

Milan, 6/9/2007

Dear Didier,

You know how much I admire your Galerie Kreo, so please accept this letter from me as a reflection on the design, prompted by your exhibition on "Tabourets". I am also sending it to ICON magazine and I would also like you to show it to Julia Lohmann, whose original and unusual commitment to her work I know and admire: a search into the critical moments of genetic metamorphosis, the memory of the living animal in the shape of the inanimate sofa ("memento mori").

Today, I read the article by Anna Bates, "The inside of a calf", in the September edition of ICON. It describes the stool, by Julia, called "The Lasting Void". I see that the plastic stool, of which twelve have been made, has been obtained using the emptied inside of an actual dead animal carcass. The designer says she has "always been interested in the transition of an animal to the product". I am happy to have designed my stool "Enigma" as part of the collection of twenty-five artists forming part of this exhibition, but the item by Julia Lohmann leaves me with a feeling of great discomfort, which I must express to you. It is an extremely negative object, as demonstrated by the three cruel pictures published by ICON. I know full well that research in design is on the decline now and I am myself a part of that trend. I also know that design, in this fleeting era, is not motivated by ethics or by values. I know design now is not an idyll and I also know that one is forced to take extreme action to find innovations and new languages. However, Julia's creative energy, in the case of your stool, truly seems to be badly directed. I do not understand what so much unpleasantness is supposed to demonstrate. If the photograph of her stool enters into the history books of design, this will be one of the most bitter examples, an extremely sad moment in the history of objects. It brings to mind the items made out of human skin in the concentration camps, not the horse skin chaise-longue by Le Corbusier, elephant foot stools or tribal leopard skin rugs. I can see no theoretical, aesthetic, methodological or anthropological reason which justifies the idea of immortalising a dead animal's last breath, in order sadistically to propose it as an item for everyday use, directly expressed in its suffering. The idea is cynical and pointless, it is simply turning the torture of a dead body into entertainment. Sometimes, in the field of art, the epic sacrifice of an animal expresses the mythology of the most ancient human violence and can be transformed into language, into a denouncement and a representation (Hermann Nitsch, Damien Hirst, Marina Abramovic, Gaetano Pesce). Perhaps this is the sensitive area where Julia is working. However, she says: "stools are funny objects, they're the last one to be sat on at a party, you have to engage with this one to know what it's about..." And this troubles me very much.

You know very well how open I am towards everything, but I care too much about life and death and the suffering of living creatures to ignore the instinct to write this letter. Perhaps Julia Lohmann is expressing a love for animals, but it is the demonstration of a cruel love which I cannot understand.

Alessandro Mendini