

Triennale
Design
Museum 9

**W.
Women
in Italian
Design**

XX1T



Infinite Present

Epiphanies of the feminine in Italian design

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A black hole

The stories of design so far told revolve almost entirely around a big black hole: the removal of the feminine. The concealment of the presence and contribution of women. The subjugation of women to a persistent and stubborn masculine hegemony. As if women had never been there. As if they had stayed at home. As if the paradigm of the dominant patriarchal thinking would struggle to even recognize the role of women even when this was evident. It has taken almost eighty years, for example, to recognize and demonstrate, how Christiane Lange has done recently, that one of the icons of twentieth century design – the *Daybed* from 1930 – is not only attributable to Mies van der Rohe, as has been the case for decades, but above all to his devoted and discreet partner, Lilly Reich. Why such a stubborn and prolonged removal?

No skeletons in the closet.

Male and female, of course, are categories that are increasingly called into question. *Gender* theory attacks their claim to provide a comprehensive and indisputable description or theory on a theme as complex as identity. The fact that gender is not a purely biological factor, but is also a socio-cultural construction is now commonly accepted. We are in a fluid phase of great change, where the proliferation of multiple and differentiated identities is likely headed in the direction of overcoming gender differences as have been known and practised over the centuries. Does this change also involve and affect the scope of design? Has the history of design also been marked by the theme of gender identity? Will the future of design overcome these differences? If this is one of the scenarios that *Design After Design* will have to, and must, confront, then it is first necessary to redefine the role that gender has played in our recent history. The ninth edition of the Triennale Design Museum does so by speaking about Italian design from the female point of view. It does so in order to experience a new perspective, to redefine a collection. No complaining, no resurgence of feminism, no cries for positive discrimination. Without “an endangered panda” to preserve and protect. Twentieth century Italian design was patriarchal design. Objectively and indisputably. Design history recognizes, at best, a

dozen examples of female design, whereas this year's TDM documents hundreds and hundreds. Women in Italian design have been and are, quantitatively and qualitatively, a significant presence that has been hidden, removed and marginalized. *W. Women in Italian Design* seeks to rectify this. Not a compensation, but rather a restored balance. *Resetting* the scene to enter the new territory of gender with a clear and transparent history behind it. No skeletons in the closet.

Beyond the paradigm of patriarchal thinking

Of course, you might be wondering why the gender issue has come to a head now. The most convincing answer is linked to the economic and productive development of globalized society. For centuries, the patriarchal perspective has never been questioned because, after all, it was functional to the productive assets and power of that world. Now the end of the industrial era and Fordist production makes that model feel wholly inadequate. The patriarchy ends with the fall of the hierarchical pyramid model of work organization, it ends with the fall of the assembly line, it ends with the fall of the family model that was proposed and practised over the last two centuries. Intangible and relational capitalism has different needs, less linked to the immediate problem solved and the mass production of heavy objects and material goods. And this leads to a greater value of a kind of creativity, but also a different way of operating and performativity. We could say that opens up to female creativity and performativity, but in view of an overall reorganization of skills and abilities that will probably lead to surmounting traditionally understood genders and, in any case, to the definitive crisis of the undisputed hegemony of the patriarchal model.

Pioneers and explorers

Research on women's contribution to design history and design culture is well advanced in many different geographical and cultural areas. In the English-speaking world, for example, in 1984 Isabelle Anscombe in *A Woman's Touch* explored and examined the contribution of female designers in textiles and interior design, while *Women in Design*

Single, team, coppie

Uscire dal paradigma autoriale significa anche scoprire che i metodi di lavoro e i percorsi progettuali non sono riducibili a quelle nette attribuzioni di paternità con cui spesso il pensiero patriarcale si è esentato dalla fatica di ricostruire nel dettaglio i processi creativi e di riconoscere meriti, apporti e contributi collettivi. I progetti, spesso, nascono da un lavoro di squadra. Nascono in studio, dalla collaborazione di più intelligenze e di più saperi che vengono tutti bruscamente cancellati dalla canonica attribuzione di paternità esclusiva: la sedia XX di YZ. Dove YZ è quasi sempre un designer singolo anche quando al progetto hanno lavorato decine di persone. Nella storia del design italiano, ad esempio, molto frequente è la presenza di coppie: Afra e Tobia Scarpa, Lella e Massimo Vignelli. Lica e Albe Steiner, Doriana e Massimiliano Fuksas. Per una lunga fase del Novecento le donne-architetto o le donne-designer hanno lavorato nello studio del marito o del compagno senza che il loro ruolo fosse pubblicamente riconosciuto. Donne muse, donne segretarie, donne tuttofare, donne comprimarie. Poi – anche se non sempre – certe donne-compagne hanno cominciato a diventare corresponsabili. Hanno firmato insieme al partner. Hanno condiviso onori e oneri del percorso creativo. Lavorare in coppia, ovviamente, significa adottare una metodologia del tutto diversa da quella del “solista” che assume come unici punti di riferimento se stesso e le sue ossessioni. Stare in coppia nel progetto e nel suo sviluppo significa essere sempre disposti a confrontarsi con l'altro, ad assumere il suo punto di vista, a mettere in discussione il proprio. Rispetto al solipsismo del creatore-demiurgo, la coppia riconosce implicitamente la fragilità e l'incompletezza delle due parti che la compongono, parti che solo mettendosi insieme acquistano creatività, completezza e maturità. *W. Women in Italian Design* accoglie le coppie e le donne che hanno lavorato in coppia, nella convinzione che anche questa inclusione apra nuove prospettive sui modi in cui va inteso e raccontato il processo creativo.

Origine du monde

Il progetto di allestimento messo in scena da Margherita Palli è una grande metafora della creazione e della creatività. Si comincia – fin dal ponte che porta al Museo – entrando in uno spazio che allude al corpo femminile ed evoca la sua natura più intima: una sorta di grande utero abitato da sussurri, litanie e chiacchiericci in cui aleggiano ricami, intrecci, merletti. Cioè gli artefatti che esprimono quello che tradizionalmente è stato il lavoro femminile: il tessere e il tramare come attività solo apparentemente domestiche, ma in realtà capaci di sottendere grandi strategie relazionali.

L'allestimento prosegue poi come un fiume che prima scorre timidamente all'inizio del secolo scorso e poi si fa sempre più prorompente, diventando pieno e vitale nel XXI secolo. Questo grande fiume in piena

scorre sotto la protezione di alcune sante, patronne dei lavori quotidiani e artigianali, raffigurate da alcune delle più brave illustratrici contemporanee italiane e rappresentate sempre con un oggetto in mano. La selezione non ha la pretesa di essere esaustiva. Vuol essere un primo e inevitabilmente parziale repertorio. Gli oggetti selezionati lo sono non per la loro rilevanza “assoluta” (ma esistono oggetti di rilevanza assoluta?) ma per la loro rappresentatività rispetto al tema del Museo. Sono stati privilegiati cioè gli oggetti e i progetti che meglio esprimono quell'idea di creatività morbida e accogliente che si vorrebbe aleggiare un po' in tutta l'esposizione. Non c'è la grafica, perché richiederebbe una mostra tutta per sé. Non ci sono le *meteore*, cioè quelle tante designer che sono apparse e scomparse, progettando magari un solo oggetto, senza riuscire a dare un segno di continuità al loro lavoro. E anche questo è un tema su cui forse bisognerebbe interrogarsi: perché tante esperienze femminili effimere nell'ambito del design? Ma a questa, come alle tante altre domande disseminate nel percorso, dovranno dare risposta – se lo vorranno – la visitatrice e il visitatore. Dovranno tessere anche loro: mettere in funzione il loro telaio mentale e provare a annodare i tanti fili da cui il Museo è attraversato. Questa è un'edizione che risuona di domande, e che lascia le risposte a chi verrà a vedere.

Infinito presente

Mi piacerebbe che tutti i verbi del TDM9 risuonassero all'infinito. Tessere progettare creare intrecciare... Tra i vari modi verbali, l'infinito non prevede un soggetto, non si riferisce a una specifica persona grammaticale (io, tu, lui, lei, noi...) e vale indifferentemente tanto per il maschile quanto per il femminile. Inoltre è l'unica forma verbale che può fungere, di volta in volta, sia da verbo che da sostantivo. Progettare/Il progettare. Tessere/Il tessere. L'azione diventa cosa. La cosa è azione. Infinita. Per tutti. Qui e ora. Senza rimpianti, senza fughe in avanti. Guardando negli occhi il gesto e la cosa. E il loro implicarsi reciproco. Tramare, ora e ancora. All'infinito. Infinito presente.

(1988) by Liz McQuiston proposes an initial mapping of all women who worked in the various disciplines of design. In the last fifteen years, research has grown with works such as *Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference* (2000) by Pat Kirkham becoming indispensable reference points for the acumen with which they identify areas, methodologies, styles and sensibilities. In the French context, a book like *Femmes designers. Un siècle de créations* by Marion Vignal (2009) goes in the same direction and carefully reconstructs the female presence in design history from Art Nouveau and Bauhaus up to contemporary figures such as Zaha Hadid, Andrée Putman, Patricia Urquiola and Matali Crasset. In Italy, Anty Pansera is to be commended as the first to systematically and passionately, with intelligence and rigour, investigate the composite and hidden universe of female Italian design, creating important exhibitions on the subject (*Dcomedesign. La mano, la mente, il cuore*, at the Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali in Turin between March and April 2008) and overseeing the implementation of valuable repertoires/dictionaries that have the merit of being an initial map for orienting the female universe in design. You need only to think of a work like *Dal merletto alla motocicletta* (Silvana Editoriale, 2002), or even the dictionary published in the catalogue of the aforementioned exhibition in Turin, which presents a collection of biographies of not just female designers, but also professionals and entrepreneurs engaged in the world of design communication. Anty Pansera's research and publications represent a vital step in recognizing the role that women played in design history who have otherwise been silenced or undervalued. Other researchers followed and showed an interest in this topic: Daniela Piscitelli in the field of graphic design, with her essay *Muoversi sulle sabbie mobili* in the book *Aiap. Women in Design Award* (2015). All of this research opened the way. It has started to redraw the map. The ninth edition of TDM continues in the direction that they first suggested.

The dogma of authorship

However, there is still a possible limit that is shared by all of this research: the fact of applying the same authorial approach to women that was adopted by the patriarchal culture that wrote the history of design as a history made up substantially of designers: designer-demiurges who, in collaboration with industry and entrepreneurs, embody the quintessence of design culture, exhausting it in themselves and in its own self-representativity. In reality, as is well known, the category of author has long been in crisis in many different disciplines: from literature to cinema, the issue of both their presumed relevance and completeness and their theoretical stamina. Design studies proceed with the cult of the Maestro, bestowing on them the honour and burden of representing all of design, its history, its performativity. *W. Women in Italian Design* goes in

another direction. First and foremost, considering how female design is an area that does not only include designers – Anty Pansera pre-empted this in her *Dizionario* from 2008 – there are also those who teach design and those who diffuse it, those who put it on display in exhibitions and those who promote it on the market. There are female entrepreneurs and communicators, archivists, teachers, gallery owners, curators all those who make up that galaxy which – especially now that design has become a mass profession – gives body to the *design system*, underpinning its richness and complexity. All of these figures contribute – each with their own language – to increase the social relevance and collective reputation of the discipline. Perhaps the time has finally arrived because we are really starting to leave the authorial paradigm, effective in the patriarchal culture of the twentieth century, when it came to claim design to its own specific identity, which is ineffective and restrictive today, when design is no longer about just designing objects, but increasingly also about triggering processes and relationships. It is precisely from this belief that *W. Women in Italian Design* proposes a methodological and ordered approach that doesn't work around bibliographic essays, but rather chooses – consciously – to represent female creativity as an underground river that runs through the Novecento Italiano, sometimes blustering like a mountain stream, sometimes placid and calm like a lowland river. It is not a system designed for "Authors", but rather for objects, artefacts, projects. A system that comes from women, but then enters into the large flow of a creativity that exceeds its limits, the calculation and boundaries of the design culture that is promoted and encouraged by the patriarchal culture. What kind of creativity emerges from the investigation of women carried out during TDM9? It is an unpredictable creativity, based on welcoming and caring. With a sudden, uncontrollable design vision. Creativity with a strong innovative content. Magmatic, fertile, chaotic. A design without testosterone. Nothing monolithic. Nothing definitive. Plenty of irony and lightness. With a peaceful, positive world view. Without complaint. A liberated creativity. Elegant. Expressing a strong vitality.

Single, teams, couples

Leaving the authorial paradigm also means discovering that working methods and design approaches are not reducible to those net attributions of authorship in which patriarchal thinking often exempts itself from the effort of reconstructing the creative process in detail and recognizing merit, contribution and collective contributions. Designs are often the result of a team effort. They come from a studio, from the collaboration of different intelligence and knowledge that are all brusquely removed from the canonical attribution of exclusive authorship: *the XX chair* by YZ. Where YZ is almost always a single designer, even if dozens of people have worked on the project. The presence of couples

Anna Gill
A Viso Aperto
2010
Carlo Poggio Design

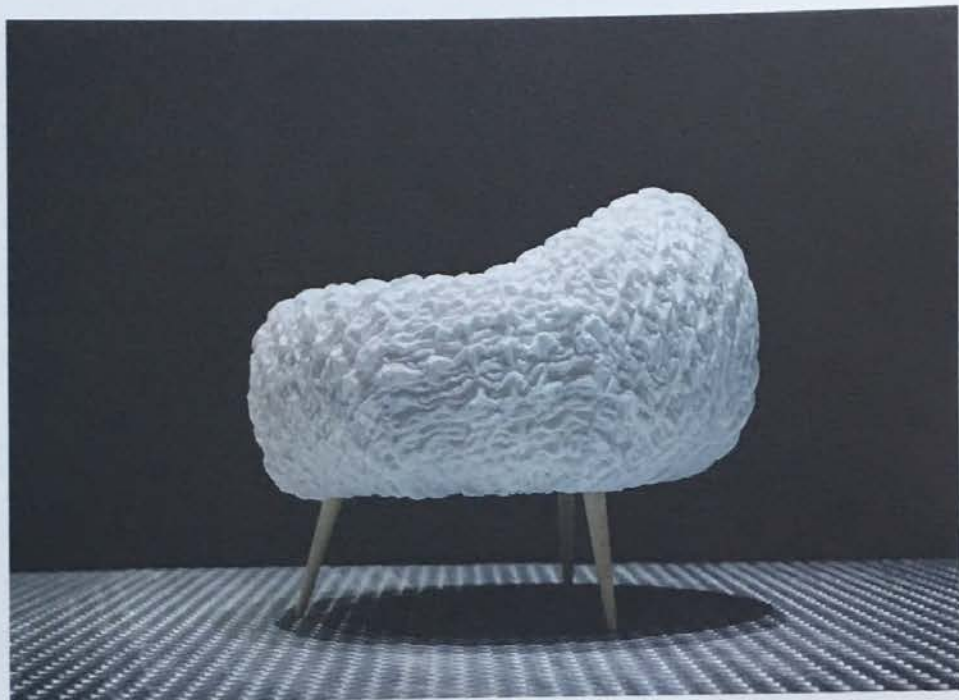


Anna Gili
Tiger mask
2013



Anna Gili
Cro
2016
Slide

Kazuyo Sejima
SANAA
Poltroncina
2016
lightsOn



Lo scopo dell'attività progettuale e artistica di Anna Gili è quello di creare oggetti che partecipino alla vita quotidiana, che siano interattivi e che instaurino dei legami immediati con il nostro immaginario più profondo e ancestrale. Primo progetto di design dopo l'esperienza artistica delle performance e delle installazioni d'ambiente, il vaso *Cro* è, infatti, un oggetto con una forte valenza simbolica. Le forme sinuose richiamano il femminile, la danza, il corpo in movimento nello spazio. Disegnato nel 1984 e poi prodotto da Alessi nel 1985, questo vaso è stato negli anni rieditato in numerosi colori e finiture. Oggi Slide, azienda specializzata nella lavorazione di resine plastiche a stampaggio rotazionale e a iniezione, ne produce una versione fuori scala. *Cro* diventa così il protagonista di una ideale performance danzante su uno scenario urbano.

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The scope of Anna Gili's design and artistic activity is to create objects that participate in daily life, which are interactive and establish immediate ties with our deeper, ancestral imagination. Her first design project after her artistic experiences in performance and environmental installations, the *Cro* vase is, in fact, an object with strong symbolic value. The sinuous forms recall the female, dance, the body in movement through space. Designed in 1984 and then produced by Alessi in 1985, this vase has been republished in different colours and finishings over the years. Nowadays Slide, a company specialized in the manufacture of plastic resins in rotational moulding and injection, makes a rescaled outdoor version. *Cro* has become the protagonist of an ideal dancing performance for urban scenery.

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