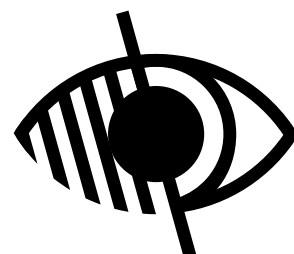


ENZO MARI
CURATED BY HANS ULRICH OBRIST
WITH FRANCESCA GIACOMELLI

29 March – 8 September 2024

Large Print Guide

the
DESIGN
MUSEUM



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Contemporanea Milan

'I want to create models for a different society – for a way
of producing and living differently.'

ENZO MARI
CURATED BY HANS ULRICH OBRIST
WITH FRANCESCA GIACOMELLI

Enzo Mari was one of the most significant designers of the 20th century. Based in Milan, he worked across art, graphics, furniture, products, exhibition-making and more for over 60 years. His life's work is a provocation to raise self-awareness, communicate knowledge and democratise design.

Mari's practice was rooted in his uncompromising belief that design should be at the service of society, not the designer. In many ways ahead of his time, he was critical and outspoken against excess production and consumption. He challenged dominant systems, attempting to counteract consumerism, grant greater worker autonomy, and heighten consciousness in users. Generations of designers have been inspired by Mari's enduring and timeless work, which continues to resonate today.

All objects in this exhibition are designed by Enzo Mari unless otherwise stated.

Curators' foreword

This retrospective exhibition, which first took place in Triennale Milano in 2020, has emerged from the dialogue and exchange of ideas over the years between Mari and the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist. It consists of a historical section and a series of contributions from international artists and designers, who have been invited to pay tribute to Mari.

The historical section is based on Mari's last exhibition project, Enzo Mari. L'arte del design ('The art of design'), which was curated by Mari himself and held at the Turin Civic Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art in 2008–9. The exhibition featured a selection of about 250 of Mari's projects out of the nearly 2,000 he created during his career.

Francesca Giacomelli's Research Platforms, specifically created for the Triennale exhibition, give insight into key themes of Mari's artistic vision and practice. They illustrate the process and methodology characterising Mari's research, and the evolution of his projects. These Research Platforms comprise a selection of materials from Mari's archive, many of which had not been shown before 2020. The exhibition also includes a series of video interviews by Hans Ulrich Obrist.

Based on Mari's own interpretation of his work, the following symbols are used in the captions:

* indicates work resulting from a personal quest to investigate form

● indicates work resulting from a dialogue with manufacturers or other organisations

Mari's last exhibition

In 2008, Mari curated and designed his last exhibition project, 'The art of design', held at the Turin Civic Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art. It forms the basis to the present exhibition, which maintains as far as possible his choice to display chronologically around 250 of his projects without distinctions between discipline or medium. Mari's curatorial decision was intended to allow visitors to see the continuous interconnections between his research and work.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 16

2008

CHRONOLOGY OF THE GLOBAL PROJECT AND ITS SEMANTIC CELEBRATION THE ART OF DESIGN

Fondazione Torino Musei decided to mark Turin's designation as World Design Capital in 2008 with a large retrospective devoted to Mari to be held at GAM, Turin. A Global Project including curatorship, exhibition design and catalogue, completely designed and realised by his studio. The initial hypothesis was that Mari would identify some twenty incisive projects that would be displayed in a niche, a small altar-like plinth, which would have a shelf with an iconographic description of the developments of the research. Mari decided to change direction, abandoning the hypothesis of the twenty project icons, he expanded the selection in order to form the definitive corpus of the 250. Twenty-odd works were accompanied by a "framed group" containing a series of iconographic references that would help visitors to understand the subtleties of these projects. The author envisaged a revolutionary solution for the catalogue design, he chose to open the volume with a flow of illustrations, excluding captions, with the exception of the date of conception of the project. During the course of his research activity, Mari realised almost 2,000 projects. He preferred not to divide his work by research field, adopting the same approach for the exhibition path, where the chronological order of the works reveals the continuous interconnection between different types of research.

The works arising out of the need to investigate the form or to contest reality (*) were displayed chronologically along the exhibition path in a constant correlation to the works arising out of a request and discussions with manufacturing companies or other bodies (●).

The exhibition pathway ended with *Allegoria della morte* (Allegory of death) and a large photograph of the 200 artisans in the Hida factory. Mari considered this group of projects as an allegorical reference to the awareness that while a large part of these products was necessary for daily life, it was even more necessary to consent the survival of those who had to work to produce them.

Francesca Giacomelli

* Catalogues for the exhibition *L'arte del design* ('The art of design'), 2008

Published by Federico Motta Editore, Milan

Private collection

* Invitation to the exhibition *L'arte del design* ('The art of design'), 2008

Private collection

* Invitation to the conference *Che fare del design* ('What to do with design'), 2008

Private collection

* Booklet (back and front) for the exhibition L'arte del design ('The art of design'),
2008
Private collection

* Sketch for the cover of the catalogue for the exhibition L'arte del design ('The art of design'), 2008
Graphite on paper
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Early sketches of the layout for the exhibition L'arte del design ('The art of design'), 2008
Graphite on paper
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

MARI IN THE MAKING

Mari was born in Novara, Italy, in 1932 to a working-class family. He moved to Milan in childhood, where he spent the rest of his life. Leaving school to work and support his family, Mari later enrolled at the Brera Academy of Fine Art, where prior qualifications were not a requirement. In his twenties, relentlessly inquisitive, he strove to understand the essence of form, seeking answers by trial and error. He developed a working method grounded in rigorous research and experimentation, out of which grew many of the key principles that guided his later work. During these formative years, Milan was being reconstructed after the Second World War. It was fertile ground for industrialists and entrepreneurs, many of whom were open to experimental and innovative ideas. They became important collaborators for a new generation of designers.

INTERROGATING FORM AND PERCEPTION

At Brera Academy of Fine Art, Mari first attended courses on painting, sculpture and decorative arts, before enrolling in stage design. Taken by the mastery of early Renaissance artists such as Giotto, he devoted himself to studying the formal perfection of their work. He experimented with the effects of colour, form and depth on perception – first in paintings, and then in three-dimensional works.

Likening these elements to a language with a grammar, he strove to learn it and put it to use in communicating his ideas visually and as clearly as possible. By the late 1950s, Mari was establishing himself as an artist.

Research methods

Whilst at Brera Academy of Fine Art, Mari set out to analyse the effects of light on our perception of colour, volume and three-dimensional space. To that end, he constructed small-scale instruments consisting of a coned chamber, various screens and cubes measuring seven centimetres per side – the average distance between the pupils of human eyes. This research informed his first-year thesis, and an array of work including the paintings and structures shown nearby.

* Instruments to research the relations between colour and volume, 1952

Photograph by Paolo Monti

* First-year thesis notes on the mutual influences between colour and volume, 1952

Etching

Private collection

* Painting 102, 1952

Encaustic paint on panel

Private collection

* Painting 109, 1952

Tempera on panel

Private collection

* Painting 119, 1953

Paint on panel

Massimo Minini Gallery

* La città giardino ('The garden city'), 1954

Tempera on paper

Private collection

* Structure 245, 1956

Oil on masonite

Private collection

* Structure 301, 1956

Tempera on card

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz and Bruno Danese

* Structure 305, 1956

Tempera on card and wood

Private collection

* Structure 468, 1959

Brass

Private collection

* Oggetto a composizione autocondotta ('Self-composed object'), 2006

As this art object is turned, the repeated elements of triangles, squares and rhombi fall to create ever-different combinations, dictated by gravity. With this work, Mari wished to communicate the idea of harmonious perfection in nature, thinking at the time about how gravity shapes landscapes into new forms, as during a landslide. With each turn, new compositions reach perfect equilibrium within the frames of this work.

Wood, glass

Produced by MAT Edizioni, edition of a 1959 original

Private collection

From paper to structure

Drawing and sketching were important stages in Mari's process, seen here with his designs and calculations that informed works nearby and in the next room.

His method involved constructing comparative models, noting observations, drawing freehand and plotting patterns into grids. Referring to this as 'programming', Mari created sequences using numbers and colours. When translated into material form, these would create different visual effects.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 1

1952-1968

INVESTIGATIONS INTO PERCEPTIVE AMBIGUITIES INSTRUMENTS FOR POLYSEMANTIC GRAMMARS: GRID, MODULE, STRUCTURE, PROGRAMME, ENVIRONMENT, CODE

These are some of the coordinates useful for an understanding of the nuances of research that were translated into a programming of art (Programmed Art) and the roots of the method characterising all of the research processes undertaken by Mari. To this end, he writes that “the concept of programme first becomes the backbone then the final objective of my work”.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH INTO RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COLOUR AND VOLUME: INSTRUMENTS AND MODEL SEQUENCES

In order to pursue his investigation into the phenomenology of three-dimensional space and its relationship to its surroundings – its environment – Mari creates the instruments that can be reused to analyse the relationships between colour and volume, in other words, the observation of the coloured surfaces determining a volume. The method used to pursue this research involved building identical environmental models, applying different colours to their internal surfaces and then noting the variations emerging from the observation and comparison of these models. The Instruments for

research into relationships between colour and volume (1952) and the thesis on the Reciprocal influences on relationships between colour and volume (1952), would form the grammar for future experiments. The work should be observed in terms of the evolution of the single cubic modules. The instruments comprise a visor and a system of 7 cm cubes; each three-dimensional model is an independent virtual environment. The ideal condition for the verification of this research would be the construction of real environments that could be physically entered by the observers but, in order to contain the costs of his research, Mari was forced to create scale models with dimensions (7 cm per side) corresponding to the average distance between human pupils, an indispensable condition for the perception of depth. Examples of these verifications are Struttura 244 (1955), Struttura 245 (1956), Struttura 249 (1956), Struttura 250 (1956), Struttura 301 (1956), Struttura 315 (1956).

Francesca Giacomelli

* Preliminary study for Structure 244, 1955
Tempera on paper
Private collection

* Study for Structure 249, 1956
Felt-tip pen, ink and graphite on paper
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for Structure 250, 1956

Graphite, ink and felt-tip pen on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for Structure 114, 1953

Felt-tip pen and graphite on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Notes for the programming of Structures, early 1960s

Ink and graphite on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Diagrams comparing colour and volume for Structure 301, 1956

Felt-tip pen, ink and graphite on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Model for programming Structures, early 1960s

Card

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for Structure 315, 1957

Graphite and ink on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for Structure 725, 1963

Felt-tip pen on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for Structure 795, 1965

Graphite, pencil and ink on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Early study for Structure 795, 1965

Graphite and pencil on paper with tracing paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for Structure 793, 1965

Felt-tip pen and graphite on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

RESEARCH PLATFORM 1

1952-1968

INVESTIGATIONS INTO PERCEPTIVE AMBIGUITIES
INSTRUMENTS FOR POLYSEMANTIC GRAMMARS:
GRID, MODULE, STRUCTURE, PROGRAMME,
ENVIRONMENT, CODE

RELATION OF DEPTH OR DIMENSION

“By varying the depth of a three-dimensional space, you also vary its environmental perception”. This premise gave rise to a new line of research in which the models of comparison no longer maintained their original characteristics, becoming diversified and progressively varying the dimensions relative to depth, as revealed by Struttura 725 (1963), Struttura 726 (1963), Struttura 728 (1963), Struttura 1059 (1964) and Struttura 862 (1967). In order to broaden this research, Mari created a new Strumento per le relazioni di profondità (Instrument for relations of depth) (1965).

THEMATIC VARIATIONS

In order to exemplify the verification of his research, Mari created a series of models made up of the programmed aggregation of prefabricated modular elements. During the verification phase, the aggregation property of the prefabricated elements – their modularity – allowed him to discover the potential of unforeseen relationships implicit in their structure. The thematic variations of

these exemplifications include Struttura 793 (1965), Struttura 795 (1965) and all the structures made from prefabricated anodised aluminium modules (some of which have already been mentioned, like Struttura 725, Struttura 726, Struttura 728, etc.).

GOLDEN OR SYNAESTHETIC SERIES

In these first research studies, Mari tried out the programming potential of the golden ratio in two-dimensional pictorial representation. The objective was to make an artwork that could be experienced diachronically (in space and time), in the same way as music; the surface of the painting features successions of golden modules whose ambition it is to visually portray the passing of time. Examples of these works are Pittura 109 (1952), Pittura 114 (1953), Pittura 116 (1953).

Francesca Giacomelli

Invitation to Mari's debut exhibition, Esperimenti colore-volume ('Colour-volume experiments') held at Studio B24, Milan, 1957
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Enzo Mari, 1959

This monograph demonstrates Mari's ascent as an artist, and the alliances he was building with like-minded practitioners. It features texts by Swiss graphic designer Max Bill and Italian artist and designer Bruno Munari, and contains a folding artwork by Mari known as Structure 463. Mari visited and spent time with Bill, and they gifted works to one another. In his essay, Bill writes that Mari thought creatively and built logically.

Max Bill, Bruno Munari

Printed by Muggiani, Milan

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

A seminal exhibition

In 1962, Italian manufacturer Olivetti organised 'Programmed art. Kinetic art. Multiplied works. Open work' at its showrooms in Milan, Venice and Rome. This was the first exhibition to bring together artists involved in these movements, one of whom was Mari. Writer and philosopher Umberto Eco wrote in the catalogue, 'here, form, art and beauty were no longer something immobile, waiting to be seen, but something in the process of "becoming" while we watched it'. The exhibition toured nationally and internationally for three years.

Catalogue for the exhibition Arte programmata. Arte cinetica. Opere moltiplicate. Opera aperta ('Programmed art. Kinetic art. Multiplied works. Open work') held at the Olivetti showrooms in Milan, Venice and Rome, 1962
Published by Officina d'Arte Grafica A. Lucini e C., Milan
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Booklet for the exhibition Arte programmata. Arte cinetica. Opere moltiplicate. Opera aperta ('Programmed Art. Kinetic Art. Multiplied works. Open work') held at the Olivetti showrooms in Milan, Venice and Rome 1962
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Invitation to the exhibition Enzo Mari held at Galleria UXA, Novara, 1974

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Booklet for the exhibition Enzo Mari held at Centro Arte Viva, Libreria Feltrinelli, Trieste, 1966

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Booklet for the exhibition Enzo Mari held at Studio 2B, Bergamo, 1967

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

EXPERIMENTAL MANUFACTURING

Mari's entry into industrial design came in 1958, when he met Bruno Danese and Jacqueline Vodoz, founders of manufacturer Danese Milano. In them, he found kindred spirits who shared his passion and who would platform his research for many decades.

For his early domestic objects, Mari used simple industrial tools like circular saws and techniques such as welding, applied to semi-finished products like metal sheets and beams. He sought to reveal their material qualities, keeping his interventions to a minimum. To him, these elements – the building blocks of modernity – were perfect because of their essential form and held within them all possibilities for construction.

* Benbecula paperknife, 1961

Stainless steel

Produced by Danese Milano

Private collection

● Ameland paperknife, 1962

Satin steel

Produced by Danese Milano

Danese Milano

Studies in metal

Mari's first containers and trays for Danese are a celebration of raw industrial product and techniques. In the Ferri Saldati ('Welded Iron') series, the informal welding of the seams between iron plates is left bare, saving on costs and becoming itself the sole decoration. The Putrella ('Girder') series results from Mari's experimentation with different iron sections: with the slightest intervention, for example by curving the ends of a beam upwards, a unit of construction becomes a tray. Other objects from this series can be seen in the opposite plinth.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 2

1958–1973

DESIGN

EXPLORING THE LINGUISTIC CODES OF MACHINES: EXPERIMENTAL MANUFACTURING

While still exploring the subject of perceptual ambiguity, in 1958 Mari initiated a new research on experimental manufacturing based on the adoption of new linguistic codes: the codes of mechanical utensils, of industrial techniques and tools, as opposed to the traditional codes of artisanal manufacturing. Mari explored the nature of materials, designing experimental objects made of metal, marble, structural steel and semi-finished products. With this kind of research, Mari set out to prove the economical ratio of using industrial equipment and semi-finished products within the framework of artisanal manufacturing, while also highlighting the formal value of this practice.

PROJECT 419 A, WELDED STRUCTURAL STEEL BOWLS, FERRI SALDATI SERIES

This is Mari's first design project. Danese required a bowl and Mari came up with the idea of using iron because he was interested in learning about this material's working techniques. His research started from semi-finished products: structural steel and iron section bars. In the Ferri saldati (Welded metals) series, the economical quality of technology guided the working of the material: the machine cutting structural sheet sections and the worker's hand welding the parts together without removing imperfections and burrs (welding residues). This choice cut production costs; Mari wanted to transform imperfection such as a brass weld-seam with no surface finishing into a decorative element, into a positive quality.

PROJECT 419 B, IRON SECTION BAR CONTAINERS, PUTRELLA SERIES

In this second research on iron section bars, the formal combinations and functional solutions were inspired by the shapes obtained from the various sections: this was exactly the formal worth of semi-finished products that Mari wanted to highlight. One of these models was the Putrella: an iron I-beam section where the designer's intervention consisted in slightly bending the extremities upwards, thus creating a bowl. Mari said: "for better or worse, this is the Allegory of design".

PROJECT 745, NEW PROPOSALS FOR HANDMADE MARBLE PRODUCTS. VASES FROM THE PAROS SERIES

This line of research aimed to reduce work on the semi-finished product to the minimum, letting the formal quality inherent to the material express itself as much as possible, leading to the creation of a series of vases whose shapes can be read as a geometrical epiphany of formal purity; expert incisions that look as if they had been made by the hands of a sculptor, but which in reality are basic curved incisions made with a circular saw.

Francesca Giacomelli

* Containers from Ferri Saldati ('Welded Iron') series, 1958

Brass-welded iron plates

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

* Container C from Putrella ('Girder') series, 1958

Iron, varnish

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

MARI AND DANESE

“In 1958 Bruno Munari mentioned me to Bruno Danese, who came to see me. Instant harmony: he is a young man of my age, curious, passionate. He fell in love at first sight with the Game of 16 Animals and the fruits of my artistic research, of which he became a collector. It is thanks to that lucky encounter that my vocation has the chance to express itself and turn into a full-time job [...]”, “[...] We immediately became friends. For us, design is not one of the many commodities in circulation, but the place to transform and dignify human work. We discuss everything, what to do, how to promote the pieces, with which displays and exhibitions, how to articulate the production catalogue [...]”, “[...] In the forty years since, I have not met another entrepreneur of such intense quality. In retrospect, I believe there are two types of entrepreneur: one, the most common, believes that a product is only the tool needed to make money, and with this category it is unthinkable to make a good object. The other, on the other hand, thinks that commercial success is necessary, because it enables one to nurture a sincere passion for the work. In that case, it is more likely to make something decent. [...]”,

Quotes selected by Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese, and taken from E. Mari, *25 modi per piantare un chiodo* (‘25 ways to drive a nail’), (Milan: Mondadori), 2011

* Technical drawings for Ferri Saldati ('Welded Iron') series, 1960

Radex copy

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Technical drawing for container A from Putrella ('Girder') series, 1958

Radex copy

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Technical drawing for vase L from Paros series, 1964

Radex copy

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Catalogue for the exhibition Quaranta vasi di ferro di Enzo Mari ('Forty iron vases by Enzo Mari') held at Galleria Danese, Milan, 1959

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Container B from Putrella ('Girder') series, 1958

Iron

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

* Container A from Putrella ('Girder') series, 1958

Iron

Produced by Danese Milano

Danese Milano

● Arran container, 1960

Anodised aluminium sheet

Produced by Danese Milano, reissued by Alessi in 1997

Triennale Milano

Art multiples, industrial materials

These resin paperweights are some of Mari's earliest limited art multiples. In resin, he found an industrial material with properties that lent themselves to experimentation. He made the material either opaque or transparent, screen-printed its surfaces, or contained smaller volumes within larger ones. In this way, these paperweights are a continuation of Mari's research into the perception of space.

* Progression of three, 1959

Phenolic resin

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

* Relation of four, 1959

Phenolic resin

Produced by Danese Milano

Triennale Milano

* Large sphere A, 1959

Serigraphed polyester resin

Produced by Danese Milano

Private collection

* Large cylinder P, 1959

Serigraphed polyester resin

Produced by Danese Milano

Triennale Milano

* Large cube P, 1959
Serigraphed polyester resin
Produced by Danese Milano
Private collection

● Citera box, 1960
Stainless steel, wood
Produced by Danese Milano
Danese Milano

● Ventotene pencil and paper holder, 1962
Stainless steel
Produced by Danese Milano
Danese Milano

● Borneo ashtray, 1966
Melamine plastic
Produced by Danese Milano
Triennale Milano

● Lampedusa pencil holder, 1961
Extruded aluminium
Produced by Danese Milano
Private collection

DISCOVERY THROUGH PLAY

During the early stage of his career, Mari became a father. Struck by the speed at which children absorb knowledge through trial and error, he often said the Nobel Prize should be awarded to two-year-olds. Among his first projects were games and books for children that he designed with his first wife Gabriela (Iela) Ferrario and brother Elio. Observing his own children, Agostina and Michele, Mari saw that the more freedom they had at play, the greater their enjoyment. His designs featured simplified forms and granted children autonomy to perpetually create and reinvent stories. He believed that by fostering the creative potential in children, they would be better able to envision a new society as adults.

● 16 Animali ('16 Animals') interlocking game, 1959

Mari designed this puzzle in 1957 and Danese put it into production two years later. It was the first time they offered designs for children. Sixteen animals, recognisable only through their outlines, are cut in one continuous line from a single piece of wood. They can be assembled into a puzzle or played with individually, as their 3cm thickness allows them to be freestanding.

Wood

Produced by Danese Milano

Danese Milano

● Il gioco delle favole ('The fable game'), 1965

The six panels that make up this game depict animals from classic fables such as a wolf, and markers of time, such as the sun. Without rules, the game encourages children to construct their own stories by interlocking the panels to create different scenes. Mari took great care over the images, simplifying forms to their most recognisable. Related process material can be seen nearby.

Serigraphed PVC plastic

Produced by Danese Milano, reissued by Corraini in 2004
Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

A selection of Mari's games for children, assembled 2008

This framed object is one of several that Mari assembled for his 2008 retrospective in Turin, and which he referred to as cornicette ('little frames'). They contain selected material to represent groups of projects or details of individual projects he was otherwise unable to show. Several others are present throughout the exhibition.

Photographs by Toni Nicolini © Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

CHILDREN'S GAMES

1959 *

“Il Gioco delle favole” (The fable game) with Elio Mari, first version in screenprinted PVC and later in cardboard, Danese. Re-edited by Corraini in 2004.

1961 *

“L'altalena” (The swing), children's book, Danese, re-edited by Corraini in 2001.

1957 *

“16 animali”, (16 animals) detail. 1961 “Il posto dei giochi” (The game space), sheet in ribbed cardboard, Danese, re-edited by Corraini in 2004.

1973 ●

“16 pesci” (16 fishes), with Elio Mari, polyurethane, Danese. 1968 “The big stone game”, eight stone slabs circumscribe a perimeter of five meters to create a playground.

1976 *

“Living”, learning game, published by Danese: use writing or drawing to represent the situations defined randomly by the 96 special cards contained in the box.

1975 ●

“Carte da disegno” (Drawing cards), the complete series consists of five booklets containing six sheets each, 98x17 cm, Danese, reissued by Corraini in 1999.

Translation of text inside ‘little frame’

► Turn to nearest table behind

The making of ‘The fable game’

To design this game, Mari carried out detailed form and colour studies of each drawn element. He took into consideration the possible interrelations between them, that could occur during play. Each double-sided card has one main illustration and two secondary images, designed to generate infinite dialogues with the other cards. He began work on the game eight years before it went into production, and several versions have since been made, with differing formats, materials and printing techniques.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 4

1957

TOYS FOR CHILDREN

APPROPRIATION OF THE VIRTUAL SPACE OF PLAY

PROJECT 346/769/785/1060, IL GIOCO DELLE FAVOLE

This game, The fable game, has no rules, each player can make his own. It is composed of six interlocking panels, each printed on both sides, with pictures of 45 animals, one nest, two eggs, one apple, nine bamboo canes, eight trees, a log, a pile of earth, and five stones. Human presence is significantly represented by a cage, a gun and an umbrella. The only illustrations related to time are a sun and a moon (day and night).

Every panel has one central illustration and two minor pictures on the sides, somewhat suggesting the idea of a potential stage. By interlocking the panels, a theatre-like setting appears. The composition of each “scene” may immediately recall a well-known fable archetype, while also prompting the child to make new connections between the characters, modifying the story or inventing a completely new one.

When two panels are interlocked together, the lateral scenes are inevitably modified: one secondary character or scene is left out hidden by the perpendicularly intersecting panel, and a new character enters the scene introducing new narrative relations or a new story altogether. While piecing together a story using their imagination, children see their creativity manifest itself in a tangible

structure, a maze-like jigsaw puzzle filled with images and symbols.

The hardest aspect in designing the The fable game was the definition and the drawing of the single pictures.

This research on iconographic simplification towards the essence of form led to the development of La Serie della Natura (Nature series), 1961–76, in collaboration with Elio Mari.

PROJECT 575/606/790/1101/1102/1206, LA SERIE DELLA NATURA

Mari selected some of the subjects included in the The fable game, such as the apple, the panther, the wolf, the lion, etc. to make high-quality low-cost multiples.

Francesca Giacomelli

● Printing drafts for panels for the black and white 12-panel lithographed and laminated cardboard version of *Il gioco delle favole* ('The fable game'), 1957
Lithograph and graphite on card
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Colour chart for *Il gioco delle favole* ('The fable game'), 1957

Ink and graphite on card

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Booklet for the exhibition *Il gioco delle favole* ('The fable game') held at Galleria Danese, 1965

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Colour studies with handwritten notes for *Il gioco delle favole* ('The fable game'), 1957

Ink and graphite on plastic-coated card

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Printing draft for the packaging cover for the 12-panel black and white lithographed and laminated cardboard version of *Il gioco delle favole* ('The fable game'), 1967

Lithograph, graphite and ink on card with tracing paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Printing draft for the packaging cover for *Il gioco delle favole* ('The fable game'), 1965

Lithograph, graphite and ink on card with tracing paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Learning through illustration

‘The apple and the butterfly’ was the first of two picture books that Mari and his first wife Gabriela (Iela) Ferrario created to aid children’s understanding of the symbiotic relationship between nature and life cycles. Here, drafts and sketches show the refining of illustrations that depict each stage in a caterpillar’s journey through life. In the first edition, pages were deliberately un-numbered and spiral bound with no beginning or end, evoking the cyclical nature of seasons and life.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 3

1958

TOYS FOR CHILDREN

INDEPENDENT EXPERIMENTATION: THE DISCOVERY OF THE WORLD

In Mari’s vision, design aimed at the creation of toys for children must take into account the sacred ritual of unrestrained fantasy.

For children, self-designing their own universe with its unique set of rules, inventing a personal alphabet, and creating codes instrumental to the narration of their systems, are actions that initiate an evolutionary journey that will lead them, as adults, to envision a project for a new society. If “discovering the world and working out one’s own behaviour within it is the condition of childhood”¹ in the framework of a technological civilisation that violates

and hides the primordial elements of nature (hence of life) and disrupts and modifies its rhythm and cycles, before designing any learning tools we must first design poetic tools that children may use to understand reality around them.

The objective is not that of replicating childsize everyday microcosms but rather fuelling the children's creative potential for them to learn to design new worlds, and perhaps, even a new society.

¹ E. Mari, *Funzione della ricerca estetica* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunita, 1970), p. 90

Francesca Giacomelli

* *La mela e la farfalla* ('The apple and the butterfly'), 1960
Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario
Published by Bompiani, republished by Emme Edizioni in 1969 and currently by Babalibri
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Printing drafts for *La mela e la farfalla* ('The apple and the butterfly'), 1958
Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario
Print on paper
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Sketches for La mela e la farfalla ('The apple and the butterfly'), 1958

Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario

Graphite on tissue paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for the apple for La mela e la farfalla ('The apple and the butterfly'), 1958

Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario

Tempera, ink and graphite on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Studies for the butterfly for La mela e la farfalla ('The apple and the butterfly'), 1958

Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario

Tempera, ink and graphite on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* La mela e la farfalla ('The apple and the butterfly'), 1969

Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario

Published by Emme Edizioni

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Mapping life cycles

Through striking graphics and unusual compositions, 'The chicken and the egg' tells the story of a hen laying and hatching an egg, and a baby chick growing into a chicken. These sketches and storyboards show the development of the illustrations and overall design. Following these publications, Mari's first wife Gabriela (Iela) Ferrario continued to create children's books independently.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 3

1958

TOYS FOR CHILDREN

INDEPENDENT EXPERIMENTATION: THE DISCOVERY OF THE WORLD

To help children discover and understand reality around them, Enzo Mari and Iela Mari (Gabriela Ferrario), the authors of *La mela e la farfalla* (The apple and the butterfly) and *L'uovo e la gallina* (The chicken and the egg), created a series of illustrated books about nature and its cycles. Intended for children who still do not know how to read, these books contain no text.

In their first edition, these booklets came in the size of an apple. and, to assure a direct and consistent visual experience, all illustrations, page after page, maintained the same size to convey the notion of a detail being part of a bigger picture.

The book *La mela e la farfalla* (The apple and the butterfly) has no cover, since it has no beginning and no end (just like the cycle of nature, the sequence of the seasons, birth, life and death), and the unnumbered pages are kept together with a spiral binding so that the child can leaf through the book starting every time from a different page.

Francesca Giacomelli

* *L'uovo e la gallina* ('The chicken and the egg'), 1969

Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario

Published by Emme Edizioni, first issued by Bompiani in 1959

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Studies for the cover of *L'uovo e la gallina* ('The chicken and the egg'), 1959

Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario

Tempera, ink and graphite on card

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Draft storyboard for *L'uovo e la gallina* ('The chicken and the egg'), 1959

Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario

Xerox copy

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Mock-up of L'uovo e la gallina ('The chicken and the egg'), 1959

Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario

Ink, felt-tip pen and graphite on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Storyboards for the Bompiani edition of L'uovo e la gallina ('The chicken and the egg'), 1959

Enzo Mari, Gabriela Ferrario

Tempera, ink and graphite on paper with tracing paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Iconic prints

Mari was drawn to the idea of the multiple, an affordable art object produced in greater numbers and thus more accessible. With his brother Elio, he turned subjects from 'The fable game' into high-quality, low-cost prints known as Serie della Natura ('The Nature Series'). These resulted from making hundreds of drawings and distilling details of each subject to their most essential. Mari stated that 'it mustn't be an apple, but rather the apple. It must be the concept of the apple'. A number of prints are still in production over half a century later.

Uno, la Mela ('One, the Apple'), 1961

Due, la Pera ('Two, the Pear'), 1961

Quattro, la Pantera, ('Four, the Panther'), 1964

Cinque, il Lupo ('Five, the Wolf'), 1964

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Silk-screen print on texilina paper

Produced by Danese Milano

Danese Milano

One calendar for life

Still in production, these infinitely reusable calendars are among Mari's most iconic designs. Formosa's date is set by selecting the month and day from a deck of plastic cards hanging from an aluminium back-plate. Timor's date is set from a fan of plastic strips of different sizes, attached to a plastic base.

● Formosa wall calendar, 1963

Anodised aluminium, lithographed PVC plastic

Produced by Danese Milano

Danese Milano

● Timor table calendar, 1966

PVC plastic, lithographed ABS plastic

Produced by Danese Milano

Danese Milano

Clockwise from top:

* Vases H, B, AY and L from the Paros series, 1964

For this project, titled 'New proposals for the hand craftsmanship of marble', Mari employed new marble-cutting machinery. He made incisions into volumes with a circular saw to remove different portions, defining the object's form through a process of reduction. Many of Mari's designs for Danese are named after islands, in this case the Greek island of Paros.

Marble

Produced by Danese Milano, reissued by UpGroup in 1986
UpGroup (vases L, AY), Danese Milano (vases B, H)

► Wall behind

● Atollo fruit bowl, 1965

Vacuum pressed PVC plastic

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

EXPANDING A PRACTICE

Into the 1960s, Mari became an established artist and designer, prolific in his work for Danese and participating in international contemporary art events. In these years, he met the art critic and curator Lea Vergine, with whom he would become life partners. Mari's interrogation of materials continued, and the form of his work was determined by its function and method of production. His designs were also concerned with durability and multifunctionality.

At the same time, Italy's economy boomed with the United States' postwar financial aid, under the Marshall Plan. As industry shifted towards mass production, Mari, like many designers across Europe, looked to plastics and technical innovations to create inexpensive products in large quantities. An exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1972 titled *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* marked the international acclaim of Italian design at this time.

► On plinth behind

● Camicia ('Shirt') vases, 1961

Glass, aluminium cylinder

Produced by Danese Milano

Triennale Milano (left), Danese Milano (right)

► Turn clockwise to the right

PROGRAMMED ART

Mari began to create contained environments made up of modular components, developing his early research on perception into a more sculptural practice. He 'programmed' smaller volumes into larger 'Structures' or grids in infinite combinations, generating visual effects that change according to the viewer's movement. Known as Programmed Art, this work formed part of a broader wave of movements emerging in the late 1950s-60s. Artists aimed to democratise visual research, play with perception, and engage with science, technology and material innovation. Mari, among other artists such as Julio Le Parc and Heinz Mack, was linked to an artistic network and movement originating in Zagreb, Croatia, known as New Tendencies.

► Plinth behind

* Structure 744, 1964

Aluminium, iron, brass

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

* Instrument to research depth variations, 1965

* View of steel and anodised aluminium installation

Ambiente Torviscosa ('Torviscosa Environment'),

designed for an archive centre, Torviscosa, 1963

Photograph by Ferruzzi

* Structure 795, 1965
PVC plastic tubes
Private collection

* Structure 735, 1963
Anodised aluminium
Daniella Betta

* Structure 918, 1968
Anodised aluminium
Private collection

* Specosfera, 1965
PVC plastic, mirror, iron
Private collection

● Serie Elementare ('Elementary Series') tiles, 1968

When commissioned to design a range of decorative tiles, Mari's intention was to create something that withstood changing trends. His design consists of 30 different tiles with lines and dots of varying dimensions, in a pared-back colour palette, intended to be used in different combinations by the user. The potential for adaptation inherent in the product afforded it great success.

Ceramic
Produced by Gabbianelli
Triennale Milano

Questioning the meaning of art

Writer and philosopher Umberto Eco described the installation *Module 856* as 'a device to test the reactions of a contemporary art exhibition viewer'. Designed for the 1967 San Marino Biennale, it comprised a survey written by Eco and a wooden cubicle with a mirrored interior that visitors placed their upper body in. The work urged participants to question the notion of artistic value, reflecting Eco's own disenchantment with the culture of contemporary art. He later refused to participate in a number of international art fairs.

* Installation view of *Modulo 856* ('Module 856'), 1967

Article by Umberto Eco titled Che cosa ha fatto Mari per la Biennale di San Marino ('What Mari has done for the San Marino Biennale'), 1967
Domus, no. 453

Translation of the original survey:

Please underline the answer you agree with.
The results of this survey will be published;
the material will be consulted by those involved.
Forms can also be signed.

What is this object?

- a) it is a work of art
- b) it is not a work of art
- c) it is a device for psychological experiments

Do you like it?

- x) I like it
- y) I do not like it
- z) it irritates me

What does it mean?

- 1) it is the highpoint of Pop Art: due to the persistent practice of isolating and displaying real objects as works of art, now the viewer is induced to consider himself, his half-length image, as a painting.
- 2) it is the highpoint of Op Art: the viewer is totally free to determine the movements of the artwork he is observing, in this case the reflection of his own image produced

with the most common optical illusion.

3) it is the most accomplished fusion of Op and Pop Art: a display of the viewer himself, a real object with the highest level of mobility.

4) it is a complete return to figuration.

5) it is a satire of neo-figurative claims.

6) it is an invitation to re-evaluate man.

7) it mocks, taking them by their word, those who complain that contemporary art lacks human presence.

8) it is based on the myth of Narcissus.

9) it quotes the motto of the Temple of Delphi, "know thyself".

10) it is intended as a provocation, drawing the viewer's attention back to himself as opposed to the "distraction" caused by the other artworks on display.

11) it is an act of protest against art exhibitions.

12) it wants to make the spectator feel uncomfortable.

13) it is the amusement of those who accept art exhibitions as they are.

14) other.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 8
1967

ALLEGORY

“DEVICE TO TEST THE REACTIONS OF A
CONTEMPORARY ART EXHIBITION VIEWER”

* 1967

Francesca Giacomelli

Scientific thought, scientific design

Mari's graphic design work extended to publications such as books and magazines, posters and branding. For publisher Boringhieri, he designed covers for their scientific titles, published under a series named *Universale Scientifica* ('Universal Scientific'). Mari employed a bold and simple graphic language, based on a grid of twelve squares populated by repeated or fragmented images. His designs shared an affinity with his Programmed Art works, and his approach mirrored the scientific thought and processes of the books' authors; among them Carl Jung and Albert Einstein.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 6

1965

BOOK DESIGN

THE ALGORITHM THAT GENERATES ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAMMING

PROJECT 765 (FIRST BOOK COVER PROJECT), COVER OF THE UNIVERSALE SCIENTIFICA BORINGHIERI BOOK COLLECTION

The initial pattern and the first book cover date to 1965. In this project, we find once again the themes of structure and modular programming, the codes that Mari developed in his early research in the field of perceptual ambiguity. The structure that characterised the first

pattern from which the final cover image was generated – or, better said, programmed – was composed of a regular grid dividing the space into twelve squares. Depending on the contents of each book, Mari used to define the final programme that factorised, structured and multiplied the images that were to appear on the book covers. In this context, the programme did not develop into three-dimensional relations set into real space, such as in his Programmed Art Structures, but occupied only a two-dimensional virtual space, in the perpetual reorganisation of images deriving from the original one that constitutes the programme's modular reference.

Mari's structure, programme, and verification process established an allegorical analogy with scientific thought, the very subject addressed by this specific book collection, based on analysis, complexity, comparison, demonstration, process, etc.

Francesca Giacomelli

● Printing proofs for covers for the Universale Scientifica ('Universal Scientific') series, 1980
Lithographs, ink and graphite on card
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Introduzione alla filosofia della scienza ('An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science')
by Karel Lambert and Gordon G. Brittan Jr., 1981
Published by Bollati Boringhieri, Turin
Private collection

● L'evoluzione della fisica ('The Evolution of Physics')
by Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld, 1963
Published by Bollati Boringhieri, Turin
Private collection

● La Storia Naturale ('The Nature of Natural History')
by Marston Bates, 1970
Published by Bollati Boringhieri, Turin
Private collection

● Il pensiero matematico ('An Introduction to Mathematical Thought') by Edward Stabler, 1970
Published by Bollati Boringhieri, Turin
Private collection

● Crescita e forma ('On Growth and Form')
by D'arcy W. Thompson, 1992
Published by Bollati Boringhieri, Turin
Private collection

SIMPLIFYING FORM AND PRODUCTION

While industry was focused on mass production, Mari's work was driven by concerns of durability, manufacturing costs and alienation among production line workers. His designs for everyday objects aimed to mine the positive potential of new production methods, to be affordable, long-lasting and multi-functional.

The projects displayed here result from Mari's research into and optimisation of new plastic polymers and industrial techniques, such as vacuum and injection moulding. He often worked with prefabricated industrial parts such as sewage piping, simplifying them to their bare essence. This exemplified his singular pursuit of reduction – both of form and of industrial processes.

Designing spaces and displays

Danese used their showroom to great effect, presenting their products in enticing ways. As the recognition of Italian design grew internationally, the company also promoted their work with travelling exhibitions. To that end, Mari devised low-cost, simple to construct and adaptable display systems. He identified shapes and forms that could be transformed into modular three-dimensional units. Made from corrugated cardboard, these could be bent and stapled into various arrangements according to the exhibition content and needs of the space.

● Linear structure display system in a curved layout designed for Danese's displays, 1965
Jacqueline Vodoz © Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz Bruno Danese

● Display systems and exhibition designs for Danese between 1964 and 1969, assembled 2008
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

CORRUGATED CARDBOARD DISPLAY SYSTEMS Designed for Danese Milano



1965

“Linear-structure display system”, (above) modules, cm 20x70x100

1964

“Cell structure display system”, white cardboard, each cell cm 50x50x50

1966

“Prismatic structure display system”, cardboard module height progression
20 cm

1965

“Trapezoidal cardboard modular display system”, each cardboard module
cm 18x170x100

1969

“Bookcase display system”, die-cut cardboard and vacuum pressed PVC shelves,
cm 40x30x140

Translation of text inside ‘little frame’

RESEARCH PLATFORM 5

1964–1970

DISPLAY SYSTEMS

MODULAR DESIGN: THE PROLIFERATION OF
MODULAR STRUCTURES

PROJECT 815/817/ 818/819/1002, CARDBOARD
MODULAR DISPLAY SYSTEMS FOR DANESE

From 1964 to 1970, Mari designed a series of corrugated cardboard modular self-supporting display systems for the temporary product expositions Danese used to hold in the Piazza San Fedele location in Milan as well as in international museums.

The company needed a solution that could adapt to diverse exhibition contexts, an inexpensive system easy to produce and to assemble with a potential of perceptive

renovation that would complement the display of diverse types of objects in various settings.

Mari immediately focused on corrugated cardboard, a material meeting all the requirements: inexpensive, easy to find, requiring no expensive industrial or artisanal techniques and no particular equipment. Its highly resistant structure, however, is not inherent in the material itself but is assured by the high-density corrugations and cellular aggregation of the single modules that together compose the final display system. The various modules (or cells) made of die-cut sheets of corrugated cardboard were sent to the exhibition location where they were folded into a three-dimensional shape, secured with ordinary metal staples and arranged according to a fixed programme, and then stapled together making the final structure even more resistant. The focal points of this project, i.e. the modules, their programming and the resulting structures, stemmed once again from his research on perceptual ambiguity.

Francesca Giacomelli

● Model for a linear structure display system, 1965
Cardboard on plywood
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Plan of a linear structure display system in a curved layout, 1965
Heliographic copy with graphite and paper
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Sketches for variations of a circular display system, 1966
Graphite, felt-tip pen and ink on paper
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Plan of a display system in an ovular layout with handwritten notes, 1964
Heliographic copy, pencil
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Sketch of a linear structure display module, 1965
Graphite on paper
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Sketch of a trapezoid structure display system, 1965
Graphite on paper
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Sketches of a trapezoid structure display system
with handwritten notes, 1965
Print on paper with graphite
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Selection of other display projects, assembled 2008
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

OTHER DISPLAY PROJECTS



1956

He created the set-up for the exhibition of an art encyclopaedia published by Bompiani. In the following decades EM, in carrying out other exhibitions, will always be consistent with this first project: when a group of objects have that formal quality within them which is the reason for their display, said quality must not be represented with a contrasting pseudo-poetics, where what is exhibited is only the setting and not the object to be exhibited.

1956

He designed the travelling bookstore for the Bompiani publisher. He transformed a truck into a conversation room to spread the existence of the book in the rural/suburban Italian towns, most of which at that time lacked libraries.

1957

He created the graphics for the texts of the exhibition “Il pensiero scientifico in Italia” (the scientific doctrine in Italy), designed by BBPR at the Palazzo Reale in Milan. The exhibition consists almost entirely of texts.

1968

He designed the display case for the Danese showcase for the XIV Milan Triennale dedicated to the Grande Numero (Big number), in white wood, 1200x500 cm.

1963

He created the prismatic structure for an exhibition at the Galleria Danese, Milan.

1965

Architect Achille Castiglioni asked him to carry out a large plastic work for RAI in the external pavilion he designed at the Milan Fiera Campionaria.

Translation of text inside 'little frame'

* Otto, l'Oca ('Eight, the Goose') from Serie della Natura ('The Nature Series'), 1967

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Silk-screen print on texilina paper

Produced by Danese Milano

Private collection

* Preliminary sketches for Otto, l'Oca ('Eight, the Goose') from Serie della Natura ('The Nature Series'), 1967

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Ink on paper

Private collection

An innovative hinge

Mari designed two versions of Java, intended for use as a container for foodstuffs. The 1968 version utilised a technique called injection moulding, which enabled him to integrate the handle and hinge. By simplifying the joint and removing the need for a connecting pin, which would have had to be applied by hand, Mari sought to ease the burden of repetitive gestures on production line workers.

From left to right:

● Java container, 1965

PVC plastic

Produced by Danese Milano

Private collection

● Java containers, 1968

Injection moulded melamine plastic

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

RESEARCH PLATFORM 7

1966

DESIGN

MASS PRODUCTION: THE STANDARDS AND WAYS TO LIMIT EXPRESSIVE OBSOLESCENCE

These were the years in which “large numbers” (the theme of the 1968 Triennale) industry and the dynamics of social transformation dominated the debate in a climate of great political and cultural tension.

Mari believed that the project determinates the whole production cycle and expressing the positive potential of industry.

PROJECT 801, GLIFO, WITH ELIO MARI

Montecatini commissioned Mari to design a bookcase system made up of modular elements. The bookcase had to be simple to assemble and disassemble, without the need for fixings, as well as low-cost, light and resistant. The modules are joined to each other by clicking together the serrated edges formed in the thickness of the walls. Mari was granted an industrial patent for the design of this particular jointing system. He decided to put Glifo on sale in bookshops and chose Dino Gavina to put the project into production.

PROJECT 907, JAVA, 1968 (FIRST VERSION 1965, PROJECT 768)

The first version of Java (1965), which was made from PVC with a semi-artisanal production process, drew upon Mari's formal experiments into semi-finished goods. Mari chose to use injection-moulded melamine for the version of the Java container manufactured by Danese. This technique allowed two of the three parts making the hinge to be made as a single piece, excluding the lid. The invention of this hinge was key to this project because it rationalised the work involved, reducing the number of stages in the production cycle.

Francesca Giacomelli

An innovative joint

Glifo is a modular bookcase consisting of lightweight plastic panels that interlock without the need for fixings. The panels' serrated edges make up the jointing system, for which Mari was granted an industrial patent. Minimising waste material, packaging and production line work, Mari's design was streamlined in its production as well as being affordable. Available directly from bookshops, Glifo could be configured and expanded in many different ways, granting users autonomy and extending the object's lifespan.

● Detail of jointing system in Glifo bookcase, 1966
Photograph by Aldo Ballo

● Variety of configurations of Glifo bookcase, assembled 2008
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Glifo bookcase, 1966
Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Injection moulded ABS plastic
Produced by Gavina
Triennale Milano

GLIFO BOOKCASE

1966 ●

On behalf of Montecatini EM designed the Glifo bookcase. He planned to create three modules (top, side, bottom) in injection-moulded ABS, with which a book reader can compose a bookcase and integrate it with other modules, which can be purchased in book stores, as the volumes increase.

According to the EM project, the library can be assembled and disassembled very easily without the need for tools and joints acquired separately. It must cost little, be very light but very resistant (it can exceed three meters in height). The modules are self-aggregating with indentations that provide, according to their composition, the cross (4 way) joint, horizontal and vertical T (3 way) joint and 2 way joint for the corners. He was granted the industrial patent. The proposal to sell it in bookstores was not understood. EM chose Dino Gavina who edited it: the sale was successful. But after a couple of years Gavina sold his own brand to Knoll, who did not understand the quality of this project and lost the original molds.

The bookcase production was discontinued in 1970. For 40 years the first buyers have been writing to EM asking where they can buy other modules.

Extract from Enzo Mari. *L'arte del design*

● Trifoglio vases, 1969

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Vacuum pressed PVC plastic tubes

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

● Trinidad carafe, 1969

Glass

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

● Bambù vases, 1969

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Vacuum pressed PVC plastic tubes

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

● Tortiglione vase, 1969

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Vacuum pressed PVC plastic tube

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

● Pago-Pago vase, 1969

Comprising two vases in one, Pago-Pago has both a wide and narrow neck, depending on which way up it is stood. To save time inventing titles for his work, Mari and Danese decided to name many of his designs after islands, as is the case with this vase.

Injection moulded ABS plastic

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

● Tongareva bowls, 1969

Melamine plastic

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

Left to right:

● Tricorno Uno coat stand, 1980

Enamelled steel, ABS plastic

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

● Mascarene wastepaper bin with ashtray, 1964

PVC plastic cylinder

Produced by Danese Milano

Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

● Kerguelen coat and umbrella stand, 1967
PVC plastic
Produced by Danese Milano
Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

● Rocco umbrella stand, 1969
Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Vacuum pressed PVC plastic
Produced by Danese Milano
Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

● In attesa bin, 1970
Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Injection moulded polypropylene plastic Produced by
Danese Milano
Danese Milano

Mari in graphics and conversation

Writing, exhibition-making and graphic design were important parts of Mari's working practice. This selection of books and posters includes his own writing and designs, as well as content related to exhibitions he curated or was part of. Next to this display are six interviews recorded by curator Hans Ulrich Obrist. These films shed light on many aspects of Mari's work and thinking.

Arte programmata ('Programmed art'), exhibition held at Olivetti, Düsseldorf, 1963

Private collection

1000 Quadratini ('1000 Little Squares') poster for Olivetti, 1967

Private collection

Ontwerp en Productie ('Design and Production'), exhibition held at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1966

Private collection

Contenir, Regarder, Jouer ('Contain, Watch, Play'), exhibition held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Paris, 1970

Private collection

Un example de design italien ('An example of Italian design'), exhibition held at Musée des arts décoratifs de la Ville, Lausanne, 1973

Private collection

Dov'è l'artigiano ('Where the artisan is'), exhibition held at Fortezza da Basso, Florence, 1981

Private collection

Enzo Mari, exhibition held at the University of Parma Communication Archive, Parma, 1983

Private collection

Arbeiten in Berlin ('Work in Berlin'), exhibition held at Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin, 1996

Private collection

Enzo Mari. Il lavoro al centro ('Enzo Mari. Work at the centre'), exhibition held at Triennale Milano, Milan, 2000

Private collection

Enzo Mari. L'arte del design ('Enzo Mari. The art of design'), exhibition held at the Civic Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, Turin, 2008

Private collection

Lineastruttura, 1966

Leading art critic and curator Lea Vergine was the chief editor of this avant-garde quarterly magazine dedicated to architecture, design and visual art. Through this work she met Mari, who was involved as the magazine's graphic designer. The two later married and remained life partners.

Published by Diaframma editore, Naples
Private collection

I giochi per bambini di Enzo Mari ('Enzo Mari's games for children'), 1969
Published by Scheiwiller, Milan
Private collection

Funzione della ricerca estetica ('Function of aesthetic research'), 1970

This text covers Mari's research and broader design theory, providing insight into his working methods since the 1950s. It is considered fundamental in Mari's body of work and crystallises much of his design research, for which he was awarded the prestigious Compasso d'Oro ('Golden Compass') in 1967.

Enzo Mari

Published by Edizioni di Comunità, Milan

Private collection

Catalogue for the exhibition Falce e martello ('The Hammer and Sickle') held at Galleria Milano, Milan, 1973

Enzo Mari

Published by Edizioni O, Milan

Private collection

Ipotesi di rifondazione del progetto ('Hypothesis for the re-establishment of design'), 1978

This essay was written when Mari was president of Italy's ADI (the Association for Industrial Design). It outlines his stance against designers and the practice of design itself. As his contemporary Alessandro Mendini wrote, the text 'attempted to change the stale structure and give effective guidance to the work of design planners, which is as problematic as ever today'.

Enzo Mari

Published by ADI, Milan

Private collection

Catalogue for the exhibition Dov'è l'artigiano ('Where the artisan is') held at Fortezza da Basso, Florence, 1981

Enzo Mari

Published by Electa, Florence

Private collection

Catalogue for the exhibition *Arte Programmata e cinetica 1953/1963. L'ultima avanguardia ('Programmed and kinetic art 1953/1963. The last avant-garde')* held at Palazzo Reale, Milan, 1983

Lea Vergine was a leading voice in contemporary art discourse. She wrote prolifically across many subject matters, including *Programmed Art*. In 1983 she curated the first exhibition to historicise the movement.

Lea Vergine

Published by Edizioni Mazzotta, Milan

Private collection

Catalogue for the exhibition *Arbeiten in Berlin ('Work in Berlin')* held at Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin, 1996

Published by Skira, Milan

Private collection

Catalogue for the exhibition *Enzo Mari. Il lavoro al centro ('Enzo Mari: Work at the centre')* held at Triennale Milano, Milan, 1999

Antonio d'Avossa, Francesca Picchi

Published by Electa, Milan

Private collection

Progetto e passione ('Design and passion'), 2001

This theoretical text consists of Mari's musings on design. In it, he reflects on the task of designing as an exercise with social purpose, his lifelong project.

Enzo Mari

Published by Bollati Boringhieri, Turin

Private collection

Autoprogettazione? ('Self-design?'), 2002

After a resurgence of interest in Mari's work, the publisher Corraini revisited the catalogue of his seminal 1974 project 'Proposal for a self-design'. They collated the original drawings and instructions for Mari's self-build furniture pieces, together with contemporaneous responses to the work and his own later reflections.

Published by Edizioni Corraini, Mantua

Private collection

Lezioni di disegno. Storie di risme di carte, draghi e struzzi in cattedra ('Drawing lessons. Stories of reams of cards, dragons and ostriches in the classroom'), 2008

Enzo Mari

Published by Rizzoli, Milan

Private collection

Enzo Mari – The Conversation Series, 2008
Hans Ulrich Obrist
Published by Verlag Walther König, Cologne
Private collection

25 modi per piantare un chiodo ('25 ways to drive a nail'),
2011

In Mari's final autobiographical text, he recounts the key projects and events from his life. He signs off on a hopeful note, the last chapter being titled 'The world saved by children'.

Enzo Mari
Published by Arnoldo Mondadori Editori, Milan
Private collection

Catalogue for the exhibition Enzo Mari: eliminare il superfluo per ritrovare l'essenziale ('Enzo Mari: eliminating the superfluous to rediscover the essential') held at Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia, 2015
Francesca Giacomelli, Massimo Minini
Published by Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia
Private collection

In Mari's own words

These conversations were recorded during the frequent visits Obrist made to Mari in Milan, and the panel discussions they took part in together. Since the early 2000s, Obrist has been conducting 'interview marathons' with artists and designers. These long conversations have become an important facet of his practice.

These videos contain explicit language and the views expressed are Mari's own.

Enzo Mari in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, 2004

On the occasion of curator Hans Ulrich Obrist's project Utopia Station in Munich, Mari covers a number of topics, ranging from his views on the status of design, culture, and his beginnings in art.

Filmed by Hans Ulrich Obrist
Triennale Milano
52 minutes 37 seconds

Enzo Mari speaking at the Serpentine Galleries, London, 2006

Mari delivers a lecture on his Living game as part of 'Park Nights', an event series hosted inside the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, London. The 2006 pavilion was designed by Rem Koolhaas.

Triennale Milano

1 hour 16 minutes 28 seconds

Enzo Mari interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Stefano Boeri in his home, 2016

Filmed by Hans Ulrich Obrist

Triennale Milano

9 minutes 37 seconds

In this panel discussion chaired by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Mari recounts the origins of his 'Proposal for a self-design' project, its reception, and his later project 'The puzzle, a user's manual'. The talk formed part of a series organised by Italian architecture and design magazine Abitare.

Enzo Mari speaking at the Triennale Milano, 2009

Filmed by Hans Ulrich Obrist

Courtesy of Hans Ulrich Obrist and Triennale Milano

23 minutes 11 seconds

Enzo Mari speaking in his studio, 2002

Joined in his studio by curators Hans Ulrich Obrist and Angela Vettese, architect Stefano Boeri, and photographers Francesco Jodice and Armin Linke, Mari expresses his views on photography, architecture and education.

Filmed by Hans Ulrich Obrist
Triennale Milano
22 minutes 17 seconds

Enzo Mari speaking at the Polytechnic University of Milan, 2005

Mari articulates his ideas on art and science, as part of an event titled 'Bridge the Gap?'. The second in a series co-curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, designers, artists, scientists and philosophers compare the two disciplines.

Triennale Milano
20 minutes 48 seconds

DESIGNER AS ACTIVIST

Present in much of Mari's work was a questioning of systems, values and purpose. Through his activism – which sought to transform domestic and institutional spheres alike – he gained a reputation as 'design's conscience', an expression coined by his contemporary, the designer Alessandro Mendini. In the 1970s and 1980s, Mari's designs, writing, exhibitions and installations increasingly expressed his opposition to and criticism of the consumer society that had been burgeoning in the 1960s.

Mari's sense of responsibility was perhaps sharpened by the political climate. In 1968, far-reaching student protests in Europe and North America called for a more politically, racially and economically just society. In Italy, this coincided with clashes between the far-right and the far-left that were to last into the late 1980s.

EMPOWERING THE USER

Mari offered designs that were both enduring and versatile, seeking to counter the societal and ecological dangers of our throwaway culture. However, feeling that his work was not impacting society to the extent he desired, he turned his focus to projects that encouraged greater empowerment in users. These invited active participation in the design and construction of objects. Mari believed the users' direct involvement would foster in them a greater understanding of the quality of a design and therefore critical reflection on their consumer choices. In his view, this knowledge would potentially free them from being conditioned by changing trends and tastes.

An important failure

With a simple rotation of a mobile backrest, Day-Night transforms from a sofa into a bed and back. Despite the design's affordability and multifunctionality, it was a commercial failure. Mari reasoned that this was because the public had been conditioned to follow fashions and equate quality with cost. This experience led him to his next project, *Proposta per un'autoprogettazione* ('Proposal for a self-design'), which engaged the public in the production process directly, in the hope they would re-evaluate their judgement of good design.

● Day-Night sofa-bed, 1971

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Steel, die-cast extruded aluminium, polyurethane foam padding, fabric

Produced by Driade

Private collection and Triennale Milano

Views of ● Day-Night sofa-bed, and the complete furniture models from * Proposta per un'autoprogettazione ('Proposal for a self-design'), assembled 2008

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

1970 DAY-NIGHT ● AND 1973 SELF-DESIGN PROPOSAL *

Maddalena De Padova asked EM to design a sofa bed. He designed the model by challenging existing models. De Padova told him that the sofa was beautiful, and that if it actually were mass-manufactured she would buy it for herself; but she decides not to start manufacturing it because “it would be impossible to sell”. A few months later the architect Enrico Astori, founder of Driade, decided to manufacture it and implement effective promotional forms.

Colleagues and critics like the product, but retailers refuse to buy it. (Its price is half less than the competing models ...). In the following months, on three occasions, several intellectuals who were part of the leftist groups (such as Servire il Popolo) declared that they preferred the beds that Italian artisans made in those years for the Arab principles of oil (round, with a marble base, water mattress, Murano glass lamps, etc.).

“I stoically accept the reasons of the retailers. But I cannot accept that people who publicly manifest my own ideals worship the most degraded commodities. How can you influence the customs and habits of ordinary people? If people made a piece of furniture with their own hands, starting from this material experience, they might begin to understand. But I know people own neither the suitable tools, nor the technical culture for it. This is why they choose to use carpenter technology thus quickly creating temporary wooden frames joined by nails. The joints are

rough and coarse but the frame can be reinforced by nailing diagonal elements onto it.”

EM quickly made nineteen models of tables, chairs, shelves, beds, wardrobes. He photographs them and publishes a catalogue with images, drawings and the quantities of wood you need to buy to build them.

He exhibits the material in a first exhibition stating that he will send the booklet with the exercises free of charge to anyone who will mail him the postage. The exhibition is successful. The newspapers “Paese Sera” and “The New York Times” dedicate several pages to him. He received a lot of requests for the “exercises”. Many people wrote, commenting on the project: some architecture students understood (1%); some (10%) rained insults on EM (a designer has to make people’s lives comfortable, I forced them to work); 89% wrote to EM saying that he was very good. (They plan to make many models for their cottage in South Tyrol or on the Rocky Mountains, in a rustic style) ...

To this day young designers or universities continue to carry out exhibitions of the original models or their derivations. An exercise was proposed, and today we still to talk about the poetics of it.

Extract from Enzo Mari. L’arte del design

A radical proposal

Perhaps Mari's most overt attempt to democratise design and subvert the market was his seminal project *Proposta per un'autoprogettazione* ('Proposal for a self-design'). He devised instructions for the self-design of 19 models of furniture comprising only wooden boards and nails, using the simplest carpentry techniques. Mari published them as a catalogue, available to any individual for the price of postage. Later, a few of the technical drawings were distributed through manufacturer Simon International. Of the project, he said: 'In 1974, I thought that if people were encouraged to build a table, for example, with their own hands, they would be able to better understand the underlying thinking that has gone into it.' Today this project is recognised as an important precursor to the open-source movement.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 9

1973

ALLEGORY

EXERCISES IN “MODIFYING REALITY BY INCITING
COLLECTIVE DIGNITY”

AND CRITIQUE

PROJECT 1123, SELF-DESIGN PROPOSAL,
WITH ELIO MARI

PROJECT 1069, DAY-NIGHT, WITH ELIO MARI

The Allegory entitled Self-design proposal stemmed from a 1971 “failure”, as Mari called it, and from the “what to do?” reflection deriving from it. The failed project in question was the Day-night sofa bed, despite being effectively promoted, the product did not meet the taste of public. According to Mari, critical reflection is always based on hands-on practice, on direct experience, and for this reason he decided to involve the user of the commodity – the potential consumer – in the designing process and in the making of the object, materially experimenting the contradictions of design. Mari made precise choices: the production tools would be hammer and nails, which in his view were already part of everybody’s culture because “everybody has at least tried to hammer in a nail”; the material would be basic wooden boards; the technical culture would be carpentry, the easiest to learn in his view. Once tools,

material and techniques were identified, Mari and his assistants used them to create a series of chairs, tables, beds, benches, wardrobes and bookshelves skipping the preliminary design phase, directly building the models. Mari drafted the objects' final technical drawings, involving Dino Gavina's Simon International company that actually produced the pieces, pairing the technical drawings with photos of the objects and simple technical instructions that only indicated the number and the size of the single pieces needed. These materials were collected in a catalogue curated by Centro Duchamp that was published on the occasion of the exhibition presenting the project at Carla Pellegrini's Galleria Milano in 1974.

Francesca Giacomelli

* 1:5 scale technical drawing of a cupboard from *Proposta per un'autoprogettazione* ('Proposal for a self-design'), with annotations for Simon International, 1973
Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Heliographic copy
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Construction drawings for X and F tables, and for M bed from *Proposta per un'autoprogettazione* ('Proposal for a self-design') for Simon International, 1973
Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Heliographic copy
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Chair P from Proposta per un'autoprogettazione ('Proposal for a self-design'), 1973

Wood, metal

Triennale Milano

* Table D from Proposta per un'autoprogettazione ('Proposal for a self-design'), 2024

Wood, nails

Design Museum Collection

► Table behind

The genesis of a project

Mari refined his designs using elementary carpentry techniques, ones that he thought anyone could follow, as 'everybody has at least tried to hammer a nail'.

In 1974, he exhibited 'Proposal for a self-design' at Galleria Milano. A selection of his designs were made, photographed and published in a catalogue alongside technical drawings and assembly instructions. This was made available from Mari upon request. It served as a manual, intended to empower users and improve their ability to evaluate objects on the market.

RESEARCH PLATFORM 9

1973

ALLEGORY

EXERCISES IN “MODIFYING REALITY BY INCITING COLLECTIVE DIGNITY” AND CRITIQUE

PROJECT 1123, SELF-DESIGN PROPOSAL, WITH ELIO MARI

The catalogue *Proposta per un'autoprogettazione*, curated by Centro Duchamp that was published on the occasion of the exhibition presenting the project at Carla Pellegrini's Galleria Milano in 1974, opens with these words: “A self-design proposal. A project for DIY furniture based on the simple assemblage of raw wood panels and nails. An elementary technique enabling everybody to relate to contemporary production from a critical standpoint. (Anyone, excluding industries and sales persons, can use these drawings to make the objects themselves. The author hopes this operation may remain an open process and invites those who will build these furniture pieces, and in particular variations of them, to send photos to his studio)”. Mari's Proposal was very successful. Already in 1974 Mari received thousands of requests and letters (now stored in the Archive) from people who carried out the Self-design project. That same year, Dino Gavina organised the *Metamobile* operation, produced by Simon International, that started with three models from the Self-design proposal: the

ICS square table, the EFFE rectangular table and the EMME bed. In 2010, Artek (the Finnish company founded by Alvar Aalto) asked Mari to produce one of the chairs included in his Self-design proposal. Their choice fell on Chair 1 (whose original model was Chair P). Mari suggested to promote the edition by selling the chair to the public in two variants: either the built chair or the kit with the wooden panels with the 1:1 instructions.

Francesca Giacomelli

* Studies for unrealised furniture models, 1973

Xerox copies

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Notes on materials and sketches of joints for furniture models, 1973

Xerox copy

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for a chair model, 1973

Graphite on tracing paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for an unrealised chair model, 1973

Graphite on tracing paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Study for a table model, 1973

Xerox copy

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Invitation to the opening of the exhibition Proposta per un'autoprogettazione ('Proposal for a self-design') held at Galleria Milano, Milan, 1974

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Catalogues for the exhibition Proposta per un'autoprogettazione ('Proposal for a self-design'), 1974

Printed by Grafiche Arsitalia, Bologna

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Promotional material for ICS (X) and EFFE (F) tables, 1974

Printed by Simon International, Bologna

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Form to order: drawings, cut to measure panels with drawings, or finished furniture pieces of three different furniture models by Enzo Mari, 1974

Printed by Simon International, Bologna

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Public response

Mari's 'Proposal for a self-design' was covered in mainstream Italian newspapers such as Paese Sera, and even reached The New York Times. He received thousands of requests and letters of feedback from the general public. He encouraged people to send photographs of built variations, but was disappointed that 'only 1% understood what the project was about'. The majority praised him for the rustic aesthetic of the models or took it as an endorsement of DIY. A resurgent interest in the project led to the manual being republished in 2002.

Letters requesting the catalogues for Proposta per un'autoprogettazione ('Proposal for a self-design'), 1974

In this selection of letters, authors variously wish Mari all the best in his 'fight against the rampant consumption of luxury furniture' and tell him of their plan to make all their own furniture. One confesses to following trends, but hopes to build and use Mari's designs rather than having them as 'mere novelty items... to show off to your friends.'

Graphite and ink on paper

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Letter with photograph of built table, 1974

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Scale models of thirteen designs from *Proposta per un'autoprogettazione* ('Proposal for a self-design'), 1973
Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Wood, metal
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

► Return to start of room

● Polluce telescopic lamp, 1963
Enzo Mari, Anna Fasolis
Chrome metal, opal glass
Produced by Artemide
Triennale Milano

One system, seventy-two ways

Aggregato ('Aggregate') consists of separate elements that can combine to form a whole. Mari and designer Giancarlo Fassina identified and designed a handful of basic lighting components, such as clamps, lightshades and bulbs, forming a system that could be assembled into 72 different lighting solutions. Like many of Mari's designs, *Aggregato* seeks to afford the user maximum freedom.

● Poster of Aggregato ('Aggregate') lighting system, 1974
Produced by Artemide
Private collection

● Desk lamp from Aggregato ('Aggregate') lighting system, 1974
Enzo Mari, Giancarlo Fassina, Elio Mari
Extruded aluminium, forged iron, PVC plastic
Produced by Artemide
Alessandro Pedretti Design Collection

● Wall light from Aggregato ('Aggregate') lighting system, 1974
Enzo Mari, Giancarlo Fassina, Elio Mari
Extruded aluminium, forged iron, PVC plastic
Produced by Artemide
Private collection

● Details and variations from the Aggregato ('Aggregate') lighting system, assembled 2008
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Living game, 1976

This game encourages children to think creatively about aspects of living. Eight packs of cards each represent factors such as profession, neighbours, possessions and desires. When brought together they conjure a multitude of scenarios. Thirty years on, Mari used the game as an educational tool with architecture students, aiming to broaden their design approach and 'think about real people, forgetting abstract and flat statistics'.

Enzo Mari, Paolo Gallerani

Card

Produced by Danese

Private collection

● Frate table, 1973

Crystal, iron, beechwood

Produced by Driade

Driade

Delfina chair, 1974

The fabric back rest and seat of this chair are held together with zips, making them removable and washable. The frame is made of electrically welded rods and is designed to be stackable. Delfina won the prestigious Compasso d'Oro ('Golden Compass') industrial design award in 1979.

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Iron rod, fabric

Produced by Driade, reissued by Robos in 1974

Rexite

● Prototype of Box chair, 1971

This chair, sold deconstructed in a bag as a kit of eight parts, is designed to be easily assembled and dismantled. The back rest in this prototype is made of fabric, although plastic was used in the industrially produced version by manufacturer Anonima Castelli.

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Fabric, polyurethane plastic

Produced by Anonima Castelli in the 1970s, reissued by Aleph in 1995

Private collection

● Sof Sof chair, 1971
Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Iron rods, fabric, padding
Produced by Driade
Driade

* Romanzo storico ('Historical novel'), 1975

This 'novel' consists solely of a fictitious but realistic family tree of 511 people. The work charts the 300-year working-class ancestry of Angelo Fantin, an imagined individual born in 1974 in Milan. It subverts the aristocratic tradition of genealogies, while inviting readers to conjure the family's stories for themselves. The project stemmed from Mari's attempt to map his own lineage and its unwritten or forgotten histories.

Enzo Mari, Carla Vasio
Published by Milano Libri Edizioni, Milan
Private collection

THE IDEOLOGY OF WORK

Mari considered not only the users, but also the makers of his designs. He strove to respond to their needs by elevating the experience and status of their work. Influenced by German philosopher and economist Karl Marx, he believed in work's transformative potential, both for the individual and for society. For Mari, the workers' labour and skill ought to be valued as equal to those of the designer.

Between 1976 and 1979, Mari was president of Italy's Association for Industrial Design (ADI). This position amplified his criticism of the design industry and its failings to serve people rather than profits.

Mapping a revolution

This atlas, created in 1974, attempts to visually communicate the workings of a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary strategy through six 'maps', with graphics by Mari and text by poet Francesco Leonetti. From top-left to right, the maps describe class division and knowledge production, examine the alienation of labour resulting from excess production and visualise geopolitical power relations. The maps in the lower row illustrate the liberation of intellectual research from bourgeois ideology, chart the proletariat's path to power and trace the origins and development of capitalism.

* Atlante secondo Lenin ('Atlas according to Lenin'), 1976
Enzo Mari, Francesco Leonetti, Eleonora Fiorani
Published by Edizioni L'Erba Voglio, Milan
Private collection

* Atlante secondo Lenin ('Atlas according to Lenin'), 1976
Left to right, top to bottom:
Social Map, Economical Map, Geographical Map,
Cultural Map, Political Map, Historical Map
Enzo Mari, Francesco Leonetti
Lithographs
Printed by Edizioni L'Erba Voglio, Milan
Private collection

RESEARCH PLATFORM 10
1974
ALLEGORY
ATLAS OF A CONTESTED WORLD

* 1974

Enzo Mari

with Francesco Leonetti Atlante secondo Lenin: Social
Plate, Economy Plate, Geography Plate, Culture Plate,
History Plate

6 lithograph panels

Edizioni L'Erba Voglio, 1976

Private collection

Francesca Giacomelli

Spin, hold, reflect

Mari created the installation 'And yet it moves' for the 16th Milan Triennale. This large wooden disc bearing the words 'Restoration', 'Revolution' and 'Reformation' was intended to demonstrate the need for collective participation in order to bring about change. Visitors were invited to spin the wheel, stop it at their word of choice and reflect on that word. Without the involvement of another visitor, the disc was designed to always fall back on 'Restoration'.

* Static and in motion installation views of Eppur si muove ('And yet it moves'), 1979

Photograph by Andrea Rovatti

Page from the catalogue for the 16th Milan Triennale, 1979
Translation of Mari's explanation of 'And yet it moves':

The public can use this work by choosing one of the three words written on it.

The first word has been offered by the GLOBE funeral parlour.

The second word has been offered by the HOUSE OF PATIENCE GAMES company.

The third word has been offered by the PERMANENT LIGHTING cooperative.

The choice – whether difficult or easy – can be made regardless. The problem might arise later.

Enzo Mari

RESEARCH PLATFORM 12

1979

ALLEGORY

INVESTIGATIONS ON COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION

* 1979

And yet it moves

Allegory consisting of a large rotating wheel inscribed with the words Rivoluzione (revolution), Riformazione (forming anew), and Restaurazione (restoration).

The wheel can be set on one word of choice but once let go it always returns to Restoration wheel

Francesca Giacomelli

A monument in pieces

Created for the 38th Venice Biennale, '44 Evaluations' consists of 44 sculptures that appear to be abstract.

They are in fact a puzzle whose parts form a hammer and sickle when joined together. In an accompanying lithograph, poet Francesco Leonetti ascribed titles to each puzzle piece. All together, the titles constitute a poem on the themes of work, unity in society and ideology. Each piece is also given an arbitrary economic value, serving as a criticism of the art market.

* View of the 44 Valutazioni ('44 Evaluations') installation at the 38th Venice Biennale, 1976
Photograph by Andrea Rovatti

* 44 Valutazioni ('44 Evaluations'), 1976
Lithograph
Private collection

► Wall to right

Artisan as designer

In his project 'Proposals for the hand craftsmanship of porcelain', Mari aimed to restore artisans' and industrial workers' skills and sense of ownership by fostering their autonomy. Commissioned by Danese to produce designs in porcelain, Mari encouraged workers to use ancient pottery and basketry techniques, resulting in the Samos series of bowls and vases. He designed initial patterns of coiled, woven and layered strips and circles of clay, inviting workers to introduce their own variations. However, in Mari's opinion, his intentions failed since the artisans simply replicated the examples set out at the start.

Below:

● Bowl E from Samos series, 1973

Porcelain

Produced by Danese Milano

Private collection

Above:

● Production process and models of Samos series,
assembled 2008

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Vase D from Che fare a Murano ('What to do in
Murano') series, 1991

Mouth-blown and smoothed Murano glass

Produced by Danese Milano

Danese Milano

● Bowl T from Che fare a Murano ('What to do in
Murano') series, 1991

Murano glass

Produced by Danese Milano

Private collection

* Il Lavoro ('Work'), from Critica della Ricerca Intellettuale Separata ('Critique of Separated Intellectual Research'), 1975

This is one of three lithographs Mari created for an unrealised exhibition. The series condemns idle intellectual pursuits that are alienated from – and not directed at – the environment, work or class struggle. 'Work' posits that research must affect reality, and if simply conducted for its own sake, is bound to be meaningless and commodified.

Lithograph

Printed by Edizioni Lavoro Liberato, Venice

Private collection

REVISITING THE PAST, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Through the 1990s and 2000s, Mari continued to produce work that embodied his singular approach to design, imbued with his theoretical ideas and ideological beliefs. His international presence was marked by collaborations with workshops and manufacturers in Japan, Germany and France, as well as by teaching posts in Germany and Austria.

In this period, contemporaneous designers were embracing the internet, advances in digital technology, and the continued impact of postmodernism, with its statement style and commercial appeal. In contrast, Mari's work often called upon the past and traditions. He subtly refined historic designs with contemporary materials and innovations, experimented with ancient techniques and revisited his own archive. Working into his eighties, Mari increasingly contemplated his life's work, and what would become of the revolutionary seeds that he fought to sow.

TIMELESS DESIGN

In Mari's view, a form is timeless, and therefore perfect, because it has been refined by generations of craftsmen, and tested by generations of users. His designs honoured forms that had stood the test of time, as opposed to existing for the sake of being new. This approach was in line with his lifelong belief that the role of the designer is one of service to society rather than to themselves.

Many of the objects shown here speak to this idea, as they celebrate the traditions and expertise of a host of international specialist manufacturers such as Alessi, Le Creuset, Magis, Gebrüder Thonet and Zani&Zani.

● Tonietta chair, 1980

This chair pays tribute to German-Austrian cabinetmaker Michael Thonet's 1859 bentwood bistro chair, which Mari described as 'the most beautiful chair... where form, function and meaning are perfectly integrated'. The two chairs share a key design principle. They both comprise parts that can be transported while disassembled, making them more economical. Tonietta was awarded the Compasso d'Oro ('Golden Compass') in 1987.

Aluminium, leather
Produced by Zanotta
Zanotta

* Documentation from the exhibition *Dov'è l'artigiano* ('Where the artisan is'), assembled 2008

Mari organised the exhibition 'Where the artisan is' as part of the Florence International Craft Fair of 1981. Held in a prefabricated dome, there was a central space for debates and seminars. A surrounding display presented moulds, tools and prototypes for a wide range of items, including turbines and the Pope's hat. The exhibition demonstrated the wide scope of craft's applications and the importance of artisans in contemporary Italian industrial design.

Photographs by Benvenuto Saba
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

DOV'È L'ARTIGIANO

1980 *

Called by the Regional Council of Tuscany, EM designed the exhibition *Dov'è l'artigiano* (Where is the artisan) which opened first in Florence in the Fortezza da Basso and then at the Triennale in Milan. The exhibit took place in a large Fuller geodesic dome. The central area consists of a low cavea for debates between the artisans and the experts or historians of artisan works. Along the perimeter of the circular space, all the materials useful for understanding this work were on display, ranging from those that indicate the artisan nature of a work to those that appear to do so but do not, from the archaic ones to the modern ones. The debate and the seminars had a significant attendance: the actual presence of materials prevent the usual phenomenon of the artisan being perceived as a "handmade" dream devoid of any value of historically coherent knowledge.

EM still thinks today that craftsmanship contains within itself the conditions that could potentially change the world.

Extract from Enzo Mari. *L'arte del design*

Waste, reused

Ecolo is a project that draws attention to the environmental impact of over-production and consumption. It also serves as a commentary on the

commodification of design. The project comprises an instruction booklet on how to transform used plastic bottles into vases, and a branded tag to attach to them. Published by homewares brand Alessi in 1992, the project was demonstrated with components given away in stores across Italy and Europe.

* Ecolo instruction booklet and tag, assembled 2008
Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

* Ecolo demonstration case, 1992
Wood, plastic, paper
Produced by Alessi
Museo Alessi

A perfect form

In 1989, Enzo Mari and his brother Elio held an exhibition at Galleria Danese displaying 66 scythes and sickles from around the world as sculptures. Mari considered these ancient tools and symbols of work as archetypes, whose form had come about through the collective knowledge of blacksmiths and farmers. Therefore, to Mari they represented the epitome of functional design. Coinciding with the exhibition, he created three limited edition art multiples of different scythes for Danese, one of which is seen nearby.

* Falce strettissima ('Very narrow scythe'), 1989
Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Metal, wood on durmast wood base with perspex case
Produced by Danese
Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese

* Perché una mostra di falci? ('Why an exhibition of scythes and sickles?'), 1989
Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Metal, wood
Falci srl

RESEARCH PLATFORM 14
1989

ALLEGORY

THE ARCHETYPE OF FORMAL QUALITY

PROJECT 1453, WHY AN EXHIBITION OF SCYTHES?
WITH ELIO MARI

In 1989, Mari held an exhibition at the Galleria Danese displaying scythes from all over the world as if they were sculptures, elevating these "tools" to examples of the highest formal quality: he believed "that scythes are a model of what design should be". The scythe is an essential symbol of work, also in a political context. Mari considered scythes to be archetypes, perpetuated and preserved through the daily celebration of work: both the work of those making them and of those using them.

This product, this tool, is an archetype or an allegory. The quality of this archetypal project is such that it can be considered in terms of a “model for the design of our living”.

● Mari’s quotes in this text are excerpted from the exhibition catalogue Enzo Mari. Perché una mostra di falci?, Galleria Danese, Milan, September 1989.

Francesca Giacomelli

* Catalogue for the exhibition Perché una mostra di falci? (‘Why an exhibition of scythes?’) held at Galleria Danese, Milan, 1989

Printed by Danese Milano, Milan

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

Mari and the workshop

In 1994, Mari embarked on a three-year collaboration with Berlin’s historic Royal Porcelain Factory (KPM). He was tasked with training its craftspeople to reimagine its production methods and designs. He established a master workshop and applied economical working methods and techniques, affording the workforce autonomy in the process. Among the resulting forms was the amphora, a vessel used in ancient Greece and Rome; the ‘broken’ vase, whose unique shape was

obtained by hitting a cylinder with a mallet; and the Berlin dinner service, based on forms from KPM's archive.

● Berlin crockery set, 1995

Courtesy of KPM Berlin

● Documentation from the collaboration with KPM,
assembled 2008

Photographs by Benvenuto Saba

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

BERLIN

Porcelain set

1996 ●

EM was called by the art historian Tilmann Buddensieg, of the scientific committee of the Königliche Porzellan Manufaktur in Berlin. He had to design a new porcelain set and at the same time train the workers. In order to do so he spent one week a month in Berlin for three years. He soon realized that if it is right to train the workers it would be more necessary to train the management (and he did so, inasmuch as possible). The first year the training consisted in the design of flower pots by researching the essence of the shape. The project arose solely from what the artisans gradually matured and therefore approved and decided. This also continued for the service project.

Among the various exhibitions held in that period we mention the one set up in the dining room of the Schloss Charlottenburg in Berlin, the palace of Frederick II, who had founded KPM to make porcelain for himself and for the nobility. The exhibition was made by displaying the prototypes of the Berlin 2000 Service on the trolleys used during production.

EM concluded the exhibition by saying: The King is gone. The hall is empty. The master craftsmen are still there.

Extract from Enzo Mari. L'arte del design

● Per forza di levare ('By means of removal') 'broken'
vase, 1994
Porcelain
Produced by KPM Berlin
Private collection

● Teapot from Berlin crockery set, 1995
Porcelain
Produced by KPM Berlin
KPM Berlin

● Tall salad bowl from Berlin crockery set, 1995
Porcelain
Produced by KPM Berlin
KPM Berlin

● Large milk jug from Berlin crockery set, 1995
Porcelain
Produced by KPM Berlin
KPM Berlin

● Amphora, 1994
Porcelain
Produced by KPM Berlin
KPM Berlin

● Double amphora, 1994
Porcelain
Produced by KPM Berlin
KPM Berlin

Learning through exchange

In 2001, Mari initiated a creative exchange with local craftspeople from the Kazan group in Hasami, Japan, one of the country's foremost pottery districts. He referred to this project as 'Inventing a tradition'. In workshops lasting roughly ten days, the group discussed the quality and history of their artisanal work. Mari encouraged them to move beyond purely imitating traditional motifs and to realise high-quality, economical designs. Self-led training continued after Mari returned to Italy.

● Documentation from the Hasami workshops,
assembled 2008

Archivio E. Mari, Comune di Milano, CASVA

● Plates and vases from the Hasami workshops, 2001
Enzo Mari, Kosei Shirotani, Kazan group craftspeople
Porcelain
Private collection

INVENTING A TRADITION

Hasami, Japan

Vietri, Italy

2001 ●

Whenever the projects involve artisanal work, EM talks with the master craftsmen trying to design coherently with their knowledge and sometimes intervening to improve them. This is what he does with the workers, but with the craftsman things are different even though he may understand. He can own the small shop in which he works independently, and if the shop is not owned by his employer then he himself is a craftsman. In this case the craftsmen have the necessary requirements to transmit their knowledge on the shape. However almost always when one deals with “artistic” craftsmanship, EM’s interlocutors are strongly influenced by “nonsense” learned in art institutes and this requires a significant “liberation” work. EM takes the opportunity to intervene where, often the administrations of regions known for ceramic production want to promote the development of the small craft shops operating in their territory. Normally they call a group of designers who are asked to design models that will be made by local workshops. Once the models have been created, catalogues and related exhibitions are edited. EM always considers the outcomes as negative, regardless of whether the models created may be of good quality: the craftsmen continue to live in their condition of “underdevelopment”.

While admitting that the designer's projects have qualities that can be acquired, the cultural background of the artisans does not allow them to acquire them. It is on this cultural deficiency that I decide to intervene by asking the Administrators of Vietri (Italy) and that of Hasami (Japan) to allow me to carry out a seminar of about ten days with a group of highly motivated young artisans. The seminars required daily conversations based on the history and quality of work but also on practical exercises.

EM then returned to Milan, but the groups continued their self-training work. For more than a year they continued to meet two days a week, where the more experienced helped the younger ones. They keep in touch with EM and come to Milan once and twice for other meetings of a few days. After a year, important exhibitions were held in Salerno and Tokyo.

Extract from Enzo Mari. *L'arte del design*

Material innovations

Hida, a Japanese manufacturer, commissioned Mari to design a furniture series with indigenous cedar (sugi). This invasive tree had to be felled to make way for other species. In order to utilise its wood, otherwise soft and unsuitable for furniture, Hida developed a fibre compression technology to increase its density and strength. Mari's resulting 34-piece series retained the wood's natural knots, a feature commonly unappealing to consumers, but appreciated by the manufacturer. Mari's text on the nearby poster expresses his admiration for Japanese culture and craft.

● Poster from the exhibition Enzo Mari e diecimila milioni di alberi di sugi ('Enzo Mari and ten thousand million sugi trees') held at Triennale Milano, Milan, 2004

Hida

Left to right:

● Po, Piave and Tevere chairs, 2004

Pressed sugi wood, steel

Produced by Hida

Triennale Milano

● Arda chair, 2007

Pressed sugi wood

Produced by Hida

Triennale Milano

Left:

● Arda children's chair, 2007

Pressed sugi wood

Produced by Hida

Triennale Milano

Right:

● Seggiolina Pop ('Pop little chair'), 2004

Sintered expanded polypropylene plastic

Produced by Magis

Magis

► Return to start of room

● Mama casserole dish, 1970

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Enamelled cast iron

Produced by Le Creuset

Private collection

● Faraglioni pepper grinder, 1970

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Melamine plastic, stainless steel

Produced by Danese Milano

Private collection

● Piuma cutlery set with rack, 1991

Steel, stainless steel

Produced by Zani&Zani

Private collection

● Knife, fork and spoon from Toscolano series, 1982
Moulded stainless steel
Produced by Zani&Zani
Private collection

● Pascal Smith funnel from Smith&Smith series, 1988
Stainless steel
Produced by Zani&Zani
Private collection

● Jack Mannarino cleaver from Smith&Smith series, 1993
Stainless steel
Produced by Zani&Zani
Private collection

● Mezzaluna knife from Smith&Smith series, 1993
Stainless steel
Produced by Zani&Zani
Private collection

● Domestica oil dispenser, 1990
Pyrex glass, stainless steel
Produced by Zani&Zani
Private collection

● Opasis oil dispenser, 1985
Stainless steel, plexiglass
Produced by Zani&Zani
Private collection

● Bread basket, 1996

Thermoplastic resin

Produced by Alessi

Private collection

● Titanic lemon squeezer, 1997

Polypropylene plastic

Produced by Alessi

Private collection

● Sparta vase, 1998

Smoothed crystal

Produced by Arnolfo di Cambio

Private collection

● Athena vase, 1998

Produced by Arnolfo di Cambio

Crystal

Private collection

● Torre pendente ('Leaning tower') vase, 2001

Lacquered wood

Produced by Marutomi

Private collection

● Nanaè object holder, 2001

Lacquered wood

Produced by Marutomi

Private collection

● Pigna vase from the Mémoire d'une fleur ('Memory of a flower') series, 2000

Glass

Produced by Daum

Private collection

● Porta Stampi Boboli vase from Mémoire d'une fleur ('Memory of a flower') series, 2000

Glass

Produced by Daum

Private collection

* Quale cultura? ('What culture?'), 1998

Evoking a Japanese zen garden, this installation presents the cultural references that Mari saw as fundamental to all his projects. Rocks are substituted with images of paintings, historic figures, archetypal objects and forms. Just as a monk tends to their garden as an act of contemplation and care, Mari sought his own grounding by returning to his touchstones – as represented by these images.

Wood, sand, reproductions on aluminium

Private collection

A LIFE IN IDEAS

In the latter decades of his life, Mari meditated on his archive and legacy. He often used installations as allegories to reflect his core beliefs and encapsulate his stance on history, culture and society. His work more generally demonstrated his enduring effort to encourage self-reflection and participation, and communicate knowledge.

Mari maintained a hope in young people and future generations. Wishing to safeguard his archive for posterity, he donated it to the City of Milan in 2019. Mimmo Jodice's photographs at the far end of the gallery evoke this body of knowledge that lives on.

● Rocking chair, 2001

Aluminium, metal, bent wood

Produced by Gebrüder Thonet, Vienna

Private collection

* Magazine advertisement placed by Mari in Domus, no. 869, 2004

Courtesy of Archivio Domus – © Editoriale Domus S.p.A.

* A lesson from Corso di disegno in 10 lezioni ('Ten-lesson drawing course'), published in *Abitare*, 2007–08

Mari devised a 'course' on the importance of drawing as a design and communicative tool for the Milanese architecture and design magazine *Abitare*. All ten 'lessons', one of which is displayed here, were then published in 2008 as a collection.

Reproduction

Private collection

► Room behind

Reflections

Mari selected this group of works to close his 2008 exhibition 'The art of design'. The installations are allegories of what Mari believed to be society's failures and where potential salvation could be found: future generations, workers and recognition of both our individual and collective responsibility. This concept is made most explicit through 'Allegory of dignity', a work that features a kneeler, traditionally used for worship, in front of a mirror. It suggests that when all dominant ideologies have failed, our own reflections, or consciousness, are what we are left with and what we must face.

* Allegoria della dignità ('Allegory of dignity'), 1988

Mirror, wood

Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea,
Roma (kneelers)

Please interact with 'Allegory of dignity' by facing your reflection. You may use the kneeler furthestmost to the right.

* Dieci, il Vulcano ('Ten, the Volcano'), from Serie della Natura ('The Nature Series'), 1972 Enzo Mari, Elio Mari
Silk-screen print on texilina paper

Produced by Danese Milano

Private collection

* Operazione Vesuvio ('Operation Vesuvius'), 1972

In 1972, French critic Pierre Restany invited Mari and other artists, including Joe Tilson, Alina Szapocznikow and Mimmo Rotella, to submit proposals for projects to be realised on Vesuvius, the volcano overlooking Naples. Mari's ironic response was a plan to make those responsible for the urban degradation of the city of Naples reside in the crater.

Enzo Mari, Elio Mari

Heliograph

Private collection

● The 200 factory workers at Hida Sangyo, 2004
Hida

* Un giorno – 27.740 giorni ('One day – 27,740 days'),
2008

In this photograph, Mari holds hands with his newborn
grandson.

Photograph

Private collection

● Altare della memoria ('Altar of memory') photograph
stand, 2002

Iron, granite

Produced by Aura

Private collection

* Il lavoro intellettuale: sessanta fermacarte ('The intellectual work: sixty paperweights'), 2010

In this work, pages from notebooks of great thinkers, artists and scientists, including musical scores and manuscripts, are anchored with paperweights. The installation evokes a worktable, where fragmented ideas emerge and their originator attempts to capture them before they disappear. It suggests Mari's desire to preserve his own archive for posterity. The paperweights are an assortment of found objects, which Mari collected throughout his life.

Various materials

Private collection and Tanya Leighton, Berlin

RESEARCH PLATFORM 19
2010

ALLEGORY
INTELLECTUAL WUNDERKAMMER: THE ANALOGUE
ARCHIVE

* 2010

The intellectual work: sixty paperweights. Allegory
realised on the occasion of the exhibition at Kaleidoscope
Project Space, Milan, April 2010
Private collection

Francesca Giacomelli

● Il puzzle, istruzioni per l'uso ('The puzzle, a user's manual'), 2009

Life: a user's manual was written by French novelist Georges Perec in 1978. It revolves around the character Bartlebooth, who travels the world painting watercolours of ports, which he then sends to a craftsman to make into a jigsaw puzzle. Reimagining the classic, Mari transformed the 18 chapters that are devoted to Bartlebooth into an art multiple in the form of a puzzle. He explained 'the lucid madness of its protagonist and his desire to shape his entire life around a single project seem to correspond to mine.'

Card, paper, wood

Published by BUR Rizzoli, Milan

Private collection

RESEARCH PLATFORM 17
2009

ART MULTIPLE PUZZLE: A USER'S MANUAL

● 2009

Enzo Mari: art multiple from Georges Perec
Box with two volumes: E. Mari, Il puzzle istruzioni per l'uso and G. Perec, La vita istruzioni per l'uso with a wood and plexiglas box containing a jigsaw puzzle-book composed of 18 bound different-shaped booklet-pieces
Edition of 660 numbered copies
BUR Rizzoli
Private collection

Francesca Giacomelli

Left:

● Vaso Colonna ('Column vase'), 2009
Statuary marble
Produced by UpGroup
UpGroup

Right:

● Vaso Pendente ('Leaning vase'), 2009
Polished marble
Produced by UpGroup
UpGroup

* Qualche puntino sulle ‘i’ (‘A few dots over the “i”’) column for Wired, 2011–2013

Culture, science and technology magazine Wired gave a column over to Mari for eight issues. In them, he expressed his lifelong ideas on design, ethics, religion and philosophy through text and illustration. Four out of the eight are displayed here.

Reproduction

Private collection

Studio Enzo Mari #001, #002, #003, 2020

Mimmo Jodice

In these images, photographer Mimmo Jodice captures Mari’s studio before the documents stored there were moved to the Centre of Advanced Studies on the Visual Arts (CASVA) in Milan. Jodice reflects that in Mari’s work, ‘thought and intellect precede and prevail over gesture and aesthetics’, an idea that resonates with him and that connects him to the designer.

Photograph on cotton paper

Courtesy of Greta Meret Gallery

TRIBUTES TO MARI

Generations of artists and designers continue to be inspired by Mari's work and ethos. At a time when society still faces many of the shortcomings that he sought to remedy, his work finds ever-new resonance in the present day.

Presented in this room are works by a selection of international artists, whom curator Hans Ulrich Obrist and Triennale Milano invited to pay tribute to Mari on the occasion of the first iteration of this exhibition. They span different generations, geographies and media, attesting to Mari's far-reaching and long-lasting legacy. Some of the pieces reference specific projects of his, while others take inspiration from them. They all connect to recurrent themes in Mari's work, such as the democratisation of art and design, the simplification of form, learning by doing and the value of play.

Untitled 2006 (Enzo Mari, Autoprogettazione 1123
xD/1123 xS/1123 xU), 2006
Untitled 2020, 2020
Rirkrit Tiravanija

Rirkrit Tiravanija challenges divisions between art and life, often creating installations that invite social engagement by way of participation in communal activities and rituals. Here, he has transformed pieces from Mari's 'Proposal for a self-design' into sculptural objects. Presented as a site of exchange, visitors can inhabit and activate it.

Stainless steel, cardboard puzzle
Courtesy of the artist and neugerriemschneider, Berlin

You are welcome to take the puzzle of Mari's construction drawing from the bookcase and assemble it at the table. Please ensure that no sharp or metal items come into contact with the works, to protect them from scratches.

Modular Hooded Sweatshirt, 2020
Virgil Abloh

This work is sold as a kit with threads, needles, pins and pattern pieces, and is to be sewn together into a hooded sweatshirt by the purchaser. Created by Virgil Abloh, designer and founder of the streetwear brand Off-White, the piece takes inspiration from Mari's 'Proposal for a

self-design'. With this work, Abloh invites the owner to use their hands to self-design their own project.

Cotton, paper, thread, needle, thimble

Off-White™

Triennale Milano

EM Wall, 2020

Barbara Stauffacher Solomon

Credited as the inventor of supergraphics, artist and designer Barbara Stauffacher Solomon distils Mari's initials to their most essential forms. She writes, 'In my work, I free art from the prison of frames as I free words and letterforms from the prison of spelling.' Adapting their scale to given spaces and proportions, Mari's initials become signifiers of his presence for visitors to encounter.

Courtesy of the artist

► Middle of room

Daybeds, 2018

Danh Võ

Coinciding with his retrospective at the National Gallery of Denmark, artist Danh Võ created these daybeds as seating for the gallery's café. They derive from Mari's

‘Proposal for a self-design’, and are upholstered with Halingdal 65, a wool and viscose textile created by Danish designer Nanna Ditzel. This weaving together of different references and elements is present across Vō’s practice, often speaking to experiences of migration and integration.

Wood, fabric

Courtesy of the artist and White Cube

You are welcome to sit on the daybeds.

► Wall to right

Chair [v] (Electric Chair), 2018

Dozie Kanu

Artist Dozie Kanu responds to the ideas of democracy, utility and consumption found in Mari’s work. This piece is layered with Kanu’s personal feelings about ‘the many forms of death familiar to black life in America, one being death by electric chair’. Kanu has stated that by breaking this object down into pieces and illustrating its assembly, he is speaking to the ways death is manufactured and re-packaged back to poor and working-class people and being self-constructed.

Courtesy of the artist

A long postcard, 2020
Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster

Artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster expresses her admiration for Mari's work, and that of his first and second wife, Gabriela (Iela) Ferrario and Lea Vergine respectively, in the form of a letter. In the spirit of democratising art and design, Gonzalez-Foerster's tribute is offered for anyone to take away with them.

Paper
Courtesy of the artist
You are welcome to take a postcard.

Lo zoo di Enzo ('Enzo's zoo'), 2020
Nanda Vigo

Artist, designer and architect Nanda Vigo was known for her experimental use of space and light. This neon installation, created shortly before her death, reinterprets Mari's '16 animals' and '16 fish' puzzles. She said, 'Redesigning his animals was wonderful. It was like following a route along a line that was precise, definitive – and decidedly "design".'

LED lights
Triennale Milano
Please do not touch the installation.

Pensare a un Dio ('Thinking of a God'), 2020

Adrian Paci

Artist Adrian Paci collected around 20 sentences spoken by Mari in various interviews. He gradually isolated one, which Paci describes as being both prophetic and child-like. Recalling an encounter with Mari, Paci was struck by the energy he transmitted, even while silent. Through this film, Paci pays homage to this memory, by seeking to isolate Mari's 'words, his face, and his voice'.

Video, 48 seconds

Triennale Milano

'I suggest looking outside the window: if you like what you see, there's no reason for new projects. If, on the other hand, there are things that fill you with horror... then there are good reasons for your project.'