

STEELIFE

STEEL LIVES THROUGH ART.

This exhibition is staged during the fiftieth year since the foundation of Marcegaglia.

The passion for steel, together with the ability to transform it, has become Marcegaglia's signature style: with this special event, Marcegaglia has set steel apart from its function while endorsing an exhibition project of high cultural and aesthetic relevance, in line with its entrepreneurial values, a peculiar harmony of technological innovation and respect for human resources.

50th
1959-2009
MARCEGAGLIA

www.steellife.marcegaglia.com

STEELLIFE REPRESENTS A WORK IN PROGRESS, A FASCINATING JOURNEY ON A QUEST FOR THE UNCOMMON CREATIVE ENERGY EXPRESSED THROUGH STEEL, RAW MATERIAL WITH ITS OWN RADIANT ALLURE AND SURPRISING AESTHETIC FEATURES.

NOT EASILY MALLEABLE AND, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THIS, NOT FREQUENTLY EMPLOYED IN ART, STEEL IS THE MEDIUM CHOSEN BY THOSE CAPABLE OF MAKING THE MOST OUT OF ITS FORMAL, STRUCTURAL AND PLASTIC PROPERTIES.

IN THE HANDS OF SUCH ARTISTS, STEEL IS LITERALLY BROUGHT TO LIFE.

[Elisabetta Pozzetti, *art curator*]

● JULIA BORNEFELD

The exhibition opens with **CORPO A NOLEGGIO**, an installation infused with a particular evocative content, inspired by the kind of stories that actually happen on the streets of Italy.

The idea came from a chance meeting in front of *Castello di San Giorgio* (Mantua), where the artist Julia Bornefeld

encountered Luna, an Alsatian dog, lying comfortably on the roof of a car owned by Cesare Maestrelli (Cesarino), the dog's owner.



Corpo a noleggio is a perfect parody of *Steellife*, in the sense of “living steel”. The steel is the car, while the life is that of its unusual passengers, transporting their load of eccentricity and extravagance.

The Fiat 500 is the setting for lively conversations between the artist and Cesarino to the tune of *Rigoletto*, while the photographs immortalise the performance of this trio: Julia, Cesarino and Luna.



● JULIA BORNEFELD

By the same artist, but in an entirely different vein is **DIN A4 WAR GAMES**, which lends itself to many interpretations: the carefree appeal of an innocent game (paper aeroplanes), the responsibility for actions that lead to death and destruction, or the fun of a Playstation, delivering highly realistic reproductions of the dynamics of war, yet experienced as a game, detached from any moral implications.

DIN A4 is the format of a standard sheet of paper, and the rest of the title refers to modern combat strategies which in modern times are commonly programmed by computers, as if they really were *War Games*.

Visitors can activate the charming carousel, appreciate the playful side of the work, embrace its political and civil implications, or simply enjoy watching these pieces of steel as they revolve, light as feath-

ers, on their flight which is not only physical but also profoundly surreal.



● ZHANG HUAN

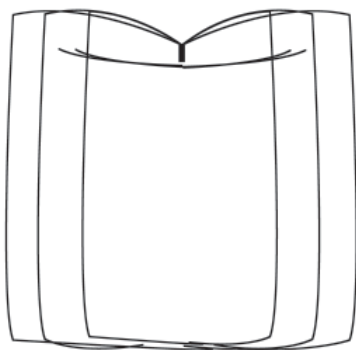
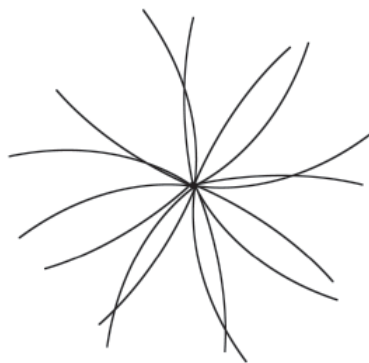
From the spinning carousel we come to the stoic, impassive **BUDDHA OF STEEL LIFE**.

Through this work, Chinese artist Zhang Huan has redefined the centre of gravity of man, who rediscovers himself through spirituality and listening to his inner voice.

In the silence of prayer, the

Buddha counteracts the frenetic agitations of our “advanced civilisation”, standing solemnly as a monument to peace and meditation, in harmony with Creation.

He is seated before a steel coil, a three-dimensional embodiment of a mandala, that symbolic reference to the creation of the cosmos and the cyclical flow of events which appears to have no end and no beginning. The sculpture crosses the boundaries typical of a work of art to give us a much deeper, timeless message. It is an unassailable emblem not only of a wise and ancient religion but also of a peaceful yet revolutionary philosophy of life.



● **MAGDALENA FERNANDEZ ARRIAGA**

An entirely different form of spirituality, obtained through mathematical calculations, is the paradoxically lightweight gigantism expressed in the works of Venezuelan artist Magdalena Fernández Arriaga. The titles of the works (**1EM009**, **2EM009**, **3EM009**) convey a rationalist slant: symbols generated by a rig-

orous approach but also by a desire to allow the public to form its own interpretations. People are free to touch the works, come up close to them and feel overwhelmed, or move away and appreciate the impressive sight of the overall vision. The equation at work here is a subtraction: reduce the lines and modules to the minimum in order to give the maximum possible mood and atmosphere. We are witnessing a metallic form of communication with the fragility of graphite and the solidity of steel, a monochrome entity which stands out in an abstract, neutral, absolute space.



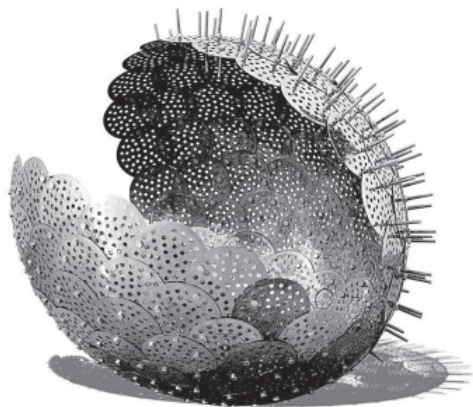
● ADEELA SULEMAN

OPEN CONFINEMENT expresses an intense ambiguity.

Together with **THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS**, placed at the end of the exhibition, it depicts a feminine sensitivity shaken by the contradictions of a society hit harder than ever by the re-emergence of terrorist attacks and socio-religious conflicts.

With an innate poetry, Pakistani artist Adeela Suleman incorporates fears into the uniqueness of an artistic invention.

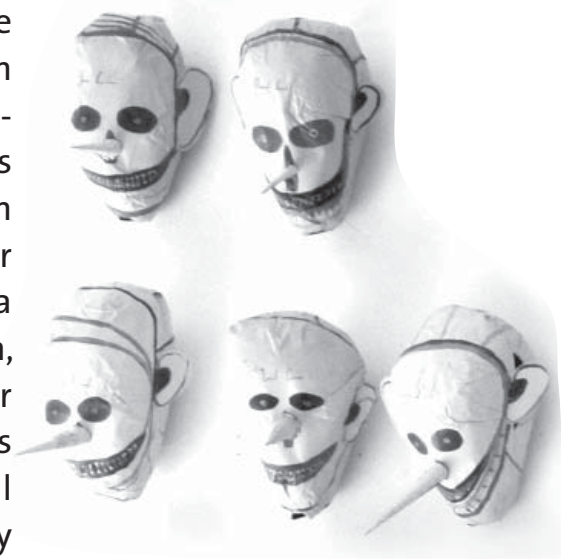
The works might look like protective cocoons or wombs in which to curl up, but in actual fact the varied positioning of nuts and bolts suggests other meanings.



In *Open Confinement* all the bolts are facing inwards with the shower filters on the outside, lined up like the whorls of a flower, giving the illusion of a safe, secure bed. Whether a suspended hammock or a carob fruit with a steely sheen, the surprise you encounter when entering the cavity is not exactly reassuring, and all preconceptions are inexorably broken down.

● FRANCESCO BOCCHINI

The inter-reaction of multiple meanings is intensified in the section dedicated to the works of Francesco Bocchini, an artist from Emilia Romagna, whose hands shape pieces of metal into mechanisms and installations with great powers of narration. The gigantic installation **BELPAESE** has two possible interpretations: a light-hearted one which ends with



the multicoloured epidermis of the sculptures, and a hidden, controversial one.

What is *Belpaese*? Or should we say, what was it? It was a land cherished for its artistic and natural treasures, a place to visit on the Grand Tour: it was our country, Italy. Today, *Belpaese* is represented by the heads of men who are dead in both the real and the metaphorical sense.

It is alluding to an Italy which over the past few decades has cultivated managers and executives rather than the lifeblood that makes Italy so unique and indispensable.

DOMATORE ALFABETICO has the same scientific approach, with its meticulous cataloguing of names. It is also equally rich in meaning. Metal shelves display a series of hats belonging to revolutionaries and anarchists, inspired by the collage *C'est le chapeau qui fait l'homme* by Max Ernst (1920). They are followed by the heads

of famous scientists, giving a total of 176 pieces forming a composition veiled with a melancholy gratitude.

Finally, the two base-mounted mechanisms **UN BALLERINO** **NON PENSA MAI ALLE PROPRIE GAMBE** and **TESTA DI UN PICCOLO PROPRIETARIO TERRIERO** are emblematic of an “other” beauty of industrial

residue. Their playful veneer hides a dramatic poetry of jerky, inarticulate, discordant movements - perhaps a metaphor for that unstable equilibrium that governs the fate of mankind and technocratic progress.

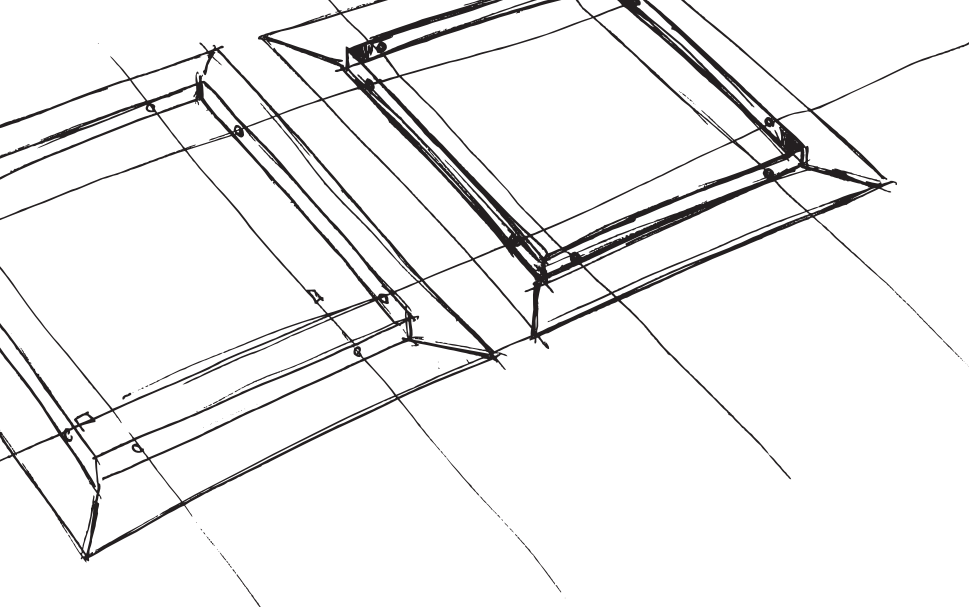
At this point there is an interval, a room in which visitors can decant their emotions, filter their thoughts and engage their curiosity.

Books about steel are suspended in the air, waiting to be “captured” by the public’s interest, while the screens give a **visual narrative of two exciting stories**.

One of them is the **50th anniversary of Marcegaglia**, a solid industrial group based on passion, technology and recognising the value of human resources. The other tells the story of **Steellife** and its eclectic contributors.

Images of manufacturing at Marcegaglia are striking in black and white, while the making of Steellife is portrayed in colour. It depicts the works of art and the extra performances developed, with the artists’ help, by photographer Alberto Givanni, a skilful narrator and multi-talented interpreter of the human soul.





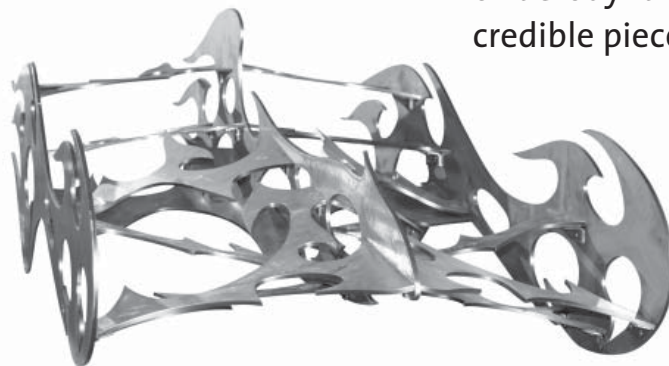
● **MAGDALENA FERNANDEZ
ARRIAGA**

The exhibition continues with **21009**, an installation by Magdalena Fernández Arriaga.

It is a well-lit room flooded with vibrant light filtering through the net curtains, interspersed with slits in the metal chessboard. The pervading sensation is that of an unreal suspension of time and space, as if floating in amniotic fluid, in another dimension.

Hypnotised, we watch the patterns of light, as if in a slow, inexorable litany which is reproduced in steady, regular cycles.

The steel ceiling with its incredible gradient forms a rigid slope up which the imagination can climb. *21009* becomes a place dominated by aesthetic senses and perception. It turns from a physical place to a mental one, from a rational domain to an irrational one, from a measurable space to a spiritual one.



● **TETSUYA NAKAMURA**

A series of steps form the seats with a view of a remarkable racing car: **THE FLASH OF LIGHTNING** by Japanese artist Tetsuya Nakamura.

The title says much about the work: a flash because of the virtual speed at which it seems to run, glimpsed only for a few hundredths of a second, and also because it is so dazzlingly beautiful that the observer finds it hard to maintain the enchantment.

Nakamura allows the material to express itself in all its gleaming splendour.

By stripping it bare, we see its majestic power of expression. Without colourful embellishments, the work is made up of aerodynamic, futuristic, incredible pieces of sculpture.



● LUC MATTENBERGER

Take care not to trip over **SANS TITRE** by Luc Mattenberger: a guard rail mounted on wheels. It can protect but also block the way: it is left to the visitor to decide. The Swiss artist's "cars" oscillate in a limbo in which their real use has not yet been fully determined. They could be disturbing instruments of attack, or just bizarre toys. For example, you could take **EXCAVATRICE** for a walk, were it not for that toothed wheel which could tear through the floor. **CANDIDATE** entertains, yet also instils unease. It is no coincidence: the idea for the work dates back to October 2000 when two kamikaze terrorists

attacked the American ship USS Cole in the port of Aden. The work is the result of an amusing, industrious mechanical collage which could become an instrument of death, if ridden by a potential suicide victim. Could the title of the work be a self-declaration?

● JULIA BORNEFELD

INTER-CONTINENTAL by German artist Julia Bornefeld 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. 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, care-free veil.



● ADEELA SULEMAN

A display case contains Adeela Suleman's works, all different yet revealing the same need: to protect the heads and bodies of the most vulnerable, who are generally women. Created from an assortment of household utensils, they are taken out of context and given a new identity: the unusual helmets **KHALIDA** and **SHAHIDA**, sparkling in the light, **CAPSULE** and the **CASE** series, assembled like so many pieces of armour.

Another work by the Pakistani artist is **HAWWA BAI WITH HER APPLE TREE AND PARROT**. It is embossed, and not made from a composition of elements but from clever and skilful finishing of the surface. We are in the Garden of Eden: the characters animating this artistic story all lie somewhere along the border between the secular and the mystical, the biblical and autobiographical, the worlds of fauna and flora in

which everything seems to flow naturally, and the human world, always undecided as to whether to choose or not, then in conflict as to whether the choice was the right one.

● SUBODH GUPTA

The exhibition ends with **THIS SIDE IS THE OTHER SIDE**, by Indian artist Subodh Gupta. With disarming simplicity, it depicts a fragment of rural life in a place where milk is not bought at the supermarket but still requires a perilous journey from one stable to the next, at breakneck speed along a rough, bumpy road, on

a Vespa loaded with dozens of milk churns. It is not just about milk: it is the adventure of a recurring conquest. This work is not some fetishistic exaltation of the relics of a disappearing society. Rather, Gupta is suggesting that the apparent simplicity of certain gestures, the seeming insignificance of certain everyday objects can become vehicles for our emotions. They help to intensify and layer our memories, becoming milestones along our path that will always lead us home, no matter where the whims of destiny take us.

