



# Julia Bornefeld

**PIECES OF STEEL AS THEY DEFY THEIR WEIGHT  
TO CHALLENGE THE LIGHTNESS OF FEATHERS  
AND THE AIRINESS OF DANCERS; A FLIGHT  
THAT IS PARTLY PHYSICAL BUT ALSO DEEPLY DREAMLIKE**

## **Stellife = Julia Bornefeld.**

**IT IS NO COINCIDENCE, BUT A COMPARISON OF TERMS THAT APPEAL TO EACH OTHER WITH EQUAL ATTRACTION.**

For this artist, steel is the perfect way to portray a rich portfolio of ideas.

Besides, the correspondence is not merely between the material and the artistic work, but spills over into personal experience.

Talking with Julia means understanding how deeply she feels the expressive power of steel.

This fascination is also part of her character: thanks to her determination, tenacity, versatility and resolve, she really can be defined as a “woman of steel”.

It is an explosive mix, if combined with an unbridled creativity that generates ideas with the same force and unpredictability as a volcano emitting fiery lava, overwhelming everything it encounters with its seemingly inexhaustible energy.

Overflowing into other people’s space is a constant feature of Julia’s work.

She seeks a visual and physical contact with the observer, who becomes part of an intense interaction and confrontation that leaves no room for any ill-concealed indifference. Involvement and provocation are key.

At this point, perhaps we should take a step back in time.

Julia has always utilised different genres, drawing extensively from photography, painting, installations and performances, all harmoniously linked and intended to achieve an intensification of expression, an emotional climax.

A common thread winds around the depths of our introspection to form an eclectic weave that portrays the unsettling, non-conformist and multifaceted sensitivity of this artist, who in recent years has amazed us with carousels, cheerful on the outside but disquieting below the surface, prostheses of human body parts given an unnatural, biomorphous identity, photographs that immortalise the phenomenological development of alien metamorphoses and orbiting, blurred, accelerated movements.

**H**er choice of materials has never been casual: they tend to have a feminine influence, such as nylon used for hosiery, felt, feathers, soft fabrics, possibly “looted” from an attic, half-ideal, half-real and still home to dusty memories, objects and moments of a cherished past.

They are brought back to life with love, and in the only way she knows how - through artistic re-elaboration.

Julia seems to live and breathe every project, immersing herself completely in the environment she is asked to interpret and describe, seeking a verbal confrontation and the polyphonic contribution of diverse skills, worlds and stories.

She holds the sensitive reins of inspiration and allows herself to be permeated by the accidental events of life, the *occasio praeceps* that suddenly whirls at her feet.

**THIS IS WHAT LED TO CORPO A NOLEGGIO, A PERFORMANCE HELD ON A SPRING EVENING IN FRONT OF CASTELLO DI SAN GIORGIO, MANTUA.** A fleeting glance, an old Renault 5 parked in the middle of the road, and, surprisingly, an Alsatian dog, sitting happily on the roof of the car.

An entirely surreal vision, the kind of comic, visionary, Fellini-style balancing act that could not fail to fascinate Julia, an artist able to grasp the element of extraordinary that lies beneath the everyday.

Having identified the owner of the dog, and the car, she began a friendship and then a creative alliance.

**T**hose vivid moments quickly come back to mind: Cesare Maestrelli, known as Cesarino, proudly opens the boot and takes out a book entitled “Mantova città che muore” - of which he is the author - along with his next work, about to be published. He introduces us to his faithful Luna, a dog with the melancholy devotion that asks for nothing more than a stroke every now and then.

She sits on the roof, having acquired the habit after that time, many years ago, when she ended up chasing a cat.

Cesarino unleashes a river of words that is almost overwhelming, while Julia listens to him and asks questions; and it seems as though that situation, halfway between paradoxical and surreal, puts her at ease.

**NOW WE ARE NO LONGER MERELY SPECTATORS, WE ARE ALSO ACTORS IN AN ABSURD PERFORMANCE. PEOPLE STOP TO TAKE PICTURES - NOT JUST OF THE DOG, BUT OF THE WHOLE GROUP.**

Cesarino eulogises the story of his life and his inventions (patents pending), his amatory virtues and the incompetence of local politicians, gesticulating like a puppet and breaking into a broad smile whenever Julia agrees with him or supports his enthusiasm.

The verbal contact moves onto the physical level with affectionate embraces and kisses on the cheek: it is done, the thread has been drawn, the work is complete. Cesarino is a jester, uninhibited to the extent that he shouts “the King is naked”, he bellows hidden half-truths and behaves so bizarrely that he is deprived of any credibility, yet with Luna he co-stars in *Corpo a noleggio* as this theatrical cargo of eccentricity and extravagance goes on tour, subjected to curious stares and the cameras of intrigued tourists who prefer to capture the memory of that unusual sight rather than the beauty of Piazza Sordello.

For Julia, Cesarino, Luna and the car represent a perfect parody of **Steellife**: steel is the car and the life is that of her unusual, rather special passengers.

While Luna and her owner continue, during the exhibition, to re-enact their “story” in the streets where it all began, back in the exhibition hall the Fiat 500 is once more the setting for the lively conversations between the artist and Cesarino, to the tune of Rigoletto.

Meanwhile the photographs immortalise the performance of the trio, Julia-Cesarino-Luna, as they sip coffee on the roof of the car, the arrival of the police, and the many and varied reactions of passers-by. In a word: **Steellife**.

## Aeroplanes, flying as light as paper yet strong as steel,

all different, tapered to slice through the air and the folds of fantasy, detached from technology and moulded by the imagination. On the wing of one of the nine, it reads: **DIN A4 WAR GAMES.**

A title that sums up the full value and ambiguity of this work.

*DIN A4* is nothing other than the size of a normal sheet of paper, the kind we have all used since childhood to create aeroplanes, boats and hats, giving a fragile form to our dreams. But some people use paper to create masterpieces.

A Chinese tradition dating back more than 2000 years has taught us how to make flying dragons, while its Japanese counterpart makes origami, which in the last century became metaphors for world peace against the atom bomb.

The rest of the title refers to the modern-day strategies of war that increasingly take the form of “clean” attacks from the sky, planned on computers and executed by star fighters and bombers.

War Games are also the computer games played by children and teenagers as they experience war in a paradoxically playful, exciting dimension.

**T**he installation is made up of contradictions, or rather opposing interpretations: **THE CAREFREE APPEAL OF AN INNOCENT GAME, INVOLVING PAPER AEROPLANES DARTING THROUGH INFINITY AGAINST THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ACTIONS THAT LEAD TO DEATH AND DISTRUCTION, AND THE FUN OF A PLAYSTATION WHICH, DESPITE REPRODUCING THE DYNAMICS OF WAR IN AN EXTREMELY REALISTIC WAY, IS EXPERIENCED MERELY AS A GAME, DETACHED FROM ANY MORAL IMPLICATIONS.**

The revolving carousel becomes a mournful lullaby that takes us back to childhood and fairground attractions, and also the inexorable cycle of military attacks and offensives.

A cordon marks the boundary and makes the work inaccessible, but the public is given an opportunity that goes beyond the tactile: it can act, by pressing a button to activate the inexpressible carousel, decide to leave it motionless or set off its dancing motion, embrace its playful levity or link arms with politico-civil philosophy. It can also decide not to think at all, and enjoy the journey of these pieces of steel as they defy their weight to challenge the lightness of feathers and the airiness of dancers; a flight that is partly physical but also deeply dreamlike, its elements moving busily yet with an intense poetry.

**I**NTER-CONTINENTAL revolves around the same ambivalent themes: the enthralling epiphany of the game, and the aberration that results when excitement is used as an offensive weapon.

A football takes pride of place in this installation, crammed with knives of varying types, ruthlessly piercing the white and black surface of eco-leather, foam rubber and steel. Once again, our enthusiasm takes us back to childhood and afternoons spent on the pitch, our teenage love affair with football and the more mature affection for our favourite team, but is enriched with a subsoil of content that goes beyond the playful, carefree veil.

There is no doubt that football is one of the sports best able to capture the attention, arouse fervour, and keep millions of people glued to their screens during the World Cup.

It has a strong power of seduction which it does not attempt to conceal, even when flaunting sums of money during the transfer season that are nothing short of embarrassing. It's football, so anything goes.

Through this work, the artist seems once again to reflect on the emotional and physical intensity that the simple roll of a ball can generate. Football is movement, passion, competition, entertainment. It is an expression of vitality, joy, tension, exultation and concentration. Footballers' states of mind pass to the spectators, as if by osmosis, like a wave of energy that breaks bridges and bursts banks.

It is a virtual undertow, and as such appears to be generated spontaneously of its own accord by the movements of the soul.

**F**ootball can also become a tool through which man's innate aggression can break free in the form of play, transforming itself, in Julia's view, into a "battle of knives" in which the ball acts as an "accumulator of negative energies".

An accumulator, in which aggression - in the competitive sense - can be dispelled, rather than an engine for fresh violence inside or outside the stadium.

The photographs acting as footnotes to the installation serve as an emotional, conceptual pendant, in stereophonic reciprocity.

Womanly curves attract men with the same magnetic force: they symbolise a sexual power that is as seductive as the game of football.

22 young men line up, each wearing their team's strip, and chase a ball for ninety minutes while trying to kick it into the back of the net as often as possible: in the same way, the charm of women makes the heads of the opposite sex spin to the extent that they engage in romantic acrobatics until they achieve the sought-after conquest.

The ball is presented here with a double meaning: the sensual side, physical attraction towards the body and the quasi-religious devotion towards a sport, and the playful side innate in the game itself, also expressed in the ironic display of footballs thanks to the two spirals reminiscent of the world of cartoons.

There is another element of ambiguity in the photographs: **THE CHEST IS DECIDEDLY FEMININE AND ATTRACTIVE, YET THE POSITION OF THE ARMS, VERY MASCULINE AND IN AN EXULTANT POSE, SEEMS TO SUGGEST OTHERWISE.**

Although not about transsexuality, the subject certainly makes us think of gender equality, something that, fortunately, makes no distinction when it comes to getting excited, celebrating and rejoicing.

**T**he works of Julia Bornefeld are inspired by childhood imagery, with undertones of the world of fairytales and the surreal.

They are formed of a polysemic material that delves deeply into the bag of memories and the uncertainty of real life.

There are several levels and several interpretations: amazement at the display, and meditation about its critical, accusatory undertones.

There is a tangible juxtaposition between the stasis, which freezes the vivid imagery of the installations and the motion that spins the perceptions, carries the gaze and hypnotises the senses.

The concentric revolutions of *DIN A4 War Games* captures the wonder of the onlooker who remains immobile, looking at the carousel, while the symbolic revolving of *Inter-Continental* invites us to explore, emulate its circular motion in order to glimpse the outside and inside of the cavity, to study the differences in the knives, and to enjoy the photographs which balance out the whole.

Different ways of appreciating the work, for a single purpose: never judge by appearances.