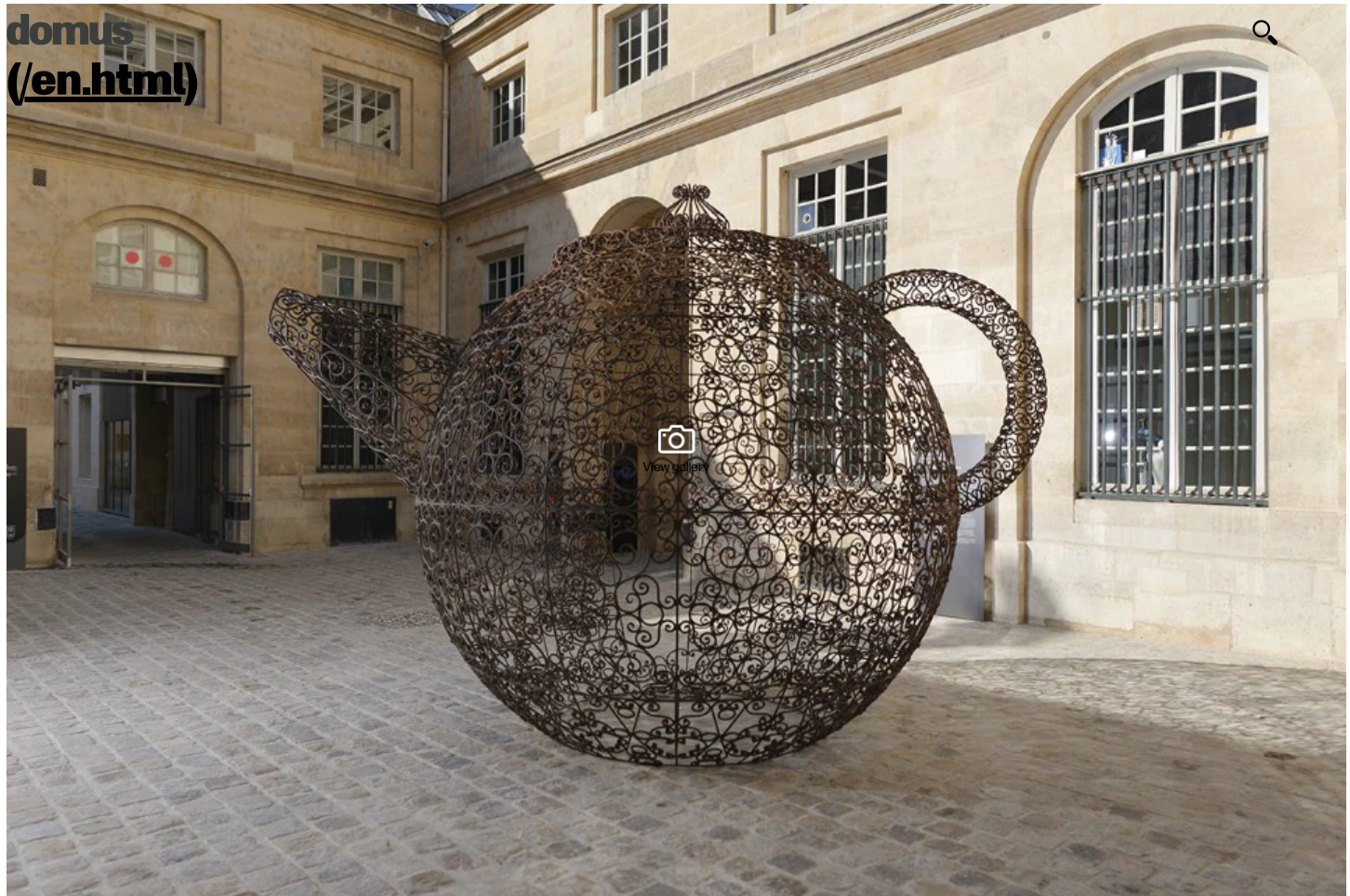
The house as a prison in the years of the feminist struggles in the Western world, or sometimes as protection. "A room of one's own", a refuge in which to nurture one's talents, as Virginia Woolf argued. The leitmotiv of these artists is that for them "construire c'est se construire": they construct themselves through art. The exhibition opens with a thought-provoking calendar: the first time a woman won a Pritzker Prize was in 2004: Zaha Hadid. Before that nothing, and after that next to nothing (Kazuyo Sejima in 2011). And it is by starting from the architecture of male domination that the exhibition explores the theme of the home.



**Francesca Woodman, Space2, Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-1978/2000-2001, Tirage gélantino argentique noir & blanc sur papier Barité. 25.2 x 20.2 cm Edition: 26/40, © George and Betty Woodman, New York / The SAMMLUNG / VERBUND Collection, Vienna**

Among the outstanding works there are "inhabitable" pieces such as the teapot by Joana Vasconcelos, *L'araignée* (*The Spider*) by Louise Bourgeois, an important section dedicated to the Nana Maison by Niki de Saint Phalle, who wanted to be considered as the equal of Antoni Gaudí and shows it in her Tarot Garden in Tuscany. After the calendar, we are introduced to the different sections, laid out in the magnificent spaces of the Monnaie (black and white marble floors, nineteenth-century white and gilded stuccowork, views over the Seine and mirrors for selfies).





But do we really need exhibitions showcasing women artists? According to the curator Lucia Pesapane: "Certainly, this is a transitional phase. We have to make sure women artists have the same weight on the market. And especially within the same kind of time frame. The artist Yayoi Kusama is 90 and her work has a value, but it will never equal to that of Jeff Koons, which had beaten all records by the time he was 70." For the curators it means starting from here, exhibiting works by women in the places of culture. "It's a political operation that takes place in public spaces, in the institutions."





**Zanele Muholi, Katlego Mashiloane and Nosipho Lavuta, ext.2, Lakeside, Johannesburg, 2007 Tirage Lambda, 76,**

The first section is titled "Desperate Housewives". It deals with the domestic environment in the 70s in Europe and the United States. Those were the years of the attack on the patriarchal system, as explained in the work of Birgit Jürgenssen, who turned her body into a walking gas cooker. Then there is the section "La maison, cette blessure", where the home is perceived as a prison. Watch the video of the performance by Lydia Schouten. Wearing a wet suit, she enters and exits from a cage, rubbing herself against the bars. There is the section "Une chambre à soi", alluding to Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay. If the home means a prison and alienation for some, for others it is a source of inspiration and reinvention of the self. The 2007 work by Zanele Muholi, the South African artist, presents photos of lesbian women who flirt protected by the walls of the home, a haven and place of refuge.

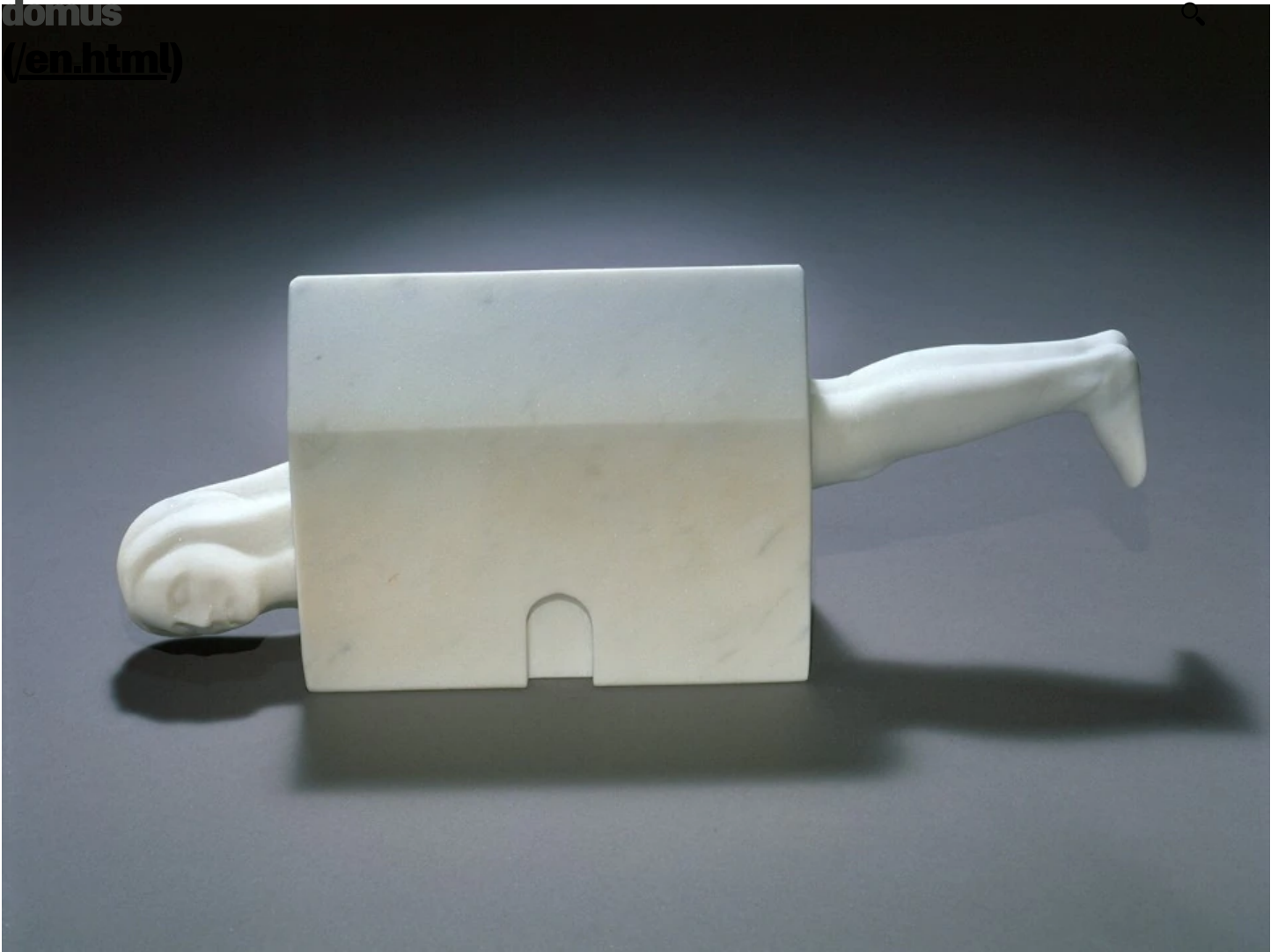




**Andrea Zittel (b. 1965) A-Z Escape Vehicle Owned and Customized by Bob Shiffler, 1996 Metal, dispositif électronique, climatisation, isolation, bois, verre, eau et sel 152.4 x 101.6 x 213.36 cm pièce Unique © Andrea Zittel, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London**

There is the section "Maison de poupée", "A Doll's House", Henrik Ibsen's play, in which the protagonist Nora is treated as an accessory of bourgeois life. The strongest female stereotypes are formed in childhood. Here the artist Penny Slinger in *Exorcism House* violently attacks the system by recreating a doll's house featuring scenes of phantasmagorical horror, which the artist conceives as "inner landscapes". The section "Mobile Homes" has a political intent, with the artists responding to a world characterised by migrations. Lucy Orta presents *Body Architecture* (1996), collective tents to be worn like clothes. An important section is "Femme Maison", taken from the title of the work by Louise Bourgeois (1985), which sums up the condition of the female gender as "food, consumer, consumed".

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**Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010)., Femme Maison, 1994 Marbre blanc 12.7 x 31.8 x 7 cm Collection Louise Bourgeois Trust © The Easton Foundation/ADAGP, Photo : Christopher Burke**

By metonymy, woman becomes the home she embodies. The section "Empreints" ("Traces") is highly poetic. It speaks of absence, the places of the lost soul, and of the body. Here is the work of Nazgol Ansarina, who recreates a wall destroyed in Tehran. Isa Melsheimer recreates a rooftop garden designed by Le Corbusier for Charles de Beistegui in the 1920s: a space with walls just 1.50 metres high, near the Champs-Élysées.

The exhibition is rich. After Paris it will travel to the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington DC, opening on 8 March 2018. Within the walls of the Monnaie, visitors do not feel burden of the feminist struggle, but they perceive its strength. And as ever, here as anywhere and quite apart from gender, it is the artworks that are eloquent.

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**Title:** Women House **Opening dates:** 20/10/2017- 28/01/2018 (Monnaie, Paris) 8/03/2018 - 20/05/2018 (National Museum of Women a Washington) **Curators:** Lucia Pesapane e Camille Morineau **Venues:** Monnaie de Paris, National Museum of Women Wasshington

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