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National College of Art and Design
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**EXHIBITING DESIGN :
THE CONTRIBUTION OF
THE MILAN TRIENNALE AND SALONE DEL
MOBILE**

BY

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INTRODUCTION

It has grown out of a sense of outrage which has increased year by year as I look around and I see how art is offered to the public . Increasingly lavish books are published and ever more expensive exhibitions are organised to create and maintain an interpretation of 'art' which has no basis in public taste . The suggestion of significance is given by a glamorous production of monographs about painters whose obscurantist works attract only ever the attention of a minority ... industrial Design is the art of the Twentieth century (BAYLEY, 1979, p.10) .

Examining this statement by Stephen Bayley in the light of recent events at the Salone del Mobile reveals an ironic truth . The very symptoms of decay which he identifies in the art world are equally as applicable to the world of industrial design today . The lavish catalogues, the ever more expensive exhibitions offering 'art' to the public are frighteningly familiar to followers of design . Bayley's desire to place industrial design on the pedestal of art has become, ironically, all too true .

The notion of industrial design, mass produced objects, as pieces of 'art' has become a popular one . Not only among design critics and historians such as Stephen Bayley, but also designers, manufacturers and consumers have come to accept this notion of 'product-culture' . As in most cultures, inequalities exist between certain products and their cultural contribution . Two divisions seem to have developed in the league-table of 'mass-produced art' - there are the anonymous ones and those with surnames attached . For example, almost every kitchen has a refrigerator in it, however, in the kitchen of the culturally enlightened one may find a 1933-Coldspot refrigerator by Raymond Loewy (1893-1986). The first example keeps your milk fresh and your ice cream hard, the second is the 'art' of the twentieth century . This trend is not confined to refrigerators or indeed kitchen appliances, it could be applied equally as well to almost every consumer market . From the Wassily chair of 1925 by Marcel Breuer (1902-1981) to the sculptural toothbrush of 1993 by Phillippe Starck (b.1940) society has unquestioningly accepted the concept of mass-produced, industrially designed product as a part of the 'art' . This is contemporary popular culture, an instant culture accessible to almost anyone at zero percent finance payable in easy monthly installments .

This study will examine one of the key factors in the formation of

this culture and one which, to this day, continues to give it credence . The role of the Milan trade fairs and the media coverage that has always been associated with them has perhaps had a greater influence than any other single factor in the metamorphosis of perception from industrial design to product art . To walk through the streets of Milan today is to take a journey through one of the design world's most influential cities . All around you are buildings, shops, products which stand testament to the city's prowess in the fields of architecture, fashion, and product design . It is therefore fitting to examine this issue in the context of Milan as it has set the trend in product design for the last four decades .

One of the most important factors in the research of this work was a formative period of study spent in the Faculty of architecture at Politecnico di Milano . A series of lectures given there by some of Italy's established industrial designers such as Richard Sapper (b.1932) and Andrea Branzi (b.1928) provided an insight into the designers side of the story while the balanced view was provided by the directors of manufacturing companies such as Paolo Borsani President of Tecno . Thus a rudimentary background knowledge of the Italian industrial design process had been gained . In April of 1993 the annual Salone del Mobile (Milan furniture fair) was held and the question of product display first began to make its presence felt . Everywhere furniture was displayed in a manner similar to the way that a sculpture might be displayed in a museum .

The literature on product design display is scant . Due to the relatively new nature and continuing evolution of industrial design as a field of professional practice, few substantial written works were available . However, of the works consulted, Dr. Penny Sparke's Italian Design (1988) was useful in providing information on the historical background to the Milan trade fairs, as was Italian Modern.(1989) by Giovanni Albera and Nicolas Monti . Peter Dormer's book Design Since 1945 (1993) provided an insight into the design processes employed by Olivetti in the formation of their new products, while his The Meanings of Modern Design (1990) touched briefly on the subject of industrial design as art.

None of the above mentioned works deal with the methods of display used to present industrial design products and the altering of its perception from product to art object . In order to research this aspect, design journals such as Domus and Blueprint were useful . Articles such as "L'effimero tra le Rovine" from Domus Jan. 1990 and "Darkness on the Edge of Town" Blueprint Nov. 1988 proved to be useful as they not only provided a source of up-to-date information on the Milan fairs, but they are

also in themselves examples of how industrial design is represented through the media . The thesis sets about examining a largely uncharted area in design literature based on both first hand experience and on accumulated research in the field .

It is not the purpose of this thesis to form a complete history of the Milan trade fairs nor does it wish to give a critical analysis of the individual products displayed at these exhibitions . Instead this study intends to examine the display methods of the Triennale di Milano and of the Salone del Mobile and to show how these events played an important role in the transformation of industrial design products into 'art' objects . It will also establish the role of the media when reporting on these events as a major influential factor . Finally this study will assess the consequences of the change in perception of industrial design and show how these consequences have already started to take effect . In order to do this, the thesis is broken into three chapters :

In Chapter I of the study examines the background to the Milan fairs, starting with the Milan Triennale . It also deals with the emergence and importance of the Italian design press and asks in what way did it contribute to the altering of the perception of mass-produced objects into pieces of industrial art ? The emergence of modernist sculpture in the 1950s played an important role as it became the surrogate mother for the infant industrial design, which at that period was still struggling to find its identity . What role did this development play in the transformation of the display methods employed at the Triennale and ultimately the Salone del mobile, and as a result was it a significant step in the progression of mass-produced object towards quasi-art/design icon ?

In the second chapter, the more recent developments in the display techniques of contemporary design's most important showcase event, the Salone del Mobile are scrutinised ? The legacy of Memphis is examined as is the role of media in determining which designs are displayed and how they are displayed . What is the current role of the Salone del Mobile? Is it a trade fair or exhibition of avant garde showmanship? Is the furniture aspect important any more or has it become a self conscious media event concentrating on the publicity stunts of the publicity hungry manufacturing industry?

Finally, in Chapter III, the role of industrial design in museums is questioned . What are the consequences of products on display in our museums ? Is it not a welcome development in the history of industrial design ,or has it more serious consequences ? Are there any visible

effects of industrial designs transgression into the realm of art present in the design world of today, and if they do exist, what are they ?

These are the main questions which the thesis sets out to examine and in conclusion the study will assess to what extent these have been resolved .

CHAPTER I

Background to the Changing Display Methods at the Milan Trade Fairs

This chapter will examine the background and the development of two of Milan's most important fairs, the Triennale and the Salone del Mobile. It will chart the relevant changes in display techniques employed at these exhibitions and the resulting mis-perception of mass-produced objects as pieces of art. The influence of the media in promoting this idea will also be examined in the study, as will the early connections between industrial design and sculpture and the influence that this relationship had on the display of mass produced goods.

Milan Triennale

The first of the trade fairs was the Biennale delle Arti Decorative and was held in Monza in 1923 (30km north of Milan). Its main emphasis was on local artisanal work reflecting the essentially regional nature of Italian industry at this time. However, during the period after World War I industry thrived, especially in the areas of transport and communications which were strategically important to the war effort and northern Italy began to build a strong industrial base. In order to expand their production output new markets were sought. The larger manufacturers expanded into international markets while the smaller regional producers also began to expand into larger scale nation-wide production. These events coincided with the internationalising of the Monza Biennale into the Triennale Internationale delle Arti Decorative, Moderne e Industriali (International Triennale of Decorative, Modern and Industrial Art) in 1930 and in 1933 the event moved south to Milan which by this stage had become the most industrialised city in northern Italy. The Milan Triennale was born.

The Milan Triennales were important for advertising the capability of Italy's manufacturing industry to an international audience of prospective customers. It became the shop window for Italian design, and as with all shop windows it was important as to how the goods were displayed in order to attract business. Initially the products were shown in their intended setting however, in the early 1950s, a subtle change began to take place. Products began to appear on top of plinths, this had the effect of isolating the design from its surroundings and forcing the public to concentrate on its aesthetic attributes. Furthermore, the use of professional lighting techniques and sound effects gave the events a more theatrical feel as the most mundane of products took on-board an element of glamour.

Even in the titles of the Triennale exhibition halls, the willingness of the design world to be assimilated into the realm of art can be seen . At the 9th Triennale in 1951 the products section was called 'The Form of the Useful' while three years later the public were left in no doubt as to where industrial design in Italy was headed by calling the display 'Il Produzione di Arte' (The Production of Art). It may be said that the meaning of the title could be confused during translation . The word 'design' had been incorporated into the Italian language only since 1941 and its predecessor was arti industriali . However, the exclusion of the word 'industriali' from the exhibition title does mark a positive or deliberate move for industrial design towards the worlds of sculpture or craft and away from its industrial roots.

Design Journals

One of the key figures in Italian design during this formative period was ,the architect, Gio Ponti (1891-1979) . An active supporter of the Monza and Milan Triennials (exhibiting at both) he founded the first Italian periodical concerned with architecture and the decorative arts in 1928 . The magazine was called Domus and was to become the mouthpiece for Italian design up to this day . The importance of the role of design journals in Italian design cannot be overstated . Today Italy has more periodicals / journals on the subjects of architecture and design than any other European country, demonstrating the size of the audience involved in the design debate . The popularity of design literature has created a highly sophisticated media structure to effectively advertise and display Italian products and the ideas and theories that accompany them . Even in the 1930s the magazines were printed on high quality paper with care and attention given to graphics, layout and photography - characteristics which continue to distinguish them today .

It was in the area of photography that the designed product - consumer interface was at its most potent . In the absence of the real thing a photograph creates its own version of reality - a pseudo reality . This pseudo-reality can present an even more powerful image as it can be manipulated, transformed and glorified into something almost unrecognisable from the original object . It was in the pages of Domus and later Stile Industria that the transformation of mass-produced item into art object began to take place . Penny Sparke, in her book 'Italian Design', points out the importance of Stile Industria as a publication which had a decisive

influence over industrial design perception during its short life-span from 1954 -63 .

In the pages of Stile Industria everything became an art object ...more so than any other magazine of this period [it] served to reinforce this special role for the mass produced design object (SPARKE, 1988, p.152).

When attempting to form an opinion about a product design by solely looking at a photograph, the viewers judgement is based only on the aesthetic attributes of form, colour and texture . This is the initial step towards transforming the product into the world of art where aesthetics are the lone criterion . The viewer cannot test its function, examine its quality of manufacture or feel its physical presence . When the product is photographed in front of a plain background its formal qualities are emphasised even more while any relationship it may have had to its intended environment is silenced . Thus we are faced with an object whose function is arbitrary, that bears no visual connection to the real world and whose existence seems entirely based on aesthetic pleasure .

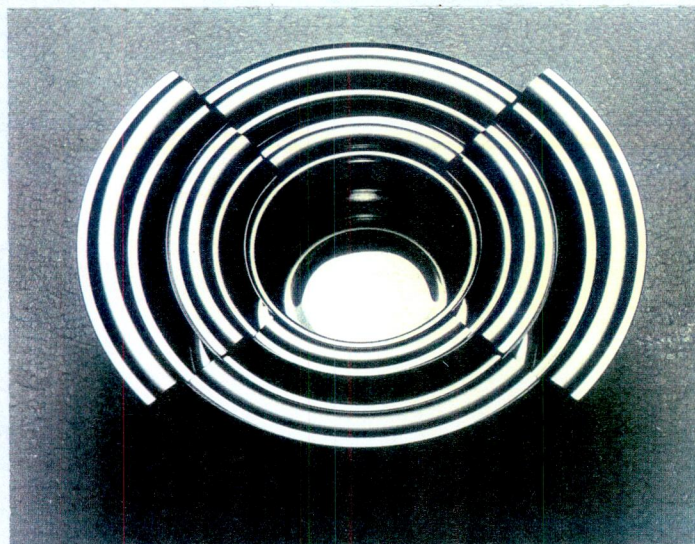


fig1 The ability of photography to abstract reality - Roberto Sambonet's Centreline set of saucepans placed against a plain background seem to have little use except for an interesting formal aesthetic one - like some type of sculpture .



The Influence of Sculpture

Another development in the display methods used at the Triennale which proved to be a step towards linking industrial design with art was the inclusion of sculptural installations in order to liven up the product display hall . The 9th triennial hall contained a large sculptural installation by Max Huber described as "being as dramatic as the exhibits themselves " (SPARKE, 1988, p.88) . This comment gives a valuable insight into the effects that such displays can have . Even with the advantage of hindsight, the author draws a direct comparison between sculpture and industrial design which are indeed two different fields of endeavour . Secondly, Sparke inadvertently implies that mass-produced products on display should be dramatic or should shock in the same way that an artist might set out to shock with a piece of work . This expectation to be entertained has developed into an essential aspect of modern design displays and will be examined later in this study (Chapter II) .

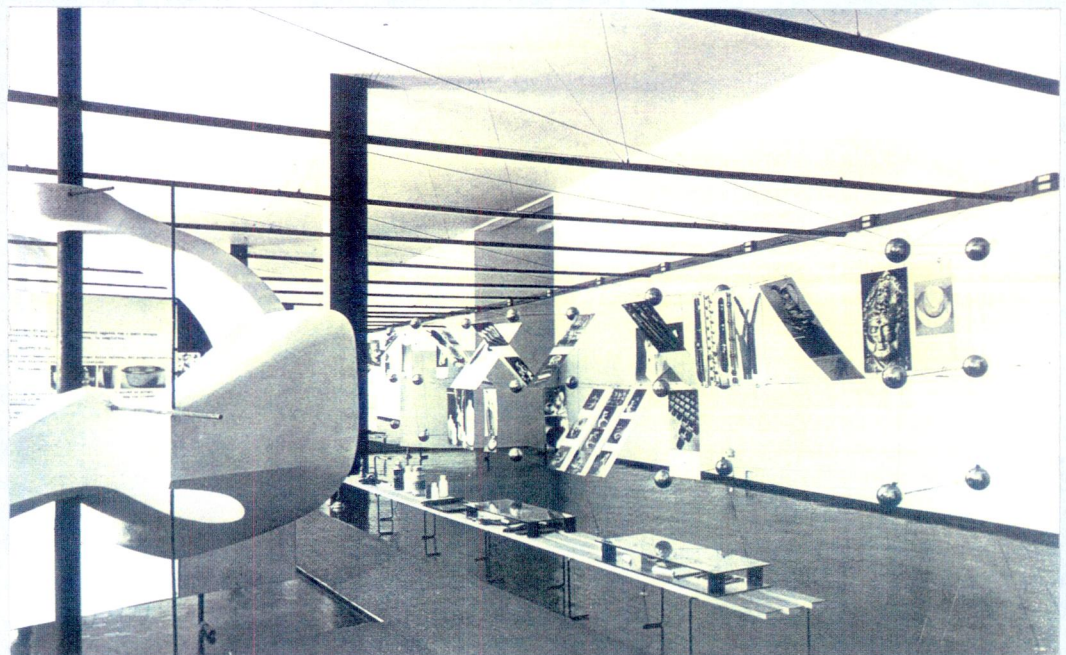


fig2. Max Huber's sculptural installation in the product design section at the 9th Triennale shows the Italian design view at the time that the fields of sculpture and that of industrial design were, indeed, similar . A view which resulted in products looking towards sculpture for both their forms and methods of display .

Once again the design journals played a paramount role in the dissemination of sculptural ideas into the field of industrial design . In the late 1940s the pages of Domus were full of illustrations of modern sculpture . In 1950 Max Bill (b.1908) published an in-depth article on the "Platonic



fig.2. Max Huber's sculptural installation in the product design section at the 5th Triennale shows the Italian design view at the time that the fields of sculpture and that of industrial design were, indeed, similar. A view which resulted in products looking towards sculpture for their forms and also being displayed like them.

Ideal of Beauty" in the magazine Stile Industria . Bill's theory broadened the definition of aesthetic beauty to also encompass that quality of function . Ordinary everyday objects such as toasters could become pieces of art . Designers began to look away from modernist architecture towards the field of sculpture as the source of their inspiration . Exponents such as Max Bill, Jean Hans Arp (1887-1966), and Henry Moore who chose to emphasise the organic over the geometric in their work began to set the trend, not just in sculpture but in the field of product design .

Taking its lead from sculpture the form of the new range of Italian products was organic . The Cisitalia motorcar, the Vespa scooter and the Lettera 22 typewriter are all examples of the new Italian design which was to become desirable all over the world . However, sculpture was not the only influence on the chosen style . It had close connections with the streamlining style of the United States and more than a little to do with the production techniques of the time . This was the focus of a recent paper on Post World War II design by Penny Sparke entitled "Industrial Aesthetics or Industrial Design ? : The influence of the U.S.A on the formation of an Italian Design Movement 1943-1960" . Streamlining had been used in the U.S. since the early 1930s and was proving very popular there with exponents such as Norman Bel Geddes (1893-1958) and Raymond Loewy (1893-1986) . Post World War II Italy was very dependant on the States for Marshall Aid in order to rebuild its economy and infrastructure . For this reason links between Italian and American industries were very close and many Italian manufacturers travelled there to study production techniques . As a result many of the same techniques came to be employed in Italy . The style of any industrial design product is dependant on the manufacturing capabilities of the industry that is to produce it .

In his book Design Since 1945 , Peter Dormer expresses a similar view . In discussing the same period of Italian design, he states :

But the limitations of a manufacturing technology had to be sold to the consumer . Thus the designer had to elaborate upon a virtue of the style that factory machines could deliver . Rounded shallow curves were organised into a style (DORMER, 1993, p.45).

However, historically speaking the Italian design field, through its mouthpiece of the design press, has always played down the influence of American streamlining or the restrictions of manufacturing industry in the formation of this style . This is the style that launched Italian design on a world scale and as a result they have chosen to amplify its connections

with the world of art rather than that of industry and commerce . In light of this, it seems only natural that the display techniques employed at the triennials should have begun to emulate those of sculpture - hanging installations, products placed on plinths, the emphasis being placed on visual aesthetics, all show the willingness of Italian design to become a wing of the traditional arts .

The Growth of Furniture Design and Manufacture

Dramatic developments were taking place in the field of furniture manufacture throughout the latter 1940s and '50s . The belated industrial revolution which had been transforming the manufacturing industries in other areas, had only slightly effected the still largely craft dominated furniture industry . However, after the devastation of World War II, there was an architectural boom - "housing projects totalling 15 million rooms to build (and furnish) represented an enormous market " (ALBERA, MONTI, 1989, p.21) . The emphasis was on low cost, functional and mass producible furniture . This period saw the foundation of many of Italy's most influential furniture manufacturers ; Kartell 1949, Arflex 1950, Gavina 1953 and Tecno and Zanotta in 1954 . By securing large orders for this standardised furniture, the manufacturers gained a solid financial base which allowed experimentation into new styles for the upper end of the market while concurrently mass producing the cheaper standardised designs . The tactics of the Cassina company at this time illustrate perfectly the scope this period provided for design development .

In 1947 the company received an order to fit the entire Italian naval fleet with new low cost but highly durable standardised furniture . In conjunction with producing this order they also began to produce furniture of a more expensive - and initially less profitable nature, for the export market. The company had acquired expertise in modern materials and production methods and had acquired a new plant as a result of the naval order, and these were put to good use . Their increased financial might also afforded them the freedom to liaise with the country's leading designers such as Ponti . In 1957 Cassina released the 'Superleggera' chair by Ponti which was to become one of the first internationally successful chairs .

Items of furniture began to appear more frequently in the pages of Domus and the other design magazines, focussing international attention on Italian design and in particular furniture design . One of the key factors contributing to the success of Italian design was its freshness and sense

of spontaneity which was partly due to the brilliance of the designers but more indebted to the flexibility and excellence of the Italian manufacturing industry .

Traditionally, furniture manufacture in Italy was small scale and localised however, what was initially a retarding factor in its development became the corner stone of its success . The medium scale production factor allowed for a higher concentration of manufacturers, each specialising in usually one production process . When a design demanded other processes to be used in its manufacture, there was a close collaboration network with neighbouring manufacturers . The smaller scale production system also resulted in more labour intensive involvement in the manufacturing process as full-scale mechanisation would prove too costly . The end result of all this was a high quality, highly flexible system of production which allowed for frequent design changes since no large re-tooling costs would be incurred . Thus Italian furniture always had its finger on the pulse of fashion and was quick to respond to changes in consumer desire.

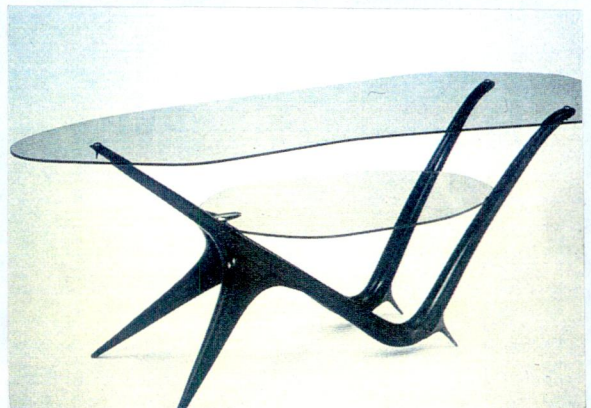
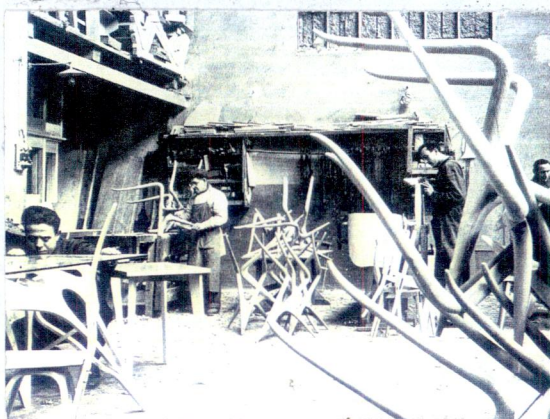


fig3. Above left -The Apelli Varesio manufacturing premises in Turin about 1950 shows the nature of Italian furniture production at the time . Workshops tended to be labour orientated and concentrated one manufacturing technique . Thus allowing for more frequent design alterations with lower re-tooling costs.

fig4. Above right -The finished table by Carlo Mollino

The Salone del Mobile -and the 'Art' of Sitting

Through the promotion of the media, public interest in Italian furniture had risen sufficiently by the 1960s to merit an exhibition of its own . In 1961 the first Salone del Mobile di Milano (Milan Furniture Fair) was held and its birth marked two important trends of that era . The decline of

1. The first part of the report discusses the general situation of the country and the progress of the work in the various departments. It also mentions the results of the work in the various departments.

2. The second part of the report discusses the results of the work in the various departments. It also mentions the results of the work in the various departments.

the Triennale and the evolution of Furniture as the spearhead of Italian industrial design .

Through its exhibitions the Triennale had gained respect and spread its influence across the world . It had paved the way for the young emerging field of industrial design and had advertised the quality of Italian product to an international audience . Through its policy of display and associated media coverage it also helped create the image of product as a collectable piece of 'art' . However, in the 1960s, the Triennale ceased to hold any more autonomous shows of industrial design and ruled out the possibility of displaying exhibitions of commercial products . Perhaps it realised the role it was playing in separating industrial design from its social / industrial roots by presenting it as a glamorous form of aesthetic research . Regardless of its awareness of these factors, it began to lose its relevance and by the mid 1970s designers were looking towards the exhibits of the Salone for new trends, not just in furniture but, relevant to industrial design on the whole .

The Triennale had given the world industrial design in the form of products placed on plinths - removed from their social responsibilities . Through the media they were given an extra dimension of stardom by the quality of the photographs used, in addition to the profound statements fabricated by the designers to promote their work . This media stardom made the products seem almost larger than life and the notion of collectability began to creep into design . Now that the baton had been passed on to the Salone, the notion of product as art would be pushed even further .

Right from its inception the Salone would place chairs on pedestals, on shelves vertically over each other, suspended from the ceiling - anywhere but on the floor where the reality of the price-tag could be put to the test by that altogether more accurate part of the body used in the 'art' of sitting . However, the real developments in the transition of industrial design to the status of icon were still to come .

CHAPTER II

Display Techniques Today

In Chapter I , the emergence and development of industrial design exhibitions in Italy was examined . The commercial and technological input which played various roles in the birth of such exhibitions were outlined . We have seen how the introduction of sculptural installations into product design exhibits began to wear away the boundaries between industrial design and art and how this marked the initial 'ascension' of the mass manufactured product to the status of quasi art-design icon . In Chapter II, this argument will be pursued to its logical , and indeed actual, conclusion in the Salone del Mobile of the 1990s, where each year thousands of people attend in order to pay homage to, or to cast longing glances at the furniture, to touch and even to sit on some of the world's most famous chairs .

Taking the Trade out of Trade Fair .

What is the Salone del Mobile today ? - an event which each year displays the latest range of furniture in such an extravagant fashion . Essentially it is promoted as an 'art' exhibition, an art of a mysterious nature - 'furniture art' . In its earlier years it had some connection with being a trade fair but, nowadays it has more in common with an art exhibition . The initial trend of displaying products on plinths and with installations by contemporary sculptors combined with designers statements linking industrial design with art, prompted the media to create an artistic image around mass-produced objects . Since then the display methods employed have served to further encourage the media to propagate this notion . The fact that thousands of people file through the doors of the Fiera di Milano showgrounds each year to 'look' at the exhibits - not to buy or to place an order - just to look, says a lot in itself . In fact, most of these people have only vague connections with the furniture world so why are they there ? They are there to witness the spectacle, to see the chairs designed by their idols, to touch the shelving unit by Phillippe Starck, to stroke the table designed by Ron Arad or to lie on a bed by Ettore Sottsass . It has become the furniture equivalent to waiting at the back door of a concert hall to catch a glimpse of the Beatles .

Similarly to music, furniture has developed it's own pop-culture . The fans of furniture are also quite young, in their mid twenties or thirties . The designs so admired however, are expensive and not many can afford a £500 chair but, those who can have bought themselves into the instant culture of modern society and have earned the status of 'elite' . Those

who cannot..... have to be content with patiently waiting each year for the chance to see and possibly sit in their thrones of instant culture .

Those followers of furniture not so fortunate to live close to Milan have to be satisfied with glimpses of their icons in the pages of the glossy design magazines which, each year without fail, provide pin-ups of the exhibits . Unfortunately the vast majority have to be satisfied with this latter method of worship which gives the media a very important role indeed - almost to the point where it has become more of a media event than a furniture fair . Countless articles appear each year in the pages of very reputable magazines describing furniture in terms more suited to the world of fine art . Articles such as "Darkness on the Edge of Town" by Rick Poyner or "No Room for the Crazies " both published by Blueprint in 1988 and 1992 respectively, congregate up images of mystery and profundity . A conspiracy of catchy headlines, off-the-cuff designer remarks, attractive photographs and an all too often one-sided journalistic account create a perception of furniture design - industrial design as works of art .

The use of the term 'one-sided' in this instance refers to articles, and indeed entire publications, which have neglected, or refused, to accept the true purpose of such events . The Salone del Mobile is essentially a trade fair, not an art exhibit . The main objective behind the companies exhibiting in the 1 million odd square meters of Fiera showgrounds is to sell products . Without the cold world of commerce there would be no Salone . It is an intrinsic part of the exhibition - when the economy recedes the Salone is immediately effected . This usually gives rise to media comments such as "Milan the most underwhelming event in 5 years" (BROZEN, "Ups and downs in Milan", Interiors, Vol 145, Dec 1985, pp162-5) . More subtle comments may mention a 'shift in emphasis' or a 'time for reflection' etc. but, what is happening in the real world of design is the production of more sensible furniture - the type that people actually buy . Each year the big manufacturers produce new avant garde, often outrageous designs and while admired by many, most people would choose something more conservative when furnishing their livingrooms . The 'showy' designs are used as advertisements to attract attention to the less obviously 'designed' designs and these 'poor relation' products actually pay for their glamorous, celebrity counterparts .

Media coverage has contrived to separate this facet of design completely from its industrial roots . Domus magazine published an article on the 1992 Milan Furniture Fair which states

I believe that after years of endeavourfurniture seems to have started to lose its cold assonance with the world of product design - where the rule is sales success, to move closer to the problematic richness of interiors where the rule is life .(ROMANELLI, "A proposito del Salone del Mobile di Milano", Domus, vol 741, Sept 1992 ,p65)

The same article calls for our homes to become "white receptacles for art (meaning furniture), lifted above everyday cares ". This type of journalism wishes to strip industrial design of its social relevance and thereby starve it of its very oxygen of survival . If industrial design and indeed furniture design was to rise above 'the everyday cares of life' it would lose its social relevance . By transgressing into the sterile, hermetically sealed world of art it becomes, by application of Oscar Wilde's adage, 'useless' .

The media, alone, are not the sole propagators of the 'mass-produced product as 'art object' theory . The manufacturers of these products are perfectly content to have their wares considered as art icons and as a direct consequence move into the realm of collectors item . This increases the desirability of the objects and thereby justifies a higher price tag . If you want a genuine piece of contemporary culture in your living room you have to be willing to pay for the privilege whether it's a Barcelona chair by Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) or the original Sacco beanbag by Gatti, Paolini and Teodoro . Designers too, are by no means neutral in this issue . While outward denials of the importance of fame may seem convincing, inward acceptance in the elevation of their (self) importance from mere collaborator with industry to omnipotent creator is difficult to refute . This combined with the prospect of larger fees and media super-stardom has proved alluring .

fig 5 Throne of instant culture?
The Sacco beanbag designed in 1968 by Gatti, Paolini and Teodoro . Due to the publicity provided by the media and the glamorous public appearances made by products such as this in design exhibitions, it has gained something of a celebrity status .





Media Magic

Media coverage was always important but, the events of the 1981 Salone were to drive home to manufacturers and designers alike just how potent a force it was . An unlikely exhibit by a group of designers calling themselves' Memphis' led by Ettore Sottsass Jnr.(b.1917) had captured the imagination of the design world's press . The Memphis group were dissatisfied with industrial design's servile role to both capitalism and industry and as a result had founded an anti-design movement in order to shock the establishment into change . Their products were deliberately kitsch with the use of rampant clashing colour schemes combined with irregular forms . It must have represented somewhat of a gamble for a designer of Sottsass' reputation to stake his name to such a movement but, it was a gamble that was to pay off . Due to the exhibit's startling absurdity, the media were irresistibly attracted and its colourful nature made it highly photogenic . The Memphis - media union was a marriage was made in heaven and subsequently made its way, in full colour, onto the pages of the design journals the world over . Critics at the time claimed that Memphis was destined to fail because it was turning industrial design into an elitist expressive for the avant garde however, through the media coverage it received, its influence was to be great -not just in the area of industrial design but in areas as diverse as fashion, jewellery and graphics.

The unprecedented publicity which Memphis received ensured its success . It was literally forced upon an unsuspecting public . The hype created around it made it a popular choice with those wishing to buy their way into design's instant culture. Manufacturers, encouraged by the valuable press coverage associated with the style and also by the growing market for the end product as a collector's item, began to produce their own Memphis-style products . In the following fairs many versions of the Memphis style began to appear in more commercial for-

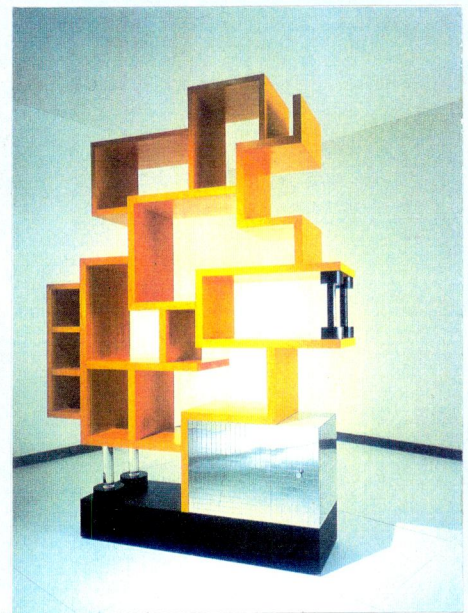


fig 6 The photogenic nature of Memphis ensured its media success and subsequently its success in the design world -proving the critics wrong .

mats and the anti-design momentum was lost . Thirteen years later in 1993 Memphis Milano is long dead but, its legacy lives on and Milan is now more the centre of media based design than ever . The two most disturbing aspects of this legacy and the way it has effected industrial design are those of product as advertisement and display supplanting the product displayed .

The Product as Advertisement

The development of the product as advertisement grew out of the manufacturers learning how to use the mass-media coverage attracted to the Salone each year . A trend began to emerge as to the types of product that attracted the media spotlight and furniture manufacturers, and in turn designers, began to pander to media attention . After the dust of Memphis had settled, the collective appetite of the design press had been whetted and was hungry for more . Sensationalism was the order of the day . Annually, hoards of hungry reporters would descend on Milan searching for the next Memphis, feeding on whatever scraps were available and describing them as veritable banquets . Anything out of the ordinary, attention grabbing or just that little bit crazy found its way into the glossy pages of Domus, Blueprint, Design magazine and countless other design journals. Manufacturers were not slow to realise this and in an attempt to gain their share of the valuable publicity at stake began to deliberately produce media-pleasing design . One problem with this trend is that these types of design are expensive to produce and sell to a relatively small market due to their avant garde nature . It would not be profitable for any producer to concentrate on this type of design in any great depth so, instead they began to produce very limited amounts of 'crazy' design which would lure the media attention to their stand where, along side the avant garde, the rest of their more saleable products would be also on display . Therefore the product which receives the most attention and critical appraisal is only an advertisement for the rest of the more mundane everyday furniture, and while the media may describe the rest of the exhibit as 'underwhelming', it becomes glamorous by association with its superstar relation .

The most recent example of this can be seen at last years Salone del Mobile (1993) where Cappellini re-released Carlo Mendini's "Proust" armchair of 1979 along with its new range of furniture . Mendini's Proust chair is a classic example of what the design journals want to see in Milan.



fig 7 The Proust chair (top) by Carlo Mendini acted as the advertising agent for Cappellini's exhibit at the 1993 Salone - drawing attention to the less media pleasing, more customer pleasing designs by designers such as Jasper Morrison and James Irvine.-fig 8



His modern treatment of an antiquated and familiar form combined with a rampant use of colour is eye-catching and incredibly photogenic . The remainder of the exhibit was very refined, almost understated in comparison with quality designs by Jasper Morrison, James Irvine and Marc Newson to name but a few . The latter designers are all members of the up-and-coming design establishment and as yet would not have the same media pulling power as Mendini . Also the fact that none of the other designers involved in the Cappellini display were Italian and for a major Italian company to exhibit without any home-grown talent could be a media mistake . The inclusion of the Proust chair in the Cappellini exhibit suggests that their marketing department were also aware of these facts and so, decided to give the display a more positive media angle. This does not detract from the chair as a piece of design or from its designer so long as it is viewed as just a chair . When magazines and indeed designers start referring to such pieces as object d'art, problems begin to emerge as the motives behind its existence are far from artistic . They are rooted in commerce and sustained by advertising .

Display Supplanting the Displayed

The second trend of the display supplanting the displayed object has a more sinister almost oedipal ring to it . We have already seen how the manner in which a product is displayed can change the way we perceive it - Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" comes to mind as a Dadaist example . Traditionally display went hand in hand with the product being displayed however, since the media explosion of the eighties and the hunger for sensationalism in design, display has entered into a new realm of importance where it has begun to actually replace the object it is intended to display .

As previously mentioned, the annual scramble for media coverage is a highly competitive one . Some exhibitors stage undisguised publicity stunts in an effort to gain centre stage . Driade is one such company whose accomplishments include experimentation with fire (which almost ended in burning down the showroom) in 1989, followed two years later by a deconstructionist set complete with slave boys pushing the Borick Sipeck furniture over and back - as Blueprint pointed out "for no apparent reason except to attract the crowds " ("Sour grapes", Blueprint, May 1991, p14) . Sipeck was involved again in the same year with an autodestruc-

tive display entitled "Air" . An event which RIBA Journal described as "a remnant of Milan's former avant garde" (GARDENER, "Milan '91 moving on ,moving out ", RIBA Journal, vol 98, June 1991, p71) . It continues to describe the event which consisted of a series of glass shelves piled high with the said designer's highly breakable ceramics, glass and timber pieces which was then blown over and smashed by a huge wind machine.

While the latter events, which were openly attention seeking, did make into the pages of various magazines they do not utilise the possibilities of display to the full . In 1988 however, one company daringly did so . That company was Pallucco design . For the duration of the fair they chose not to exhibit in the fair grounds (a trend which continues to become more popular with each successive year) - opting instead for the eerie surroundings of an abandoned bloodstained abattoir in Via Lombroso in the south east of the city . Described by Blueprint as "the most memorable event of the fair "(POYNOR, "Darkness on the edge of town", Blueprint, Nov 1988, p 52) . The article correctly interprets the brilliant staging of the show as "a frank attempt to charge the furniture with atmosphere by association " . However, the collective media fail to understand the motives behind this wish to charge the furniture with atmosphere. They refuse to acknowledge that the entire staging is for their benefit, instead they prefer to consider it all to be part and parcel of one great artistic concept . I don't think that any design journalist seriously believes this notion of it being 'part of the art' but there is an unwritten rule which prevents them putting this in print .



fig 9 Pallucco's slaughter-house rendez vous with the media in 1988 was to be a profitable one as photographs such as this made it onto the pages of design magazines the world over .



This hidden agenda exists in the design world also . A designer will never admit (not often anyway) to deliberately trying to please the media . In this case for example Pallucco describes his furniture's twisted forms as being derived from his preoccupation with fallen angels and he suggests with conviction that "the slaughter house would be a probable rendez-vous for weary angels in search for some nocturnal shelter" (POYNOR, "Darkness on the edge of town ", Blueprint , Nov. 1988 ,p52) . There is no mention of attracting the media or of wanting to sell some chairs or of gaining some publicity - it is as if the entire event (the Salone, the exhibit, the interview and even the publicity) happened by accident .

Blueprint donated an entire 3 page spread to the exhibit and made it their cover story entitling it aptly "Darkness on the Edge of Town" however the darkness in question is not that of profundity or mystery but, that of self-deceit, fallacy and ego inflating propaganda . The ensuing publicity was widespread and Pallucco as a furniture manufacturer had gained an international audience . It would be a hard act to follow but, follow he did.

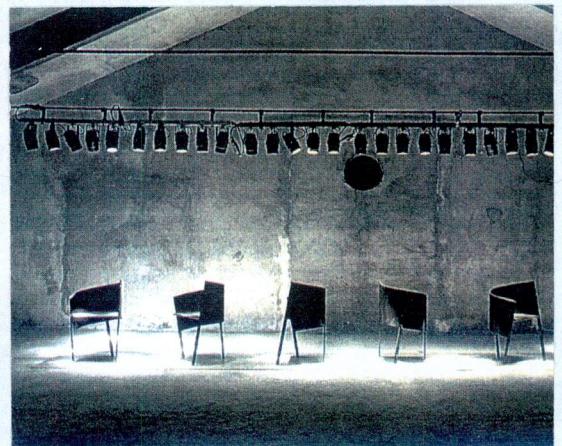


fig 10 The use of professional sound effects and lighting techniques and photography made the exhibition into an event that the journalists would not forget when writing their articles . The furniture was only a sideline attraction .

1989, on the same site, although further into the heart of this wasteland (as the previous site had been demolished), Pallucco once again stole the Salone's much sought-after limelight . Domus played the Media role this time around and made it the leading story of its January 1990 issue as part of the hype for the forthcoming fair . Entitled "l'Effimero tra le rovine" (Effimeraity through the Ruins) Domus described it as "an event for the intelligentsia which normally frequent the Salone del Mobile". The article tries to recapture the the drama of the event and is typical of the Milan Fair journalistic style :



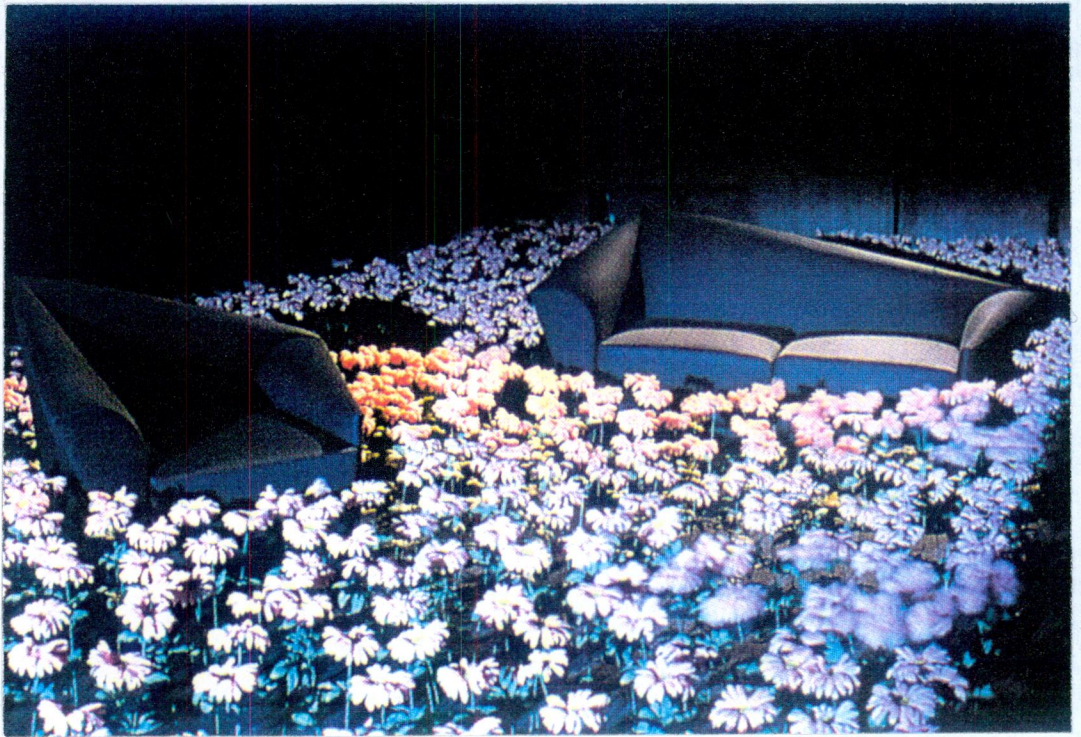


fig 11 and 12 The following year Pallucco Design's exhibit was as visually impressive as the previous year . When confronted with furniture presented in this way it is difficult to regard it as anything other than a work of art . The floral backdrop alienates any functional pretence and also obliterates any notion of the environment the furniture was intended for . Gradually, the Salone becomes more about display and less about furniture .



Through the trees that have grown wild one senses the presence of other buildings . They are on the other side of the wall . Through a gaping hole, you enter a courtyard encircled by sheds ... once again light, darkness and music animate the scene ... the music persuades you to enter - a carpet of flowers covers the entire floor"(TOMMASINI, Maria, "L'effimero tra le rovine" Domus, vol 712, Jan. 1990, p5) .

The eye-catching photographs in both of the fore mentioned articles capture the imagination and set the scene - speaking louder than anything the printed text has to say . No amount of money can buy publicity like this . This is not to suggest that the media coup Pallucco pulled off two years in a row were achieved at a low cost . In 1988 the lighting was designed by Henri Alken (cameraman for Wim Wenders' film "Wings of Desire ") and fashion photographer Peter Lindberg provided the photographic evidence . The following year's show involved set designer Peter Pabst and composer Peter Smith . These people are among the top exponents in their fields and as a result command high fees and the fact that Pallucco is willing to make such capital investment is proof of the rewards to be gained by the right kind of media exposure and also of the deliberateness with which he intended to use the media .

When presented with furniture displayed in this manner it is difficult to regard it as anything else other than a type of fine art sculpture, yet it is little more than a crowd pulling exercise which thanks to the media has become an integral part of 'Milan' furniture design and has even surpassed the product in certain cases as the focus of attention .

Due to the injection of fashion values into the Italian furniture market, by a yearly exhibition which demands new ranges and new styles to feed the sensation hungry media machine, manufacturers have begun to feel the strain . This growing pressure has become especially acute in the latter years due to the worldwide recession, whereby many manufacturers don't see the point or the profit in releasing new ranges when the markets don't exist . However, for a major company, not to partake in the Salone could have disastrous consequences . A new trend has begun to emerge where exhibitors release the same range as in the previous year but with a different display which will serve as sufficient bait for the media . The continuing trend of the growing importance of display which we have traced through the work of Triade and Pallucco comes to its logical conclusion - display supplants the displayed .

The 1991 exhibit from Cassina (one of the fairs biggest exhibitors) illustrates this point perfectly . In a case of 'round up the usual suspects',

Achille Castiglioni (b.1918), one of the big-name industrial designers, was requested to design the display which became the product to be sold to the design press . The company wished to highlight its leather working skills and to show the environmentally aware society of Milan that leather is a by-product of meat . Without using any overly graphic images Castiglioni created a quite brilliant display consisting of cows constructed from tins of beef . No new furniture was displayed in this exhibit but, the pages of the design press still carried headlines about "Castiglioni and his Cubic Cows" (ANTONELLI, "Castiglioni and his cubic cows", *ID (NY)*, vol 38 Sept 1991, p12). and because of their photographic nature Cassina received the visual publicity aswell .

CASTIGLIONI AND HIS CUBIC COWS Every year, on the occasion of the Milan Furniture Fair, leading companies in search of a new visual statement about their products call upon designers and architects to create dramatic showroom installations. But when Achille Castiglioni and Italo Lupi were presented with the theme of Cassina's exhibit for last April's edition of the Fair, they knew they were in some kind of trouble. The company's mandate was to tell a tale about nature and artifice, to give visitors a look at the roots of upholstery in order to explain the interaction of organic and mechanical issues in industrial production. This was to be a story, in short, about leather. "We were supposed to go back to the origins," explains Castiglioni. "And the origin of leather is the cow." Irony was the key to avoiding moralism or macabre images. The living creatures were reduced to cubic black-and-white cows, life-sized geometric figures that evoked the source of leather. But to make the connection even more abstract, the cow skins were presented as a texture of fictional canned beef labels printed to suggest three-dimensional volumes. According to the designers, these cans depicted leather as a by-product of the cows' primary function: food provision. "We wanted to show a separation between flesh and skin and consider leather as a product of recycling; we wanted to show raw meat, but of course we could not and would not transform the showroom into a butcher's shop. So we decided we would show it naked, instead of raw, but ready to eat in cans," says Castiglioni. After walking amidst the herd of cows constructed of plywood shapes with angles that do not exist in nature, the visitor then encountered a scented bazaar of leather skins, perfectly tanned and dyed, that beckoned the visitor to touch and smell. This led to a dramatic display of the company's products, with recent armchairs suspended from the ceiling. The showroom's final raked display, where cow skins acquired their new functions and structure, turned the theatrical content of this mise-en-scène into comedy instead of drama. —Paola Antonelli

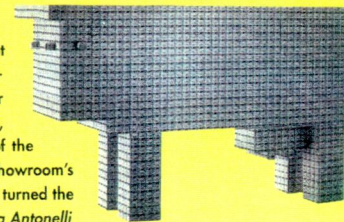
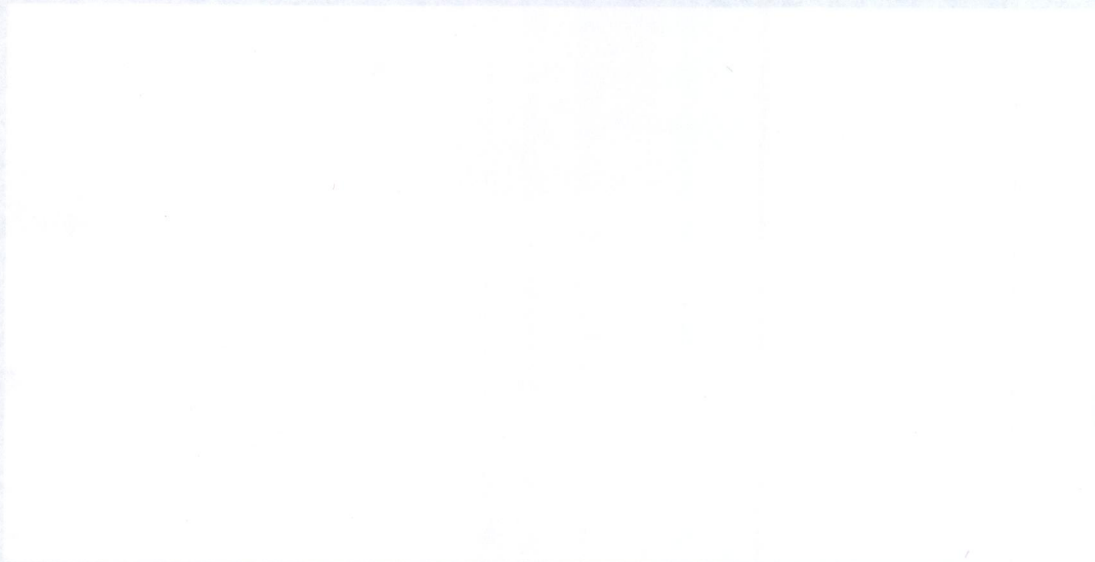


fig 13 Display supplants the displayed -Castiglioni's cubic cows replace Cassina's need to display new furniture .

This example makes lucid the fact that design or indeed furniture is not terribly important when it comes to coverage of the fair . The above mentioned article does not mention the Cassina furniture once ! What is important is hype, spectacle, and the by now predictable element of surprise . However, contrary to media belief the true purpose of the Salone is about commerce, about selling chairs, about advertising, about spectacle - not about art .



CHAPTER III

Product Design Galleries - The Final Step

The previous chapter, examined the quasi-art status bestowed on the Milan Furniture Fair by the media, and more importantly on the products displayed there . The commercial display antics of the furniture industry have been misconstrued as artistic statements by the design press and subsequently the design world at large .

As a direct result of this, thousands of people each year go to the grounds of the Fiera and the city showrooms ,who unquestioningly accept the notion of 'furniture as art' . This trend is not only confined to the Salone or indeed the field of furniture design . Other examples of mass-produced goods being elevated, in the minds of the culturally enlightened, to the status of fine art objects are plentiful . Dedicated followers of 'design culture ' will be all too familiar with products such as the Kettle with little bird-shaped whistle by Michael Graves (b.1934) for Alessi or the Coldspot refrigerator by Raymond Loewy for Sears Roebuck . In fact most people can recognise some design classic in a list that includes lamps, cars, radios and motorscooters . Mass produced design has become an accepted part of 'high' art culture . This chapter will examine the consequences for industrial design as it takes the final step from the production line into the museums .

Museum pieces

The final step in the process of design entering the art world is its inclusion in permanent gallery or museum exhibits . Due to the fact that this step has already taken place, and that products are physically present in museums all over the world, it provides a strong argument for those who support this notion of product design as a facet of the fine arts . At present, to argue that products are not pieces of art is akin to proclaiming that the world is flat, when in almost every major city one can enter a museum or gallery and witness first hand products displayed as works of art . All over the world galleries and museums have displayed collections of products, consumer products, whose existence is almost entirely dependant on their commercial - functional role, products that started life in shop windows and that were definitely more at home there . It is difficult to say whether this is a direct result of the media hype surrounding product design (already outlined) or whether museums have set the trend for the media to follow . Either way, it is not such a leap of the imagination to move from the displays at the Salone del Mobile to that of the galleries and museums, as trade fairs become galleries and museums become



fig 14 The concept of furniture design and thereby industrial design as an 'art' exhibit is one which is gaining acceptance. The display techniques employed in the Milan fairs of the last half century have had their influence on the design museums of today .



trade exhibits . Even the shops that sell the furniture have adapted to this trend such as the (now defunct) 'Furniture Gallery' on Parliament St, Dublin 2 .

There has been stiff competition between the various modern art galleries and museums in the last decades to entice the public through their doors . Perhaps the reason being that much of modern abstract painting or sculpture can be alienating to the ordinary man . The need to understand the existential meaning behind all things is a basic trait of human-nature and we find it hard to relate to an object that has no reference to anything beyond what it is . A lack of apparent meaning or function can be disconcerting and, in the case of painting or sculpture, tends to make the on looker feel uncomfortable by challenging their every preconception as to what art is or should be . This is often the intention behind such types of thought provoking work .

The introduction of industrial design into galleries is perhaps an attempt to make them more user-friendly, to give them a broader-based appeal . When confronted with a fridge or a chair on a plinth we are in no doubt to the reasons for its existence . We know that, albeit in the past, this product had an obvious purpose and this puts our minds to rest as regards the meaning of its existence . This in turn allows us to relax and to enjoy the finer points of its styling happy in the knowledge that we understand the meaning of 'art' .

Unlike art, product design, while having a social function, has also got to sell to the public in order to survive. This necessitates a comprehensible relationship between the consumer and the product, the user must be able to relate to the product - if not it won't sell . In order to remain desirable to the majority of potential consumers, the product must not openly challenge the accepted 'norms' of society . The forms and aesthetics employed in the product are seductive (in-line with what the majority think) in order to compete for valuable market space . These are the factors which make a product successful and ability to implement them is what makes a successful designer . The same factors make a design a popular museum piece .

In his book "The Meanings of Modern Design" Peter Dormer uses the example of the 'enthusiast's camera' to illustrate how the ephemeral notion of function can help us enjoy an aesthetically pleasing object .

Once the consumer knows that the object has some function, whether nominal or perfunctionary, the justification is fulfilled and subsequently set aside and the pleasures of the object itself are

enjoyed - the handling, the adjusting, refitting the lenses, listening to the aperture ratchet ring click ...(DORMER, 1990, p109) .

Industrial design products therefore are perfectly suited to their new-found role of modern art museum exhibit . Indeed, it seems quite a natural progression in the light of the recent events at the Salone, that mass-produced products should be displayed in a more permanent gallery setting .

Many have argued that this is a welcome development, that at last industrial design has received the recognition it so richly deserves and that its position as 'the art of the twentieth century' (BAYLEY, 1979, p10) has been acknowledged . While recognition of the role played by industrial design is long overdue, it should not take the form of a back door entrance to the fine art world . The present trend, welcomed by so many (among their number it must be said are designers and design historians) does have short term advantages such as media coverage, glamour ,freedom to be more expressive - the long term consequences however, are of a much more profound and serious nature .

Glamour Design

Let us firstly examine the effects that this misrepresentation of design will have on the design world itself . The large majority of media articles concentrate on the area of 'high design', the name given to the more 'artistic', less practical type of design, making this seem like the ultimate goal in the field . Also type of design exhibited in Milan and the way it is displayed, combined with the presence of products in museums, drives home the same message . This detracts attention away from the industrial functional or manufacturing problems and concentrates it on the visual aesthetic . The result is the creation of 'glamour design', a type of design which concentrates on aesthetics, a design which alines itself more closely with the art world and as a result a type of design which becomes less willing to compromise itself for industry .

There will always be those designers who are willing to tackle the more industrial side of the problem and these will begin to find themselves alienated from their 'artistic' cousins . The net result could end in industrial design dividing itself into two distinct practices - engineering design and a sort of mass-produced craft design . The effects of this would be disastrous as industrial design would lose its potency . The very soul of indus-

trial design is rooted in the fact that it managed to combine the concerns of industry and of aesthetics into one coherent practice whereby a balanced overview is present at all stages of the design . There is no awkward application of aesthetics after the design is complete but, an harmonious and simultaneous development of the two . It is in this all-round innovative ability that the future of design lies . However, the present trend serves only to alienate industry by producing designers reluctant to compromise their artistic beliefs for the sake of function, market or manufacture .

To the uninitiated, it may sound encouraging to have industrial designers whose beliefs are so important to them that they are unwilling to compromise, however, the entire industrial design process is based on compromise . No one person can claim responsibility for the total design of an end product - materials engineers, production managers, electronics experts, market research all have their say on the final design . Dormer in his book Design Since 1945 gives an insight into the design process by citing the procedure at the Olivetti plant in Ivrea, northern Italy.

The managers decide that a new product or range of products is required ; researchers are then commissioned to collect information about market and technical aspects ; specifications are worked out that can form a brief to both the designers and the development engineers . At this stage the department responsible for the corporate image is brought in and the designers too are involved in the initial discussions . Once all the commercial requirements have been sorted out, then the designers begin work on the design concept (DORMER, 1993, p27) .

This extract makes lucid the vast range of specialised requirements a design must satisfy and thereby the compromising nature of design which is far removed from the world of art . Yet design historians are quick to point out that "in 1946 the lexicon 80 was the first typewriter to be exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York "(ALBERA and MONTI, 1989, p22) . It almost makes it seem ridiculous for a designer to talk about *his* or *her* designs as if they had the sole input . As if the end product was the culmination of an artistic concept and an uncompromising vision . The fact that the designer can create a unified coherent image which satisfies these multifarious criteria is indeed a work of art but, not in the classical or traditional meaning of the word . The 20th century field of industrial design can not be made to fit neatly into the pre-existing frame-

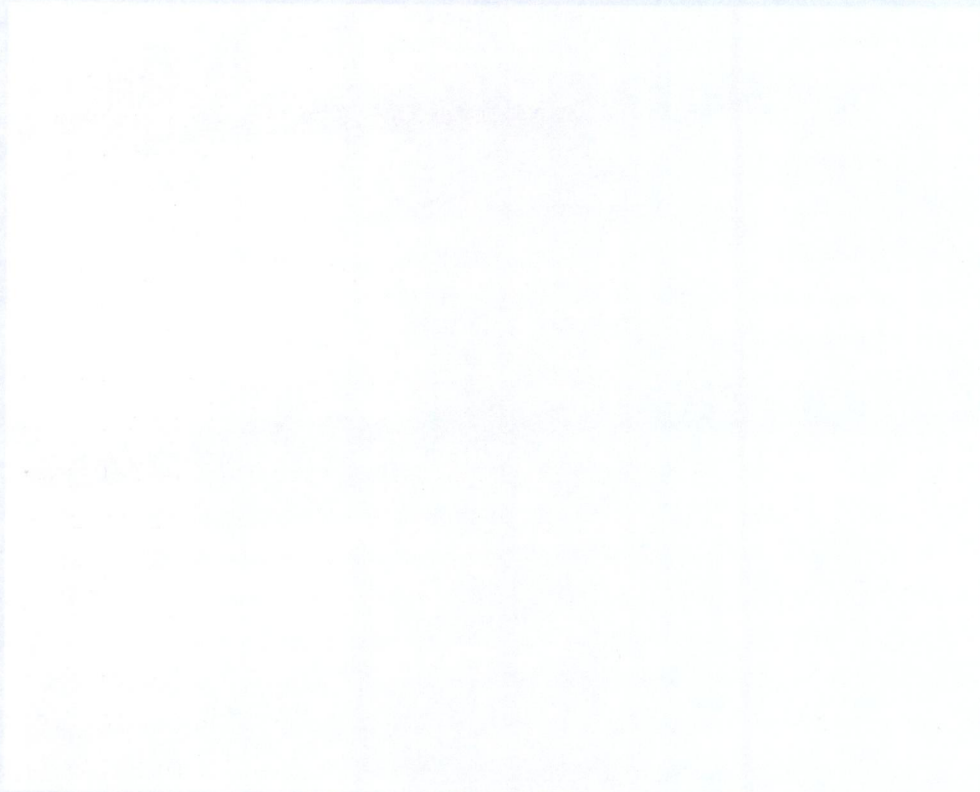
work . The need for a new system of display and appreciation has existed for quite some time .

By the early 1960s Ettore Sottsass had begun to question the entire relationship between industrial design and industry and its servile role to capitalism . He made a series of trips abroad, to India in '61 and to the United States in '62, where he was influenced by the eastern ideals of love and attention in place of manipulation and use . The American experience interested him in pop-art and anti - high culture movements . In her book Italian Design, Penny Sparke writes of the range of furniture based on american pop-art images, which he designed for Poltronovo on his return in 1965 . These pieces were produced as prototypes and displayed in a Milanese gallery, the author suggests that "these works made no claim to be part of the world of high culture " and that "they suggested a new role for design " (SPARKE, 1988, p156) .



fig 15 A photograph taken from Domus Nov. 1969 showing the above mentioned furniture by Sottsass . Despite his claims that the furniture made no claims on the world of high culture this photograph was part of a five page feature that Domus magazine carried on the display, thus making it part of the new avant -garde furniture movement destined to become high culture due to media coverage .

This view is not strictly correct as the furniture's very presence as a display in a gallery renders them part of high culture thus posing an interesting contradiction . While Sottsass' anti-high culture intentions may well



have been genuine, by displaying the prototypes in a gallery he was yet again putting industrial design on the pedestal of art . Domus subsequently did a five page spread on Sottsass' furniture on display which further emphasised the apparent contradiction . While this was, and to a certain extent still is, the only system available for industrial designers to get their ideas across to the public, it is inadequate as it is always open to misinterpretation as further evidence that mass-produced objects can be works of art .

Consumer Culture (Keep on Shopping in the Free World)

The social consequences of industrial design as art are also quite disturbing . The potency of industrial designs role in society has been recognised - as Forty points out in Objects of Desire

Far from being a neutral or offensive artistic activity, it has much more enduring effects ...because it can cast ideas about who we are and how we should behave into permanent and tangible forms (FORTY, 1986, p6) .

So what are the long term effects of considering products as works of art ? If culture is society's way of describing itself and galleries and museums are where we go to listen, then what are we being told when we stop to look at a piece of furniture or a product on display in an art gallery? We are witnessing the glorification of consumerism . We are being told that the accumulation of attractive products is an art form akin to collecting antiques or good paintings . We are being told that visual attractiveness is a valid reason for buying often unnecessary consumer goods . We are being subtly told that there is no such thing as a non-renewable resource, that the status -quo is acceptable and that, in short, consumerism is good. It supports the notion of continuous growth in the consumer market, which almost all of industry has grown to depend upon, and this growth has in turn come to be equated with a notion of freedom .

Freedom to shop has become one of the most powerful images of western freedom and when news reports want to drive this home they show footage of queueing Russians outside of empty shops, as if capitalism holds the answer to every question .

As Forty pointed out, the values and ideas embodied in products are very powerful and by their sheer physical existence can become accepted as fact - in the same manner as the physical existence of prod-

ucts in a museum drives home the acceptance of products as art . In an era where great change is necessary due to pressures on the environment and on developing nations, the existence of consumer goods in our museums acts as an obstacle to change . Industry has realised this and has begun to use it as a tool of marketing . The most recent and perhaps the boldest attempt is the advertisement for the Olympus μ [mju] camera "pronounced mju as in Design Museum". In doing so it reiterates for anyone who may not have been aware the ease at which we can buy our way into instant 'high culture' .It also reiterates the inevitable consequences of industrial design being displayed in design museums .

**Pronounced Mju.
As in Design Museum.**

When the Conran Foundation Collection opened at the Design Museum we sent our cameras along. We had to. They were part of the exhibition. They were the only cameras lucky enough to receive an invitation. Curator Ross Lovegrove chose two models of the Olympus Mju to be part of "a valuable reference archive for future generations." He also said they embodied "the pluralist aesthetic of our times." (And we thought two and a half million people bought one because they were good cameras, silly us.) Of course it is slightly baffling why anyone would want to go all the way to the Design Museum (open every day from 10.30 to 5.30 including Sundays) to peer at a Mju when they can peer at one in their local camera shop. Where you can also pick one up and examine the sleek and elegant features (without setting off an alarm). But if you must insist, there are plenty of other icons of modern design to see. It is, as Ross Lovegrove appositely put it, "a snapshot of our time." And it really is fascinating. You should take a camera.

OLYMPUS



fig 16 The ultimate step - 'instant art' . Straight from the production line into the design museum giving credence to the capitalist consumptionist ethic which created it -making culture a commercial commodity which can be bought over and over again .



Symptoms of Decay

One may think that the effects mentioned in the previous arguments are purely theoretical and that in reality they will never come into being . One need only look to the design situation in Milan today to see the initial symptoms of decay . At the moment there is a life-sapping feeling of apathy towards Italian design among Italian students and manufacturers alike . In the corridors of the Politecnico, for so long the educator of great Italian designers, one can almost hear the dejected sighs of the students who firmly believe that Italian design is dead . They talk bitterly of the present generation of designers for destroying their inheritance . Also in the real world of industry the message is seeping through, with fewer Italian designers than ever present at last years Salone . Instead the manufacturers are opting for northern Europeans, Americans, or Japanese to design their wares .

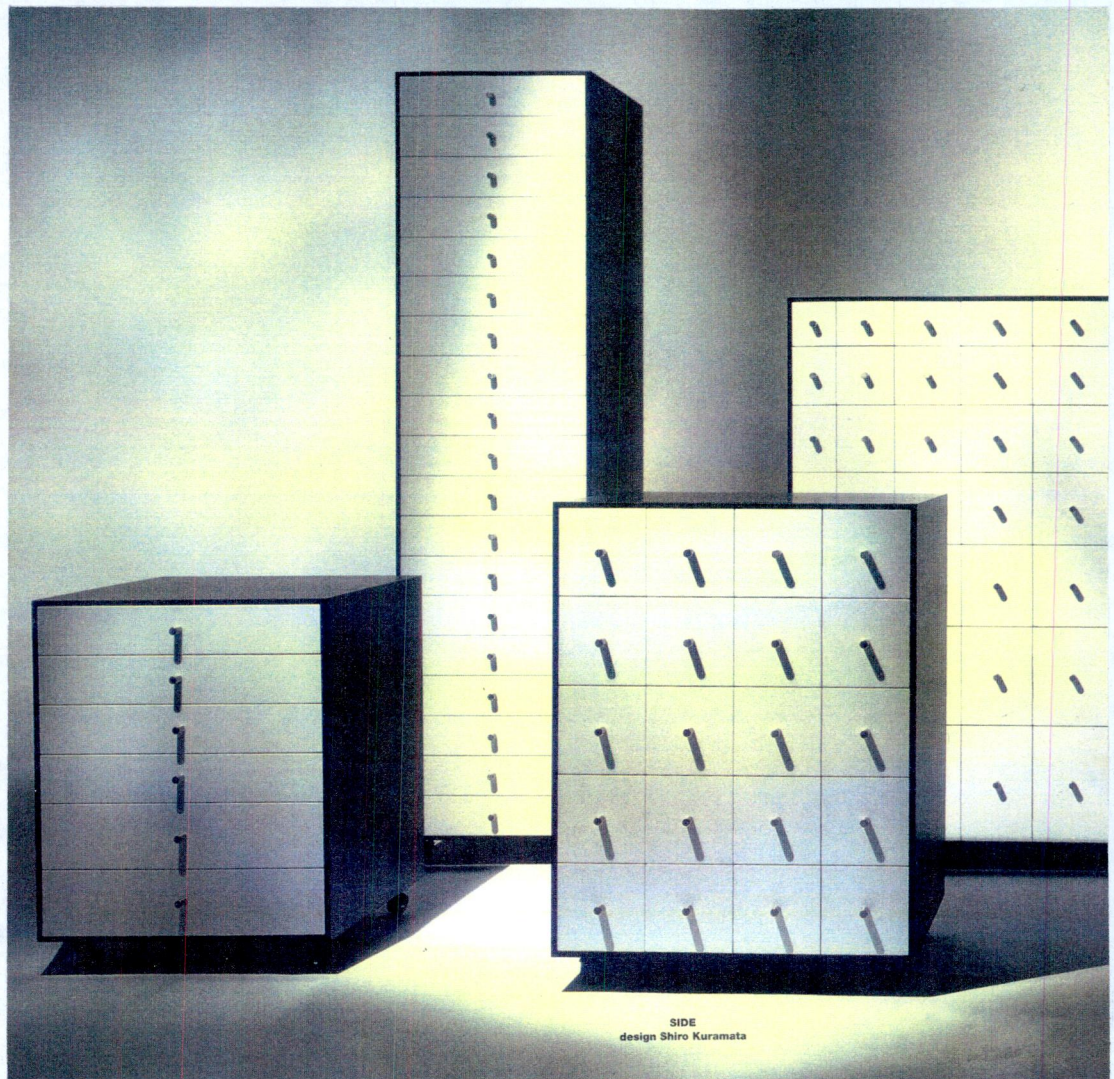


fig 17 Chests of drawers by Shiro Kuramata . Part of the 'non-Italian' Cappellini exhibit of the 1993 Salone del Mobile .



The previously mentioned Cappellini exhibition is a perfect example of the lack of innovative Italian design talent . Apart from the Proust chair ,which was designed over ten years ago the entire exhibit was compiled from work done by foreign designers . Morrison, Dixon, Irvine and Shiro Kuramata are all British, Eriksson and Sandell - Swedish and Australian - Marc Newson . Cappellini himself has cited the problem as Italian design being "too contaminated by history, too much sons of Sottsass or Castiglioni " (REDHEAD, Foreign exchange, Blueprint, April 1993, pp33) . This is of course the case, as the new generations of Italian designers try to relive the outdated notions of product as art or as they reproduce media pleasing design in an effort to regain Memphis glory. There is a lack of philosophy evident in Milan design at present . New designs are simply self-conscious re-workings of the old ideas in order to fulfil the media's not-so-hidden agenda in an effort to live up to the great names of the past .

Cappellini seems optimistic about the future by stating that there is always a period of reflection after one of greatness and he believes that in the future Italian design will once again be great (REDHEAD, "Foreign Exchange ", Blueprint, april 1993, pp 33) . If this is to be the case then the old design cliches will have to be forgotten forever, the Milan furniture fair will have to return to its role as a trade fair and forsake its artistic pretenses which have prevented the new generation from truly expressing themselves . Furniture and industrial design will have to regain the social relevance they lost in their attempt to gain entrance into the world of art . What is needed is a concentration on 'real' product design as opposed to designing publicity stunts for the media, for manufacturers and for Milan .

CONCLUSION

Industrial design as a field of endeavour is still very much in the adolescence of its development . As with any adolescent, it is still searching for its identity, still learning to talk, still learning how to articulate its emotions in a coherent manner . The existing language seems too restrictive and so industrial design is in constant danger of being misunderstood its consciousness being too underdeveloped to realise . In its search for its identity, industrial design has had many foster parents - from the masculine function of the modernist 1930s to the femininity of the organic 1960s . From the disposability of the 1970s to the recyclable 1990s . Yet industrial design continues to search for its true role .

This study has concentrated on the path which has lead industrial design to the world of art . A journey which started back the early 1950s with its befriending of sculpture and that has culminated in the Salone del Mobile . We have seen how the display techniques used to present this mass-produced 'art' have attracted the presence of the media and how, combined, they helped to create an 'artistic' image around industrial design . Design's affair with the art world has, on the surface, flourished as the design journals convinced both parties of their suitability for each other . It was a relationship which apparently worked well, many like Bayley were, and infact still are, convinced that industrial design actually should continue to be the 'art' of the twentieth century . We have seen how the visual side of design has taken over from the functional aspects in the priorities of the design press and as a result how the present generation of designers have followed suit . Display techniques have become as important as the products being displayed and in some cases this trend has even replaced the need for content to display . This study has shown that the relationship between industrial design and the world of art is not a nurturing one for industrial design and one that will never reach fruition . It serves only to further alienate industrial design from industry and social function turning it into a mere cosmetic application of external aesthetics .

Already in Milan, questions are being asked as to where designers went wrong, and more importantly what direction to go in now? There are no easy answers . Perhaps this new-found concern for our planet will bring a sense of reality back to the consciousness of industrial design enabling it to redefine itself and to rediscover its social and moral roles . Industrial design must re-awaken itself to its powers of change . Its future lies in its ability to change the future and to make it better . To remain as an adopted child of the arts is to condemn itself to living in the past where industrial designers will continue to replay old themes . Industrial design

as art is a self conscious design, as the Milan examples have shown, a design afraid of being innovative, a design lost in the quest for the abstract ideals of beauty, a design unable to compromise .

The cult of displaying Industrial design in museums and galleries has been shown to be a detrimental one . There are too many designers designing for immortality and not enough designing for life . To get a chair accepted into the MOMA or into the Victoria and Albert museum is considered a higher accolade than designing a product which may improve the life of some of society's marginalised such as the old or the less abled . A greater emphasis needs to be placed on *real* problems, problems associated with living, rather than concentrating on abstract ideals of beauty or trying to express an opinion of society through the medium of a chair . This is precisely why industrial design as 'art' will never work . It is an outdated notion which cowers from the responsibility of building a better world finding safety in the untouchable high ground of art .

There is a new breed of designer coming, one which is not afraid to tackle the real challenges that face industrial design . One whose voice will make itself heard in society, not through attention seeking design or media publicity stunts but, through the guise of change and vision . Designers that are as yet unknown but, that can be seen walking through the halls of the Salone shaking their heads, silently .

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