

The Museum of Modern Art

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ITALY: THE NEW DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE, one of the most ambitious design exhibitions ever undertaken by The Museum of Modern Art, will be on view in the galleries and garden from May 26 through September 11. Directed and installed by Emilio Ambasz, Curator of Design in the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, the exhibition reports on current design developments in Italy with 180 objects for household use and 11 environments commissioned by the Museum.

The exhibition is presented under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Foreign Trade of Italy and the Italian Institute of Foreign Trade (I.C.E.) and the Gruppo ENI, with contributions from ANIC and Lanerossi (companies of Gruppo ENI), Fiat, Olivetti, Anonima Castelli, Alitalia, and Abet Print, and with the collaboration of a large number of Italian industries.

Italy, Mr. Ambasz says, is not only the dominant product design force in the world today but also illustrates some of the concerns of all industrial societies. Italy has assumed the characteristics of a micro-model where a wide range of possibilities, limitations and critical problems of contemporary designers throughout the world are represented by diverse and sometimes opposite approaches. These include a wide range of conflicting theories about the present state of design activity, its relation to the building industry and to urban development, as well as a growing distrust of objects of consumption.

The exhibition will be organized into two parts: Environments and Objects. The objects were selected and the environments were commissioned because of their relevance to particular current attitudes toward "the task of design." The exhibition therefore devotes major areas to audio-visual presentations explaining the purpose of the exhibits, and a concluding audio-visual section in which the director of the show, Mr. Ambasz, gives an analysis and critique of the problems raised. In addition, most of the environments contain a TV screen on which is shown a three- to four-minute film made by

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the designer to explain his environment.

Made in Italy and shipped to New York, the environments are intended for two modes of contemporary living -- the permanent home and the mobile unit. Four illustrate the counter-design approach of designers who believe no more objects should be added to our cluttered consumer-dominated culture and that social and political changes are needed before we can change the physical aspects of our society. Seven pro-design environments were made by designers who believe it is possible to improve the quality of life by improving our physical environment.

The pro-design environments pay special attention to new forms emerging as a result of changing patterns of life style: more informal social and family relationships and evolving notions of privacy and territoriality, as well as the exploration of new materials and production techniques. Each environment occupies a 16 x 16 foot area in the galleries. Among them are Ettore Sottsass' micro-environments in plastic, each on casters so occupants can easily re-arrange them to fit their needs; Joe Colombo's fixed plastic units for bath, kitchen, sleeping, and storage that can be put into any existing space; Gae Aulenti's molded plastic elements which can be combined to form architectural multi-purpose environments; Rosselli's aluminum mobile house which expands from 7 x 14 feet to 20 x 29 feet; Zanuso-Sapper's house, an aluminum container from which two plastic molded shells housing bedroom and bathroom/kitchen units telescope; and Mario Bellini's glass-walled "exploration" car can also expand when stationary. La Pietra's environment suggests a bridge between the pro-design and counter-design proposals; he believes we can liberate ourselves from present conditions by better use of the communications network.

As a prologue to the environments section, and functioning as an ironic commentary on the present, there is Gaetano Pesce's "underground room." It represents the remains of a habitat of the year 2000 as found in the year 3000. The counter-

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design environments consist of Superstudio's 6 x 6 foot box of polarized mirror glass with a grid in the floor through which tubes project bringing air, food, water and communications to the occupants, who can also watch a film on TV that describes the designers' vision of the world and see pictures of clouds projected on the ceiling; and Archizoom group's empty room containing only a microphone over which come harsh words about the destruction of objects and institutions, followed by a pleasant voice describing a utopian world. Derossi, Ceretti, and Rosso, a group of young designers from Turin who believe there is no point in designing any objects or environments until the entire urban policy is redirected, wrote three pamphlets which are given to visitors, describing the present and the future.

Complementing the environments, there will be a display of 180 objects produced in Italy during the last decade by more than 100 designers. These examples of product design (furniture, lighting fixtures, flatware and china) were selected for their design quality and to illustrate the various intellectual design positions which have evolved in Italy in the last 10 years.

The objects section illustrates three prevalent attitudes toward design in Italy today: "conformist," "reformist," and "contestatory," Mr. Ambasz says.

Most are by conformist designers who are concerned with exploring the aesthetic quality of single objects such as chairs, tables, bookcases, which answer the needs of traditional domestic life. Bold use of color, imaginative utilization of the possibilities offered in new hard and soft synthetic materials, and advanced moulding techniques characterize this work. About 60% of the objects on view are in this category, including Joe Colombo's "Poker" table (1968) in laminated wood and steel; the "Soriana" lounge chair (1970) by Tobia and Afra Scarpa, in polyurethane and dacron covered with fabric; the "Arco" floor lamp by Achille and Piergiacomo Castiglioni (1962) in steel

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with a marble base; and the "Giunone" floor lamp (1969) in lacquered metal, and the "Selene" stacking chair (1965) in reinforced polyester, both by Vico Magistretti.

Describing the reformist designers, Mr. Ambasz observes that they do not invent substantially new designs but rather re-design known objects with new, ironic and sometimes self-deprecatory socio-cultural and aesthetic references. Examples are the "Donna" armchair with footstool (1969) shaped liked a woman, by Gaetano Pesce in polyurethane; the "Sassi" stones, different size seats by Piero Gilardi, in polyurethane; and the "Joe" sofa (1970), designed to look like a baseball glove in polyurethane and leather by De Pas, D'Urbino and Lomazzi.

While the "contestatory" designers believe that an object can no longer be designed as a single isolated entity, their reaction is to conceive of their designs in terms of environments and to propose objects that are flexible in function and permit multiple modes of use and arrangement. The results of this mode of Italian design do in fact seem to correspond to the preoccupations of a changing society, Mr. Ambasz observes. Among the examples on view are "Tavoletto," (1967) a low table on casters with folding bed inside, by Alberto Salvati and Ambrogio Tresoldi in lacquered wood; "il Serpentone" (the jumbo snake), a settee of unlimited length that can be bent into concave or convex curves of any radius to suit the user's needs, designed by Ms. Cini Boeri (1971) in polyurethane; the "Sacco" or bean bag chair (1969) by Gatti, Teodoro and Paolini in polyurethane filled with little balls; and the "Ghiro" mattress-lounge chair (1967) in polyurethane and fabric by Umberto Catalano and Gianfranco Masi.

The objects will be exhibited in the upper and lower terraces of the Museum's Garden in containers especially designed by Mr. Ambasz.

An accompanying publication,* edited by Mr. Ambasz, and published by The Museum of Modern Art, illustrates the environments and objects shown in the exhibition, and

*ITALY: THE NEW DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE edited by Emilio Ambasz. 432 pages; 380 illustrations (110 in color); clothbound \$15.00; paperbound \$7.95. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Clothbound edition distributed to the trade by New York Graphic Society Ltd. in the United States and Canada.

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includes a series of historical essays and critical analyses of Italian design written by major Italian critics and historians.

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