


curve

A person in a wheelchair is positioned inside a structure made of vertical glass panels. The floor is highly reflective, mirroring the person and the wheelchair. Above, several knives are suspended by thin wires, creating a dramatic and somewhat unsettling atmosphere. The overall color palette is dominated by blues and yellows.

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Kazuo Kawasaki

artificial heart

Casting light
new metals

Classroom addition
design counts





New design landscapes

Universally known as the land of the design maestros, Italy has never been an easy place for new talents to grow and glow. After a year-long census of Italian designers, Milan's Triennale has staged an impressive exhibition, featuring 124 young talents, selected by a jury chaired by Andrea Branzi.



above
Helix silver corkscrew, 2006, by Alessandra Baldareschi for De Vecchi

above
Spugna da cucina, 2005, by Carlo Contin for Coop. An abrasive sponge that can be hung on the kitchen sink for cleaning cutlery.

opposite
Dandelion lamp, 2006, by Matteo Bazzicallupo and Raffaella Mangiarotti of Deep Design for Technodelta. Transparent flutes diffuse LED generated light.

Does it still make sense to talk about *industrial* design? This seems to be the fundamental question that emerges from the exhibition recently staged at the Milan Triennale: *Il paesaggio mobile del nuovo design italiano* (The changing landscape of new Italian design).

The idea for the exhibition was born last year when the Triennale originated a census of young Italian designers. All individuals below the age of thirty-nine years and three months were asked to submit some of their work and a brief outline of their activities. The materials that were collected were analysed by a panel of experts led by architect Andrea Branzi. The purpose: understanding what Italian design is all about in the 21st century.

While other European countries have been very quick to understand the need to cluster and support young talents in the field of design, Italy – perhaps paradoxically hindered by its world status as Design Land – had never done so. The mere idea of taking a snapshot of contemporary young Italian design is thus in itself news and a forward-thinking, albeit long overdue, cultural activity.

More than 600 creative professionals entered the census and 124 of them were then selected for inclusion in the exhibition (staged from January 20 to April 25) that would describe the real nature and soul of contemporary Italian design.

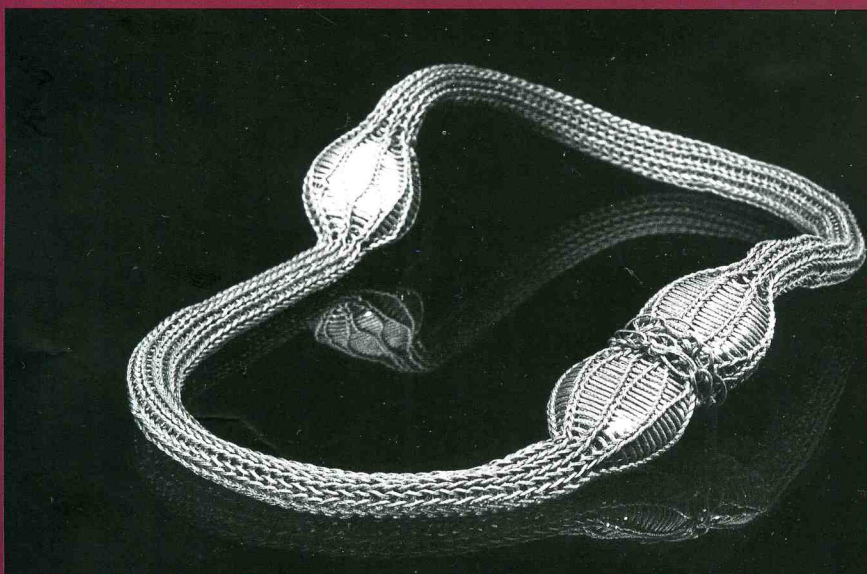
The landscape that emerges from the exhibition is one in which the word 'industrial' associated with the word 'design' does not seem to make a lot of sense

anymore. This is a big change in a country that came to the forefront, in the 50s and 60s, as the place for industry to meet creative minds. Italy has moved from a situation that Andrea Branzi defines as "comforting and clear", in which very few designers dominate the industrial scene, to one in which everyone is a designer. The word 'designer' has come to indicate a more generic creative professional rather than a person who is able to conceive a product and respond to all the challenges of putting it into production.

After analysing the work and creative approach of all 600 individuals who took part in the census, Davide Rampello, president of the Triennale, came to the conclusion that "the Italian designers of the 21st century are no longer that handful of great minds called on by enlightened industrialists to produce high-quality goods, but thousands of creative people who work in sectors such as furniture products, communications, publishing and even catering and hospitality".

Next to beautiful, almost classical, industrial design accomplishments such as motorbikes, pieces of furniture or lighting solutions, the exhibition also staged biscuits, recipes, hats made of pieces of paper, a fish tank with a "do not disturb" room and many other 'experimental' pieces – none of which was obviously conceived to be industrially manufactured.

"It does not make any sense to compare the present generation of designers with the previous one," explains Andrea Branzi. "No-one asks a designer today to create



It does not make sense to compare the present generation of designers with the previous one

a finished product – a masterpiece. Rather, young designers are asked to define innovation strategies, to continuously bring out new products, new solutions, new communications that will help the industry in a global market." These days, designers are often orchestrators and art directors rather than single players.

On the other hand, many young Italian designers now self-produce most of their work and this 'crafty' approach to design is by far one of the most important phenomena of our times. It is a sort of return of applied arts, on a global scale, and is certainly driven by Northern Europe, where the 'arts and crafts' movement was never put out by the rise of industrial design.

The new generation of Italian designers is less ready than previous ones to work for years in the studios of well-known professionals with (often) little gratification. The attention of the media and the numerous exhibitions dedicated to new talents offer to young designers the possibility to create their own work and expose it to the world in a much easier way – often hoping to grab the attention of the industry but more often stimulating a self-run, sometimes internet-based, business. Let us just think of young design stars such as the Belgian/Dutch duo Studio Job. Now world famous, they only work on limited-edition pieces, small batches of extremely high quality products which they often create themselves in their studio. They do not work with big producers – not because producers are not interested in their designs, but because they'd rather work on a small scale. (And with old prototypes fetching enormous amounts of money at auctions – who can blame them?)

"These designers," explains Branzi, "see a world that they do not like and they try to change it. But not, like their predecessors, by developing political schemes." They do it by acting in their own little universe, through the creation of a nice little object that can improve the quality of our existence, if only for one second. What they produce is always witty and smart, sometimes useful in a sort of nitty-gritty way, sometimes beautiful, sometimes bare – but hardly ever industrial.

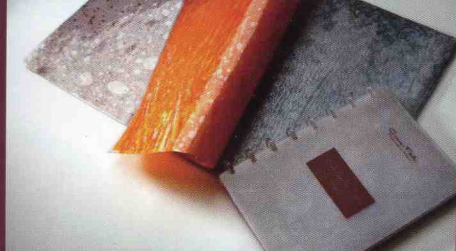
Yet the desire to continue to couple the word 'industrial' to the word 'design' is strongly felt by some of the designers whose work is exhibited at the Triennale. "The need to compete globally – which should in theory push companies to invest even more in industrial design and innovation – paradoxically often leads them to close themselves up and innovate through evolution rather than revolution," say Matteo Bazzicalupo and Raffaella Mangiarotti. The Milanese duo, who work as deepdesign, have in their portfolio companies such as Barilla, DaimlerChrysler, Kraft Foods, Giorgetti, GlaxoSmithKline, KitchenAid and Mandarina Duck – to name a few. In their opinion, life for the 'pupils' of the great maestros is not that easy. "Unlike years ago, it is today more difficult for the talented, yet unknown, designer to find an enlightened company that truly wishes to invest in innovation through design," they say.

The temptation to leave industrial design for a more crafty approach can then become alluring in order to get more visibility, and often also a good income. But according to Bazzicalupo and Mangiarotti, industrial design is very different from crafts – and it should continue to be so. "The two worlds can move

together, but a real quality-of-life enhancement through design can only occur through industrial design," they say. "In a different, more florid, economic situation perhaps more young designers would be able to work on an industrial level. As the world is today, the path towards innovation is often really tough, especially for young people, who need greater determination and courage than their predecessors."

After visiting the exhibition, one is thus left with a feeling of scatteredness. It's impossible to draw a link – aesthetic or philosophical – along all projects. The new Italian design is mobile, fragmented, intelligent – and always attempting to be creative, because creativity is the key to success and success is what everyone is aiming for. Maybe sometimes – one is tempted to think – for its own sake? ■

Laura Traldi



Quaderno di mare, 2006, by Carlo Cracco. Sheets of cooked fish for a copybook to be preserved in the fridge – to be eaten cool or fried.

right
Una Seconda Vita, 2006, by Paolo Union for Attese Edizioni. If the bowl falls and breaks the dotted decoration provides the chance for a new life, in a new form – without a function.

below
Flat Piano, 2006, by Matteo Bazzicalupo and Raffaella Mangiarotti of Deep Design. A table with an electronic keyboard. A miniature amplifier transforms the surface of the table into a three-dimensional speaker.

opposite page
Neckless, 2006, by Brunella Caccaviello for Flos ad Florem in waxed cotton shaped as a net.

