ARTnews

"Andrea Bowers Salutes the Climate Change Activists of the 1980s at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo"

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Andrea Bowers' solo exhibition "La Ragnatela," at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo.Courtesy Sebastiano Pellion di Persano

Andrea Bowers' solo exhibition "La Ragnatela" at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin, Italy, is unintentionally, aptly timed, given its focus on the politics of climate change: Last year, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni hit pause on solar panels on farmland, calling it a "threat to our food sovereignty."

Bowers' show spotlights the Italian anti-nuclear feminist movement and women's camp La Ragnatela—"the spiderweb", in Italian—that launched in 1983 in Comiso, Sicily, to protest the installation of US nuclear cruise missiles at the NATO base in Comiso. The show is a mini-retrospective composed of Bowers' political activist work which was in dialogue with the movement. There are works by Bowers that she created in 2003, straight out of graduate school, as well as pieces produced in 2013, 2022, 2023 and four newly created artworks for the exhibition.

Much of La Ragnatela's history has been forgotten, so Bowers worked with curator Bernardo Follini to find and rebuild the network of Italian ecofeminists. Follini found three women, who are now in their 80s and 90s, who contributed documents and clippings to the exhibition.

"The social engagement part of my practice is the least known about or documented because the art world is more focused on objects, but this is what I'm most proud of," said Bowers during a preview in Turin, dressed in head-to-toe black with her Botticelli-esque hair flowing freely.



Installation view of *Political Ribbons* (2026).
Sebastiano Pellion di Persano

The show opens with *Defense of Necessity* (2003), a quilt that nods to women's traditional crafts, and it's one of the first pieces that Bowers created as a political artist. On close inspection of the quilt, there are sowings of spiderwebs, a symbol for the Women's Pentagon Action, an American grassroots ecofeminist and anti-nuclear movement that was simultaneously taking place in Italy by way of La Ragnatela and in England with the Greenham Common Women's Peace Encampment. *Defense of Necessity* is held up as a fence in the show. "The fence is the site often where nonviolence is questioned whether it's becoming violence. Activists who are involved in nonviolence are always saying, if we cut that fence, does it become violence? Or is this called an offense of necessity, which is an argument that smaller injustices, or you break small laws to protect the world from larger injustices," explained Bowers. "It's a legal term and because it has the word 'fence' in it, it's a play on words and it's poetic."

On the other side of the fence are four vitrine cases, two of which feature a timeline of the La Ragnatela movement. The others display letter exchanges between the women in Comiso and their comrades in England, who eventually traveled to Comiso to help them protest. There are photographs of some of the women who were arrested for protesting, along with a letter from one of the women, who was detained for a long time and put on trial, during which she wore a T-shirt that says "question authority." Bowers took the tagline and added it to *Neon Spiderweb #3* (2026), a neon spiderweb with the words sitting on the outer string of a web—the artist also made three other neon works with such slogans: "A better end of the world is possible," "Return our future" and "To be free from fear." The political slogans of hope pour over into *Political Ribbons* (2026), brightly colored sheets of silky ribbons that repeat the mottos on the neon signs or feature new sayings: "People over profits," "Outlaw women are the only hope for earth's survival" and "Widen the web to break the nuclear chain." Visitors are urged to take ribbons from the wall with them when they visit the show. Bowers explains that it's a "simple way for people to take a position." It's a methodology that she's used before, adding that to this day, she still gets a thrill out of seeing them in the wild or online.

Bowers' pieces in the show command attention no matter their size. Her graphite on paper works: *Diabloblockade, Diablo Nuclear Power Plant, Abalone Alliance, 198* (2003) and *Women's Pentagon Action, 1981, Detail of Woven Web Around Pentagon* (2003) are hyperrealistic. the artist has recreated photographs that were given to her by her mother's friends who were part of the Californian eco-group Mother for Peace. In *Cardboard* (2026), a larger-than-life cardboard with an "empowered Italian woman" facing her back to the audience holding a flag that says "Sun and wind," the artist taught herself how to use an iPad to draw the image that's been projected onto a thick cardboard.

The show at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo is sort of a homecoming for Bowers, as she last showed at the foundation in 1998 as part of a group show titled "Guarene 98." Some 28 years later, her pieces from the Chandeliers of Interconnectedness franchise grace the halls of the space as visitors make their way to other exhibitions by Nan Goldin or Joseph Yaeger. The show, however, feels cut short. Perhaps Bowers has more to say than can fit the space she was

given. (It would have been a better idea to give her two galleries to really demonstrate two decades of hard passion for the environment.)

Still, she managed to make a mark with *Neon Opland* (2026), another neon sign that imitates a doodle from a La Ragnatela poster of a woman kicking a missile with the words "No ai missile" written beneath. It's somewhat phallic, a comical touch made more apparent by teenage couple who were flirting on a bench opposite its neon lights.