

Design and decoration: memories of an on-and-off love story

After its prime in the 1980s under Mendini, Sottsass and Guerriero, decoration languished on the back burner of visual experimentation in interior design, experiencing a revival at the start of the new millennium. Attraction to ornament is mutable and ephemeral, but recent interest in the decorative factor looks to nature for inspiration

by PATRIZIA SCARZELLA

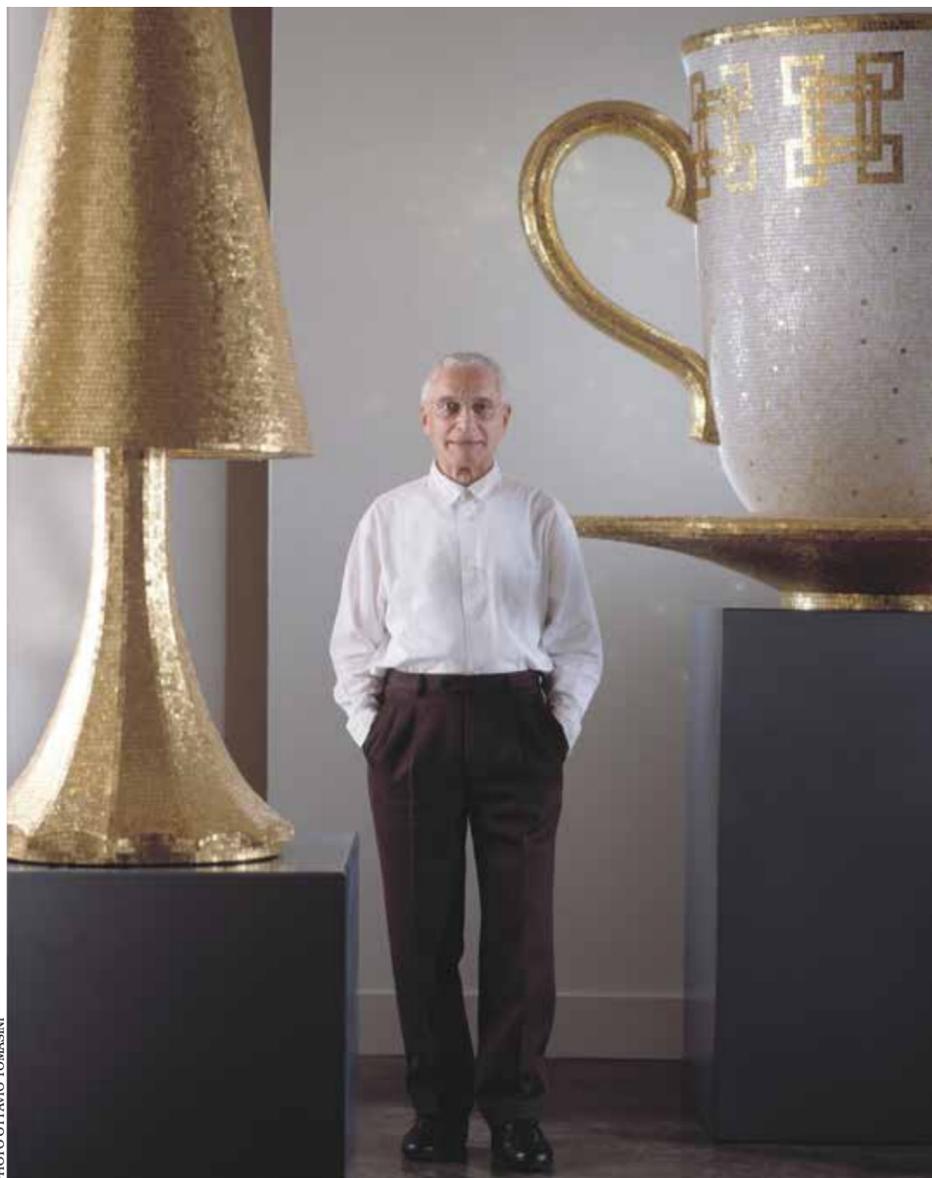
Decoration experienced one of its heydays in the early 1980s. The groups Alchimia (1976–1990) and Memphis (1981–1987), the architects Alessandro Mendini, Alessandro Guerriero and Ettore Sottsass produced brash, breakthrough ideas at a rapid pace, with which they wrote an important chapter of the history and evolution of international design. Those were the exact same years I began my career as an architect and journalist. Decoration, texture and colour were everywhere – in words, ideas and projects that multiplied day after day with unequalled velocity and intensity. One of the artefacts of decoration's proliferation in the 1980s was Sottsass's work on the design of plastic laminate patterns for the Abet Print company, a collaboration that began in the early 1960s. In 1972, an exhibition by Sottsass, Archizoom, Superstudio, George Sowden and Clino Trini Castelli titled "Superficie neutra" revealed the aesthetically ground-breaking potential of this artificial material devoid of tradition, used as it was to interpret an evolved concept of modern living. Plastic laminate was ideal for the search for new visual stimulus.

The evolution of decorative laminate continued, and in 1980 the Centrodomus in Milan presented the exhibition "La superficie modificante" with a display designed by Alchimia. It showed the first results of the "Ricerca sul decoro" initiative sponsored by Abet, Editoriale Domus, Alessi, Fiat and Zanotta. The project was led by Alessandro Mendini, Paola Navone, Guido Jannon, Giannino Malossi, Carla Ceccariglia, Stefano Casciani and Rosa Maria Rinaldi, who analysed decoration according to two four lines of study: household objects and furniture; fashion; architecture; and automobiles. A picture map of decorations was produced. This archive was the first to be a codification of decorations, taking as the common denominator the daily artificial surroundings, and excluding naturalistic and figurative decorations. In 1980, a *Domus* article in issue 612 reads:

"The material was classified according to the affinity of the signs and their layout. Several surprises have come to light. For example, the reminder of how fabric designs have been fascinatingly anticipatory of subsequent artistic developments; or the appearance of an unknown aspect of synthetic materials, whose marking are totally at odds with the self-negating 'non-disturbance' message that was attached to these materials by orthodox design." The "Ricerca sul decoro" research project laid the foundation for new decorative patterns ideated by the Memphis group a few years later. The sketchbook *Esercizio formale nr 2 - catalogo di mobili decorativi di stile moderno* by Ettore Sottsass contains drawings he made between 1978 and 1980. They show previews of a future evolution: designs that would be applied to Memphis furniture. We see the famous *bacterio* pattern for the first time, created for Abet Print and subsequently a major icon of the movement that revolutionised the vision of contemporary living. Parallel to the birth and achievements of Memphis, Alessandro Mendini paved his route with Alchimia by designing an "abacus of decorative stylistic elements" that materialised on the Zabro collection produced by Zanotta in the 1980s. He then ramified it by developing multiple versions that he applied to design, painting and buildings.

A significant episode in Mendini's passion/obsession with decoration came in 1978, when he and Alessandro Guerriero of Alchimia met the artist, set designer and painter Prospero Rasulo. Using an episcope (a magic lantern for projecting images of opaque objects), Rasulo made trials of decorations by projecting pointillist paintings by Paul Signac and Georges Seurat onto a faux 18th-century armchair that Mendini had sent to his studio. Mendini's aim was to create an optical disorientation through the extraordinary effect produced by the pointillist brushstrokes. This resulted in Mendini's first Poltrona di Proust, presented at his exhibition "Stanza del XX secolo" with the collaboration of Rasulo and Pierantonio Volpini. The Poltrona di Proust soon became such a powerful icon that it propelled Mendini, who became the editor-in-chief of *Domus* in 1979, onto the international stage as an artist-architect-designer.

Then came a void. After the feverish years during which Memphis and Alchimia dominated the design scene, decoration seemed to im-



Alessandro Mendini with several of his *Mobili per Uomo*, oversize gold mosaic sculptures of quotidian objects. Made by Bisazza, 1997–2008

plode, its potent energy died out. There was a diffuse need for silence, whiteness, rarefaction and extreme basicness.

Later, at the dawn of the new millennium, there was a sudden, silent, almost whispered invasion of floral fantasy by the Dutch designer Tord Boontje. His peaceful, light, poetic, romantic, intimist and joyful patterns brought decoration back to design.

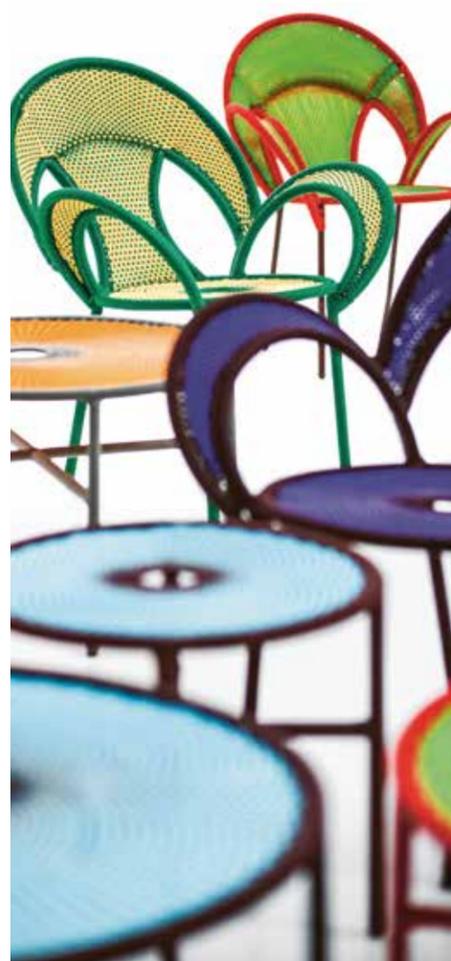
In an interview a few years ago, Boontje described how he had been brought closer to decoration by the birth of his daughter. "It is an incredibly important experience for an artist, because it radically changes the state of mind with which you approach a blank sheet of paper." Thanks to that unique and extraordinary event, Boontje has produced innumerable household objects in which, like a happy fairy tale, the protagonists are delicateness, ornament and minute marks inspired by nature, illustration and storytelling. It is not surprising that his dreamlike installation for Swarovski Atelier was called *Winter Wonderland* (2016). From his famous Blossom lamp for Swarovski Crystal Palace (the crystal manufacturer's collaboration series with designers) to tile decorations for the Italian company Bardelli, Boontje became a media fixture, and for a while he invaded our domestic scenery.

But the attraction to decoration is fickle, ephemeral and does not readily establish a stable relation to taste and interiors. At most, it succeeds in occupying a more durable post in the department of home accessories and ornamental objects.

Other projects proposed decorative approaches based on creatively reinterpreted ethnographic themes, such as *M'Afrique* by Patrizia Moroso, presented in Milan in 2009 with a display designed by Stephen Burks and an introduction written by Maya Angelou: "There is an image, an idea of Africa that lives deep in human imagination. Its form often transcends the power of the word and its profile lies under layers of conscious retrieval. It is alive within each one



From top: the Mega Chandelier and the Eden Queen rug by Marcel Wanders for Moooi, 2018; the Winter Wonderland installation by Tord Boontje for Swarovski



Banjooli chairs (2016) by Patrizia Urquiola for the *M'Afrique* collection produced by Moroso

of us on a primordial level, inexplicable yet undeniable." The African continent was inspiring to Moroso for being "extraordinarily rich in diverse creativity, making it one of the greatest sources of inspiration for Western modernity." The *M'Afrique* collection of products included designs by Tord Boontje, Bibi Seck and Ayse Birsel, Patrizia Urquiola, Stephen Burks and Philippe Bestenheider, all using textiles and a hand-weaving technique with plastic threads traditionally employed for making fish-nets. The result was a highly attractive world of colours and decorations, immediately likeable. Africa is a decorative world that has always had its niche of aficionados, but this project had the merit of going beyond traditional ethnic signs by revisiting them in a contemporary design key.

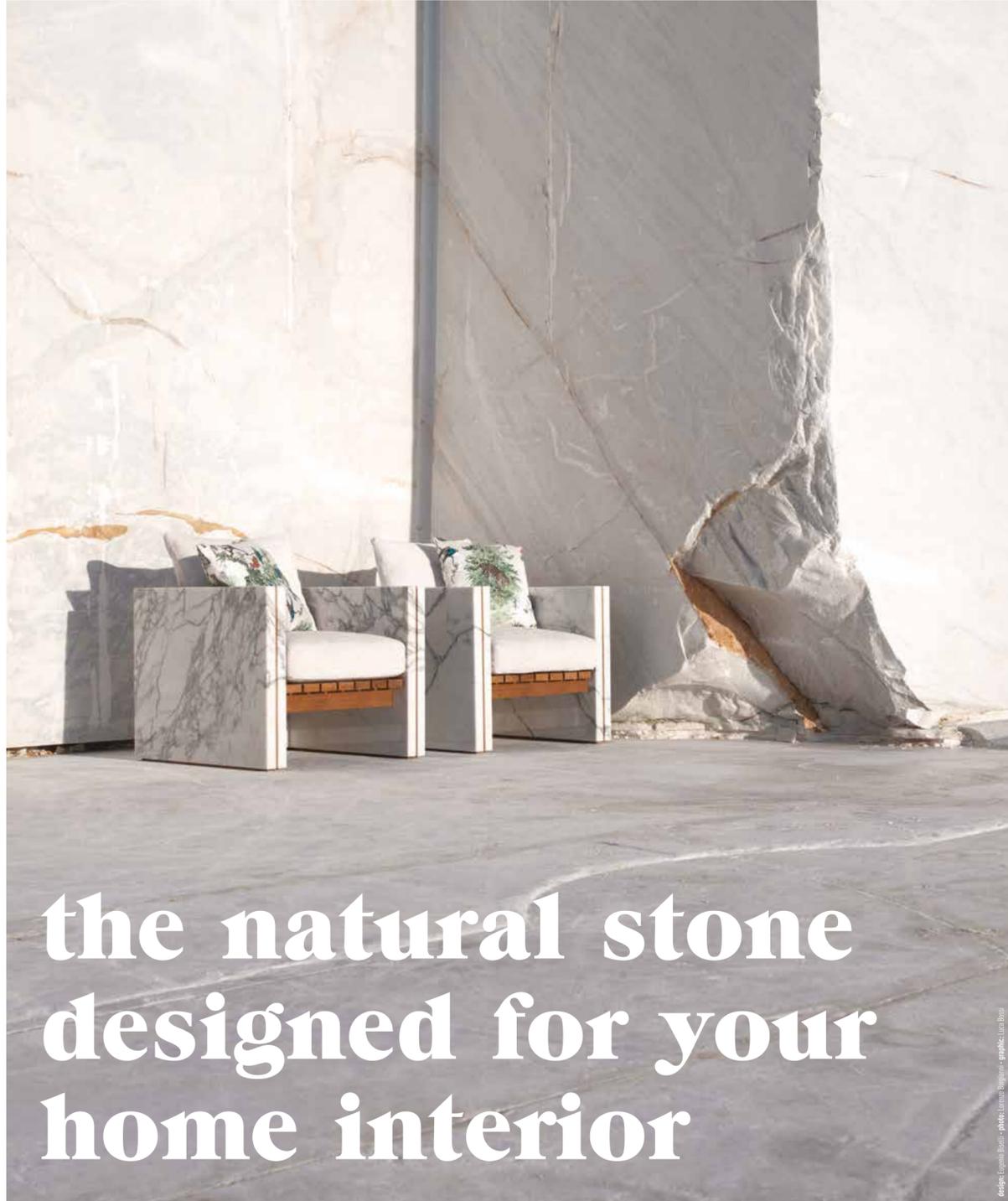
Nature played the leading role in another small, sophisticated decorative episode presented at the 2018 Fuorisalone in Milan: the unusual, unexpected creatures homaged by Marcel Wanders for the Moooi collection. The visually impactful Museum of Extinct Animals was a scenographic display of ten large, hyperreal drawings and a video. The extinct species were the inspiration for a new decorative style of Moooi products, where patterns were applied to all surfaces, from armchairs upholstered in laser-cut leather to rugs, and wallpaper with 3D textures. Nature will probably also be the central theme of many other upcoming stories of signs and decorations, some of them taking their cue from "Broken Nature", the exhibition at the 22nd Triennale di Milano event, open until 1 September. The show focuses on the environment and how our frail links with Earth can be strengthened.

The Blue Marble, that famous photo taken of planet Earth in 1972 from outer space, shows a chromatic palette dominated by blues, whites and greens, the colours of the elements water, clouds and plants. What better source of infinite inspiration for artists, illustrators and designers?

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Participatory architecture 2.0

From South America to the Indian Ocean, and from Holland to Italy, more architects are working on bottom-up projects for communities where resources are scarce. Their great ally is the World Wide Web

by LAURA DROUET, OLIVIER LACROUTS



PHOTO: LANG STILIANO, COURTESY AL BORDE

At the beginning of this year, the Curry Stone Foundation – an American organisation that supports architects and designers who work in close contact with local communities – launched a new series of podcasts called Social Design Insights. The current topic is the Narrative of Design and Activism. The podcast conversations have joined an already broad selection of contents proposed on the CSF website, which explores subjects relevant to people practicing social architecture. These include migration, education, urban planning, scarcity of building materials, public space and disaster recovery. Since being founded in 2007 by Clifford Curry and Delight Stone in the state of Oregon, the CSF has sought to have a wide international impact by talking about and promoting online what activist architects are doing in different parts of the world. The approach is shared by many supporters of participatory culture, which, after the success of the do-it-yourself movement in the 1960s, began embracing the possibilities offered by Internet in the 1990s, using it as an excellent tool to create and diffuse grass-roots content. When it comes to peer-to-peer practices, Internet does indeed constitute a precious tool for connecting, informing and raising awareness in a vast audience. Rob Breed and Changfang Luo, architects based in Amsterdam, have grasped and implemented this potential on their online platform, Architecture in Development (AiD), launched in 2011. Tired of working for the elite and “fascinated by the way architecture reinforces a sense of belonging in communities”, the two decided to become the voice of a type of architecture that brings people together. With AiD, they intend to give visibility to the numerous community initiatives that blossom all over the world, but often remain invisible and unbuild because of the difficulty to gather adequate resources, both in terms of funds and labour – one of the main obstacles for participatory projects. In that respect, it can be useful to take to Internet to make demand and offer meet. Think of crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter, KissKissBankBank, Ulule and Eppela, which regularly host projects for post-disaster infrastructure, or manual workshops held by young architects and organisations. There is great interest from “individuals, non-governmental organisations, schools and businesses wish-

ing to share their competencies and resources to improve the well-being of communities that have insufficient means,” say Breed and Luo. So their idea is to use AiD as a kind of catalyst. “The aim is to highlight the best initiatives on our website and explain their needs to potential sponsors around the world.” When you want to reach distant communities and have them collaborate, another important channel is social media. Twitter, for instance, has grown to be the favourite place of exchange for the big community of international architects who promote a collaborative mode of building, centred on users. Among the most active are Doina Petrescu, the Romanian co-founder of Atelier d’Architecture Autogérée, a collective based in France that encourages the regeneration of cities through bottom-up projects; Jeremy Till, the co-founder of the online research platform Spatial Agency; and the Italians Bianca Elzenbaumer and Fabio Franz of the office Brave New Alps. “Since we left London,” says Elzenbaumer, “Twitter has become a channel by which we keep in touch with friends whose research is in line with ours. It is a way to discover projects and articles that we otherwise would not come across in our daily life.” Thanks to activity on that network, the pair is actively building an international audience while it develops projects that are local, but deal with global themes. One is the recent School of Hospitality, a modular, temporary structure that was built and later installed in Rosarno, Calabria with help from asylum seekers, activists and architects. Conceived as a language school and a place where legal and medical assistance is provided for seasonal migrant workers who are mistreated, the project is based on self-organisation. It receives no public funding and was partially financed thanks to a crowdfunding campaign. Although Internet is still an excellent basis to create critical mass, and launch and finance new projects, the real world is nonetheless the playing field where architects must work to promote participatory practices that have a durable impact on communities. Brave New Alps, which often collaborates with other architecture collectives such as the French group Yes We Camp! seeks direct involvement with people in every design phase, from the conception to the physical realisation. “We are

interested in design as tool of research. Everything we design is a way to get to know the world. We like the fact that the peer-to-peer approach allows us to share our often transformative learning experiences with others,” says Elzenbaumer. In her book *The Practice Turn in Architecture: Brussels after 1968* (Routledge, 2015), Isabelle Doucet, a researcher and professor of architectural history, observes: “Involving the user in the production of architecture may be considered a threat to an architect’s creative autonomy and control over the design process.” Aware of this preconception, David Barragán of Al Borde, an architects collective in Ecuador, sustains that by adopting participatory practice with his partners Pascual Gangotena, Marialuisa Borja and Esteban Benavides, they have become “facilitators”, while their architecture has turned into a tool to empower people. “At the beginning, we thought that participation only worked in the ambit of social projects, simply because in common perception, it is a practice linked to a lack of financial resources. But soon, we realised that it is an approach that creates ties that cannot be quantified in money,” says Barragán. “It’s a very slow process, because everything is based on reciprocal trust and the seeking of agreements,” he continues. This ode to slowness and trust is particularly evident in the case of the project for the Nueva Esperanza school, a small construction conceived by Al Borde after a long conversation with the community of fishermen living in Puerto Cabuyal in Manabí, Ecuador. The minute boat-shaped pavilion built in 2009 has recently received a new bigger building to satisfy the continuously evolving needs of the community. “As we always say – for us, the participation of the people is not an obstacle. It forces us to look at the real requirements. We invent nothing from scratch. We never arrive in a place and say, ‘Hey, we have a project for you’”, continues Barragán. He affirms that the Nueva Esperanza school has become a “workshop environment for participation,” suggesting that when people have the possibility to participate in decision-making processes connected to their living environment, they become a very committed and engaged community.



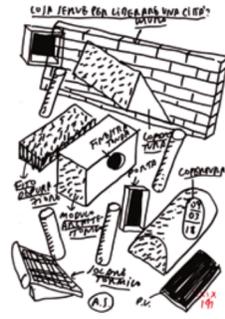
PHOTOS: NADIA LUCISANO/BRAVE NEW ALPS



Top: lunch-room pavilion for the Ecuadorian community of Guadurnal, designed by Al Borde with Taller General using existing structures, 2018. Above: the Hospitality School, a temporary modular construction designed by Brave New Alps in Rosarno, Calabria, 2018



Two projects made possible through the online platform Architecture in Development. Top: the Naidi Community Hall in the Fiji Islands, designed by Caukin Studio in partnership with The Jazmin Fund, a branch of the Naqaqa Giving Foundation. Above: the Bamboo Kindergarten built by Architecture Sans Frontières International in Java, Indonesia after a series of workshops held with the school's administrators and parents



Designing by playing

La Città Libera, a board game by Antonio Scarponi, teaches the principles of participatory urban development

In 2018, the Italian architect and designer Antonio Scarponi, the founder of the office Conceptual Devices, developed La Città Libera (The Free City), a board game aimed at supplying architects, real estate developers and future users the tools to co-create off-grid residential developments while taking into consideration the needs of everyone. Scarponi is a supporter of do-it-yourself practices linked to the principles of self-design. He is used to hacking preconceived ideas with alternative solutions. "Design is knowledge and storytelling. I tell a story and you make it. Making it becomes a sort of recipe that everyone is free to follow or not," he says during our visit to his office in Zurich. The recipe behind La Città Libera is based on a simple yet revealing observation: "The city has a function that lies between the desire to be with others and the desire to retreat. This blend of wanting to be close, but not all the time, is what gives shape to the city." Then came his idea to make all the actors involved in a typical residential project interact with one another around the same design table. "You turn the conceptual process around, and invite the client to build together with the developer." Scarponi illustrates this by extracting from a big wooden box a series of standard elements, including rectangular lots (3 x 6 centimetres), walls, garden and vegetable patch modules, and tiny photovoltaic panels. The game is straightforward: each player is given the same elements and asked to imagine the house of her dreams. "When the respective projects are lined up to create a block, the houses that might have functioned very well on their own now need the attention of the participants. They realise that some details must be rethought from a community viewpoint. So they must be undone and rebuilt together," explains Scarponi. At this point, the communication between all the players becomes a fundamental requisite and the game morphs into an actual participatory process. "Only by working together can you succeed in optimising costs and space. For example, we can all agree on the positioning and quantity of energy-producing units," he suggests. Intentionally without rules, the game leads to completely unpredictable processes and results every time. "It generates a poem where imperfection adds value. There is a story and it was composed together by the entire community," concludes Scarponi. **L.D., O.L.**



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Forever young: the Bauhaus

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Bauhaus, celebrated with events and exhibitions around the world. This German school became a movement, the basis of modern design, and is still vastly popular. Its success is thanks to the institutions that have preserved and handed down its legacy; thanks to designers who exported the Bauhaus approach throughout the world; and thanks to the companies that continue to produce many of its pieces. The message here is resonant because it unites ethics and aesthetics



by CECILIA FABIANI

What makes the Bauhaus still so relevant? What is the message it contains? One hundred years after its founding, the most famous school of architecture, design and art of all times is remembered even more for the mark it left in terms of design (architecture, products, furniture and art) than for its revolutionary educational model. Especially in the design field, Bauhaus furniture and objects have become icons, timeless best-sellers. So why, despite design moving in the opposite direction, is the value of the school still universally recognised? Founded in Weimar in 1919 by Walter Gropius, the school was built on a vision, one that is connected to the German word *Gesamtkunstwerk*, referring to an all-inclusive artwork that integrates and contains different types of art. From day one, interdisciplinarity connoted the didactic approach. The school was a fusion of the city's prewar academy of arts and the school of arts and crafts, the latter of which had been directed by Henry van de Velde for many years. The idea was to unite arts and applied arts, to which also technology and production was added over time. The *Vorkurs* (preliminary course) was the same for all students, and characterised by the study of materials and colours, which were considered of equal importance. Renewal and experimentation were part of looking to the future, one of the school's constitutional aims. The three successive directors were Walter Gropius (1919-1928), Hannes Meyer (1928-1930) and Mies van der Rohe (1930-1933). The three successive locations were Weimar (1919-1925), Dessau (1925-1932) and Berlin (1932-1933). Many illustrious talents, too many to mention, taught at the Bauhaus, contributing to making the school an unrepeatable phenomenon. They include Lyonel Feininger, Johannes Itten, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Gerhard Marcks, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Oskar Schlemmer, alumni who became teachers, such as Josef Albers, Marcel Breuer, and the external professor Mart Stam. The school's vicissitudes were subject to the changing political landscape during the Weimar Republic, but nonetheless the didactic vision, although it evolved over time, remained always coherent and revolutionary. In 1933, the school was shut down by the Fascist regime, and many teachers, students and disciples fled to the United States and other countries. Those who moved overseas included Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, the Alberses, and some time after, Marcel Breuer. Wassily Kandinsky chose France, and Paul Klee returned to his native Switzerland. This meant that the Bauhaus concept was continued and developed in other countries after the school had closed,

Top: steel cream and sugar set with tongs and tray by Marianne Brandt and Helmut Schulze for Alessi, 1928. Above, from left: the B 9 set of tables by Marcel Breuer for Thonet, 1925; the Barcelona chair by Mies van der Rohe for Knoll, 1929. Opposite page, top: the Tac 02 coffee and tea service, an evolution of the Tac 01 from 1969 by Walter Gropius for Rosenthal. Opposite page, centre: the S 32 chair by Breuer for Thonet, 1928; the WA 24 lamp by Wagenfeld for Tecnolumen, 1924; and a group photo taken at the Bauhaus workshops in Weimar, around 1924

thanks to former teachers and former students who became professors abroad. In 1937, the New Bauhaus was founded in Chicago, later becoming the Institute of Design. But in addition to teaching, the Bauhaus group continued to design all over the world. One example is White City in Tel Aviv, an area boasting 4,000 Bauhaus buildings, 1,000 of which are part of the Unesco world heritage site there. Much later, design training in Germany itself was influenced by the Bauhaus. This was after the war, in 1953, after the school had been closed for 20 years. Otl Aicher, Inge Scholl and the Bauhaus alumna Max Bill founded the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, a school that studied the socio-political aspects and industrial culture of design. There was a focus on graphic design and product design, but there was no art department, despite the fact that the Bauhaus members Albers and Itten taught there. The school had many ties to manufacturing and the industry, and lasted 15 years until 1968, during which time it had an international character and students from 50 countries. The short life of the Bauhaus (only 14 years) contributed to its legacy, much like an actor who dies young crystallises his image, stopping time. The locations in Weimar (with buildings by van de Velde) and Dessau, with its fascinating buildings by Gropius both for the school and his Meisterhäuser (masters' houses) were restored thanks to the German reunification, and also they became Unesco heritage sites. Currently, they are occupied by universities, museums and foundations. However, the Bauhaus Archiv building by Walter Gropius is considered the epicentre of the school and movement's course of action. It was designed for the city of Darmstadt in 1964, but built in Berlin, and not until 1976-79. As a small gem of architecture, this museum and archive with a busy programme of exhibitions and events has contributed to keeping the history and fame of the Bauhaus alive. Despite its small dimensions and just 700 square metres of exposition space, it has become a symbol of the city. The building is under restoration, seeing that

40 years have past since it was constructed. In the Bauhaus centennial year, Berlin is welcoming visitors in a temporary museum in the Charlottenburg district, a freshly restored office building from 1955-56. It is famous for its past as the historical premises of the Kiepert bookstore, and for being designed by Paul Scheubes – a stratification of culture and history. The real news is the extension of the Bauhaus Archiv by Volker Staab, which will enlarge the exposition space to 2,000 square metres, meaning almost triple what it is now. This is because the Bauhaus Archiv is preparing to become not just a centre for exhibitions and the archive, but also a platform of exchange, a think-tank for designers and creatives. The Archiv's director Annemarie Jaeggi believes that the cultural, international liveliness of Berlin makes it the perfect place for debate. In our collective eye, and from the viewpoint of phenomenal sales, the Bauhaus is connected to steel-tube furniture (which until the Bauhaus was only used for hospitals) particularly the pieces by Marcel Breuer, but also by Stam, who developed its constructional idea, and Gropius. One of the biggest and most important producers of the furniture is Thonet. Many other objects, lamps and pieces of furniture did not find success until after the Bauhaus trajectory had ended. In the 1960s, the Bauhaus style became highly fashionable. The Gavina company produced the Wassily Chair by Breuer. Cantilever chairs marked the period after that. Among the classics and today's best-sellers are the Barcelona series by van der Rohe for Knoll; the teapot from the Tac collection by Gropius for Rosenthal; the egg coddler by Wilhelm Wagenfeld for Janaer Glas and his lamp for Tecnolumen; and the ashtray and objects by Marianne Brandt for Alessi. The Tecta company carries a wide selection of Bauhaus classics. Some objects and furniture are produced by several manufacturers at once, and the copyright linked to the school and its designers is somewhat murky. In any case, such rights expire 70 years after the creator's death. Besides these questions, what is behind the Bauhaus mania? What resonance does it have? "The aesthetics of the objects – devoid of decoration, characterised by functionality – has undeniable allure. This is the visible side, but there is something more that is not seen, but that can be felt. These are the values transmitted by the products, and they have to do with ethical aspects. We could speak of a rulebook of the Bauhaus," says Annemarie Jaeggi in a video. What is she referring to? A type of design that finds solutions to problems, that is contemporary, that never copies, that uses materials in a correct way, that saves material, that is straightforward and looks to the future. In a word, "they are functional objects that give a sense of happiness when you take them into your hand."



Designers of the World Unite

On display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a Fiat Cinquecento, typewriters and chairs by famous designers relay the qualities of good design and its power to drive social progress without borders

by MASSIMO VALZ-GRIS

From unshowy kitchen utensils and commonly used electric appliances to iconic pieces of furniture and toys, a utilitarian automobile and typewriters, all is on display at "The Value of Good Design" at the MoMA in New York until 15 June. The show illustrates how good design is a basic ingredient of emancipation and democratisation. It also demonstrates if and how the best practices of the past century can adapt to the needs of contemporary society, so different, so fluid, yet so vulnerable. The exploration starts with a rediscovery of two fundamental series of exhibitions, "Useful Objects" (1938-1948) and "Good Design" (1950-1955), organised precisely at the MoMA to promulgate the dawn of modern industrial design. It continues with publications, conceptual work, timeless masterpieces, and displays of entire houses, fully furnished. Exhibits include the Fiat 500 by Dante Giacosa; chairs by Charles and Ray Eames, Arne Jacobsen, Eero Saarinen, Gio Ponti and Franco Albini; the Lexikon typewriter by Marcello Nizzoli for Olivetti; and the 35-millimetre film camera Werra made in East Germany by Zeiss-Werk. The thread of "The Value of Good Design" travels through very diverse eras and societies, – from the United States under the New Deal, to Iron Curtain countries, and Italy during its economic miracle – with a single aim: to answer the question of what made design good or bad yesterday compared to today.



Exhibition view of "The Value of Good Design" showing the Fiat 500 by Dante Giacosa, 1957; the Lexikon typewriter by Marcello Nizzoli for Olivetti, 1949; and the Luisa armchair by Franco Albini, 1948-1955

A response to urgent demands

We selected seven projects at Design Indaba 2019 that tackle the scarcity of water, the recycling of industrial offcuts, the availability of medicine in remote places, and the treatment of depression and anxiety

by **MARIANNA GUERNIERI**

Design Indaba in Cape Town is a major creative conference on the African continent. Much like a TED event on the subject of design, three days are devoted to talks that inspire design activism by presenting both theoretical speculation and concrete answers to urgent issues. Industrial designers, fashion designers, architects, graphic designers, advertisers, researchers and scientists take the stage, one after the other. The goal is to instil confidence and hope in over 2,000 visitors. The annual fair has been promoting innovative entrepreneurship for 24 years now. Founded in 1995 by Ravi Naidoo, the director of Interactive Africa, the company that runs the festival, Indaba aims to contribute to a better future through presentations by charismatic and proactive talents. Of the 53 international speakers who discussed their projects, we've selected seven whose work is directly related to urgent contemporary problems. Some are consolidated initiatives ready for more ambitious phases; others are still experimental concepts.

From Silicon Valley to Rwanda, the drone Zipline carries blood bags and medical supplies to remote places hard to reach by car. Conceived by Keller Rinaudo, Keenan Wyrobek and William Hetzler in 2011 and implemented in 2018, it is a miniature plane that can contain up to 1.5 kilos of material. The drone itself weighs 10 kilos and can travel for 120 kilometres round trip with one battery charge. The way it works is simple. When a doctor or medical worker has an emergency, they send a text message or WhatsApp to the Zipline. Soon enough, the drone parachutes the requested supplies into a small container. Waiting time varies from 10 minutes to 1 hour. At Design Indaba 2019, Wyrobek connected to one of the two distribution centres his company runs in Rwanda to show the audience in real time the launch of a Zipline. Once it is loaded, it is catapulted into the air. The drone resists wind and rain. To date, it has made over 11,000 deliveries, with an average 500 launches per day and many lives saved.

Health is also the focus of the product designer Kacper Pietrzykowski. When he specialised in experimental design at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, his graduation project was a device for diabetics to measure blood sugar. His emphasis was on the psychological implications of this chronic illness, which requires so much attention from the patient he calls it "a second job". The Polish designer calls his non-invasive device Ida, after the name of the person with whom he studied the disease. The machine considers the side effects and resistance that may arise from the daily routine of measuring blood-sugar levels. Ida measures haemoglobin through a sensor that identifies if the glucose levels are greater than 80 milligrams per litre, thus avoiding many invasive tests and limiting the waste from the more common test strips.



Clockwise, from left: Mind Mirror by Freyja Sewell; Twenty by Mirjam De Bruijn, to save water in detergents; clothes by Algorithmic Couture worn by the designers; the edible water bottle Oohol by Rodrigo García González



The emergency treated by Freyja Sewell is the "scourge of the future": depression. "Dependence upon technology, lower attention spans, increased stress and anxiety are just a few of the problems caused by our consumption of technology," explains the British designer. "Research shows that people who meditate improve their memory and have greater control over their emotions, less anxiety and low levels of depression." Her Mind Mirror, part of a broader study of privacy and mindfulness, monitors what happens in the brain when we meditate, with non-addictive or competitive graphic and sound renderings, inspired by the notion of expanded consciousness.

Plastic. On the total and definitive reuse of this material-burden, the Dutch designer and maker Dave Hakkens built a DIY empire, providing makers all over the world with tools to recycle plastic quickly with machines that are easy to build. Born as an online video tutorial on how to select, assemble and recycle plastic, the project became a universal platform - precious-plastic.com - where users can join together with others who want to open their recycling business. Now that Precious Plastic can stand on its own, Hakkens is embarking on new projects, an offline community we'll hear more about after the summer.

Joining plastic and water, the Spanish designer Rodrigo García González analysed the Oohol project - the legendary edible water bottles. Conceived by Skipping Rock Lab based in London (González is co-Ceo), aims to eliminate the plastic packaging from water sold at retail. In order to do this, the lab was inspired by the molecular cuisine of Ferran Adrià, who "spherified" liquids, trapping them in gelatinous membranes through chemical reactions between natural agents. The result are small edible sacs full of liquid. Skipping Rock Lab's research lies in making this formula as effective as possible and accessible to everyone.

Water is the key element in the project by the young designer Mirjam De Bruijn, who trained at the Design Academy in Eindhoven. De Bruijn reconsiders home detergents and cosmetics sold in supermarkets whose water content is 80 per cent. The majority of unsold products are an enormous waste. With Twenty, De Bruijn imagines a packaging system that contains only the "useful" 20 per cent, inside a biodegradable capsule. Each person is free to recombine it with water from their own homes. Fashion industry waste is among the most harmful to the environment. Japanese designer Kye Shimizu invented Algorithmic Couture, born to overturn the "design-production-sale" formula into "design-sale-production" one. Algorithmic fashion detects by 3D scanning the shape of the buyer's body, designs totally customisable clothes through parametric drawings, and divides them into modular elements made up of bands and triangles to obtain anti-waste geometric forms. The production consists in laser-cutting these forms and assembling them easily to create garments.



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In search of Milan's sincerity

by RAFFAELE VERTALDI

The Instagram account *@postsinceri*, opened less than a year ago, is trying to map a part of Milan that is hiding in plain sight, one consisting of "bocce courts, trattorie and public recreational clubs," as stated in the description. It is the overall picture of a city where innovation competes against persistence, where top-down revisionist trends and bottom-up protectionist policies share the same social and urban fabric. We conducted a "Direct chat" with the two creators of the Postsinceri initiative, who prefer to remain anonymous.

What is your background?

We are both in our thirties and live in Milan. We come from

two totally different lines of work, but what we do for a living has no relevance for the Instagram account we manage together. We habitually frequent bars, restaurants and night clubs, just like our contemporaries, but last year we decided to experiment with an alternative.

Why @postsinceri?

Postsinceri originated to share places in Milan that we partially already knew and partially are discovering now. They are alternatives to what would seem to be the predominant rule of Milan's aggregation points: appearances above substance. This is what made us define our spots "sincere" in the deepest meaning of the word: genuine, pure, honest, upfront. In a word, we indicate places that actually "are" instead of "trying to be".

Which are the parameters you follow for your selection? Is there a prerequisite for being published?

Inexpensive or reasonably priced. Long-standing management. No invasive remodelling. A certain type of patrons. Finally, our incontestable personal taste. But mostly, it's an immediate feeling. Above all, we are looking for people-oriented places, where the barman smiles and you can tell he has a positive attitude toward serving you; where the cook takes a liking to you and tells you her life story; where the old man invites you to play cards because they're missing a fourth player; where the bocce fanatic wants to teach you how to play.

Does sincere design exist?

Yes, but it is not enough to make a bar or restaurant a sincere place. Just having retro design, matchboarding on the walls, a

briar-root bar-counter, a tariff board with changeable plastic characters and cold fluorescent lighting is not enough. The aesthetics of the sincere place also regard the people who go there and work there. In Milan, we have become accustomed to a certain type of *design povero* that is artificially inserted into a sophisticated interior. In a *posto sincero*, you would never find intentionally peeled-off plaster, and the 1970s plastic laminate tables have been there since the 1970s.

When exactly does being conservative become an ethic necessity?

When the cost of progress is equal to the loss of identity and credibility. Therefore, to maintain one's integrity there is no other choice than to refuse standardisation, refuse to sell yourself out in response to a superficial market demand.

That said, we do not want people to consider these places to be museum pieces. Quite the opposite. Really sincere places are ones that are still lively, where you can integrate with the people who have been going there forever.

Milan has always seen itself as a promoter of change, but sometimes the novelty is dangerously shallow and the social policies seem stale. In what way could your Instagram profile contribute to invert this trend?

We want to propose an alternative that is unknown to most of our peers. However, the operation is not without risks. On the one hand, we wish to demonstrate and communicate the affection and pleasure we feel when we frequent these places, and we wish to prevent them closing down. On the other hand, we risk damaging their atmosphere by denaturing

it. There is a continuous and difficult compromise between saving them and preserving them.

How do you imagine your account evolving over time? An archive, a vade-mecum, a network?

Since the start, we attempted to set up the profile as something different to what is generally around when it comes to restaurants and nightlife. We do not want to review the sincere places. The sincere places are not catalogued or indexed. Just mentioned. This will remain the only intention of the project. We'd like people to try out the places we recommend to gain awareness of the fact that Milan is not solely made up of consumer events, Furniture Fair hype, fashion weeks, and chains opening and closing, but that it has its own identity, which is endangered.



Bar Beppe, Via Plinio 18



Trattoria da Tomaso, Via Gaetano De Castilia 20



Trattoria Il Tettuccio, Via Giuseppe Ripamonti 94



Brunch Bar, Via Domenico Cimarosa 3/A



Margy Burger, Piazza Santo Stefano 2



Trattoria Nova Maurizio, Via Mac Mahon 24



Lessons found in materials

Experimental waste-based compounds point to a profitable way of respecting the environment and territorial identity. New materials made from algae, salmon skin, limestone, apple skins and fungus are being invented



Left: fabrics from The Uprooted, a project by Atelier Luma that explores the use of invasive or exotic plants in the Camargue (Provence, France) to create innovative ecological objects. Above: objects in the Marecree collection by Aurore Piette, made of sedimented limestone, sand and mud from the Gironde estuary in France. Right: the composite tiles by Mogu are based on homegrown mycelium fungus



by VALENTINA CROCI

The design profession has unavoidable contemporary responsibilities: the rethinking of production processes; the organising of supply chains from the gathering of the material to its transformation into a finished product; the disposal of products at the end of their life cycle; and the reuse of waste. In the early 2000s, the design industry made its first life-cycle assessments, which are methods to quantify the environmental impact that a product or service has during its life cycle. Today, the aim is to activate a circular economy, one that self-regenerates through an appropriate of flows of materials. This passage marks an interesting jump in scale, because it means that the planning of an economic and productive system aimed at minimising waste can be applied to small numbers and short supply chains, too.

Circular economy has entered design methodology right at the start of designers' academic training, so experiments have been appearing that involve new materials based on the waste of local industries. Their applications and the exchange they entail between diverse fields of business have not existed until now. In this approach to sustainability, waste is not only converted and upcycled, but tells the story of communities, local specificities and local farming traditions. Since 2016, the cultural centre Luma Arles in France has been exploring the use of waste materials, mostly from the region's food-farming industry. Its think-tank Atelier Luma is intent on promoting virtuous procedures on ecologic, social and economic levels. From invasive weeds and algae gathered in the Camargue, natural glue and dye are made. From tufts of Merino wool found on the Chaîne des Alpilles, yarn is spun for use in the textile sector.

Different clays are studied and catalogued with the aim of incentivising the local ceramic craft. By mapping the area's materials, professions and competencies, Atelier Luma wants to favour cooperation between different fields. At the current Triennale di Milano exhibition, "Broken Nature" (until 1.9.2019), the think-tank has on display the research project *Algae Geographies* (with Algae Platform and the Medsea Foundation). It shows an alternative economy for the wetlands of Southern France, which could become an incubator for the cultivation of biomaterials. The study hypothesises a transnational initiative in the Mediterranean to forge connections between local biomaterials, manufacturers and circular, decentralised production methods. This platform would act as an aggregator of knowledge and experimentation to generate heterogeneous goods, like objects made from microalgae, 3D-printed biopolymers, fabrics dyed and printed with pigments from algae, and bio-laminates

made from algae and starch-based polymers.

Thomas Vailly, a designer based in Eindhoven, recently collaborated with Luma on the development of a biomaterial made from sunflower-processing waste. Sunflowers are used to produce oil, seeds, biofuel and animal feed, but the rest of the plant is thrown away. However, from the residue of the oil pressing, a water-based glue and a vegetal leather can be created. When the tough outer fibre is stripped from the stem, it can be heat pressed into cladding panels. The stem's pith can be used to form a natural alternative to styrofoam.

Before dealing with the ideation of a determined product, an increasing number of designers focuses first on finding specific resources in their own geographical area and developing a process of gathering and transformation of the material.

For his degree-project in textile at Central Saint Martins in London, Andrea Liu began experimenting with the tanning of salmon skins both smoked and fresh, inspired by Alaskan Native American methods of tanning. He has succeeded in obtaining sustainable and 100 per cent chemical-free luxury leather. His study included looking at industrial tanners such as Atlantic Leather in Iceland, Nova Kaeru in Brazil and Nanai-Salmo Leather in Germany. His supplier is the artisan salmon smoke-house H. Forman and Son in London. Liu weaves the strips of leather and makes modular patterns that can find application in fashion and interiors.

Aurore Piette gathers materials such as limestone, sand and mud from the Gironde estuary in France, respecting their natural sedimentary layers. They come from rock erosion and settle into deposits that are usually removed by the Port Authority maintenance crews. Thanks to Piette's operation, mutual advantages are obtained with the institutions involved. Productive synergy is generated with local artisan's workshops. Her collection Marecree has a rough aesthetic that emulates the material's formation process, as if the objects had been spontaneously created by nature.

Nikolaj Thrane Carlsen from Denmark has developed a material made of seaweed collected from the shores. He has *Zostera marina*, a species of seagrass, directly recycled by farmers on the islands Møn and Bogø, which lie south of Copenhagen. The seagrass is mixed with carrageenin, a pectin obtained from purple carrageen seaweed, to make a durable, stable compound. His inspiration comes from the traditional seaweed roofs found along the coasts of Denmark, which can last up to 200 years. The shell of his Coastal Chair is attached to a frame made of reused oak wood. Recycled brass brackets hold the shell to the frame, making it easy to separate the parts to be recycled individually.

Studio Florian & Christine from London also uses raw material supplied by the sea and coast. Its project Hong Kong Harbour/Future Sea Craft is based on organised beach-combing in the harbours of Hong Kong. With degraded ocean plastic (PET, polypropylene and high-density polyethylene), smooth shards of coloured glass, pieces of rusty metal and ceramics, they create lamps of glass and metal, screens, new solid composites and fabrics, all in collaboration with artisans. The studio has thereby put to practice a thorough process of upcycling.

In a more institutional ambit, the vegan upholstery material used for the Privé collection by Cassina has been much talked about. It was Philippe Starck's idea to fine-tune Apple Ten Lork, a covering material made of apple skins by the Frumat company from Bolzano. Frumat is specialised in bio-based materials from the food-farming industry around Bolzano. The different types of faux leather are pleasant to the touch, made from discarded apple skins and produced in a low-emissions process. In the furniture sector, but without the use of vegetal material, there is also the S-1500 chair designed by Snohetta for Nordic Comfort Products in Northern Norway, which produces it industrially by injection moulding. The chair is made from a polymer found in disused fishing nets supplied by the fisheries Kvarøy Fiskeoppdrett and Nova Sea. The recycled plastic is patterned naturally by traces of colour and marbling given by the nets.

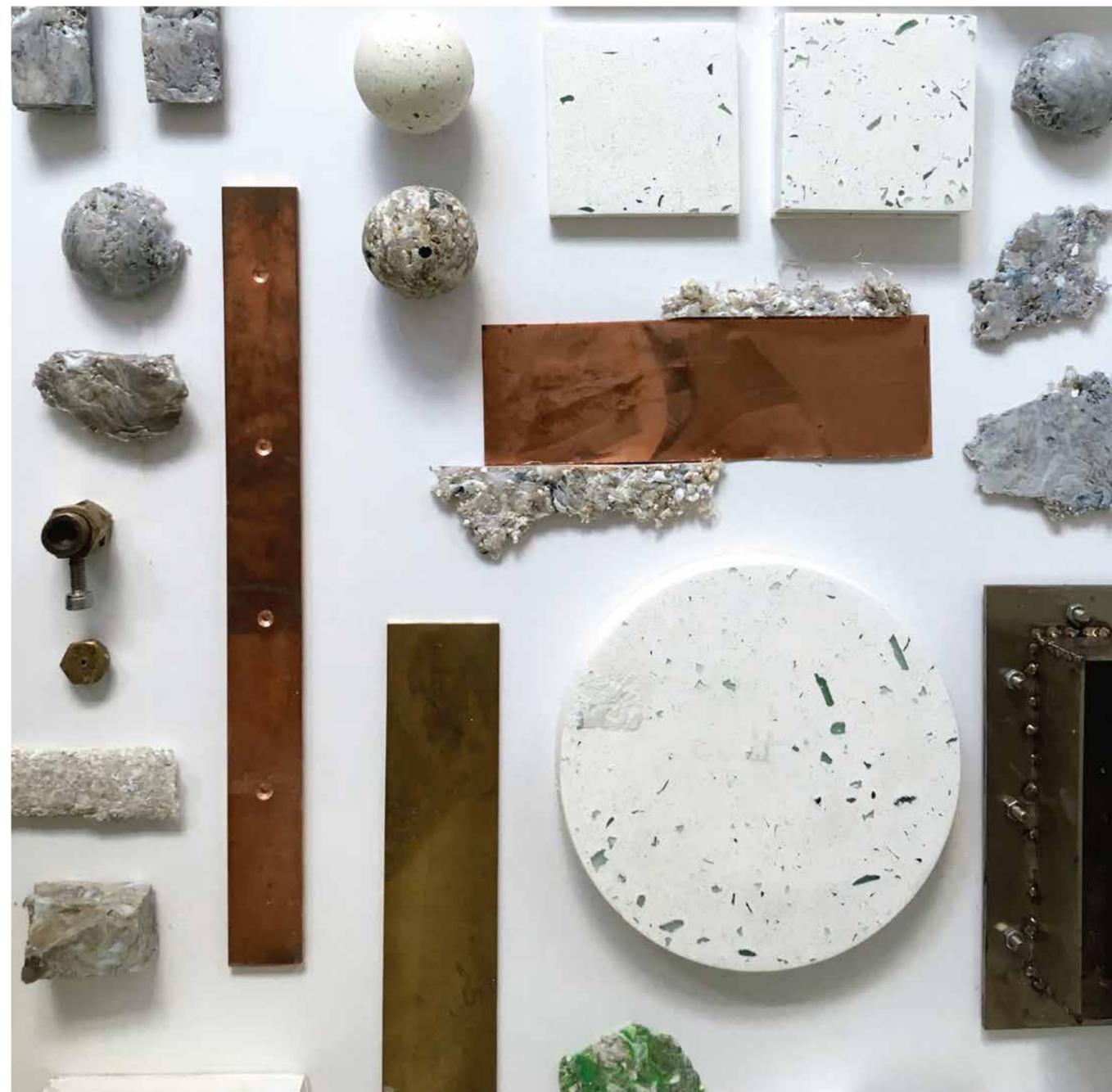
For a few years now, we have been hearing about biomaterials made of mycelium fungus. Mogu, a company co-founded by Maurizio Montalti in Varese in 2015, has concretised a study conducted by Officina Corpuscoli, one of the first to work in this direction. Mogu develops composite materials derived from organic fibres, by-products from food farming industries, and links them together with mycelium, a biopolymer that forms the threadlike "root structure" of mushrooms. By designing and configuring the growth processes of structured composites, it is possible to obtain physical properties that are stable, durable and specific. The Mogu range includes the product Mogu Wave, sound-absorbent and fireproof tiles and panels based on agricultural or industrial biomass. Mogu Floor is the name of composite tiles with a core of mycelium derived from waste fibre from the textile industry. The core is covered with a two-component bio-based resin that makes the product suitable for industrial flooring. The cladding is coloured naturally with pigment from biomass: corn cobs, rice straw, coffee grounds, discarded algae and clam shells. These products comply with European regulations and constitute a sustainable alternative to common synthetic materials based on petroleum products or limited resources.



House in Laesoe, Denmark with a traditional seaweed roof. This particularly durable type of construction is found along the Danish coasts



Nikolaj Thrane Carlsen has developed a composite made of seaweed collected from the shores. He recycles *Zostera marina* collected from farmers on the islands Møn and Bogø



The Hong Kong Harbour/Future Sea Craft project by Studio Florian & Christine from London turns degraded ocean plastic (PET, polypropylene and high-density polyethylene), smooth shards of coloured glass, pieces of rusty metal and ceramics into new objects

In the home of design

The Triennale di Milano has changed the Design Museum formula from temporary and thematic to permanent and chronological

by CHIARA CANTONI

After 11 temporary editions, the Triennale Design Museum changes course and format: no longer large works displayed in cycles, but something permanent, a stable home, under the guidance of Joseph Grima, for a kind of archive of archives, consecrated to design culture and its protagonists. Open to the public beginning 9 April, in the large curve on the ground floor of the Palazzo dell'Arte, the new Italian Design Museum inherits the testimony from the experience of the TDM and, shifting focus from theme-based to historical-based chronological reasoning, presents for the first time in a permanent installation a selection of cult Italian design objects among the 1,600 pieces found in the Triennale Collection.

Iconic works, accompanied by mostly unique materials that recreate the design context and process, from research to production: in addition to photos, ad campaigns, and original packaging, there are also some corresponding wooden models made by Giovanni Sacchi for



Two pieces from the Triennale's Design Museum permanent collection, opening to the public on 9 April: above, Gianfranco Frattini, work helmet, 1963; right, Marcello Nizzoli, Giuseppe Beccio, Olivetti Lettera 22, 1950

the most prestigious names in architecture and design.

Watchword: to give full exposure to the collection, integrating over the next three years targeted acquisitions that, even from a documentation point of view, will recreate the broadest Italian perspective on the history of this discipline. With a *nota bene*: "Even before being a place of memory, the ambition is to be a place of inspiration, in the most ancient sense of the word 'museum', that is, the sacred place of the Muses," states director Joseph Grima. "Since oftentimes the channels of the most intense inspirations are not inanimate objects but the voices of the people who created them, we wanted to include their testimonies, asking them to describe in a simple way the genesis and cultural conditions corresponding to each object".

Interviews over the telephone, a method that embraces an idea by Vico Magistretti: "I like concept design, that which is so clear it doesn't have to be drawn. Many of my designs were conveyed over the telephone".



The chair from the sea

Handsome, sustainable, 100 per cent recycled, and designed by Snøhetta: the S-1500 is made of plastic fishing-nets discarded by Northern Norwegian fishing industries. A circular production cycle makes the chair all the more virtuous



by LAURA RAGAZZOLA

Before climate change and the ecological crisis, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre warned: "We are always responsible for what we have not been able to avoid."

Now that the signs of "broken nature" (the title of the exhibition underway at the Triennale di Milano) are tragically obvious, we can no longer ignore the risks of irreversible damage to the environment. The responsibility that Sartre mentioned must motivate us to make a radical change in our individual and collective behaviour. In particular, we must abandon the "take, make and waste" approach that has been guiding industrial development for decades now. The alternative to our old ways implies a search for new efficient and sustainable methods that allow us to reuse materials instead of perennially creating new refuse.

The Norwegian design office Snøhetta began such a search two years ago, concentrating on plastic, one of the biggest pollutants for its ubiquity around the world and for its widespread use in the home and in factories. The Norwegian team set up the Snøhetta Plastic Lab, which is at once a research laboratory and an exhibition. The project leader is Stian Alessandro Ekkernes Rossi, a 31-year-old Italian-Norwegian polyglot and citizen of the world. He was born in Italy, studied in Den-

mark, worked in Guatemala and now lives in Norway. His first idea was to headquarter the lab in a shipping container. "I went to pick out an unused one at a container yard in the Port of Oslo. Then I modified it myself to turn it into a research centre on wheels," says Ekkernes Rossi. "At first, I parked it out in front of the office, so it was handy." But now, for one year, the container will be touring the entire Norwegian capital as a travelling educational exhibition. The ambition is to spread the word that plastic is a precious resource that can and must be reused. The City of Oslo, selected in January by the European Commission as European Green Capital 2019, gave the initiative its support right away. In the meanwhile, the Plastic Lab has begun studying plastic and the possibilities of designing products and processes that favour its reuse. The first result of this research is the amazing S-1500 chair. Developed with the Norwegian furniture company Nordic Comfort Products (NCP), the chair's body is 100 per cent recycled plastic received from local fishing industries. The steel legs are recycled and produced locally. The design is inspired by a classic piece of Norwegian furniture, the folding chair R-48 by Bendt Winge, also produced by NCP and one of the most widely used chairs in Norway. Over 5 million R-48's have been sold to schools and offices.



Top: conveyor belt and molten plastic. Above: the Snøhetta Plastic Lab in Oslo, and the S-1500 chair made of recycled fishing-nets

The decision to make a chair came naturally. "The S-1500 is intended to be a kind of manifesto that enters homes and rouses awareness. It aims to inspire new habits regarding waste," says Ekkernes Rossi. "One day, I was travelling to the north of Norway for a meeting with the managers at NCP, and I made a surprising discovery," the architect recalls. "Along the coast, where there are flourishing fisheries for the farming and processing of salmon, almost 70 tons of plastic fishing nets are thrown away annually by each single fishery. So I suggested that my interlocutors recycle that material, seeing it was only a few kilometres away from their headquarters." And so they did. The gathered fishing nets are ground into coarse granules and moulded into chairs. The process means that each S-1500 is different, despite it being industrially produced. "I like to think that every schoolchild will be able to recognise her own S-1500," says Ekkernes Rossi of Snøhetta.

It's a redemptive design. It has been estimated that it takes a fishing net 600 years to decompose. The S-1500 is locally sourced and made, and contributes to the area's circular economy, a sustainable way to bring plastic from the frigid oceans to the lively rooms of houses, schools and offices. "Then some day, the chair might go back to being a fishing net that catches fish in the North Sea," he imagines.

Kitching and the art of typography

A visionary pioneer of this time-honoured and newly appreciated technique, Alan Kitching believes in the tactile quality of moveable letters

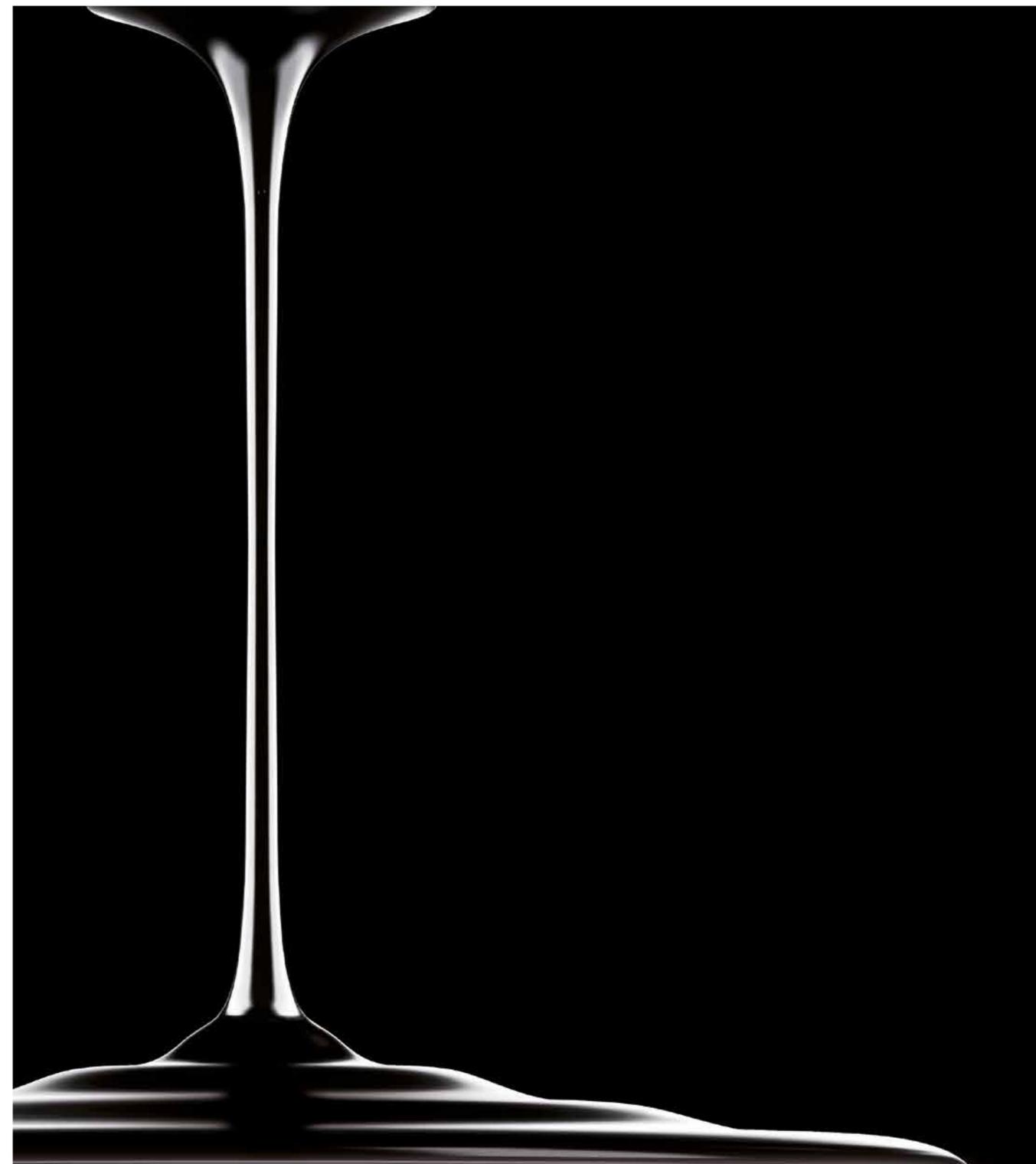
by CHIARA CANTONI

Alan Kitching (1940, Darlington, UK) has elevated typography to a form of art by exploring the expressive potential of lettering. He challenges this discipline's compositional limitations with ingenuity and commitment, rediscovering an ancient technique while the rest of the world was chomping at the bit to move on. Today the art of typography is thriving once again, and Kitching is one of the people who can take for it. He is a visionary pioneer of paper embossing, who chose manual press machines over computer print, who preferred the tactile quality of wood and lead movable type pieces over the aseptic precision of digital composition. He started his career at 15 as an apprentice at J.W. Brown & Son. From there he moved on to Watford College of Technology, where he founded his first experimental workshop with Anthony Froshaug, who taught him respect for printing conventions while prompting him to develop a practice based on observation and innovation. In London, he became a partner at Derek Birdsall's Omnific Studios in 1977, where he focused on paper-embossing techniques. At the dawn of the digital age, he decided to go against the stream and invested in types and presses, opening his Typography Workshop in Clerkenwell in 1989. Since then, there has been no looking back. His was a steady flow of commissions from the National Theatre, covers for *The Guardian* weekend



magazine, and Royal Mail stamps. Finding a balance between technical experimentation and conceptual innovation, Kitching has designed books, magazines, billboards, and corporate identity for clients including The British Library, *Dazed & Confused*, Penguin Books, *The Times*, Random House and Tate Modern. His encounter with the designer and author Celia Stothard, whom he married, marked the beginning of a fruitful professional partnership. In 1994, Kitching was appointed Royal Designer for Industry and named member of Alliance Graphique Internationale. Recent work includes the letterpress graphics for Alan Bennett's *Allelujah!*, the *For *U*K's sake stop Brexit* poster, and *Alan Kitching's A to Z of London*, presented at London Art Fair 2019. Throughout the 50-plus years of his career, teaching has been a constant commitment (from 1991 to 2006 he taught at the Royal College of Art), inspiring generations of printers.

Left: Kitching in his workshop in South London. Below: John L. Walters, *Alan Kitching: A Life in Letterpress*, Laurence King, London 2017



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Mobility has become too complex and critical to be examined only at the hand of performance parameters such as speed. Georges Amar, a design professor at Mines Paris Tech and the author of *Homo mobilis*, explains how to grasp the good potential of mobile life



Bryant Park in Manhattan is equipped with free Wi-Fi, power outlets, public toilets and food stands, making it a popular tourist hang-out and an after-work meeting point for many New Yorkers. Although the park is municipal, it is managed by a private not-for-profit company and considered an excellent example of well-administered public space

by STEFANIA GARASSINI

You expect him to talk about technology, particularly the possible evolutions of the use of smartphones and tablets, but as soon as he begins to speak, it's clear that his interests are much broader than that. Georges Amar is a design professor at the École nationale supérieure des mines de Paris (a.k.a. Mines Paris Tech), a long-standing engineering school. Amar is also the author of the book *Homo mobilis - Une civilisation du mouvement* (Fyp Editions, Roubaix 2016). In March 2019, he held a conference on this title at the "Meet the media guru" event organised in Milan by the digital culture centre Meet (a branch of the Fondazione Cariplo) and by the Fondazione Giannino Bassetti. The event was the first instalment of the "Around Mobility" cycle by the two foundations. Amar, who has a long past as the head of innovation at the Parisian

public transport authority RATP, proposes a thorough rethinking of the concept of mobility, and to do so he wants to start with the words we use to describe its new phenomena. It is not enough to use labels such as smart city or augmented reality to account for highly complex circumstances that involve so many aspects of human life. We must go further in depth, starting with the language we use. According to the French professor, it is the only way to truly understand the good potential contained in this new frontier of "mobile life", as he defines it.

"In order to succeed in thinking in a new way, we need to find new words," says Amar. "Traditionally, mobility was an exception. Life took place in specific places between which we moved, preferably as quickly as possible, because movement was considered a waste of time. Today, we are in a transition phase. The equivalence between mobility and trans-

port no longer makes sense. In the paradigm "mobile", I work everywhere, I study everywhere. This is a radical change, and we have not yet the right words to describe it. My work right now is to create oxymorons, such as "mobile place", which is a contradiction, because a place is fixed per definition. But there are a few examples, such as food truck, disco buses, and trains equipped for working. Another oxymoron is "individual public transport", which I use to describe services such as BlaBlaCar, where rides are shared in private vehicles. This is where we start: trying to give a name to something that we are still unable to grasp very well. If you can't name something, then you can't think about it."

We often hear talk about "intelligent mobility", and you refer to the term, too. What do you mean by it?

To tell the truth, I prefer "meaningful mobility".

where the meaning is human and immeasurable by types of performance such as speed. It is not sufficient to evaluate mobility only by quantities, such as kilometres per hour. The phenomenon is much more complex, and a cultural fact. Only if we render it in its entirety will we succeed in managing it in the best way. Walking, for example, is an aesthetic and cultural experience that involves all the senses. If we see mobility as an anthropological fact, then the past is interesting, too. The real key to understanding today's challenges is re-evaluating the entire evolutionary path that brought us here.

What impact might this new idea of mobility have on the structure of a city?

I consider the city to be an ecosystem of movements. If we want to think of a new policy for urban space, we must quit considering places and transport as if they were opposites. We must look at hybrid situations where the two elements are combined. That's where the best potential lies.

Another ubiquitous term is "smart city". Much research and investment is being made in this field of study. What is your opinion?

Normally, we use the expression smart city to mean that digital technology is adding intelligence to the city. I propose to turn the perspective around. Data are stupid. The city makes them intelligent. The city is the most ancient form of a network. It is human intelligence embodied in the ground. While Internet is the art of meeting, it is the polis that created the thinking behind it. The problem is that in the modern age, we seem to have forgotten all of that, simplifying the role and function of a city in the name of criteria of rationalism and efficiency, which have created true urban monsters. The city has a very ancient intelligence. Digital technology, on the other hand, is comparable to barbarism. It breaks everything, but brings new things. It must be tamed, otherwise it has a destructive impact. Only a virtuous encounter with the dynamics of urban life can bring interesting results.

Could you give an example?

I'll mention a personal experience. I was in New York for a work appointment with a researcher I had never met. We were to meet at Bryant Park, a green area in the heart of Manhattan, at the foot of a monument whose picture I had received. I needed Internet, a smartphone and the digital photo of my interlocutor. All this made a real encounter possible, for work, in a place that to me represents an emblem of mobile life. Outdoors, with perfectly functioning Wi-Fi, electric outlets in every table, bar and toilet. This is my idea of hybridisation, Internet helping us to live better in the concrete spaces where we happen to be. Internet is often identified with the idea of globalisation, but it is not only that. I believe in its great potential to give new vitality to localities, to the places where we meet, the ones that are crucial to the life of every city.

Hello future

At the Barbican Centre in London, the world's biggest interactive exposition on artificial intelligence illustrates the evolution of AI and its relation with humans with installations that blend art, science, technology and nature

by CHIARA CANTONI

From Shinto animism to the advent of a new species, from golems to chess, the Barbican Centre in London is hosting "AI: More than Human" (16 May - 26 August 2019), an exhibition by the guest curators Suzanne Livingston and Maholo Uchida. The show is about scientific and creative developments in the field of artificial intelligence. It explores the relation between humans and technology by means of immersive installations and research projects by some of the most famous digital artists, scientists and gurus of machine learning. The four sections - The Dream of AI, Mind Machines, Data Worlds and Endless Evolution - show how our ancient desire to breathe life into inanimate objects has evolved. We see the anthropomorphic figures of Hebrew and Japanese folklore; the attempt to convert rational thought into a code; the creation of the first neural network in the 1940s; and the recent algorithms of automatic learning, which every day bring us closer to making our dream come true. "Artificial intelligence is a key marker of the zeitgeist and we are thrilled to be exploring the subject, both as a motive for scientific progress and a stimulus for creativity," says Neil McConnon, the head of Barbican International Enterprises. "This exhibition looks at the journey to date and the potential to collaborate as we evolve together."

The dynamic interaction with the numerous installations gives us the distinct feeling that such cooperation is possible. *Kreyon City* by Sony CSL, for example, has visitors build their city with Lego blocks, helped by AI for all major architectural and infrastructural decisions. *Vespers*, a project by Neri Oxman, a designer from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, shows what it means to design with life. From the relic of the ancient death mask to the digital fabrication of an adaptive, responsive living mask, the project points towards an imminent future where wearable interfaces are customised not only to fit a particular shape, but even one's genetic make-up. In the video *A Machine View of London* by Andrew Witt and Tobias Nolte, AI maps the shapes of the one million buildings of London. The project is one of their series of FormMaps, an ongoing architectural research project that aims to compare and create a complete catalogue of building patterns from cities around the world. Applications of day-to-day use in sectors such as health-care, journalism and retail are joined by more creative ones such as the ever-changing immersive environment by the art collective teamLab, which is populated with Chinese characters and natural phenomena triggered by visitors.

A more futuristic hypothesis is given by the music group Massive Attack. Marking the 20th anniversary of the landmark album *Mezzanine*, it has encoded the album in strands of synthetic DNA in a spray-paint can. The AI scenarios at "More than Human" illustrate how the new world is already here.



MALEY-COOPER PHOTOGRAPHY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

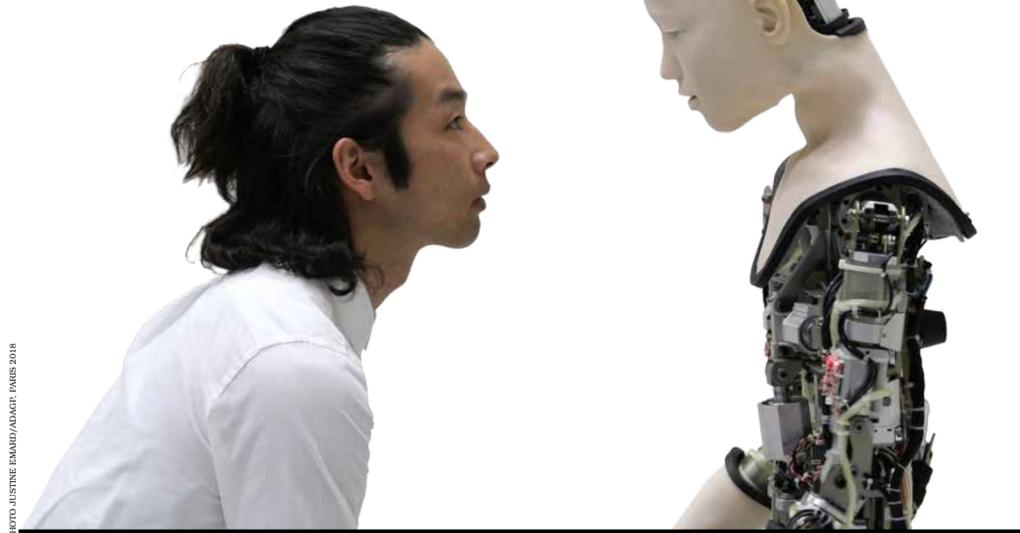


PHOTO: JUSTINE EMARD/AGENCE PARIS 2018

This page: three exhibits at "AI" in the Data Worlds section, which examines AI's capability to improve commerce, change society and enhance our personal life. Left: synthetic beehive by the Mediated Matter group from MIT.

Right: Faceprint, an interactive installation by Nexus Studios, showing how algorithms construct our image from our (mostly online) behaviour. Below: Co(AI)xistence by Justine Emard shows interaction between a robot and a Japanese performer by means of signals, body movements and spoken language

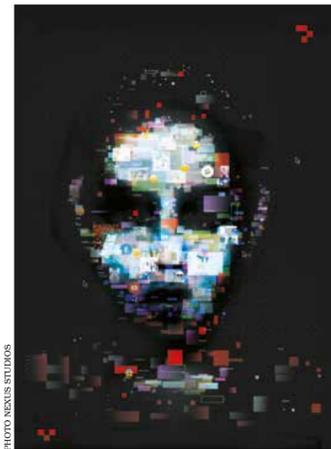


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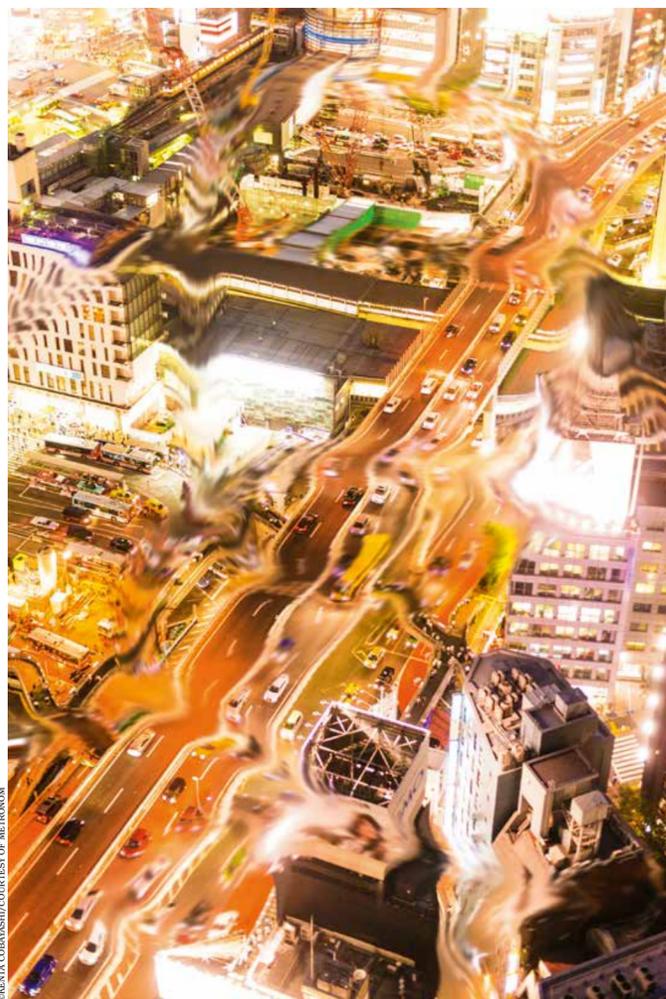
Digital ecology needs revamping in view of the subtle pervasiveness of information technology

by ALESSANDRO SCARANO

Sports shoes that tighten or loosen with a tap on a phone? The Nike Adapt BB does it (BB stands for basket ball). A talking washing machine? Candy makes one called Bianca. It was presented at the 2018 IFA in Berlin, the biggest European trade show for consumer electronics and home appliances. You can ask certain speakers to tell you the weather forecast, or a joke. The Japanese start-up Mui makes a home-automation screen that is a sanded wood panel. Thermostats can crank up the heating when you're not home yet. There are door-bells that recognise friends and family. There's a watch that vibrates if you forget it on the bar-counter, and a TV that already knows what you want to watch. Every day, we read about self-driving cars. Cruising the roads of Phoenix, Arizona, there is Waymo One, a driverless robotaxi by Alphabet, Google's parent company. We are living in the middle of a technological paradigm shift.

For one decade, tablets and smartphones were the first-born divinities from the Mount Olympus of intelligent devices. Down below swarmed a maelstrom of unconnected, stupid inert objects. Where is Internet? In the computer. Had you ever imagined connecting the door-bell, the coffee maker, or your squash racquet for the game on Thursday night? Well, that's precisely what is happening. A new generation of products designed to gather data, upload data and download data is entering the market. They communicate with one another, composing a silent, unstoppable flux. An extensive network is diffusing intelligence throughout the world like a flood. It is called the Internet of Things, IoT for short. The definition was coined at the end of last century by Kevin Ashton, a brand manager with Procter & Gamble.

Talking washing machines, listening tchotchkes and automobiles deciding if and when to brake are part of the spreading presence of the Internet of Things. Artificial intelligence embedded in daily life is practically invisible, but not innocuous. We are in the middle of a technological paradigm shift that should not catch us off guard



Kenta Kobayashi, *Shibuya Yellow*, #smudge, 2018, from the 14th Fotografia Europea event, 2019

Cisco Systems estimates that the IoT was born just before 2009, when the number of objects connected to Internet surpassed the number of people on the planet. "Sal awakens; she smells coffee. A few minutes ago her alarm clock, alerted by her restless rolling before waking, had quietly asked, 'Coffee?' and she had mumbled, 'Yes'." That's neither an ad for the latest smart-home system by Samsung, nor is it the start of a minor story by Philip K. Dick, although it could be both. Those are the words of Marc Weiser writing in the September 1991 issue of *Scientific American*. He was explaining a concept he had been working on for quite some time, "ubiquitous computing". Weiser was then the head of the Computer Science Laboratory at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center, and his article, titled *The Computer for the 21st Century*, announced that something was about to change in the way we access computers. In 1996, Weiser's webpage explained it this way: "Ubiquitous computing names the third wave in computing, just now beginning. First there were mainframes, each shared by lots of people. Now we are in the personal computing era, person and machine staring uneasily at each other across the desktop. Next comes ubiquitous computing, or the age of calm technology, when technology recedes into the background of our lives."

Weiser and his research group were working in world where operational systems with windows such as Macintosh and Windows were somewhat new. Everything was still being printed out on paper, cell phones were the size of intercoms, and Internet connection was a rarity. Precisely a few days before the *Scientific American* article came out, access to the first website was achieved by a person outside the Cern network where it had been developed. The first iPhone would not be launched for another 15 years. At the time, the idea that computers would really be ubiquitous, except for the place they were supposed to be – on a desk – was absolutely groundbreaking. In Weiser's system, there were three types of devices: pads, tablets and boards, intelligent displays corresponding to the dimensions of smartphones, tablets and interactive whiteboards. With his colleague John Seely Brown, with whom he co-wrote the essay *Designing Calm Technology* (Xerox PARC, 21 December 1995), Weiser introduced a second concept, that of "calm technology", where we hear a strong echo of the epistemology of Michael Polanyi, a Hungarian philosopher, economist and chemist according to whom true knowledge is tacit or unexpressed. Back 1991, in the *American Scientist*, Weiser begins his article by saying, "The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are undistinguishable from it." In 1995, he writes: "Calm technology engages both the centre and the periphery of our attention, and in fact moves back and forth between the two."

Marc Weiser died in 1999, when the Internet of Things was still a mere intuition. He did not get to see anything of the world he anticipated. In the past decade, Amber Case, an American cyborg anthropologist, has been reviving the principles of calm technology (*Calm Technology: Principles and Patterns for Non-Intrusive Design*, O'Reilly Media, 2015: "We are all cyborgs now", TEDWomen 2010) and collaborating on projects with the tech giants Google and Microsoft. The intent is good: the decentralisation of technology, and the breakage of the emotive link between humans and the machine given by continuous interaction with social platforms. However, "calm" does not mean "innocuous". Quite the contrary. A continuous flow of data surrounds us. Objects are listening to us. They are making decisions in our place. The loss of the computer's centrality foreseen by Weiser goes hand in hand with less control over the information. If technology runs in an increasingly peripheral area of our perception, how can we control what is at the source? It suffices to look at a simple router such as SafeThings, made to connect the IoT. Fabricated by Avira, a German company specialised in security, the device shows how the data from our connected household electrical appliances stream back and forth from China to the deserts of North America. It is easy to ingeniously consider smart objects as the innocent domestic accessories of a new terrestrial paradise. But we will need to draw the parameters of a new ecology that is as intelligent and connected as the new world we are about to inhabit.

A new world of intimacy

In Reggio Emilia, 'ties of affection' is the theme of a photography festival for experts, enthusiasts and the curious



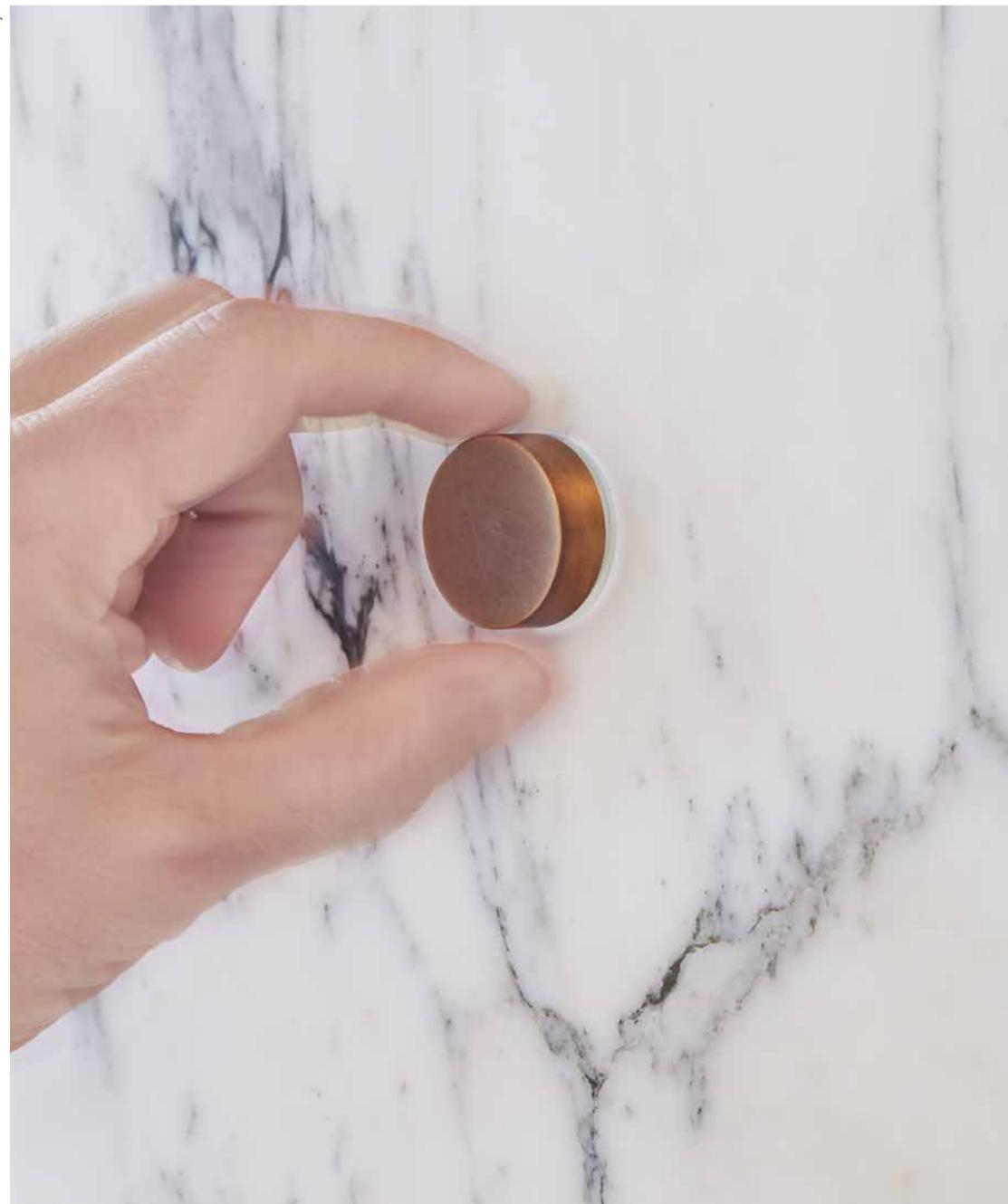
by RAFFAELE VERTALDI

The bonds created by intimacy, relationships and new worlds are the focus of the Fotografia Europea 2019 held in Reggio Emilia (21.4-9.6.2019). Now in its 14th edition, the festival directed by Walter Guadagnini habitually offers a programme suited to a broad public. This year, it starts with international maestri from the past and present. The classic, formal elegance of a big Horst P. Horst retrospective acts as a counterpoint to "Unbridled Curiosity", an anthology by Larry Fink that responds to this year's theme with a special selection from his vast repertoire of social encounters, superbly crystallised in black and white. Vincenzo Castella (*Urban Screens*), Giovanni Chiaramonte (*Verso Gerusalemme*) and Francesco Jodice (*Rivoluzioni*) represent the Italian school, while the guest country this time is Japan, whose complexity is reflected in the fluidified reality of Kenta Kobayashi ("Photographic Universe"), in the humorous family shots by Motoyuki Daifu (*Holy Onion*) and in the cross-over identities of Ryuichi Ishikawa (*Mitsugu*). The focus on Japan is also seen in work by Vittorio Mortarotti, Anush Hamzehian, Pixy Liao, Pierfrancesco Celada (the winner of the festival's contest) and Justine Emard. Guadagnini sees Emard's video as the cornerstone of the entire event. It shows a balletic exchange between a dancer and a robot, and is currently featured at the Barbican Centre in London at the exhibition "AI: More than Human" (see article on page 39). Standing out among the new proposals are the Arabian cities by Michele Nastasi (*Arabian Transfer*), intercultural photomontages by Lucie Khahoutian (*The Tapestry in My Room*) and conceptual landscapes by Jaakko Kahilaniemi (*100 Hectares of Understanding*). The documentation of migration by Samuel Gratacap, and Jacopo Benassi's look at the relationship between ability and disability take up the task of analysing the festival's theme through an ethical lens. Fotografia Europea is a chance to discover places in the city that are not always open to the public. Examples are the group exhibition "Ropes/Corde", the result of a contest organised by Giovane Fotografia Italiana; "Famiglie - Un mondo di relazioni"; the book fair [PARENTESI] dedicated to independent photographic publishing; unmissable off-site shows and events such as portfolio readings, workshops and numerous seminars included in the programme.



From top: Francesco Jodice, still from *Rivoluzioni* (2019) a 20-minute HD film; Thomas Struth, *Cappa chimica*, University of Edinburgh, 2010; Michele Nastasi, *Plant Souk*, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2017

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From treatment to care

Design for the health-care sector is newly empathic toward the end user.

Publicly available open-source designs and digital fabrication processes have entered the methodology of conceiving products and services, making them more flexible and customised, shifting the focus from “design for everyone” to “design for one”

by VALENTINA CROCI

Design could do very much to improve all aspects of health-care by creating solutions for medical centres and the treatment of individual patients. Solicited by the unignorable aging of the population and the rising of costs of national health-care systems, the number of funding opportunities organised by the European Union in this sector has risen, as has the number of health-care design departments instituted by international design schools; and cultural institutions are exploring the subject of health in its day-to-day dimension – I am referring to the exhibition “Access+Ability” held at the Cooper Hewitt in New York in 2017, and the exhibition “Fragilitas” held at the La Boverie art museum in Liège, Belgium in 2018 during the Reciprocity triennial on design and social innovation.

An interesting aspect of this phenomenon is that illness, health-care and disability are no longer being analysed along the lines of problem solving. In the medical field, this traditional approach has produced efficient but stigmatising devices, and interiors that are functional and hygienic, but impersonal. Now, design is being interpreted from the patient's point of view, with the aim of rehabilitating the dignity of people coping with difficulties. Designers are adopting an empathetic approach toward the needs of end users.

The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design set up in 1999 at the Royal College of Art in London was one of the first schools to work on a broad range of projects for personal wellness, many of which are developed with and for health-care industries. In Kortrijk, Belgium at Howest college, there is the small design lab D4E1 (Design for Everyone), coordinated by Lieven De Couvreur. It is where design builders, therapists and disabled people have been working together for ten years now to construct co-created products or adapt existing objects that assist the handicapped, improve their living conditions and social relations. Seeing that the needs of each patient are unique, digital fabrication technologies are used to make the design results adaptable to different medical conditions and different day-to-day requirements. For instance, D4E1 made prosthetics that allow amputees to play musical instruments.

De Couvreur explains how it works: “Product hackers look for new possibilities in a frugal



Prosthetic pinkie for flute players with disabilities. Project by D4E1, Kortrijk

manner, using local resources and the skills at hand. Although the phenomenon of product hacking has been around for a long time, its manifestation has drastically changed through several shifts in do-it-yourself culture, leading to open-source design. These shifts mean that professional designers are no longer placed above users when determining what is right or wrong for them. The processes of direct digital fabrication can create niche products that are adjustable on demand. In this way, the devices used to assist people become part of rehabilitation therapy. They evolve along with their owner by being adapted as physical abilities change. “Product hacking opens the road to creating objects for spheres that have been neglected up until now. Three-dimensional printing in small series (from 10 to 50 copies) allows for innovation in product type. Often such products originate in the open-source design world, where peer-to-peer implementation means that communities with little means and skills can take part.

At Central Saint Martins, the bachelor's degree project by Yaohan Gu is called Wheels4U, a low-cost do-it-yourself wheelchair for disabled children in the developing world. It is built from daily objects like plastic washbasins and discarded children's bicycles. The parts are packed in a box that acts as an instruc-

tion manual. Black outlines on the box indicate which additional components are needed to complete the wheelchair, which is easily assembled, adjusted and repaired by hand.

With the aim of creating a big community of design builders, healthcare professionals, care recipients and caregivers, the three-year project Made4You (1.1.2018 – 1.1.2021) has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 initiative. Its partners are Zentrum für Soziale Innovation (AT), Waag (NL), Global Innovation Gathering (DE), Fab Lab Berlin (DE), Wevolver (UK), KU Leuven (BE), OpenDot (IT) and Together to Go (IT). The group is developing a centralised platform for accessible do-it-yourself care applications that can be freely reproduced. Made4You looks for needs that are not covered by the traditional health-care system, which often offers standardised products and services that are too expensive and difficult to adapt. In 2015, OpenDot worked with the non-profit foundation Together to Go on a collection of personalised products for children with restricted mobility, which they co-designed with the children's parents and therapists. To a certain degree, the products can be changed in scale, because they are made up of standard components and elements that can be easily adjusted to specific individual needs.

Here, design has become a vehicle for social inclusion by shifting the focus of “design for everyone” to “design for one”.

We need products that embrace an empathetic vision of medical design. In order to take medicines in public, we might need to bare parts of our body or use unwieldy technical units. Innumerable situations can embarrass and stigmatise us when we suffer from difficulties. Objects like Hplus are required. Designed for the bachelor's degree course at Central Saint Martins by Matt Canham, Hplus is a collection of six personal health-monitoring products currently in the prototyping phase. Used with a digital application, the items show a sense of colour and tactility, fully avoiding the classic aesthetics of medical devices. Hospital Hacks designed by Molly Bonnell is a “sick kit” of garments for hospital patients or day-clinic visits. Equipped with zippers, openings and pockets to favour access to medication without getting undressed, the clothes are sewn from cheerfully printed fabric that resembles normal day wear. Ink stamps, adhesives and patches are included for the personalisation of tubes

and bags that carry medication. Bonnell, who graduated in fashion at the Parsons School of Design in New York, wishes to “empower patients to

reclaim their hospital experience and destroy the stigma of the ‘sick’ person”. When it comes to the social stigma regarding women and their physiological prerogatives of menstruating and breastfeeding, the designer Lauren E. Lee from San Francisco has developed the prototype of a wall for public bathrooms. Heated electrically from within, its tiles have an ergonomic curve for the lumbar region or abdomen. Its warmth alleviates menstrual pain. The wall works like a public bench, and favours solidarity between women instead of isolation. On the American market, the design company Ideo has launched Willow, an all-in-one wearable breast pump. The device is wireless, and composed of three parts that snap together. Only two parts need to be cleaned and are dishwasher-safe. Mobile, discreet and hands-free, the pump fits easily into a bra, allowing women to breastfeed for longer with less compromises and discomfort. Its appearance is similar to two computer mice.

Integration with daily life is a crucial element in the design of medical devices, because it makes a positive impact on people's life. LifeTools is a small Italian company founded by Nicola Golfari, who aims to bring the design world closer to the disabled my means of a concrete approach. Each of his company's implements is structurally innovative in aesthetics for functions often neglected by designers. The folding shower seat Pill, for instance, uses a roto-sliding mechanism (patent pending) that makes it easy to grip because it slides higher up on the wall. Meant for the elderly or people with restricted mobility, the seat has a removable silicone cover that comes in different colours and is easy to clean.

Another company particularly active in this ambit is Fuseproject in San Francisco. In the early 2000s, it began specialising in wellness and health-care design by introducing the first digital monitoring systems. Now, for L'Oréal's Technology Incubator, Fuseproject has redesigned My UV Patch, comprised of a series of micro tiles with photoreactive dyes that respond to ultraviolet rays, giving feedback to the wearer to prevent harmful skin damage. The sensor is so small that it is stuck with adhesive on a fingernail or accessories such as glasses or jewellery. Monitors are present in the lives and routine of many people. “It is becoming natural for us to turn to technology and design to improve our life and understand the world around us,” says Yves Béhar, the founder of Fuseproject. “Bringing this curiosity to health-care is an enormous opportunity for us designers. From conceiving the experience, to designing the service, to producing the object, many ambits of the health sector can be improved. With an aging population, the management of chronic illnesses and the introduction of unknown, innovative technology, it is important that the objects in the medical sector become easy to understand and use, and efficient for the end user. Design can supply answers to many of these challenges.”



Above: the cordless, wearable breast pump Willow (2017) designed by Ideo. Mobile, discreet and hands-free, the pump fits easily into a bra, allowing women to get on with their life in the meantime. Only two parts need to be cleaned and are dishwasher-safe. Automatically switches phases from stimulation to expression. An app tracks milk volume and pump time

Bio-agreeable

Hannes is a prosthetic hand designed for Inail, Italy's government body regulating compensation for workplace accidents. The anthropomorphic replacement part by DDP Studio incorporates medical engineering by the Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia

by MASSIMO VALZ-GRIS

Few objects demonstrate more clearly the truth behind the assumption that the aim of design is to improve our daily life. The hand was the result of cooperation between the Inail Prosthetics Centre in Budrio, Emilia-Romagna and the Italian Institute of Technology in Genoa, using the most advanced algorithms of artificial intelligence. Hannes gives an amputee 90 per cent of manual functionality back. The office DDP from Milan was responsible for the architecture of the prosthesis and the electromyographic sensor that transmits impulses from the brain to the robotic hand. The design was so good, it was included in the 2018 ADI Index, an annual guide of the best Italian design objects published by the Associazione per il Disegno Industriale.

Gabriele Diamanti, the 39-year-old co-founder of DDP Studio (with Lorenzo De Bartolomeis and Filippo Poli), talks about the project. “We began the job in July 2015. The challenge was to transform a robot skeleton into an anthropomorphic hand that people could use all day long, meaning not too heavy or disproportionate. It also needed to make actions possible that other prostheses did not allow.”

DDP's preliminary research concerned the clinical implications and the aesthetics, which included a study of human proportions in art history. “After the initial phase, we started working with Patient Zero, progressing by



degrees toward the synthesis between the necessities of engineering and the necessities of the patient,” continues Diamanti. “For instance, we were able to obtain the natural concavity of the palm, a detail that was a complication for the engineers, but very important for the person wearing the hand.”

Hannes is composed of five main elements: a central structure housing the motor; jointed plastic fingers; two shells for the palm and the back of the hand; and a silicone bellows containing wrist and thumb. The thumb has three positions for different types of gripping. The project was co-financed by Inail and the Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia. It cost three millions euros, a decidedly modest amount. “The spending was highly efficient, because our bio-inspired design was based on a robotic hand that IIT had already developed with the University of Pisa,” says Lorenzo De Michieli, the 45-year-old coordinator of the Rehab Technologies laboratory co-run by Inail and Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia.

From an engineering point of view, the great advantage of the hand is its automatic adaptability, says De Michieli. “It is operated by a single motor connected to the muscles of the forearm by a sensor. The movement of the fingers is partly autonomous, meaning they adapt to the objects they grasp without the person needing to command them with complicated muscular contractions, as you need to do with other high-tech prostheses.”



Warm Wall (2017) is an ergonomically curved, electrically heated section of tiles designed by Lauren E. Lee to alleviate menstrual pain. Conceived for installation in public bathrooms, favouring solidarity between women



Above: removable silicone cover of the shower seat Pill (2018) by the Italian company LifeTools. Below: a thumbnail microsensor registers exposure to ultraviolet rays. Developed by Fuseproject for the L'Oréal Technology Incubator. No batteries





An electric bicycle pays homage to Jean Prouvé

by LAURA RAGAZZOLA

It is both refinedly hi-tech and a throwback to another era. Inspired by a bicycle conceived by the French architect and designer Jean Prouvé in the middle of World War II, the new Coleen (delivery from July 2019) is produced by 85 per cent in Southwestern France. Prouvé (1901–1984) was passionate about the products of science and industry. “qu'ils roulent, qu'ils volent ou qu'ils soient statiques” (whether they drive, fly or stay still), as he writes. In his life, he designed everything: lamps, doors, stairs, windows, elevators, furniture, prefabricated houses and even bicycles. In 1941, he designed a utilitarian one with a rear rack, made to get the French to work during the war. He later gave one to each of the 200 employees of the factory he founded in 1947, Ateliers Jean Prouvé in Maxéville, just outside Nancy, where he built his famous prefabricated houses.

Audrey Lefort and Thibault Halm, who co-founded the Coleen bicycle company in Bayonne, Pyrénées-Atlantiques in 2014, share Prouvé's interest in technological innovation and his lively entrepreneurial spirit. They too, love exploring new roads, as demonstrated by their new electric-assist creation modelled



Top: the Coleen model presented at the Consumer Electronics Show 2019 in Las Vegas. Two photos on upper right: belt drive and hub motor; handlebar with hydraulic brakes. Above: the bicycle designed by Jean Prouvé in 1941

after the French designer's bicycle. Coleen presented its product in January at the yearly Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, the biggest trade fair of its kind in the world.

“The design of the frame is inspired by Prouvé's,” say Lefort and Halm. “But the technological innovation and the use of high-performance materials such as carbon fibre allowed us to reach very high levels of lightness (19 kilos) and functionality of use.” The motor, however, is where the heart of the project lies. It distinguishes this electric bike from the others on the market. As the fruit of a long study conducted by duo, the motor (positioned in the rear hub) is silent, lightweight (2.3 kilos) and its removable battery is entirely integrated into the frame. The battery recharges in 2.5 hours (an 80-per-cent recharge can be obtained in 1.5 hours) and runs for an average of 100 kilometres on a single charge.

Each Coleen is fitted with a keyless ignition system that works via Bluetooth to allow riders to unlock and start their bike remotely using their smartphone. The integrated high-definition display, readable even in sunlight, supplies all the information the rider needs to know, from kilometres travelled to battery level and speed. The bicycle is 100-per-cent made in France, down to the smallest detail. Prices start at 6,000 euros.

An ode to Ivan Illich

Breaking free from our subjugation to the speed of technology and machines would give us a low-cost chance to regain our own space.

It would also bring us freedom of manoeuvre to resolve mobility issues on all scales

by WALTER MARIOTTI

Today, the 21st century is rediscovering another new form of design: the design of time. Or, better said, the design of that relation between time and space that translates into speed. The beginning of our century faces us with a set of challenges – energy, climate, demography, water – that question the central and obsessive idea that informed the 20th century: that of “saving” time by means of increasingly faster travel, faster vehicles, faster cities, faster people. An idea that today is questioned on a global scale, which leads to an authentic paradox since globalization is (among other things) the implementation of speed on a global level. Among those who had foreseen this return to the past is Ivan Illich, an unusual philosopher, theologian and activist, who believed humankind's dream of speed had morphed into an obsession, taking the man of 20th century very far from his body, from the enhancement of his capacities, and ultimately from his essence. For Illich, the dream of speed had become a nightmare, in which humans, once free citizens, turned into time, energy, and mobility consumers: increasingly demanding customers who want better quality products and who are not interested in defining a different dimension of consumption.

In 1973, soon after the first great energy crisis, Illich wrote *Energy and equity*, a book that cannot be considered a simple glorification of motor-less wheel transportation (the bicycle) invoking a utopian degrowth, but that is rather a serious economic analysis of the dictatorship of fossil fuel energy resources to the detriment of human-based resources and that is the cause of social inequality. For Illich, the energy crisis was the proof of human subjugation to machines – those very machines that had promised to free man but that instead had turned him into an “energy slave”. A condition that would remain unvaried even if said energy were green, sustainable energy: because it is in fact the thirst for energy itself that turns individuals into automatons, directing them towards an idea of progress that in the best-case scenario will turn out to be an illusion. “Once the critical quantum of per capita energy is surpassed, education for the abstract goals of a bureaucracy must supplant the legal guarantees of personal and concrete initiative. This quantum is the limit of social order.”

For Illich, basically, higher levels of available and consumable



energy per capita does not mean making the society more democratic, just as taxes to find new sources of alternative energy do not increase equality.

Because the real issue is that of mobility: movement in a unit of time. For the author it is this total dependence on transportation by virtue of means of transportation that are not inherent to the human being that reveals “the contradictions between social justice and motorized power, between effective movement and higher speed, between personal freedom and engineered routing”. Illich goes on to say that under the illusion of saving time, citizens transform into mobility consumers in their daily work-to-home merry-go-round, signifying an authentic lack of time that less-technologically advanced societies handle differently. “What

distinguishes the traffic in rich countries from the traffic in poor countries” he argues “is not more mileage per hour of life-time for the majority, but more hours of compulsory consumption of high doses of energy, packaged and unequally distributed by the transportation industry”.

By defining the social injustice of mobility and energy access, Illich indicates how this can lead to the redesigning of space and time. A territory's configuration is modified by the demands of the transportation industry that, with its motorways, paradoxically isolates those fields that once the farmer could reach on foot or, due to the availability of an ambulance, induces people to live further away from those clinics that once could also be quickly reached on foot. In short, the so-called progress draws apart that which it claims to draw closer via infrastructures, mechanization, energy and power. But there is more: time itself, subject to an exasperated ideological exploitation, becomes a currency that can be spent, gained, invested, wasted, and used, in a market where means of transportation inequality leads to a correspondent disparity in time management, maximising it for a minority to the disadvantage of a majority. Quoting Joseph Proudhon, Illich writes that “beyond a critical speed, no one can save time without forcing another to lose it. The man who claims a seat in a faster vehicle insists that his time is worth more than that of the passenger in a slower one. Beyond a certain velocity, passengers become consumers of other people's time”.

For Illich, 15 mph is the limit beyond which shortage of time and human frustration appear, with humans travelling under the illusion that higher speed equals wellbeing, while many of their working hours go into paying for that transportation, which is nothing more than a commodity to be sold to consumers and that, as any other industrial product, is implicitly scarce.

The bicycle as a means of transportation symbolises the attempt to reduce this divide that speed institutes between two fundamental trajectories of development of human liberties. Besides being environmentally sustainable, bicycles are the only mechanical means of transportation that allow us to regain possession of our spaces, at a low price, with limited space occupation, and with ample margins for manoeuvre towards facing the issue of short to middle distance mobility without setting unreachable goals or relying on impossible and ill-fated ideologies.

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My house is your house

It's both private home and public space, open to culture and the city. Renewed by the Italian architect Filippo Taidelli, the house-atelier of the artist Adrian Paci in Shkoder, Albania revives tradition and participation with the aim of countering miserly new real-estate initiatives and hampered social interaction



by LAURA RAGAZZOLA

Art and architecture combined to counter urban decay, building speculation and the loss of identity of the built surroundings: this is the idea behind Art House, the "open" residence of the artist Adrian Paci in the old city centre of Shkoder, Albania, 50 kilometres from the Adriatic Sea. Art House was made in collaboration between Paci and the architect Filippo Taidelli, and the design was shortlisted for the EU Mies Award 2019. Shkoder is a lively city, formerly a cradle of Albanian culture. For years now, it has been the victim of a development model that has progressively altered the urban fabric, allowing for the systematic demolition of traditional housing in favour of anonymous condominiums.

Adrian Paci, a Shkoder native, wished to give a sign of change. His interest in human vicissitudes and social dynamics is also seen in his work, which touches deep chords of sentiment. Paci has been living in Milan for quite some time, but divides his life between Italy and Albania. Over the years, he witnessed the contradictory growth of his city, and when he speaks about it, you can sense his emotional involvement. "It all started in the late 1990s. That's when the process began that denatured the urban morphology of Shkoder, as has happened in many other Albanian cities. The ancient dwellings were torn down, and in their place, complexes were erected that have no connection to the urban fabric or local traditions. In front of my family house, they constructed a nine-storey building. Its oppressive presence has not only changed the physiognomy of the neighbourhood, but also daily life and the relations between the people. It was an arrogant move of pure speculation, hoping to be a new model for the development in our area. My family and I decided to resist and oppose this, and Filippo Taidelli rose to our challenge very well."

And so, a new building was constructed on the land of the old family house, next to it. It's called Art House. Not only does it contrast with the characterless visual language of the surrounding new architecture, but it deliberately turns its back to the graceless tower and all the undistinguished new buildings that have popped up nearby. This gesture of resistance breathes fresh life into a small section of the city.

"It was a brave adventure," observes Filippo Taidelli, who has become good friends with his client. Born in Milan in 1972, Taidelli has worked on a broad range of projects, from the university campus of Humanitas in the periphery of Milan, to the master plan and new headquarters for the Tenova metal company in the province of Varese. "On the one hand, it was an exciting but big responsibility to work on a project that was important to Adrian's private life, his past and his family his-

tory. On the other, there was the stimulus of imagining the personal and professional future of an artist, to create a place that would meld two different types of spirit in a nonetheless complementary way." The new house had to have the twofold function of a family residence and an atelier that could open up to the community to offer an art-related experiences and initiatives involving the city's culture. Hence its special horseshoe shape with two independent but integrated wings, one private and one public.

On the south, the two-storey Art House is open to natural light. Large sliding windows, loggias and terraces capture the sun and show a dialogue in colours and materials with the beautiful Ottoman facade across the way. ("My grandfather was born there, and it is now inhabited by one of my relatives who is an active member of Art House," illustrates Paci). To the north, the house is protected by a more austere front, where a traditional stone wall is built with inserts of river pebbles, a local technique. A lush selection of greenery tumbles over it as a reference to the spontaneous plants seen luxuriantly peeking from the city's ancient homes. "The introverted character of the building was a forced choice," explains Taidelli. "It was necessary to create a distance from the new high-rises that have altered the proportions of Shkoder, which originally featured small houses built around courtyards, just like ours."

Inside, thanks to an open and flexible plan, the border between family space and public space (the atelier) is very fluid. The small garden functions as a place to socialise and meet new people and old acquaintances, just like it used to be in this city. "The courtyards of Shkoder have always been locations for parties, for evenings spent with friends and family, for the celebration of weddings," says Paci. This made it easier to abandon the idea of the house as an exclusively private entity, and embrace a combination of social and domestic.

Public and private, side by side, is a major focus at Art House, but also in Paci's artistic production. "In my work as an artist, I try to understand how these two realities can live together and

carry on a conversation. I look to the past and the future at the same time. Of course tensions are inevitable, and even necessary," underlines Paci. "It is positive that the public enters into the private sphere and calls it into question, but also that the opposite happens. Without the life experience that the private domain contains, the public domain risks becoming rhetoric, purely ideological, an enunciation of good intentions," says Paci. All this explains why a house, the quintessential realm of privacy, is able to acquire new vital energy by opening up to the community. In turn, the community can find inside a domestic space, an intimate, sincere experience where the individual is important.

Art House has become an important presence in the life of the neighbourhood and the city. Through a busy programme of events and initiatives, the house-atelier invites not only young artists to participate (see the Art House School), but also the worlds of art and international culture, and the locals themselves, who can take part in conferences and debates. In the courtyard of Art House and in four other courts in town, an independent film festival on art and artists takes place, accessible to everyone. Called "Lo schermo dell'arte", the show is a branch of its namesake initiative in Florence.

Despite its small scale, Art House can be considered part of a wider process of urban regeneration. As Taidelli says, "It is a project that well interprets two trends that are coming about in Italian cities as well. I am referring to sustainable urban retrofitting, which rehabilitates existing spaces before using new land. We now have the intellectual and technical means to do this well. I am also referring to an increase in social flexibility, which translates to the existence of shared areas and mixed areas, where public and private spheres, family and artistic spheres meld."

In a word, the house is not merely a concept, but "a space that generates interpersonal relations and that connects to what used to happen in the past, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future," as Taidelli concludes.



Top left: seen at the Marubi National Museum of Photography in Shkoder, Adrian Paci (back row, third from right) with Lucjan Bedeni (the director of Marubi, back row, first from left) and Michelangelo Pistoletto (hat) with the Art House team. Above: the exterior of Paci's house-atelier contrasts with the modern buildings surrounding it. Below: Paci (right) with Filippo Taidelli. Large sliding glass doors bring natural light into all the rooms



Do robofarmers dream of electric sheep?

The widespread use of advanced automation in Dutch agriculture has brought a radical change to the dynamics of farm-work and the appearance of the landscape. A study by Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam shows the positive and negative consequences of the phenomenon

by VALENTINA CROCI

In The Netherlands, large hangars are visible from the road. Some are entirely automated dairy farms, where robots keep the barn clean and sensors monitor the animals' health. Others are greenhouses where vegetables and flowers are cultivated in customised growth cycles without allowing the natural alternation of day, night or seasons to obstruct production. In 2016, Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam began studying automated farming under the research project Automated Landscape, based on the fact that Holland makes massive use of automation for floriculture and dairy cows. Robotics are employed from the port of Rotterdam to the nearby region of Westland, where most of the country's greenhouses are. The research also looked at data centres as another type of "farm". Holland is Europe's hub for data centres (Google settled here) thanks to good connection with undersea cables, incentives from the government and the availability of land.

"Automation is changing the way we live, work and eat," says Marina Otero Verzier, the director of research at Het Nieuwe Instituut. "The spaces of automation are changing the territory, yet designers and architects are not much involved in this transformation process. We think it's important that they participate in this huge phenomenon. There is not even any regulation pertaining to these spaces." The study conducted by the Dutch research institute does not aim to propose design solutions, but to create public awareness and favour exchange between policy makers, which could then engage designers.

"Through visits and drawings, we began documenting the automated farms to understand what the level of automation was, what type of technology was implemented, how many employees were still needed, how big the farms were growing, and how the architecture was changing. Farm-work now involves sitting in front of a computer and managing agricultural parameters through software applications and their sensors. We were interested in the relation between machine and living beings. For example, cows are entirely groomed, fed and kept clean by robots.

A new symbiosis with the machine has been established, much like what is described in the 1967 poem *All Watched over by Machines*

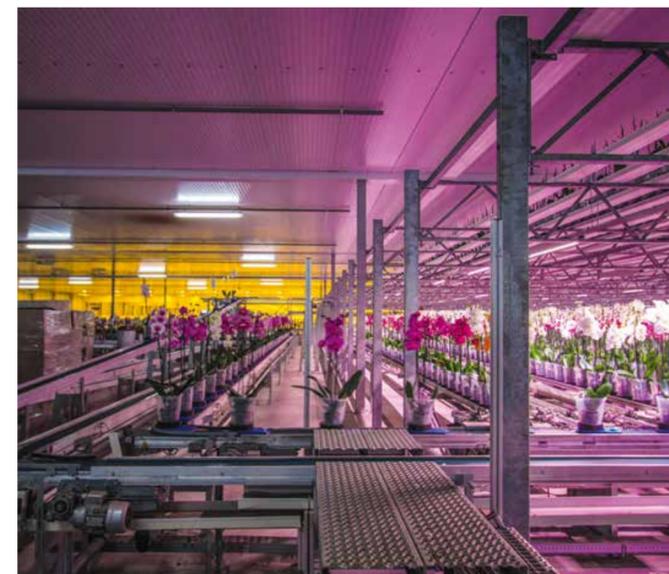


of *Loving Grace* by Richard Brautigan. "Here is the first stanza: I like to think (and | the sooner the better!) | of a cybernetic meadow | where mammals and computers | live together in mutually | programming harmony | like pure water | touching clear sky".

The difference is that the hippy cyber-utopia of the 1960s now has pragmatically dystopian overtones. Automation has brought a transformation of the landscape, too.

"Robotic technology is expensive, so the farms have been grouped into big infrastructures, substituting the family-run type of farm. And all this has come about without regulation. Giant pieces of land are controlled by drones. The farmers check progress remotely, not from a traditional farmhouse, but from row-houses that are built close to the greenhouses and dairy farms. Architects have not yet been involved in the analysis of this change, because just one type of basic, elementary building has been erected, an uninteresting assignment for an architect. But it is urgent that they take part, because the digital world is rapidly changing the form of the world. Then, virtuous processes can be envisioned, such as the reuse of the energy dissipated by the automated farms. Or instead of distributing the merchandise around the world over the big market platforms, it could be distributed locally thanks to automation, which lowers costs and the use of primary resources. It is necessary to consider the problem from a broader perspective. Thanks to our studies, the issue is currently being discussed at schools and in the government. The Delft University of Technology drafted a report that is under examination at the Ministry," continues Otero Verzier.

The effects of automation and robotised production on our well-being have not yet been studied in depth. One factor is the constant illumination of the farms, which creates light pollution that influences the circadian patterns of people working and living nearby, and limits their ability to see the stars. This fact, plus speculative analysis of the relation between light and darkness, led to the research-based exhibition "I See That I See What You Don't See", the Dutch entry (led by Het Nieuwe Instituut) at this year's 22nd Triennale event in Milan. It shows how technology can maximise efficiency but limit our connection to Nature.



This page: photos made for the research project Automated Landscape conducted by Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam. The study's aim was to raise public awareness concerning robotised farming, favour exchange between policy makers, and involve designers



Across the city

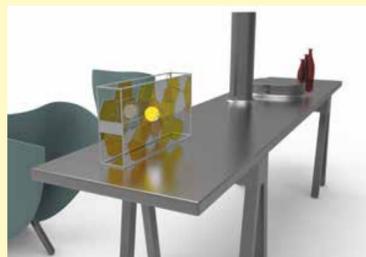


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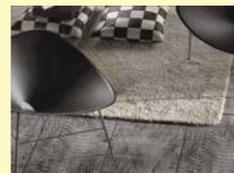
If Milan can now be considered the capital of design (and that means all kinds of design), this is also due to a proliferation of activity on the part of numerous entities who are able to tap into and bring added value to the many aspects of design culture in Italy and abroad. Of these, a prominent role is played by the Istituto Marangoni, an institution that began offering training for the world of fashion almost a century ago - founded in 1935 by Giulio Marangoni as an "Art Institute for Fashion" aimed at professionals and highly specialised technicians in the field - and over the years has extended and diversified its offer, opening schools in London in 2003, Paris in 2006 and Shanghai in 2013. In addition to this, a School of Fashion, Design and Art opened in Florence in September 2016, and more recently in Shenzhen (2016), Mumbai (2017) and Miami (2018): new international centres for fashion, design and luxury goods. The great emphasis that the Istituto Marangoni places on the crossover between teaching courses and the many-faceted contributions that can come from different worlds of design has thus over time been handed over to four generations of professionals from over 100 nations, taught to experiment with their skills and sensibility in a range of fields, to understand and manage every kind of creative process from beginning to end, following an approach that is not about rigid specialisation. This premise also gives rise to a strong interaction with the increasingly diversified reality that is Milan Design Week: a platform for presentation but also an unmissable opportunity to compare and contrast as well as collect inspiration for design. Following their significant participation in 2018 - particularly noteworthy was the event-space Rado Star Prize Italia 2018 at Superstudio Più: an original pop-up store inspired by the theme of "Natural Freedom" created by students from the Interior, Product, Visual, Fashion and Accessories Design - this year Istituto Marangoni are extending their participation in the event to include a packed programme of activities made up of installations, exhibitions and talks. Events kick off in Via Cerva, the Milan site of the School of Design, with an immersive "Design Experience" dedicated to the best projects by students and alumni from all study courses, created in close partnership with leading Italian and international design brands, such as



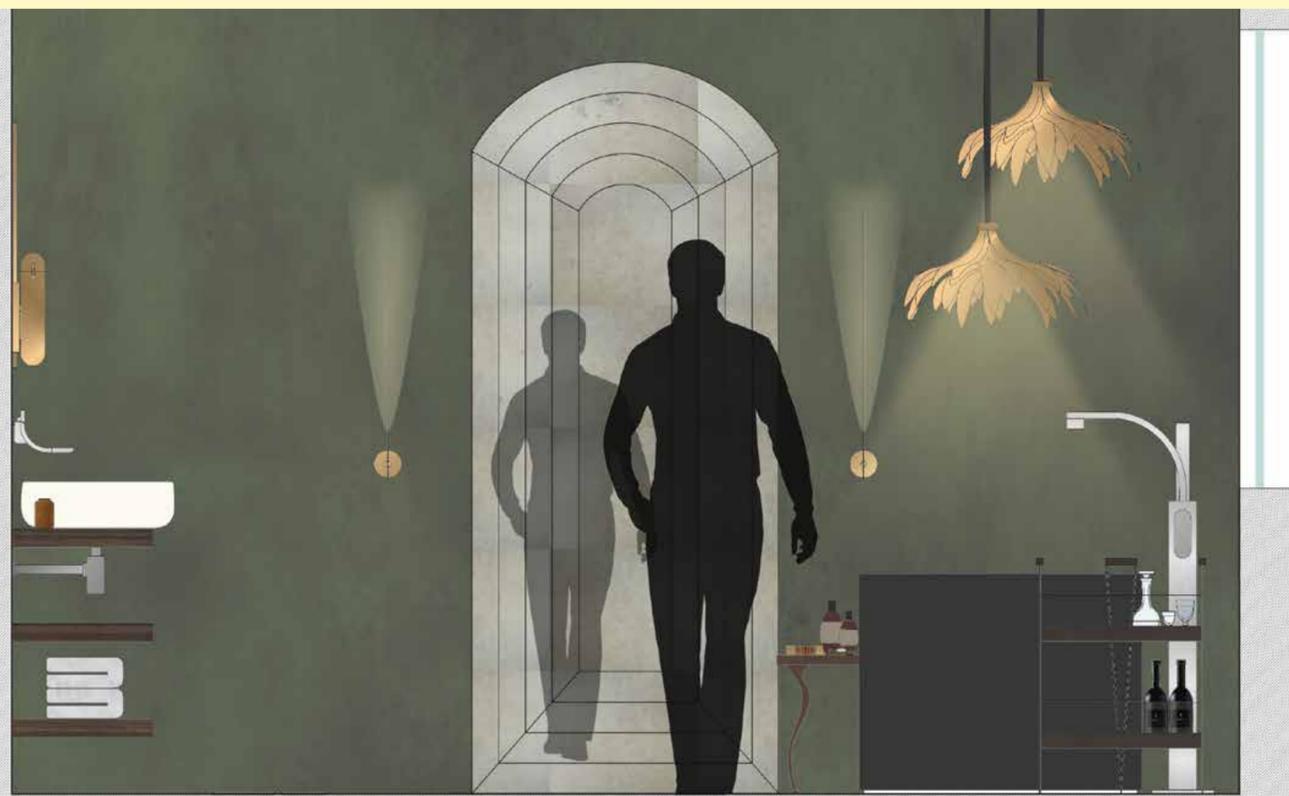
A large number of designs are on show in Milan Design Week 2019 by the School of Design from the Istituto Marangoni (above, view of the Milan site). Projects include a concept for Icone Luce -Master Contemporary Furniture by student Marco Ripani (below left) and Anomaly in the System for Lea Ceramiche (below, right)



One of the elements that characterises Marangoni is the design interaction with leading companies, invited to work in close contact with the students. Results of this research include the design study Lost in Dream, developed for Ceramica Flaminia and displayed as a prototype in the company's showroom (image below)



Cappellini, Ceramica Flaminia, Icone Luce, Lea Ceramiche and Orsoni. Connecting it all together both conceptually and spatially is the design of the exhibition curated by Giulio Cappellini, one of the most renowned talent scouts in the sector and Istituto Marangoni brand ambassador all over the world. A shared capacity to be curious and inclusive, to open up to every stage of design, to blend and weave together different skills and spheres, can be seen in experiments and creative developments that are very different from one another; the result is a group of objects and solutions with a mix of physiognomies but that belong in a conscious manner to the same urban and design culture. As well as in the headquarters of the institute in the heart of Milan, projects developed by students from Istituto Marangoni are also displayed in the showrooms of top designer companies such as Ceramica Flaminia, Cappellini, Lea Ceramiche - sophisticated prototypes for new designs will be presented, developed by students in close collaboration with the companies - and Ceramichè Refin, with the project "Mimesis, Material Performances", realised with Ooniko, a new high-end glass-making brand. One of the central sites for Istituto Marangoni's cultural and exhibition project for Design Week 2019 will consist of the district between Porta Nuova and Porta Volta, known as "IDD - Innovation Design District". Here the Institute will play a prominent role with the visual identity project "IDD REFRAMED", designed by the students and created as part of the initiative "Recognising the district at a glance", promoted by IDD in collaboration with the School of Design. There is also a packed programme of meetings and talks. As part of the "Icon Design Talks" series, at the Riccardo Catella Foundation, on April 12th at 5.00 pm, Mark Anderson, Director of Education of Istituto Marangoni Milano - The School of Design, will talk to Tom Dixon, a British designer with his own distinctive approach to the design of furniture, lighting and accessories for interiors. The school is also present at Rho-Fiera, the large, traditional centre of the International Furniture Fair, with a space in the legendary Salone Satellite dedicated to the "Prisma Project". Here, a team of selected students have an opportunity to exhibit some of their best.



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For some time, materials have been key to the design of architecture, interiors and furniture. While the classic way forward throughout the history of design has always been: "first the form, then the material," now things have been more or less reversed and the characteristics of construction materials have a technological and aesthetic complexity that goes beyond that of all the other components in the finished object. One of the most sensational examples of this growing trend is represented by the research and manufacturing strategy activated in recent years by Porcelanosa Group, a leading Spanish company in the field of ceramic floor and wall coverings, also renowned for their recent development of a series of new-generation materials. These "supermaterials" for the design of products and interiors developed by Porcelanosa are endowed with special aesthetic and technological characteristics that ensure excellent durability and resistance to wear induced by continuous use, not only inside the family home but also in contract and public spaces. One of these is Par/ker, a ceramic parquet that is able to combine the technical performance of ceramic with the aesthetic qualities of wood. Makers of construction components and materials typically approach design with a view to extending it to the production of systems that offer infinite potential rather than limiting themselves to coming up with a single object, albeit mass-produced. Putting this all together has led the Porcelanosa group to place their attention on the kitchen, traditionally the heart of the home and the focal point for all the activities that are woven into family life. With the brand Gamadecor, the Spanish company has created kitchen collections that are complete in every part: versatile systems that are fully customisable, designed for kitchens that are tailor-made to suit the specific lifestyle of each user. Gamadecor offers kitchen fittings with a simple, stylish design, that combine aesthetic refinement with a strong emphasis on maximising user functionality. Their proposal is articulated around the creation of new materials that have been specially conceived and developed for building kitchen components, such as for example Krion™: a new-generation solid-surface material developed by Systempool, one of the companies in the Porcelanosa group. Warm to the touch and resembling natural stone, Krion™ is made up of two thirds natural minerals (ATH Aluminium Trihydrate) and a small percentage of extra-strong resin. This composition gives the material unique qualities: absence of pores, antibacterial properties without the need for additives, hardness, durability, low-maintenance, easy to repair and clean. Krion™'s versatility makes it suitable for use for a wide range of elements in the kitchen, from ceilings to door fronts on all kinds of units, including tall units for housing built-in domestic appliances. On an aesthetic level, this composite material also matches perfectly with glass, making it suitable for all kinds of applications and creating an ultra-stylish result. In more general terms, advanced technological research into materials, finishes and technological features for the kitchen constitutes the distinctive feature of the Gamadecor range for 2019. Observing and exploring the dynamics of everyday life in the home, the brand has developed an articulated and dynamic vision of the kitchen of the future, concentrated into their concept for a Smart Kitchen. This project is currently being developed by the company's R&D department and will soon constitute a basic unit included in all Porcelanosa Kitchens. Taking a sustainable view of the use of resources, the Smart Kitchen has also been conceived to reduce the food waste that occurs on a daily basis in ordinary domestic kitchens. This advanced device can offer assistance in terms of spending, providing information on stored food, ideas for improving diet and health and even designing specific menus for more virtuous use of food. The system is based on a special intelligent surface that integrates a network of invisible sensors inside the furniture, without the use of bar code readers or other invasive technological solutions. In this way, the Smart Kitchen project does not alter the design of the kitchen, meaning it can also be introduced into existing fixtures to transform any kitchen into a smart kitchen. The information recorded by the sensors is sent to your smartphone or tablet thanks to a special app that provides the desired notifications in real time, bringing the heart of the home directly into the future.



Elegant and refined, Gamadecor kitchens are based on extensive research into state-of-the-art materials and technologies developed by Porcelanosa Grupo. The result is Smart Kitchen: an intelligent, interactive kitchen that communicates directly with the user, establishing a new culture of virtuous food consumption



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The unsustainable functionality of art

On display at Le Dictateur in Milan, 12 functional sculptures by Thomas Braida explore the difference between art and design. Their hyper-decorativeness and hyper-emotivity beg for joyful use

by CHIARA CANTONI

We see a shuffling of cards, a crossing of confines, an inversion of direction – from the necessity of the form, to a hypothesis of functionality. We see this precisely during the fair, the quintessential place where the opposite road is celebrated – function first, from whence comes the coherency of form. Curated by Caroline Corbetta, and forming an imaginary continued line from the MiArt to the Furniture Fair, the new solo show by Thomas Braida, “La bava sul cuscino” (“the drool on the pillow”) hosted at Le Dictateur (6–14.4.2019) is an experimental dialogue between the two above-mentioned worlds, a felicitous act of cross-fertilisation on the creative trajectory of their respective possibilities. In this border-land where art reaches out to design, and design welcomes the dialectic with art, the young painter’s “functional sculptures” take their shape from clay. In a twofold design deviation, he takes on both a material and a discipline unfamiliar to him. “I am curious. New things intrigue me,” says Braida. “When I model a pitcher or any of the other objects that I am creating, I can’t help wanting to make something beautiful, thereby forgetting about usage. As an artist, I pay no attention to the differences of my approach with design. I see no objective limits between an egg-cup and a painting. However, I’m better at painting.”

The project started with a personal invitation. “I was furnishing my house, and I asked Thomas to make me a ceramic coffee table,” says the curator Corbetta, a talent scout of emerging artists who was the first to see the creative urgency in Braida’s pictorial brushstrokes. She has promoted him from the start. “After a few months, Melville/Goya arrived at the house. A coffee table, or stool if you want, with marine decorations in relief teeming on the base like life in the ocean depths. Under the intense blue surface, or perhaps the subconscious, a dreamlike dimension unfolded, populated by seashells, dragons and fantasy creatures. These are typical of the monstrous twist Braida impresses on reality, tempering it with flashes of humourism. The result was so strong that I encouraged a follow-up.” Two partisans of cross-over creativity, Federico Pepe and Stefania Siani, enthusiastically opened the doors of their exposition space, programmatically dedicated as they are to hosting hybridisation between artistic languages and unconventional projects.

On display are a dozen ceramic objects. They contain the



communicative power of art and the potential use of design. Cats are turned into ash-trays; snakes are egg-cups; forests are coffee tables; volcanoes are vases. The pieces are unique and factually usable, but at the same time, they are fully authoritative in claiming the autonomy of the object. “They have all the grip of art, without the inaccessible sacrality of the fetish, which is often a pretext to create distance,” comments the curator. “These desacralised, hyper-decorative and hyper-emotive sculptures can be admired, but also employed if you want. They invite us to enter into a relation; they want to be on friendly terms with you. Precisely in that personal relation, the work becomes the property of everybody, although it does preserve a nucleus of unfathomable mystery.”

For the Friulian artist Braida, the work constitutes his need. Corbetta explains: “In Braida’s overabundant imagination, there is also an overabundance of styles and grounds. He paints on notebooks, vases, newspaper clippings and the tops of jars for preserves, continually annotating in all possible ways his vision of the world. Ceramics, sometimes repainted dry after the second firing, is another frontier of painting. It’s three-dimensional painting.”

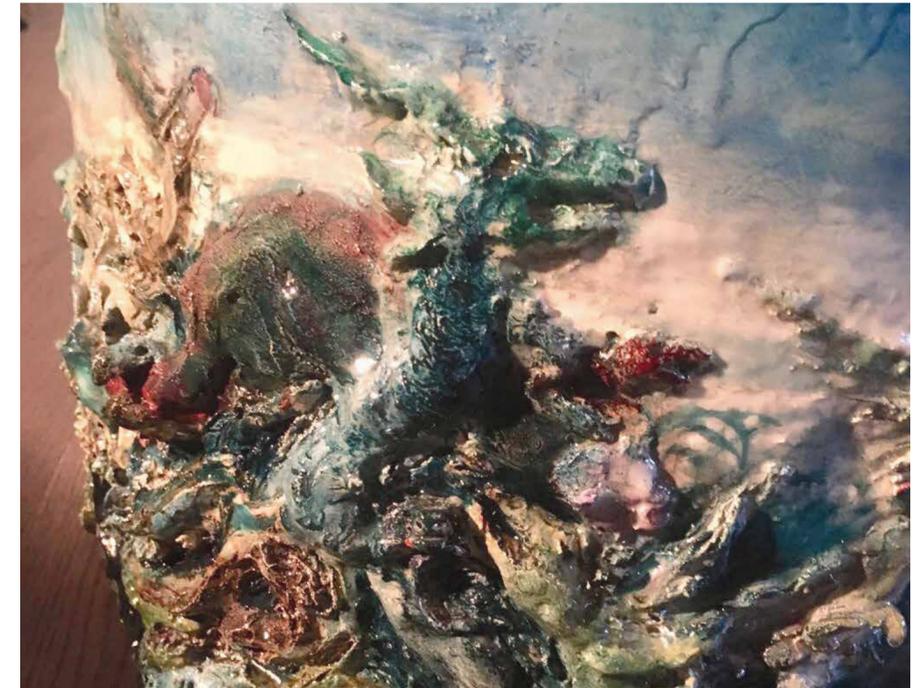
Braida adds: “I was thinking of Giorgio Morandi and the way he created sets for his still-lives. And so I wanted to construct the elements of my paintings myself, making the objects exist first, and then portray them.” A fantasy-filled world has come of that idea, inhabited by imagery and suggestions that are baffling, like waking up from an intense dream whose traces are still on the pillow. Hence the exhibition’s title, conceived in the display as a domestic habitat, an installation saturated with signs and emotive resonance, where the pieces converse with each other and with the space.

“My functional sculptures are like asterisks on a blank sheet of paper, doodles in the kitchen, distorted elements of space, of beauty. They are incongruous, but put you in a good mood in the morning when you see them. They are colourful points in the grey morning mind-set,” says Braida. He has already held an exhibition in a residential space once before, during the 2017 Venice Art Biennial with the show “Solo”, also curated by Corbetta, hosted at Palazzo Nani Bernardo.

“Many of these things will come back in my paintings, but I like the feeling of cold clay between my fingers,” says the artist. From painting to sculpture and vice versa, the dialogue is stratified; referentiality is rife. It couldn’t be otherwise for Braida, whose upbringing was permeated by a taste for colour and manual creativity transmitted by his ceramicist father, who helped him with the more technical aspects of the work. Corbetta comments: “At the moment, the desire to rediscover artisanal techniques and traditions is exploding in design as well as art. As a personal project, I am following a research topic back to the 1930s, when Gio Ponti invited artists like Lucio Fontana and Fausto Melotti to design ceramic objects. At the time, both artists made a distinction between the decorative endeavours and their primary artistic production, but by the 1950s, such divisions became blurred. Now that creative expression is much freer, we can go back to exploring the border-line, where the urgency, potency and sincerity of the artistic gesture count – with all the potential broadness and limits of an almost impossible functionality. This is where Braida’s sculptures stand as crystallisations of fantasies that are meant to live in our spaces, as nightmares or dreams that do not dissolve in the morning. You open your eyes, and they’re still there.”



Top: the artist Thomas Braida with Caroline Corbetta, the curator of Braida’s exhibition “La bava sul cuscino” hosted at Le Dictateur in Milan (6–14.4.2019). Above: the Melville/Goya coffee table-cum-stool was the first to be made of the 12 functional ceramic sculptures on display. Right: detail of the Melville/Goya showing rich decoration inspired by the ocean depths. Shells, dragons and fantasy creatures humorously inhabit all Braida’s work, including his paintings



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“The natural world no longer exists.

The world has become entirely
and completely artificial. Our naturality consists
in proceeding with our methodical programme
of moving away from nature.

The boundaries between true and false have
disappeared. Everything has become fake.

People and things are now like souvenirs
of themselves. The need to ‘mask’ is enormous.”

Alessandro Mendini. *Alchimia*, 1986