

# XL

*"Non un festival, ma un allenamento  
collettivo al pensiero, all'azione, all'adesso".*



**Mara Oscar Cassiani**  
***Bondone (2020)***  
**19 Novembre - 11 Dicembre 2020**  
**INBTWN Capitolo IV**  
**A cura di Claudia D'Alonzo**  
**Per XL - Centrale Fies**

"Creating a direct connection between ancient folklore rituals and our new contemporary folklore". This is how Mara Oscar Cassiani describes one of the main features of her work, which moves between performance, choreography and post-digital artist.

Cassiani's research combines webcultures iconology and a performative practice, enacted both through and within her own body. Despite employing hyper-contemporary aesthetics and languages, her work often goes back to the archetypal roots of the very symbologies it investigates and appropriates.

Within the hypertrophy of digital visual cultures, Mara Oscar Cassiani discloses magic signs and often unconscious symbols, propitiatory animals and avatars, talismans and Redbull cans, popular rites from the past and celebrations of the rave culture, the dancing figures of the Sardinian tradition and the cyclical nature of movements accompanied by techno music, savage spirituality and motivational mantras governing minds and bodies in the era of neoliberal capitalism.

In her works, she appropriates symbolic elements from inside and outside the web to research the primeval images hybridising human and animal species that have entered our collective subconscious, as well as the traces of myths and dreams, of Dionisian offerings and rituals that are rooted well into our bodies. These traces are transformed into works which, through a diversity of formats, generate celebrations and rituals, leading to a state of daze or dreamlike trance which are among the consequences of the browsing experience.

For a Wifi base artist, as Mara likes to call herself, being in-between doesn't mean just inhabiting in a constructive way the space between inside and outside, between online and offline dimensions that have long since collapsed into a single one. It also means belonging to an environment, that of digital cultures, that is a semiotic slime of high and low, simultaneously present, past and future. A visual fluid that the artist navigates with both her physical body and several avatars, while allowing herself to be transformed by it, to provide ephemeral and transitory representations, following the 4/4 tempo of techno music, the same one of her heartbeat.

The re-shuffling or, in the words of the artist, the 'mixtape' of icons and symbols moves between and steals from diverse styles, because the web and its countless cultures have crushed every possible sense to such polarization. The remixing of pre-existing elements and signs to produce new and original meanings is a leitmotif crossing the entire artistic and cultural production from Duchamp's readymades to the recent meme phenomenology, by way of situationism, new dada, blog culture and post-production. Rearranging persistent visual elements sourced from diverse iconographic archives, allows the artist to play with the fleeting connection between the signifier and its referent, forging narratives and representational formats which deviate from the dominant ones, such as those related to roles and gender.

This attitude permeates Mara Oscar Cassiani's work through a diversity of strategies for expression and the production of meaning, which in an equally heterogenous fashion engage with a plurality of symbolic devices. In the case of *Bondone*, the iconographic systems that are involved are those of traditional culture from Trentino and wild characters, which get hybridised with contemporary fantasy video games in order to trigger shifts in the meanings of historical and contemporary iconographies of female warriors, hence of the stereotype associated with the feminine: being mild, peaceful, passive, victimised, generators of life and non-violent.

Recombining elements drawn from such visual realms into the artist's personal reinterpretation, the work develops an "other narrative" aiming to challenge the boundaries and limitations given to the female condition through the aforementioned

figures or their related stories. While it is true that western cultures are populated by female warriors - whether real or imagined, from the Amazons to the ones of the Nordic sagas - only rarely these figures triumph thanks to their valour, as in the case for male heroes. Their deeds are often depicted in ways that are similar to those narrating episodes of sacrifice and martyrdom. Perhaps this is also why they are often also described as virgin and pure. If they don't pay with their life, strong and powerful female figures are usually stigmatised as demonic and monstrous. In other instances, the warriors' stamina becomes erotic or sexual hypertrophy offered to the male gaze, a phenomenon that we can recognise in many contemporary visual productions, from cinema to video games.

With *Bondone*, Mara Oscar Cassiani crosses elements and sources gestures from such historical and contemporary sagas, re-signifying them through a reenactment taking the form of a performance and a web-based visual atlas. In the dark space of the website, gifs evoke the power and struggles of female fighters, between fantasy worlds and current politics: weapons of female warriors from the gaming world, excerpts from the speeches of activist and politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and clenched fists with painted fingernails invite us to dive into the artist's creative process, into the imaginary she is progressively creating by mixing diverse levels and styles, up to a proper celebration with the performance itself.

The performative moment brings together different layers of appropriation and recombination. The format and the audiovisual language is taken from online video-tutorials, while the ritual is that of a training that invites us to learn to clench our fists and practice our fighting skills.

Claudia D'Alonzo