

1 ✧ Craft and the birth of post-war Italian design

Introduction

IN NOVEMBER 1950 *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* opened at New York's Brooklyn Museum (see plate 1).¹ Primarily American conceived, funded and organised, *Italy at Work* aimed to boost Italy's post-war reconstruction by presenting the nation's hand-made wares to the American consumer. Despite the word 'design' in the title, craft materials and techniques dominated the two thousand five hundred exhibits (see figure 1.1) and the five room sets designed by architects including Carlo Mollino and Gio Ponti. Enjoying critical and popular acclaim, *Italy at Work* spent the next three years travelling to eleven other museums across North America, closing at the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design in November 1953.²

In May 1951, just as *Italy at Work* was embarking on the second leg of its tour, the ninth *Triennale di Milano esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative e industriali moderne e dell'architettura moderna* (Milan Triennial International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts and Modern Architecture) (see plate 2) opened in Milan, with the theme *L'unità delle arti* (The Unity of the Arts). The Italian architect and artist organisers attempted to project a unified image of post-war modernity, but this was clouded by internal conflicts that reflected wider political turmoil. While industrial design was present, craft remained the mainstay of Italy's exhibits, and both were given multiple roles by competing visions for the nation's post-war future.

Two exhibitions, one in Italy, one in America. Each offers contemporaneous yet contrasting visions for the future of Italian design and craft and their relationship in the early 1950s; the first from one of its key markets, the second a home-grown vision. This chapter focuses on these exhibitions, and considers what their conceptualisation, organisation and reception reveal about the roles that design and craft were being given in the immediate post-war period, how they were caught up in



1.1 Installation view of *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* at Baltimore Museum of Art, including table and chairs designed by Carlo Mollino, 1953.

the cultural, national and international politics of the period, and how these key vehicles for the dissemination of Italian design and craft would inform their shape for years to come.

A handmade reconstruction

Italy at Work was part of a larger number of American-led initiatives aimed at resuscitating Italy's post-war economy. Between 1944 and 1954 Italy received \$5.5 billion in aid from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the Interim Aid program and the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan.³ This assistance was not without political motivation: the late 1940s and early 1950s were overshadowed not just by the fallout from the end of one war, but the threat of another – the Cold War. America was concerned at Italy's leftist leanings: the Partito Comunista Italiana (Italian Communist Party (PCI)) was the largest communist party in Europe, and in 1945 it shared power in an anti-Fascist alliance with the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats (DC)) and other left-wing groups.⁴ This did not last long. In 1947 the DC dissolved

its collaboration with the PCI and won a convincing majority over the Communist–Socialist coalition in the April 1948 parliamentary elections. America's role in this political shift has been extensively examined.⁵ As the elections approached the amount of American aid increased and the terms on which it was given made clear: in early 1948 the Secretary of State George Marshall (after whom the Marshall Plan was named) warned that 'all help to Italy would immediately cease in the event of a Communist victory'.⁶

Building on a perceived link between economic prosperity and reduced Communist support, American support for Italy's craft industries was framed by this anti-Communist propaganda: the *New York Herald Tribune* was amongst several American newspapers to promote *Italy at Work* as a way 'to enable Italy to help itself more successfully in the effort to shield the country against misery and Communism', two phenomena seen as different sides of the same coin.⁷

Supporting Italy's rehabilitation also made economic sense, for both nations. Italy had to rely on heavy exporting to compensate for extensive importing as high levels of unemployment and low wages for those in work limited its domestic market. This situation was exacerbated by the Italian government's plans for post-war economic development, which prioritised exports over domestic consumption in order to improve the nation's balance of payments and international competitiveness.⁸ This strategy also saw certain industries prioritised over others; the Italian government gave financial incentives to textile exporters, mindful of an American market keen on its woven wares.⁹ Enabling Italy to be a trading partner was also important for America, as it attempted to avoid the economic downturn of its European allies.¹⁰

Max Ascoli and the House of Italian Handicraft

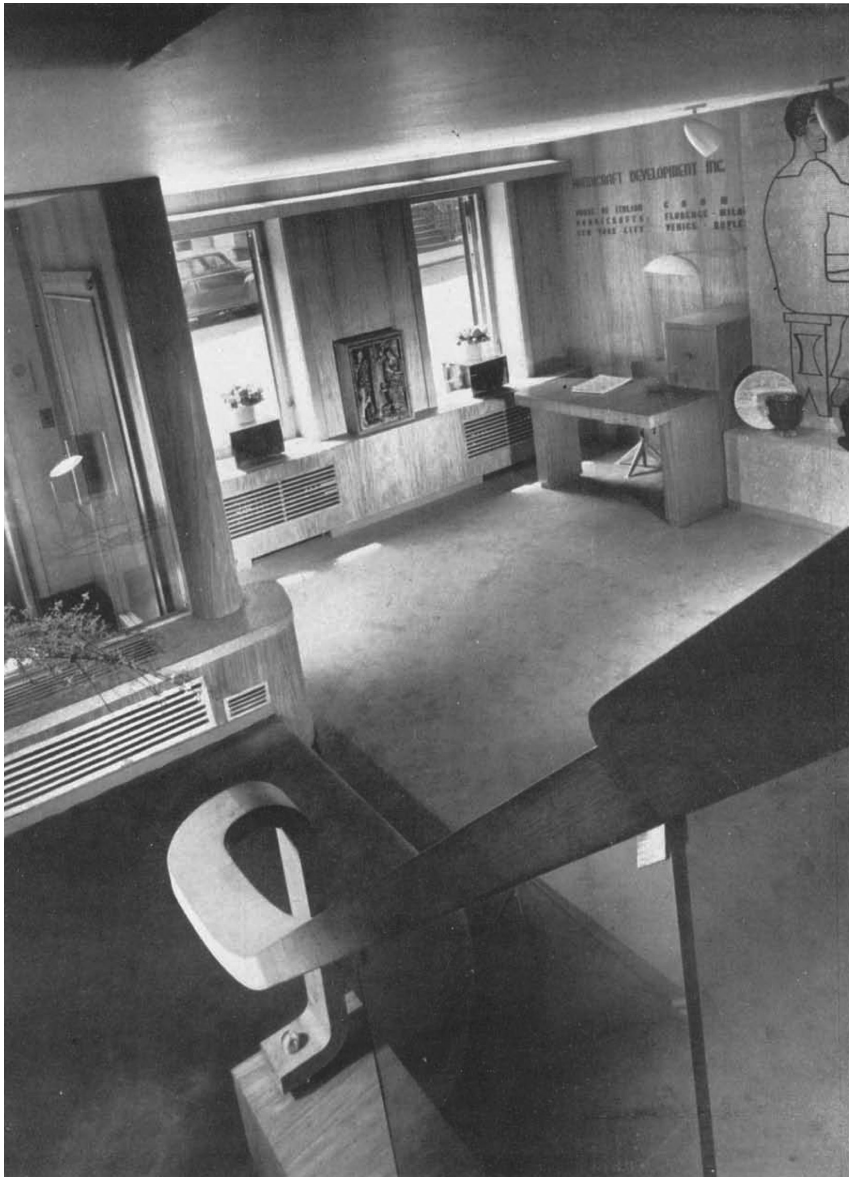
Italy at Work was not the first American-led initiative that actively promoted craft, and it was enabled and shaped by these earlier activities. Chief amongst these were the philanthropic efforts of the Jewish-Italian émigré Max Ascoli, who had emigrated from Italy in 1931 to escape political persecution. In 1945 Ascoli set up Handicraft Development Incorporated (HDI), a non-profit organisation for what the *New York Times* described as 'the rehabilitation of Italian handicraft for export to the American market'.¹¹ This external focus would feed into every aspect of both HDI and *Italy at Work*, particularly in terms of the emphasis on developing craft rather than industrial manufacture in Italy. While Italy was only part industrialised in 1945, less than 10 per cent of the 1938 value of the country's industrial plants had been destroyed and the engineering industry had actually grown during the Second World War.¹² If

America encouraged Italy's industrial development it would only create competition for its own producers, and Ascoli knew he needed to show this would not happen. According to the *New York Times* he 'emphasized that there would be no attempt to compete with established trade', a reassurance later repeated by *Italy at Work's* curators, and one that would inform what direction Italian production would be encouraged to take.¹³

Under Ascoli's guidance, HDI engaged in a three-stage strategy to help Italy's crafts: first boosting production, secondly exhibiting the results to create an appetite and thirdly enabling consumption through selling Italian wares. The first was crucial: facing a country whose paucity of natural resources had been exacerbated by wartime sanctions and a policy of autarchy, from 1945 HDI exported materials including lace, leather and metal through UNRRA to Italy's artisans, alongside tools and equipment, such as seven electrical kilns to the historic ceramic town of Faenza.¹⁴ It also offered technical and artistic advice through the Comitato Assistenza Distribuzione Materiali Artigianato (Committee for the Assistance and Distribution for Craft Materials (CADMA)), a Florence-based organisation Ascoli set up at the same time as HDI and which had representatives across Italy.

CADMA organised competitions for local artisans and from 1947 exhibited selected results at the Handicraft Development Incorporation organisation's New York headquarters, called the House of Italian Handicraft (HIH), a three-storey brownstone with an interior designed by the American-based Italian architect Gustavo Pulitzer (see figure 1.2). On the showroom's opening, products including ceramics, glass, porcelain, lingerie and leather handbags were all displayed.¹⁵ At this stage, visitors could not yet buy goods directly from the showroom, and instead were directed to department stores including Abraham & Strauss, Lord & Taylor and Macy's, who had been carrying Italian goods since the 1920s.¹⁶

The HIH organised a number of exhibitions in this second stage of activities. In June 1947 came *Handicraft as a Fine Art in Italy*, consisting of objects conceived by architects and artists including Lucio Fontana, Renato Guttuso, Fausto Melotti, Giorgio Morandi and Sottsass, and made by anonymous artisans. In stark contrast to the photographs and biographies of the artists and architects involved, the catalogue gives no details of the artisans who actually made the products.¹⁷ Their anonymity and the limitation of their role to that of executing another's ideas, rather than realising their own, would both be hallmarks of the artisan's experience and representation in post-war Italian design more generally. It seemed that the artisan could not be left alone, and craft's economic and cultural significance would only continue if it was endowed with the



1.2 Interior of the House of Italian Handicraft, New York, 1948.

contemporary forms of expression that only architects and artists could provide.

In January 1948 Sottsass and several others from this exhibition participated in *Vita all'aperto* (Outdoor Living). Together with architects including Ernesto N. Rogers and Ignazio Gardella they created a number



1.3 *Vita all'aperto* (Outdoor Living) installation at the House of Italian Handicraft, New York, 1948.

of room sets (see figure 1.3), in which neo-rationalist modular metal shelving units were used to display craft products. This co-existence of industrial and artisanal modes of expression could be seen to be in tension. Rather it embodies what Sparke has described as design's openendedness in the early 1950s, as well as an embryonic, supplemental status in relation to craft that the shelves' supporting role quite literally suggests.¹⁸

Writing about the exhibition in *Domus*, Ponti had much praise for *Vita all'aperto*, as it presented craft that was designed by Italian architects and artists and which, compared to other export-orientated industries, was not corrupted by the American market.¹⁹ Ponti chastised American buyers who had the same ceramics made in the Veneto as in the Abruzzi regions, the same lace in the Northern town of Cantù as in Florence, a cost-cutting exercise that negated the regionalism of Italy's craft traditions and was 'corrupting not only the hands and minds of the executors, but also the taste of us consumers!'²⁰ However, what Ponti wanted for Italy's crafts only went so far. When HDI initiated its third and final retail strategy it was not Italian architects but the American consumer who determined the design of the objects sold.

In spring 1948 HDI entered its third and final phase – retail. Keen to ensure its stock would meet American taste, the organisation sent out

questionnaires to four thousand retail outfits to find out what products would most appeal. They would use this to decide which materials to make available to Italy's artisans, using a five million dollar loan that Ascoli had negotiated from the Export-Import Bank.²¹ In order to administer the loan effectively, Ascoli merged CADMA and the House of Italian Handicraft into the Italian-based Compagnia Nazionale Artigiana (National Artisan Company (CNA)), and temporarily closed the HIH while they ascertained how best to direct Italy's exports.

The questionnaire showed that ceramics were the most popular type of craft objects and that American consumers preferred bright colours, unusual forms and 'traditional' designs.²² When the HIH reopened as the Piazza in November 1949, the latter prevailed. Although there were some design-led pieces, also on sale were salt and pepper shakers in the shape of 'miniature Chianti wine bottles' and painted ceramic jam jars that clearly went against Ponti's vision for craft's design-led future.²³

The Piazza proved popular, particularly in terms of its craft products – sales of Italian furniture, straw baskets, marble, alabaster and Sardinian textiles all increased following their display at the Piazza, and in the first six months of 1948 Italian exports to the US totalled nearly fifty million dollars, more than for the whole of the previous year.²⁴ It suggested that if *Italy at Work* was going to sell Italy's renaissance in design, it would have to take account of this preference for craft first.

Italy at Work

Amongst the visitors to the HIH in 1949 was Meyric Rogers, curator of decorative arts at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC). For Rogers, its opening was the first 'tangible evidence of what was happening' in Italy's post-war crafts.²⁵ It was also the first step towards *Italy at Work*: following his visit Rogers contacted Ramy Alexander, the CNA's American vice-president, about the possibility of an exhibition of 'the present achievement of Italian designers and craftsmen in the various fields of the decorative industrial arts'.²⁶

That summer Rogers visited Italy. He and Alexander toured studios, workshops, schools and shops in and around Italy's centres of craft production including Rome, Naples, Florence, Milan and Venice.²⁷ Although sufficiently impressed to think that an exhibition was viable, Rogers was not keen on everything he saw. His praise for furniture companies including Milan's Artigianato Produzione Esportazione Milano (Craft Production Exportation Milan (APEM)) and Azucena was tempered with caution that 'the industry as a whole, where not guided by the more

progressive architects and designers, produces either clever copies of the antique or flashy pseudo-modern suites.²⁸ Similarly, he admired Venetian jewellery 'in spite of the quantities of tourist trash', and had the same selective praise for the glassware of Venini, Seguso and Barovier & Toso.²⁹

On his return Rogers contacted Charles Nagel, the director of the Brooklyn Museum, to see if he would be interested in hosting the exhibition.³⁰ He invited the industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague to serve on the selection committee, and in June 1950 they travelled to Italy where they were joined by Alexander and two CNA representatives – the American Richard Miller and Italian Alberto Antico.³¹ Together they toured over two hundred and fifty producers, schools, exhibitions and shops to identify exhibits.³² These were then collected together in the basement of Florence's Uffizi gallery before being shipped to New York.³³

Rogers's selection criteria promoted a more modern design aesthetic compared to the Piazza: 'any object could be chosen ... provided it was not purely traditional in design and satisfied a high standard of quality in form and color in relation to its material and purpose ... Naturally much credit was given to sincerity of craftsmanship.'³⁴ The emphasis on contemporary design meant that little alabaster was deemed suitable for inclusion, and Naples' traditions of coral, cameo and ivory were similarly left out for being an 'unresolved problem'.³⁵

There were also economic restrictions. The Italian government had agreed to pay for the exhibits in return for the profits on ticket sales, but their limited funds prohibited precious metals or gems being included.³⁶ Other materials were rejected for not being sufficiently craft-like. Dorwin Teague noted their difficulty in deciding when a ceramic work was craft and not art, considering an object 'admissible' if it was made from clay and not bronze or marble.³⁷ This medium-based definition, one of the conventional ways that craft is defined, resulted in a heterogeneous range of ceramics, from dining services semi-industrially produced by the Florentine firm Richard Ginori (see figure 1.4) to the one-off wares of the Campania-born Guido Gambone (see figure 1.5), whose primitivist anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels were widely promoted by both American and Italian commentators as contemporary updates of Italy's ceramic tradition.

Gambone was part of a bigger clay-based revolution happening in Italy at that time. This was centred in the Ligurian coastal town of Albisola, which had become a hotbed of futurist experimentation earlier in the century and now attracted international and Italian artists such as Pablo Picasso and Fontana, the Argentine-born founder of Spatialism, and an artist who challenged the conventional dimensionality of canvas



1.4 Tea set, vase and plates, manufactured by Richard Ginori, Florence, c. 1949 and shown in the *Italy at Work* exhibition. Porcelain.

and clay with his built-up, slashed and punctured surfaces.³⁸ Yet while Fontana's abstract, experimental approach to ceramics was championed in *Domus*, it was largely lost on the American public.³⁹ Rogers noted that Fontana's 'daring and ingenuity' are 'somewhat difficult for an untrained public to appreciate – particularly in this country'.⁴⁰ While most of the show's exhibits were distributed amongst participating museums on its closure, Rogers suggested that Fontana's were given to Dorwin Teague, who had greatly admired them, as none of the museums had expressed any interest.⁴¹

Craft politics

The emphasis on craft also contributed to the other near-absence in *Italy at Work*: industrial design. Compared to the twenty-six pieces of handmade furniture featured in the catalogue, including marquetry by the Bolognese cabinetmaker Enrico Bernardi and woven-straw-seated chairs by the Florentine furniture maker Guglielmo Pecorini (see figure 1.6), there were just four industrial design objects: an Olivetti typewriter and electronic calculator, a Robbiati espresso machine and Lambretta scooter.⁴²



1.5 Ceramic figure made by Guido Gambone and featured in *Domus* magazine, 1950.

To an extent, the motivations for this emphasis on the handmade were the same as those of HDI. Rogers echoed Ascoli with his assurance that 'this movement for the enrichment' of Italy's crafts 'supplements rather than competes with ... [our] own production', adding that America's increasing demand for the handmade far surpassed what Italy's crafts practitioners could produce.⁴³

Rogers attributes this rise in demand to the moral and ideological values he sees in craft: it fulfils 'needs, material as well as spiritual, which can be supplied only by the enjoyment and practice of individual skills'.⁴⁴ Both Dorwin Teague and Rogers repeatedly refer to the qualities of the individual in the catalogue and promotional articles, and the latter identifies individualism as a key craft quality. While not opposed



1.6 Two chairs with wooden frames and woven raffia seats and backs, designed and made by Guglielmo Pecorini, Florence, c. 1949, shown in the *Italy at Work* exhibition.

to industrial production outright, Rogers saw a need for the handmade too. He described craft as offering 'a necessary counter-balance to the lifeless monotony of purely mechanical production', echoing larger 1950s American craft discourse that was itself informed by arts and crafts ideology.⁴⁵

This ideological appropriation of craft permeated the selection of exhibits – objects were prioritised that either demonstrated the individual maker's mark, such as Gambone's ceramics or the *sgraffito* ceramics individually decorated by the Bergamo artist Franco Normanni for the Milanese firm Arte Artigianato Orobico (see figure 1.7), or referenced the vernacular, such as Pecorini's straw-seated chairs. These objects typify what Sparke calls the 'Janus' nature of Italy at this time, looking 'back' towards craft and 'forward' towards a modern design aesthetic and therefore serving a key transitional role in the path towards post-war modernity.⁴⁶

It is significant that Rogers found this quality of craft individualism not in America, but in Italy. Rogers seeks an alternative to the alienation of mechanised modernity not by returning to handicrafts in his own country, but by encouraging its continuance in Italy. He defends Italy from its persistent stigma of backwardness, but still asserts a cultural



1.7 Dinner set, made by Arte Artigianato Orobianco, Milan, 1950, shown in the *Italy at Work* exhibition. Black *sgraffito* with chartreuse centre.

difference based on its less industrialised condition.⁴⁷ The exhibition and the surrounding rhetoric repeatedly construct Italy as America's non-industrialised, non-modern 'other', in which the spatial separation between America and Italy, and the former's superior economic and industrial might, is translated into a temporal difference.

This perceived co-joined spatial-temporal difference exposes a quasi-colonialist aspect to Italy and America's relationship in the exhibition. It echoes the writings of the post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha, who dismisses the idea of 'cultural contemporaneity' in the perception of those located temporally or spatially elsewhere.⁴⁸ Similarly, the anthropologist Johannes Fabian has argued that there is 'no knowledge of the Other which is not ... temporal, historical, a political act'.⁴⁹ Just as Rogers repeatedly constructs Italy as a traditional, craft society rather than a modern, industrial nation, so the anthropologist denies his subject is coeval. Instead, the 'other' is located in a more authentic past and utilised to critique the more advanced present: 'the posited authenticity of the past (savage, tribal, peasant) serves to denounce an inauthentic present'.⁵⁰ This is seen in the repeated construction of Italy as a traditional, craft society rather than a modern, industrial, design nation, not just in Rogers's written rhetoric, but visually on the catalogue's cover.

Authenticity is a key craft concept, one that will be returned to repeatedly in this book. In *Italy at Work* craft's authenticity and individualism are conflated with politically motivated praise for freedom of expression. As Rogers described, 'for years the individualistic energies of the people had been repressed and canalized by totalitarian controls basically foreign to their temper'.⁵¹ In the Cold War context, Fascism and Communism were conflated as two equally noxious forms of non-democracy that suppressed individual freedom. As a *New York Journal* writer put it: the 'taste of dictators, whether Fascist or Communist, obviously runs in the same uninspired groove'.⁵² Nor were the curators innocent of this politicised taste. Nagel derided the furniture selected for them by Turin's local government. Claiming to have been 'politically innocent' of that fact that it was Communist-run, he added 'I'm sure Stalin would have loved every minute of it. It was the kind of conservative flub-dub stuff that Commies seem to love, and that sent Mussolini into raptures'.⁵³

The exhibits may have been free from the politics of Communism, but they were not without external influence. Several had been selected from Florence's CNA showroom, the organisation that directed the design of Italy's artisanal products for export to America.⁵⁴ Others were bought from the APEM store.⁵⁵ Untangling what counts as an authentically Italian craft expression in this context is an ultimately futile project; Italy's artisans were always being directed by someone, whether it was for domestic or international tastes. In order to see how different these geographies' visions were, the next section examines one of the Italian-authored sections that were present within the American curated exhibition – the room set.

Gio Ponti's room set

Five especially designed interiors were included in *Italy at Work*. A fantastical dining room by Ponti (see figure 1.8) was joined by a living-dining room by the Turinese architect Mollino furnished with his characteristically curvaceous furniture, an outdoor terrace by the Neapolitan architect Luigi Cosenza, a foyer for a child's theatre by the artist Fabrizio Clerici and a private chapel by the Milanese architect Roberto Menghi.⁵⁶

In comparison to the other room sets, Ponti's dining room was a collaborative effort. Ponti designed the freestanding and built-in furniture, the latter alternately hidden or revealed by mechanised movable walls, all of which was made by the Milanese cabinetmaker Giordano Chiesa.⁵⁷ The surreal decoration of flowers and butterflies on the walls and furniture was by the Milanese artist and decorator Piero Fornasetti, another regular Ponti collaborator. The Sardinian artist Edina Altara painted the



1.8 Dining room installation designed by Gio Ponti for the *Italy at Work* exhibition, 1950.

mirrored door at the back of the set, while the sculptor Melotti conceived and made the large neo-classical ceramic figures of Orpheus and Eurydice on the shelves at the left-hand side. The rest of the ceramics were designed by Ponti and made at Richard Ginori, where Ponti had been art director since 1923.⁵⁸

Ponti's collaboration with firms such as Richard Ginori, Fontana Arte and Christofle is one of the reasons why he is rightly held up as a patron of Italy's craft tradition. As an editor, architect, curator, director of several Monza *Biennali* and co-director of a number of Milan *Triennali*, Ponti promoted and worked with those practitioners and firms that he saw as exemplary. His relationship with craft was far from one dimensional, but informed by a multiple, and hierarchical view of the crafts and the artisans he worked with. At one end were the *artisti-artigiani* (artist-artisans), men like Fornasetti, Gambone and Melotti, and occasionally women like Altara, whom Ponti endowed with a freedom of creativity.⁵⁹ These were the artisans Ponti was most interested in, as he made clear in an 1959 issue of *Zodiac* magazine, in which he, alongside several other architects, critics and commentators including Giulio Carlo Argan and Sottsass were asked to assess the state of Italy's crafts.⁶⁰ As Ponti stated, 'my interest [is] in the handicraft of "artists", that is of cultured ... men' whose work influences, rather than is influenced by, the marketplace – a category that the architect firmly placed himself in.⁶¹

At the other end of the spectrum were those largely anonymous artisans who executed Ponti's designs. The fact that he named Chiesa indicates both his standing and the extensiveness of their collaboration. Chiesa worked on many of Ponti's projects, including an early version

of the *Superleggera* and furniture for both the architect's home in Milan's Via Dezza and the Pirelli building, the latter designed by Ponti in collaboration with Antonio Fornaroli, Rosselli and the engineer Pier Luigi Nervi and opened in 1958.⁶² By 1960 adverts for Chiesa's firm, Chiesa Arredamenti, were appearing regularly in *Domus*, one of the many examples of the interconnectivity between Ponti's roles as an architect and editor and his use of the magazine as a vehicle for promoting his own tastes and preferences.⁶³

In *Domus* Ponti had high praise for Chiesa: 'The furniture and the entire installation was made with extreme perfection and passionate attention by a master cabinetmaker ... Giordano Chiesa of Milan, a man of great experience and infinite resources.'⁶⁴ His admiration rested on his skill as an executor, rather than an artistic figure. As Letizia Frailich Ponti, the architect's youngest daughter who worked for her father in this period, later confirmed, Chiesa was 'a marvellous executor, not creative but technically perfect'.⁶⁵

Ponti made clear that he did not himself realise any of the objects he conceived. The architect described his role as that of designing 'for able hands – not to work as a potter but to develop designs for pottery'.⁶⁶ He denied that what he did was 'directing' artisanal activity: 'we do not direct anything, as we could make such mistakes!'⁶⁷ Instead, Ponti called this an activity of 'suggestion'.⁶⁸

This was the case with the white ceramic *Scacchi freudiani* (Freudian Chessmen) included on the right of the room set (see figure 1.9). In *Domus*, Ponti described these as 'giant chess pieces, cleaved open, which revealed the thoughts – confessed and not – that harbour in the chest of the king (weapons and women), the queen (the jack), the jack (the queen), the knights (mares)'.⁶⁹ He admitted that the ceramics were not his original idea, but 'a Pontian invention already beautifully realised by Andrea Parini', examples of which were included on the next page.⁷⁰ Ponti's 'invention' was to translate the coloured, individually decorated and identifiably hand-moulded shapes of Parini (see figure 1.10), a ceramist based in the Venetian town of Nove, into the all-white, clean-lined and version for Richard Ginori, whose neo-classical forms were more suited to the firm's larger production scales. There is no mention of what Parini, the director of Nove's art school, thought of this.⁷¹ He cannot have been too disgruntled, as he later sent photos of his work to be included in *Domus*, recognising the potential of such exposure.⁷²

The appropriation of ideas was fairly common, and it ran both ways. According to the Italian architect and journalist Manolo de Giorgi, Chiesa took the 'liberty of turning out "parallel" products' based on Ponti's designs, and the architect was 'almost flattered that his work had



1.9 King from the *Scacchi freudiani* (Freudian Chessmen), designed by Gio Ponti and made by Richard Ginori, c. 1950. Porcelain.

sparked a spate of copies.⁷³ This copying was one way that the collaborations between architects and artisans led to the diffusion of modern design on a wider scale in post-war Italy, as small workshops produced works in the style of Ponti and others. Branzi later commented on this in *The Hot House: Italian New Wave Design*: 'this kind of indiscriminate and irreverent plundering permitted a renewal of form throughout the middle ranks of Italian society ... a first sketch of modern Italy to take shape in a provisional but complete fashion.'⁷⁴

Appropriation, whether a 'Pontian invention' or the artisanal copying of architects' designs, was key for the growth of Italy's design culture. It illustrates just one side of design and craft's relationship and just one way that Ponti was so significant in shaping craft at the level of design, production and representation in the 1950s and throughout his whole career.



1.10 A collection of *Scacchi freudiani* (Freudian Chessmen), designed and made by Andrea Parini, c. 1949.

Despite Ponti's dominant role in Italy's design culture, his remit in *Italy at Work* did not go beyond the museum's walls. The curators' ambitions did: from the outset, *Italy at Work* was conceived as a large-scale version of the HIH, in which visitors would see examples of Italy's handi-crafts, and then buy identical or similar versions in stores across America,

thus continuing to boost Italy's post-war economic and cultural resurgence. Inside the exhibition, this was most explicit in the presence of the CNA representative, on hand to inform visitors where items similar to those on show could be bought locally.⁷⁵ Outside, it was explicit in the many department stores that put on displays in connection with the exhibition – displays that spoke once again of the difference between Ponti's vision and that of the American marketplace.

Italy-in-Macy's

At the same time as *Italy at Work* was on its multi-state tour, department stores including Abraham & Strauss, Lord & Taylor and Macy's all organised accompanying displays of Italian products.⁷⁶ In some cases, the House of Italian Handicraft acted as intermediaries, suggesting and sourcing goods to sell, while in others the stores sent their own buyers to Italy to choose merchandise. This was the case with Abraham & Strauss, whose buyers came back armed with goods that celebrated the age-old, artisanal quality of Italy and its products, including 'lacy baskets from Naples and Milan, glossy new leathers and brasses from Florence'.⁷⁷

The largest of these ventures came in 1951 when Italy-in-Macy's opened, a fortnight of promotion of Italian crafts held at its flagship store in New York, co-sponsored by the department store and the Italian government. Eighteen months in preparation, this was billed as a celebration of Italy's 'Second Renaissance' that the 'unique Italian arts and skills are creating in that historically lovely, fertile and ingenious land'.⁷⁸

Italy-in-Macy's embodied the opposite to everything that Ascoli, CADMA and Ponti advocated in America's promotion and assistance of Italian craft. It explicitly promoted the Americanisation process behind the objects on display, achieved by 'Macy buyers working on-the-spot, hand-in-hand with the best of Italy's father-to-son craftsmen'.⁷⁹ This involved 'a refinement, or "toning down" of the ornateness and florid finishings popular with many Italian artisans' achieved 'through tactful and patient coaching of Italian artisans and workers'.⁸⁰ The resulting 'amusing' earthenware boots (see plate 3), Venetian glass nativity scene, calfskin poodle collar and other products suggest that, in the case of Macy's, Americanisation translated into a reliance on stereotypical motifs of Italy as traditional, as religious, even whimsical, and still an artisanal society.

The displays similarly framed Italy through American eyes: one of the window displays, curated by fashion designer Ken Scott and glass designer Ginette Venini, consisted of glass Venini fish 'amid classic Chioggia fishermen's baskets and nets'.⁸¹ Inside the Herald Square branch was a model replica of St Peter's Cathedral in Rome, a full-sized Venetian

gondola, a donkey cart adorned with paintings of Harry Truman and Marshall alongside displays of straw-covered glass bottles, and sales clerks in Italian costumes alongside Italian artisans practising their crafts.⁸²

Over twenty-five thousand people came to the first day of Italy-in-Macy's.⁸³ This success was surely problematic for the likes of Ponti attempting to project a modern, design-led image of Italy. As seen in Ponti's comments around HIH, it was important that Italy's crafts would be directed by Italian minds. This would re-assert the nation's prestige, rather than see it debased by its orientation towards American, commercial interests – which is what happened at Macy's.

The question of what to do with Italy's vast reservoir of crafts, and how these could be employed for socio-cultural, economic and ideological ends in the American context, has defined the arguments laid out in the first half of this chapter. The second half will show that the attempts to deal with Italy's crafts were equally problematic and undecided within the domestic context. As with Ponti's room sets, craftsmanship and Italy's craft traditions would play a defining role at the *Triennale*, and what shape these would take would be just as ideologically and politically determined as they were in HDI and *Italy at Work*.

A contested modernity

On 12 May 1951 the ninth *Triennale di Milano* opened at the Palazzo d'Arte in Milan. The theme of *L'unità delle arti* was apt for an exhibition that brought both arts and nations together: in addition to the twenty-seven Italian sections was the largest-ever international participation of twelve nations, including the much-praised Scandinavian countries and first-timer America, housed in a pavilion designed by the neo-rationalist studio BBPR in the Palazzo's grounds.⁸⁴

The international reaction was positive. Dorwin Teague told *Interiors'* American readers it was 'the most stimulating show of its kind I have ever seen'.⁸⁵ As in *Italy at Work*, craft productions dominated the installations of glass, lighting, ceramics, metals, jewellery, leather, plastics, straw, embroidery, textiles, furnishings and displays from Italy's art schools. The CNA had a section, as did the Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie (National Organisation for the Crafts and Small Industries (ENAPI)), another organisation aimed at modernising Italy's crafts through collaborations with architects and artists. Industrial design was officially present for the first time too, in the installation *La forma dell'utile* (The Shape of the Useful) on the ground floor.⁸⁶

The domestic reception was not so warm. As the following sections will demonstrate, the *Triennale* was widely criticised for the formalism of its exhibits, seen as indicative of a lack of social engagement and

aesthetic and ideological unity. *L'unità delle arti* had been chosen because it was seen as the only theme sufficiently anodyne to conceal the differences between those in charge.⁸⁷

The 1951 *Triennale* captures Italy at a transitional moment. The 1947 ninth *Triennale*, directed by neo-rationalist architect Piero Bottoni, was wholly consumed by the imperative of post-war reconstruction. Rebuilding Italy's war-torn or otherwise inadequate housing stock and providing the affordable, space-saving furniture needed to fill it were the focus of the ninth *Triennale*, most visibly expressed in the Quartiere Triennale 8 (8th *Triennale* Quarter (QT8)) housing development built on the city's outskirts as part of the exhibition.⁸⁸ Some crafts were present, including ceramics by Melotti, enamelware by Paolo De Poli and glass designed by Ponti and Sottsass. Unfortunately, as Sottsass, one of the co-curators of the craft section, lamented, the public expressed 'incomprehension and ... general disinterest' towards these innovative forms.⁸⁹ The organisers though had bigger problems: the exhibition's unveiling coincided with a shift away from the Left amongst public opinion, and Bottoni was accused of producing a 'proletariat *Triennale*' with a 'Communist program'.⁹⁰

The next *Triennale* of 1954 was equally focused. While the organisers declared a wish to continue the ninth edition's theme of the relationship between the arts, its main emphasis was on the relationship between the arts and industry.⁹¹ In addition there was a widely acclaimed industrial design installation and accompanying international conference.⁹² Craft materials and techniques still formed the majority of Italian exhibits, but were now grouped under the homogenising banner of *merce* (commodities), arranged in mixed-media displays dispersed around the *Triennale* that further diluted their visibility.⁹³ The crafts were largely ignored by the press; the British magazine *Design* picked up on their presence only to criticise the 'exclusive, experimental and costly' look of the textiles, ceramics, glass and metalwork.⁹⁴ In *Stile Industria*, Alberto Rosselli declared that craft was 'no longer a determining element of production, inert in its formal repetition of stylistic elements'.⁹⁵ Craft now served a purpose not as an autonomous field but as 'an important and valuable help in the definition of form in the industrial object'.⁹⁶

As both founding editor of *Stile Industria* and co-founder of the Associazione per il Disegno Industriale (Association for Industrial Design (ADI)) two years later, it is not surprising that Rosselli was so dismissive about craft. In the early 1950s Italy was undergoing the second of its industrial 'revolutions', the first having occurred in the 1880s following Italy's unification in 1861.⁹⁷ Italy's industries were rallying at an incredible rate, and by 1951 industrial production had surpassed pre-war production levels.⁹⁸

However, the productive reality was not as clear-cut as this picture suggests: industrialisation was a localised and fragmented phenomenon, concentrated in the 'industrial triangle' of Genoa, Milan and Turin.⁹⁹ Agriculture was still the dominant employer and, despite private and state investment in Italy's steel, engineering and automobile industries, small-scale, manual workshop production continued to dominate furniture and its related industries. The 1951 third Censimento Generale dell'Industria e del Commercio (General Census of Industry and Commerce) reported that of the thirty-six thousand firms engaged in the production of wooden furniture, a quarter of which were in Lombardy, 90 per cent were classified artisanal.¹⁰⁰ The census defined a firm as artisanal if it was not engaged in mass production, if it consisted of only one production unit, and if the owner was engaged in the manufacture process and in the training of apprentices.¹⁰¹

While the 1954 *Triennale* expressed the desired, rather than an actual, shape of industry, there is a discernible shift in the place of craft between 1951 and 1954. From its multiple and highly visible presence at the ninth *Triennale*, it has been disarmed and limited to the realm of commodities.¹⁰² This was tied up with the uncertain and highly contested nature of the direction that Italy itself would take at this time, which would influence not only the multiple ways that craft was appropriated at the 1951 *Triennale*, but also which of these would go on to play a role in Italian design in the early 1950s. At times there were clear parallels with the ideas and aims of *Italy at Work*. At others, the American and Italian visions suggested a very different relationship between the two realms.

Politics at the 1951 Triennale

The 1951 *Triennale* was a site of cultural complexity and ideo-political contestation, in which a ruptured national political landscape was writ small within the exhibition's walls. With the DC's share in the vote falling in the early 1950s, tensions between left and right were high.¹⁰³ These political divisions were mirrored in the personalities behind the *Triennale*. Under the president Ivan Matteo Lombardo, curation was divided between an executive committee and board of governors. The latter included Bottoni and Ponti, while Franco Albini, the architect and artist Luciano Baldessari, painter Adriano de Spilimbergo, and architects Marcello Nizzoli and Elio Palazzo made up the executive committee.¹⁰⁴ Leonardo Borgese, the *Corriere della Sera's* art critic, identified the clear split between them; on one side was Albini and Bottoni, who represented the utilitarian, socially committed neo-rationalist left, while the other was headed up by Baldessari and de Spilimbergo,

characterised by an apoliticism and embrace of richly expressive decorative arts.¹⁰⁵

Several of those behind the 1951 exhibition had been involved in previous *Triennali*, and their disagreements represented a battle between aims interrupted by war or frustrated as hopes for post-war renewal were extinguished. The year 1947 had been dominated by the politics of Albini and Bottoni, who sought to retrieve rationalism from its ambiguous relationship with Fascism by re-envisioning it as a social programme rather than aesthetic style. In this new, or neo-rationalism, low-cost, standardised mass production of both the home and its contents was deemed the only viable solution to provide for those classes most in need.¹⁰⁶ These politics were present in 1951, most notably in the section dedicated to four rationalist architects killed in the Second World War: Carlo Gialli, Edoardo Persico, Giuseppe Terragni and Giuseppe Pagano. These last two typified the movement's ambivalent relationship with Fascism: Terragni's best-known work was Como's La Casa del Fascio (The House of Fascism) while Pagano, initially a supporter of the regime, joined the resistance and was subsequently condemned to Mauthausen concentration camp.¹⁰⁷

The rationalists' resistance activities assisted the movement's moral rehabilitation in the immediate post-war period, and the left's role in the anti-Fascist movement contributed to the continuing cultural strength of Communism in 1951, despite 1948's electoral defeat and the DC's repressive actions.¹⁰⁸ Yet theirs was not the dominant position at the 1951 *Triennale*: largely confined to the QT8, Bottoni and his collaborators were physically and ideologically marginalised and with them their social ideals and hopes for cultural renewal.

The events of 1951 represented a moment of cultural stagnation. Those architects in charge of the *Triennale* went largely unchanged from pre- to post-war, exemplifying a wider restoration of interwar bourgeois culture in the 1950s and an inability to deal with Fascism's problematic legacy. This reaffirmation of earlier ruling groups and values denied the re-invention of institutions that Germany had demonstrated both possible and necessary for post-war creative renewal, as seen in its refounding of the Deutscher Werkbund arts organisation in 1947.¹⁰⁹

Unsurprisingly, Borgese declared 'Albini-Bottoni' the losers and 'Baldessari-Spilimbergo' the winners at the 1951 *Triennale*. But what a pyrrhic victory this was: Baldessari was responsible for curating the mostly heavily criticised interventions of the whole *Triennale*, creating displays and invoking criticism which exposed the fragmented and hierarchical nature of the arts in this period, one that undermined their widely championed unity in Italy from the Renaissance onwards.¹¹⁰

The unity of the arts

Albini and Gentili credited Baldessari for being one of the few organisers who actually attempted to work towards the *Triennale's* theme of *L'unità delle arti*.¹¹¹ An architect, set designer and painter involved in both futurism and rationalism, Baldessari would become most known for his pavilions for the Breda electronics company at the *Fiera Campionaria di Milano* (Milan Trade Fair).¹¹² Together with the architect Marcello Grisotti, Baldessari was in charge of the entrance hall, atrium, staircase (see figure 1.11) and first-floor vestibule of the building. He commissioned large-scale works from a dozen artists including Aegnore Fabbri, Romano Rui and de Spilimbergo. Fontana created a looping neon installation, *Concetto spaziale* (Spatial Concept), that hung over the staircase, while the ceramist Antonia Campi, one of the foremost female ceramists in Italy at this time, who had also featured in *Italy at Work*, contributed a large abstract enamelled ironstone sculpture.

In his review, Borgese dismissed Fontana's piece as mere 'neon lighting', and completely overlooked Campi's presence – illustrative of a wider overlooking of female practitioners.¹¹³ Campi's omission did mean that she was saved from Borgese's condemnation of the entrance spaces, which he summed up as 'abstract-concrete-spatial-function squalor'.¹¹⁴ He was not alone. The critic Gillo Dorfles described the result as 'that which should not have happened ... of letting the most disparate and contradictory of artists do as they liked, one intermingling with the other, illustrating their "stylistic" incongruity, right in the decoration of the exhibition's entrance areas; in the discipline[s] most dedicated to and representative of current taste'.¹¹⁵

Borgese and Dorfles suggest not only that Baldessari and Grisotti failed to produce a coherent representation of Italy's arts, but that this was an impossible task. The arts existed in a fragmental hierarchy, in which architecture sat firmly at the top. The catalogue equated the unity of the arts with the '*completeness* of architecture', while Baldessari declared that the entrance spaces highlighted 'the necessary subjugation of painters and sculptors to the wishes of the architect. Here, what mattered was the architectonic statement of the rooms; it did not matter much which figurative or non-figurative work it was'.¹¹⁶

This assertion of architecture's hegemony came at a time when it was beginning to look in doubt, particularly as the hoped-for centrality of the culture of neo-rationalist architecture in post-war reconstruction failed to transpire.¹¹⁷ In the early 1950s architecture's dominance was being challenged, on the one side by design and on the other by art.¹¹⁸ This fight for superiority was visible not only in the prominence given to works such as Fontana's neon sculpture in the *Triennale* and its



1.11 View of the main staircase in the Palazzo dell'Arte at the ninth *Triennale di Milano*, 1951. On view are *Concetto spaziale* (Spatial Concept), a neon sculpture by Lucio Fontana, and below an abstract ironstone sculpture by Antonia Campi and ceramic mural by Giuseppe Ajmone. On the right is a high relief by Romano Rui. The space was curated by Luciano Baldessari and Marcello Grisotti.

critique but in the approach to the crafts. While there was consensus that Italy's crafts needed an outsider's hand, there was little consensus between artists, architects and curators over what direction these traditions should take. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the ceramics

section, curated by Ponti – the loudest voice in debate over the future of Italy's crafts.

Ponti's ceramics section

Ponti had been involved in the *Triennale* since its first manifestation as a *Biennale* in nearby Monza in 1923. He had been instrumental in its relocation to Milan for the exhibition's fifth manifestation and transformation into a *Triennale* in 1933, which he directed, and he co-directed those of 1936 and 1940.¹¹⁹ In 1951 Ponti returned to a directive role, but, as Borgese reported, this 'god of the old Triennali' ended up withdrawing from the executive committee and overseeing just one section: ceramics.¹²⁰

The *Sezione ceramica* (Ceramics Section) was designed by the architect Carlo De Carli (figure 1.12). Unlike the majority of the Italian sections, objects were not displayed in vitrines but on wooden trestle tables and wall-mounted shelving. Rustic woven-seated ladder-back chairs at the end of the tables and sheets of woven raffia suspended from the ceiling made for an intimate environment within the neo-classical container.¹²¹ The display's crafted appearance was offset by the standardised plywood shelving system and the exhibits, which similarly consisted of an encounter between artisanal and industrial cultures.



1.12 View of the *Sezione ceramica* (Ceramics Section) at the ninth *Triennale di Milano*, curated by Gio Ponti and designed by Carlo De Carli, 1951.

The ceramics were divided into three categories: *industrie* (workshops), *ateliers d'arte di industrie* (artistic manufacturers) and *artisti ceramisti italiani* (Italian artist-ceramists).¹²² In the catalogue Ponti explained that the emphasis was not on the first group, the artisanal workshops spread throughout Italy, nor the larger manufacturing firms based in towns such as Laveno and Doccia that made up the second.¹²³ Instead, it was on 'the happy marriage between ceramics and the modern artists, painters and sculptors that have represented the lively and daring avant-garde of modern Italian ceramics'.¹²⁴ This was the group that Ponti would praise in his *Zodiac* responses on the state of contemporary craft. The *artisti ceramisti* were divided into three sub-categories: those such as Pietro Melandri and Gambone who only practised ceramics; artists such as Fontana, Melotti and Fabbri who engaged with ceramics; and up-and-coming practitioners such as Salvatore Meli, Parini and Pompeo Pianezzola.¹²⁵ With the exception of the latter, these practitioners were the same as selected for *Italy at Work*, although a wider selection was included in the American show.

Ponti described his selection criteria as 'intentionally representative than critical, to show ... Italian ceramics as they are, at least above a certain level of taste, of capability and invention'.¹²⁶ Critics quickly debunked any pretence to representativeness in the curation. Dorwin Teague stated that 'it is clear to anyone familiar with the field that in selecting exhibits Ponti has exercised his own highly personal taste, and the result is a stimulating collection marked by conspicuous omissions and distortions' with many younger practitioners notably absent.¹²⁷ Albini and Gentile criticised the type of ceramics favoured here: they were concerned at how 'damaging Ponti's attempt to bring sculptors to do ceramics – not objects, but sculptures in ceramics' was for future directions in artists' engagement with this craft and also criticised the 'technical incomprehension of some of the sculptors'.¹²⁸

While Ponti encouraged craft's future in the direction of one-off, artistic luxuries, Albini had a different vision, based on his more socially engaged view of design. In his review of the 1951 *Triennale* he singled out for praise an installation that was based on 'a more modest, but more concrete and useful project, [in which] several artists have collaborated with artisans on rugs, fabrics, metals and other materials' – an option that 'we consider the richest road for durable results'.¹²⁹ Albini does not specifically name the project, but only ENAPI's display fits this description. Furthermore, Albini himself contributed to this project, with *Gala*, an organic shaped rattan and reed armchair similar to the *Margherita* chair designed with the architect Ezio Sgrella and made by Bonacina, a furniture producer based in nearby Brianza area (see Chapter 2).

ENAPI and creative collaborations

Ponti dedicated six issues of *Domus* to the 1951 *Triennale*, yet he omitted any mention of ENAPI's presence (figure 1.13), and also left out the CNA, leather, lace and embroidery installations.¹³⁰ It is not a coincidence that those sections that were overlooked were not only all craft based, but were also seen as highly problematic. They correlated with what ENAPI's president, Corrado Mezzano, described as 'the poorest and the most impoverished sectors' of Italy's crafts – straw, alabaster, embroidery and leather.¹³¹ Ponti did feature the straw section, the only one curated by female architects, Emma Calderini and Eugenia Alberti Reggio. However, it was only to warn that the 'fields of straw and wicker, for their folkloristic origins, [were] dangerous to taste – like leather, glass, alabaster, etc.'¹³²

Ponti was not alone in his aversion to folklore. In 1960, Tommaso Ferraris, the *Triennale's* general secretary since 1954, described the 'false traditional forms and nauseating folklorism that up until some ten years ago sent a good part of the bourgeois classes into raptures', and appealed to architects interested in Italy's craft traditions 'to absolutely not confuse this with including folklorism' in their designs.¹³³ This refutation of folklore can be understood in a number of ways. Although not as prevalent as in Nazi Germany, nationalistic celebrations of Italy's indigenous folk culture had taken place under the Fascist regime.¹³⁴ Folk culture also had southern associations in a nation with a strong north-south divide, and in which most architects – Ponti included – were either born or educated into the north. Ponti saw straw workers as 'capable of beautiful productions' only when guided by artists and architects such as Alberti Reggio, whose designs were included in the section and in Ponti's selective coverage of it.¹³⁵

The strategy of ENAPI was to organise collaborations between architects and artisans. It had originally been set up as the Ente Nazionale Fascista per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie (National Fascist Organisation for the Crafts and Small Industries (ENFAPI)) in 1922 as the result of legislation that granted 300,000 lire for the establishment of regional committees for Italy's small industries.¹³⁶ This group, ENFAPI, organised courses, exhibitions and trade fairs, established links between artisans and artists – particularly in the field of furnishings – and distributed raw materials.¹³⁷ This last role became the promotion of autochthonic materials for identifiably indigenous Italian crafts such as majolica and marble production under the Fascist autarchy campaign.¹³⁸ Present continuously from the third *Biennale* of 1927 to the 1936 *Triennale*, ENAPI would not return to the exhibition until 1951, by which time the word *Fascista* had been removed from its name.



1.13 View of the Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie (ENAPI) section at the ninth *Triennale di Milano*, 1951. Curated by Gino Frattini of ENAPI with Ugo Blasi. Vitrines designed by Marco Romano.

This promotion of collaboration between artists and artisans dates back to ENFAPI's interwar activities. As the American design historian Marianne Lamonaca has noted, by the 1930s it was deemed no longer economically feasible for artisans to be both 'design innovator and executor'.¹³⁹ Providing them with designs from artists such as Ugo Carà

and Tommaso Buzzi was seen as a way to shorten production time and bolster productivity, but also to ensure that their objects would be suitably modern and desirable to the marketplace.¹⁴⁰ There were also benefits for the architects involved, as ENAPI provided a platform for architects and artists to try out ideas with skilful artisans, free from the commercial constraints of industry – just like the early HIH exhibitions.

For the ninth *Triennale*, ENAPI sponsored a competition for artists to submit designs for artisans to execute. However, Mezzano was unhappy with the results and so decided instead to approach ‘artists of exquisite sensibility and safe experience ... whose drawings or models ... were entrusted for execution by the most skilled artisans’.¹⁴¹ Over forty artists, including Giuseppe Capogrossi, Fornasetti and Emilio Vedova, and two architects, Albini and Alfio Fallica, provided designs that were made by around sixty artisans, who worked individually, in cooperatives or in small firms.¹⁴²

This strategy would be repeated by ENAPI at the eleventh *Triennale* of 1957. Agnoldomenico Pica, an architect and critic heavily involved with organising several *Triennali*, was highly concerned for both the architect and the artisan in this arrangement, as this lengthy denunciation indicates:

An artist in Turin, Rome or Genoa was requested to make a design, was paid for it, and then the designed object *was made* by an artisan in Cascina, Cantù, Torre del Greco or anywhere at all. What happened therefore was that the designer was a complete stranger to the materials and techniques, while for the artisan the design was equally unfamiliar, a bolt from the blue; the consequence was that the artisan created work using ideas of which he was little convinced, while the artist, conceiving forms for unknown materials and techniques, was fated to fall into an unrelated decorative approximation, a formalism as inevitable as it was transitory. But worst was that the artisan participated in this modernity merely as one executing another’s ideas, a skilled workman: a layman lending his labour to the artist. The artisan was, in a word, completely annulled as an inventive power. Did this mean the redemption or the renewal of the artisan, or was it not rather suffocating him to the point where he was reduced to a kind of qualified labourer?¹⁴³

According to Pica, ENAPI actively promoted the denial of the artisan’s creative role and his reduction to that of alienated executor, who was only valued for his skill. In the face of increasing mechanisation in industry in the 1950s, in which the manual skill of the worker was in danger of being made redundant, this was a dangerously reductive approach that threatened any rationale for the artisan’s ongoing existence.

Praising craftsmanship

Fortunately, the skill of Italy's artisans was identified as an asset worth saving at the *Triennale*. While praise for the products of Italy's craft industries was selective, the craftsmanship they contained became one of this *Triennale's* most commonly celebrated aspects. Dorwin Teague described the craftsmanship in the *Arredamento e mobil singoli* (Apartments and Free-Standing Furniture) section as 'superb, the touch light, the feeling for materials sure'.¹⁴⁴ He saw craftsmanship as Italy's greatest resource: 'the Italians are able to assemble a range and quality of craftsmanship in many fields that no other nation in the world today can challenge successfully'.¹⁴⁵ British designer Robin Day admired the skill involved in the construction of the *Triennale* installations and the casual intimacy between the architects and artisans in this process: 'few working drawings were in evidence while the exhibition was being built, rapid progress apparently being made through verbal instructions from architects to fast-working and skilful craftsmen'.¹⁴⁶ As the architectural historian James Ackerman has shown, this emphasis on verbal communication rather than detailed drawings in Italy dates back to the Renaissance (see Chapter 2).¹⁴⁷

So important was craftsmanship to Italian design's reputation that international commentators expressed their concern at those architects who seemed to play fast and loose with it. On the occasion of the 1954 *Triennale*, Olga Gueft, the editor of *Interiors*, was worried that the new-found 'passionate concentration on industrial design implies that the Italian architect may deprive himself of the fabulous craftsmen who hitherto gave his work its almost universal marketability and appeal'.¹⁴⁸ Gueft made clear that craft was a key component of post-war Italian design but was quick to calm fears of its impending demise.¹⁴⁹ Rather, Italy was proof that craftsmanship did not necessarily die out in industrialisation: 'we may yet discover that the essential is craftsmanship in the broad sense, and not necessarily *hand-craftsmanship*'. As an example, Gueft cited some bent plywood chairs designed by De Carli, Albini, and the trio of Vittorio Gregotti, Ludovico Meneghetti and Giotto Stoppino as 'sufficient proof that competence, precision and wit can exist in industrial design'.¹⁵⁰

Throughout the post-war period craftsmanship would remain a key component of design of all forms. This was confirmed in the 1959 *Zodiac* survey. As the art critic and historian Giulia Veronesi noted in her summary of the responses, Argan, Ponti and Rosselli all predicted 'a peaceful coexistence and active cooperation (where it was not already taking place) between craftsmanship and industrial design'.¹⁵¹ The findings echo Rosselli's comment in *Stile Industria* on the redefinition of craft

as at the service of industry, wherein it takes on a supplemental, servile role within industry rather than existing as an autonomous field of production. Adamson has identified this supplementarity as a key trait of 'modern craft', one that will be explored further in the next chapter.¹⁵²

Yet craftsmanship was not the only role that craft was being given in the development of Italian design in the early 1950s. This final section looks at one of the few installations at the 1951 *Triennale* that received near universal praise, *Architettura spontanea* (Spontaneous Architecture). It was one of the few sections that sought to uphold a vernacular, authentically Italian craft expression, rather than eradicate or modernise it through the architect's hand. As such, it suggests that it was craft's construction as a non-modern 'other', so prevalent in the curation and representation of *Italy at Work*, which would become another of the defining roles for craft in post-war Italian design.

The alterity of the vernacular

Architettura spontanea (see figure 1.14) was curated by the architects Ezio Cerutti, Giancarlo De Carlo and Giuseppe Samonà, with visuals by the graphic designer Albe Steiner. They created a zig-zagging passageway in which the visitor walked past large- and small-scale photographs of buildings interspersed with captions containing descriptions and critical commentary. The photographs depicted examples of largely anonymous, rural buildings from all over Italy, dating from the medieval era to the present.

The American architect Bernard Rudofsky, whose 1965 book and exhibition *Architecture without Architects* would become a reference point for the later, more radical turn to the vernacular amongst Italy's architects (see Chapter 4), identified the multiplicity of the term in Italian as compared to the English language.¹⁵³ For Rudofsky, the vernacular referred to number of different architectural modes: 'anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, rural'.¹⁵⁴ Usage depended on the user's agenda. Sabatino has explained in his work on Italian architecture's appropriation of the vernacular in the early twentieth century that the terms 'spontaneous', 'minor' and 'anonymous' were used by those architects 'concerned with stressing the fact that vernacular buildings were not designed by professionals'.¹⁵⁵ Most important in the Italian context was the distinction made between vernacular and folklore, the latter negatively dismissed for its sentimentality and eclecticism, as well as its southern and nationalistic associations.¹⁵⁶

The praise for *Architettura spontanea* in an otherwise heavily criticised *Triennale* stands out. Dorfles called it 'one of the most characteristic and interesting' installations at the *Triennale*.¹⁵⁷ This was not the first time this type of architecture had appeared at the Milan exhibition. At the



1.14 View of the *Architettura spontanea* (Spontaneous Architecture) section at the ninth *Triennale di Milano*, 1951, curated by Ezio Cerutti, Giancarlo De Carlo and Giuseppe Samonà. The large photograph on the left depicts vernacular rooftops in Alberobello, in the heel of Italy.

sixth *Triennale* of 1936 Pagano and Guarniero Daniel curated *Architettura rurale italiana* (Rural Italian Architecture), an exhibition of the research they had conducted into rural Italian housing.¹⁵⁸ It chimed with a larger interest in Italian popular and folk arts in the earlier twentieth century, as seen in Charles Holmes's *Peasant Art in Italy*, published by *The Studio* magazine.¹⁵⁹ In Italy, Eleanora Gallo authored 1929's *Arte rustica italiana*, a collection of illustrations of regional traditions and the vernacular that was appropriated both by those endorsing and in opposition to the Fascist regime.¹⁶⁰ Sabatino describes Pagano's efforts as part of an attempt to subvert the 'bombastic classicism' that was being promoted as 'an "authentic" expression of Italianness' by the government and its supporters.¹⁶¹

To an extent, the motivations were the same in the immediate post-war period, as neo-rationalism attempted to dissociate itself from any fascist connotations. The vernacular was evoked in buildings designed by architects including Sottsass, De Carlo and Albini. According to De Carlo's biographer Benedict Zucchi, they identified 'an alternative current within modernism, whose lineage began with Wright and the Chicago School and included, amongst others, William Morris, Ebenezer

Howard, Loos, Berlage, Dudok, May and Gropius', a reconceptualization of rationalism based on research conducted by Persico in the 1920s.¹⁶² Veronesi similarly identified a Morrisian, arts and crafts ancestry in her review of *Architettura spontanea*: 'it has above all the merit of being entirely original in our century, which has totally forgotten the good side of Ruskin's theories on architecture and Morris's on craft (between spontaneous architecture and the products of authentic craft there obviously exist very close analogies: the genesis is the same).'¹⁶³

The perceived synonymy between spontaneous architecture, craft and authenticity cut across the different positions at the *Triennale*. To the neo-rationalists, it chimed with the neo-realism movement in cinema and literature, which strove for a depiction of reality untainted by fascist artifice.¹⁶⁴ For Ponti, it was expressed an identifiably national architectural style. He praised 'the "truth", the substance, the origin, the purity', in essence the pure *italianità* of this architecture as what made it so appealing.¹⁶⁵

For Veronesi, the merit of the buildings exhibited lay in their connection 'to the economic, material, historical, geographic, cultural, etc. facts of their environment'.¹⁶⁶ She suggests an authenticity based on site specificity, a place-based identity that will be further discussed in Chapter 3. This identification with a specific site of production is a key craft trope, one that would fuel the work of architects such as Mario Botta and Carlo Scarpa and become the subject of the British architect Kenneth Frampton's postmodern writings.¹⁶⁷ What is notable in the *Architettura spontanea* section is exactly which places the vernacular was seen to exist in.

Sixteen regional committees submitted examples of buildings to the organisers. Given both the lateness of their submissions and contrasting visions amongst its organisers, the photographs were organised not by region or by any critical theme but by geographical type: mountain, hill, plain or sea.¹⁶⁸ Socio-cultural and economic differences between Puglia's *trulli* dry stone huts, Sardinia's huddled-together housing and the vernacular language of Piedmont and the other regions were abandoned in favour of a classification based on geographic affinities. All historical difference was erased, leading to architecture from the fifteenth century juxtaposed with that of the 1950s, with no attempts to make visible distinctions between them. Combined with the rural location of the architecture featured it amounted to a perception of past-ness in the architecture on show. *Architettura spontanea* articulated the cultural difference and the authenticity of a historically removed 'other' just as *Italy at Work* had done. The difference was that it was taking place on home turf.

Architettura spontanea was not meant to provide a romantic image of rural Italy. It was not, as one of the captions declared, about 'studying

ways to save' this architecture, but 'about understanding why they are in good health and why they disappear'.¹⁶⁹ However, it was precisely the former that was perceived in the exhibition's reception. The critic and future town planner Carlo lamented that the exhibition's 'lack of in-depth sociological research' meant it became admired merely in populist, folkloristic and romanticised terms rather than being interpreted as the critical tool intended.¹⁷⁰ Several critics noted other problems with the display – mainly that the aestheticised photographs of the architecture concealed the poverty behind them.¹⁷¹

The impoverished reality behind these photos of vernacular architecture was already unravelling in the early 1950s. In 1945 the writer and painter Carlo Levi had published *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (Christ Stopped at Eboli), a memoir of his political exile to Italy's remote south under the Fascist regime.¹⁷² It helped to expose the conditions of the inhabitants of Matera in the Basilicata, who lived in the infamous *sassi* – primitive homes carved out of the rock. Shamed into action, in 1952 the Italian government forced the fifteen thousand cave dwellers to re-locate to the nearby developing city of Matera.¹⁷³ This was part of larger, generally abortive, attempts to deal with the 'Southern Question' at this time, most prominently in the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* (Fund for the South), set up in 1950 to fund investment and infrastructure there.¹⁷⁴

Arguably, the appearance of the vernacular at the *Triennale* was a signifier of its impending demise. The art historian and craft writer Paul Greenhalgh has noted how the vernacular is 'noticed only when other forms of living began to destroy it' and describes the 'powerful irony ... that it was the modernisation of European culture which gave the vernacular a presence on the cultural scene'.¹⁷⁵ This endangered condition made it a powerful 'other' for architects looking for a shared, suitable language for post-war design and architecture. Just as the 'otherness' of Italy's craft traditions lay at the root of their appeal to industrialised America, so Italy's architects found their own 'other' in their domestic vernacular.

Conclusion

Italy at Work and the 1951 *Triennale* show up two ways that craft was being constructed to play a role in post-war Italian design; first as craftsmanship and secondly as a vernacular 'other'. Craftsmanship was seen as one of jewels of Italy's crown, particularly by Italy's American, and growing European, markets, while the perceived alterity of craft appealed to Americans and Italians alike; for the former it was a panacea to the country's mass industrial production, while to the latter it offered an authentically Italian language in a profession increasingly without

direction. The House of Italian Handicrafts, *Italy at Work* and the *Triennale* all made clear that craft required the modernising hand of an artist or architect to justify its ongoing existence, but at the same time these exhibitions demonstrate that Italy's crafts provided opportunities for architects to design objects and to establish their international reputation. Above all, what is identifiable is the co-existence of design and craft in the early 1950s, a condition that the next chapter will examine in more detail.

Notes

- 1 *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* has been the subject of a small but valuable number of articles and essays useful for further research. See Wava Carpenter, 'Designing Freedom and Prosperity: The Emergence of Italian Design in Postwar America' (MA dissertation, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution and Parsons The New School for Design, 2006); Maristella Casciato, 'Between Craftsmanship and Design: Italy at Work' in Juan José Lahuerta et al. (eds), *La arquitectura norteamericana, motor y espejo de la arquitectura española en el arranque de la modernidad (1940–1965)* (Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra, 2006), pp. 9–18; and Sparke, 'The Straw Donkey' 59–69.
- 2 After opening at the Brooklyn Museum, the exhibition travelled to the Art Institute of Chicago; the De Young Museum, San Francisco; the Portland Art Museum; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts; the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas; the City Art Museum, St Louis; the Toledo Art Museum; the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York; the Carnegie Art Museum, Pittsburgh; the Baltimore Museum of Art; and finally the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design. Anon., 'Institutional Sponsors' in Meyric R. Rogers, *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1950), p. 7.
- 3 D. W. Ellwood, 'Italy, Europe and the Cold War: The Politics and Economics of Limited Sovereignty,' in Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff (eds), *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture and Society 1948–1958* (Oxford and Herndon, VA: Berg, 1995), p. 3.
- 4 Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943–1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 82.
- 5 Chiarella Esposito, *America's Feeble Weapon: Funding the Marshall Plan in France and Italy, 1948–1950* (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1994); Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, pp. 115–18.
- 6 Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 115.
- 7 Barrett McGurn, 'Italian Exhibit of Handicraft will Tour U.S.: Museums to Show Goods Made by Artisans; 3 Shipments to Be Sent', *New York Herald Tribune* (11 September 1950), p. 16.
- 8 Vera Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy 1860–1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 327.
- 9 Nicola White, *Reconstructing Italian Fashion: America and the Development of the Italian Fashion Industry* (New York: Berg, 2000), p. 22.
- 10 Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, pp. 78, 93.

- 11 Max Ascoli was also involved in the Mazzini society, the New-York-based anti-Fascist organisation for Italian intellectual émigrés set up in 1939. Anon., 'U.S. Group to Aid Italian Handicraft: Tools and Materials Will Be Loaned to Increase Exports to this Country', *New York Times* (2 August 1945), p. 17.
- 12 Vera Zamagni, 'Betting on the Future: The Reconstruction of Italian Industry, 1946–1952' in Josef Becker and Franz Knipping (eds), *Power in Europe? Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany in a Postwar World 1945–1950* (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1986), p. 283.
- 13 Anon., 'Americans to Aid Crafts of Italy', *New York Times* (9 October 1945), p. 4.
- 14 Anon., 'U.S. Group to Aid Italian Handicraft', p. 17; Jane Ellis, 'Heirs of Cellini: The Traditional Italian Handicrafts are Reviving, Thanks to American Aid', *New York Times* (2 November 1947), p. sm15.
- 15 Examples of the products on display can be found in anon., 'New Arts and Crafts from Italy', *House & Garden* (June 1947), p. 120.
- 16 In 1928 Macy's included a room set designed by Gio Ponti, including examples of Italian embroidery, ceramics and glass. Anon., *An International Exposition of Art in Industry* (New York: R. H. Macy and Company, 1928), pp. 54–8.
- 17 Anon., *Handicraft as a Fine Art in Italy* (New York: House of Italian Handicraft, 1947) [unpaginated].
- 18 Sparke, 'Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption', 74.
- 19 Gio Ponti, 'Handicraft e Cadma, una occasione che può diventare storica', *Domus* ([no date] 1948), p. 34.
- 20 'Corrompendo non soltanto le mani e le menti degli esecutori, ma anche il gusto di noi come consumatori!' Ponti, 'Handicraft e Cadma', p. 37.
- 21 Gertrude Dinsmore, in anon., 'Survey Conducted for Italian Goods: Questionnaire Seeks to Learn U.S. Needs, Allocate Material under Export-Import Loan', *New York Times* (29 March 1948), p. 31.
- 22 Anon., 'Pottery Put First in Italian Lines: Alabaster, Leather, Glassware, Linens Ranked Next in that Order in Store Survey', *New York Times* (18 January 1949), p. 36.
- 23 Anon., 'Display Ad 90 – No Title', *New York Times* (3 December 1950), p. x36.
- 24 Anon., 'Handicraft Lines Recover in Italy: Senator Brewster Tells Italian Chamber Here of Amazing Gains in Short Time' *New York Times* (1 October, 1948), p. 37.
- 25 Meyric Rogers, 'Italy at Work', *Interior Design & Decoration* (11 November 1950), p. 50.
- 26 Brooklyn Museum Archive, New York (hereafter BMA), Records of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946–1955), Exhibitions: Italy at Work (1), 1949–1950. Rogers, 'ITALIAN CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL ARTS: Report on a Survey Made in Italy, June 2–July 5, 1949 by Meyric R. Rogers', p. 1.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 30 Rogers had initially contacted Francis Taylor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but Taylor could not commit to the exhibition due to large works planned at the Museum. BMA, Records of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946–1955), Exhibitions: Italy at Work (1), 1949–1950. Rogers, letter to Charles Nagel, 1 November 1949.
- 31 Walter Dorwin Teague, 'Italian Shopping Trip: Twelve American Museums Send Out a Battery of Buyers', *Interiors* (November 1950), p. 145.

- 32 Rogers, *Italy at Work*, p. 16.
- 33 Anon., 'U.S. Museums Aid Italy's Recovery', *Art Digest* (1 January 1951), p. 15.
- 34 Rogers, *Italy at Work*, p. 17.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 42.
- 36 BMA, Records of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946–55), Exhibitions: Italy at Work, 12/1952–6/1953; House of Italian Handicrafts, 'Memorandum on "Italy at Work"', 26 May 1953; Rogers, *Italy at Work*, p. 35.
- 37 Dorwin Teague, 'Italian Shopping Trip', p. 145.
- 38 For a concise history of Italian twentieth-century ceramics, see Hockemeyer, *The Hockemeyer Collection*, pp. 14–51.
- 39 Gio Ponti, 'Picasso convertirà alla ceramica: ma noi, dice Lucio Fontana, s'era già cominciato', *Domus* ([no date] 1948), p. 24.
- 40 BMA, Exhibitions: *Italy at Work*. Correspondence re disposition of materials. (1954/01–1954/07). Records of the Office of the Director – D|54–55|CN, Rogers, letter to Baron Carlo de Ferrariis Salzano. Consul-General of Italy, Jan. 22, 1954 [unpaginated].
- 41 *Ibid.* [unpaginated].
- 42 Rogers, *Italy at Work*, pp. 121–4.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 110.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 32–3.
- 46 Sparke, 'The Straw Donkey', 62.
- 47 For more on the pervasiveness of the discourse of Italy's 'backwardness' see John Agnew, 'The Myth of Backward Italy in Modern Europe' in Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (eds), *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), pp. 23–42.
- 48 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 6.
- 49 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 1, 32.
- 50 *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 11, 32.
- 51 Rogers, *Italy at Work*, p. 13.
- 52 Inez Robb, 'Assignment America: Political Democracy an Aid to Italian Art', *New York Journal* (7 July 1950), 15.
- 53 Charles Nagel in *ibid.*, p. 15.
- 54 BMA, Record of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946–55) Exhibitions: *Italy at Work* (1), 1949–1950. Nagel, letter to Richard Miller, 9 June 1950 [unpaginated].
- 55 Ponti was amongst the architects behind APEM's products: Enrico Freyrie, 'Dimostrazione di qualità del nostro lavoro', *Domus* ([no date] 1948), p. 57; Marya Mannes, 'Italy Looks Ahead', *House & Garden* (June 1947), p. 93.
- 56 For more details on the interiors, see 'Five Special Interiors' in Rogers, *Italy at Work*, pp. 50–61.
- 57 Gio Ponti, 'Una sala da pranzo da guardare', *Domus* (November–December 1950), p. 29.
- 58 Paolo Campiglio, 'Ponti and the Artists', *Domus* (February 2008), p. 91.

- 59 Ponti used the word 'artisti-artigiani' to describe those artists that contributed to the *Vita all'aperto* exhibition in which Fornasetti and Melotti both participated. Ponti, 'Handicraft e Cadma', p. 34.
- 60 Responses to the survey, spread over two issues of *Zodiac* magazine from 1959, were from (in the first issue) Giulio Carlo Argan, the Dutch architect J. J. P. Oud, Alberto Rosselli, Ponti, the Finnish designer Timo Sarpaneva and Sottsass, and (in the second) the French architect André Bloc, German arts publisher Gerd Hatje, the Swiss architect Mario Labò and the Frenchman André Hermant. In 2010 their answers were translated and reprinted in Catharine Rossi, 'Commentary' and 'Primary Text: "'Points of View': An Enquiry on Handicrafts (Où en sommes-nous avec l'artisanat?)," *Zodiac* no. 4/5, 1959', in *Journal of Modern Craft* 3:2 (2010), 89–116.
- 61 Ponti in Rossi, 'Primary Text', 101.
- 62 Chiesa made the furniture for one of the bedrooms in the Via Dezza apartment. Ugo La Pietra (ed.), *Gio Ponti: l'arte si innamora dell'industria* (Milan: Coliseum, 1988), p. 158. For details of Chiesa's involvement in the Pirelli building, see anon., 'Mobili a Göteborg', *Domus* (June 1955), p. 47.
- 63 An advert for Giordano Chiesa Arredamenti with the tag line 'per un arredamento di qualità' (for quality furnishing) appeared in Giordano Chiesa Arredamenti, *Domus* (December 1960) [unpaginated].
- 64 'I mobili e tutto l'ambiente sono stati eseguiti con una estrema perfezione ed una cura appassionata da un maestro ebanisteria ... Giordano Chiesa di Milano, uomo di esperienza e di infinite risorse.' Ponti, 'Una sala da pranzo da guardare', p. 29.
- 65 Letizia Frailich Ponti, personal interview with the author, 13 October 2008.
- 66 Gio Ponti, *Espressione di Gio Ponti* (Milan: Guarnati, 1954), p. 6, in Nathan H. Shapira, 'The Expression of Gio Ponti', *Design Quarterly* 69/70 (1967), pp. 4–72.
- 67 Ponti in Rossi, 'Primary Text', 101.
- 68 For reference to and examples of Ponti's self-declared work of 'suggestion' see Gio Ponti, 'Considerazioni su alcuni mobili', *Domus* (February 1950), p. 29.
- 69 'Scacchi giganti e spaccati che rivelano i pensieri – confessati e no – che covano in pectore il Re (armi e donne), la Regina (il Fante), il Fante (la Regina) e i Cavalli (le cavalle).' Gio Ponti, 'Le ceramiche fantastiche', *Domus* (November–December 1950), p. 54.
- 70 'Una invenzione pontiana già bellamente realizzata da Andrea Parini'. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 71 For more on Parini, see Piergiorgio Coin, 'PROGETTO CULTURALE: una prima iniziativa sull'arte dei ceramisti della terra veneta' in Alberto Prandi (ed.), *Terre d'arte: manifatture e opere di ceramisti veneti dal 1930 ad oggi* (Venice: Coin Rialto, 1986), pp. 28–33.
- 72 Anon., 'Parini a Nove e cinque teste di zucchini', *Domus* (June 1952), p. 46.
- 73 Manolo de Giorgi, 'A Costly Inheritance', *Domus* (February 2008), p. 103.
- 74 Andrea Branzi, *The Hot House: Italian New Wave Design*, trans. C. H. Evans (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), p. 45.
- 75 BMA, Record of the Offices of the Director (Charles Nagel) 1949–2/1951 (1), Nagel, letter to Albert Kornfeld, Editor-in-Chief, House & Garden [undated, unpaginated].
- 76 Anon., 'Italy at Work: A Great Show of Italian Handicrafts will Tour 12 US Museums in the Next Three Years', *House & Garden* (December 1950), p. 125.
- 77 Anon., 'Display Ad 55 – No Title', *New York Times* (1 December 1950), p. 13.

- 78 BMA, Records of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946–55), Exhibitions: *Italy at Work*, 1951–1952, ‘Macy’s and the Italian Government, as co-sponsors, invite you to ITALY-IN-MACY’S, U.S.A’ [unpaginated].
- 79 *Ibid.* [unpaginated].
- 80 *Ibid.* [unpaginated].
- 81 Anon., ‘Catalogue Raisonné 1921–1986’ in Anna Venini Diaz de Santillana (ed.), *Venini: Catalogue Raisonné 1921–1986* (Milan: Skira, 2000), p. 221.
- 82 ‘Retail Trade: Abroad at Home’, *Time* (17 September 1951), www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,815481,00.html, accessed 7 March 2011.
- 83 *Ibid.*
- 84 BBPR was set up in 1932 by Gian Luigi Banfi, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto N. Rogers. For more details on the ninth *Triennale* see *Triennale di Milano, Nona Triennale di Milano: catalogo* (Milan: Esposizione Triennale Internazionale delle Arti Decorative e Industriali Moderne e dell’Architettura Moderna, 1951).
- 85 Dorwin Teague, ‘A Report by Dorwin Teague’, *Interiors* (September 1951), p. 93.
- 86 *La forma dell’utile* was curated by di Belgiojoso, Peressutti and Max Huber, and was included on the ground floor of the Palazzo d’Arte. Saverio Monno identifies the first unofficial appearance of industrial design as at the seventh *Triennale* in 1940. Saverio Monno, ‘Premessa’ in Ugo La Pietra (ed.), *Fatto ad arte: arti decorative e artigianato* (Milan: Edizioni della Triennale, 1997), p. 5.
- 87 Anty Pansera, *Storia e cronaca della Triennale* (Milan: Longanesi, 1978), pp. 69–70.
- 88 Terry Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy*, 2 vols (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), vol. II, p. 156.
- 89 ‘Incomprensione e ... generale disinteresse’. Sottsass co-curated the *Sezione dell’oggetto* (Object Section) with Luigi Caccia Dominioni, Luigi Frattino and Lidia Levi. Pansera, *Storia e cronaca della Triennale*, n. 27, p. 356; Sottsass, ‘Le vie dell’artigianato’, p. 25.
- 90 ‘Triennale proletaria’ and ‘programma comunista’. Pansera, *Storia e cronaca della Triennale*, p. 64. Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy*, p. 156.
- 91 Pansera, *Storia e cronaca della Triennale*, p. 396.
- 92 The *Mostra Internazionale dell’industrial design* (International Exhibition of Industrial Design) was curated by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Roberto Menghi, Augusto Morello, Marcello Nizzoli, Michele Provinciali and Alberto Rosselli. *I congresso dell’industrial design* (First International Congress of Industrial Design) ran from 28 to 30 October 1954. Agnoldomenico Pica, *Storia della Triennale di Milano 1918–1957* (Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1957), p. 75.
- 93 Igor Kopytoff has argued that ‘commodification homogenizes value’. Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process’ in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 73.
- 94 Anon., ‘Points from the Triennale’, *Design* (October 1954), p. 8.
- 95 *Stile Industria* was set up in 1954 by Editoriale Domus and publication ceased in 1963. ‘Decaduto come elemento determinante di una produzione, inerte nella ripetizione formale di elementi stylistici.’ Alberto Rosselli, ‘L’oggetto d’uso alla Triennale’, *Stile Industria* (October 1954), p. 1.
- 96 ‘Un importante e prezioso aiuto nella definizione della forma di un oggetto industriale.’ *Ibid.*

- 97 John Foot, *Modern Italy* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 3; Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy 1860–1990*, p. 31.
- 98 Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871–1995*, 2nd edn, (Harlow: Longman, 1996), p. 348.
- 99 On the ‘industrial triangle’ and its role in Italy’s history of industrialisation, see *ibid.*, pp. 126, 131, 165, 191, 349–50.
- 100 Table 1, ‘Ditte, per ramo, classe e sottoclasse di attività economica, secondo la forma giuridica’ in Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *III Censimento generale dell’industria e del commercio 1951*, 18 vols (Rome: Tipografia Failli, 1955), vol. II, pp. 10–11.
- 101 ‘Avvertenze’ in *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 5.
- 102 Sparke, ‘The Straw Donkey’, 62.
- 103 Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, pp. 141–2.
- 104 Triennale di Milano, *Nona Triennale di Milano*, p. 7.
- 105 Leonardo Borgese, ‘Si apre oggi a Milano la triennale d’arti decorative’, *Corriere della Sera* (12 May 1951), p. 3.
- 106 Penny Sparke, ‘“A Home for Everybody?”: Design, Ideology and the Culture of the Home in Italy, 1945–1972’ in Paul Greenhalgh (ed.), *Modernism in Design* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), p. 186.
- 107 Michaelangelo Sabatino, ‘Pride in Modesty: Giuseppe Pagano’s “Architettura Rurale”’, *Journal of Architectural Education* 63:2 (2010), 96.
- 108 Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 187.
- 109 Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: California University Press, 2007), p. 77.
- 110 Leonardo Borgese, ‘Si apre oggi a Milano la Triennale d’arti decorative’, p. 3.
- 111 Franco Albini and Eugenio Gentili, ‘Esperienze della T9’, *Metron* (September–December 1951), p. 23.
- 112 For more on Baldessari, see Vittorio Fagone, *Baldessari: progetti e scenografie* (Milan: Electa, 1982).
- 113 ‘Illuminazione al neon’. Borgese, ‘Si apre oggi a Milano la Triennale d’arti decorative’, p. 3.
- 114 ‘Lo squallore astratto-concreto-spaziale-funzionale.’ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 115 ‘Quello che non avrebbe dovuto avvenire ... lasciare che gli artisti più disparati e contraddittori si sbizzarrissero, uno frammischiato all’altro, e, soprattutto, che dessero prova della loro incongruenza “stilistica”, proprio nella decorazione delle sale di accesso alla mostra; nel settore più dedicato e esemplificativo di gusto attuale.’ Gillo Dorfles, ‘Piccola guida per la IX Triennale’, *Pirelli: rivista di informazione e di tecnica* (June 1951), p. 40.
- 116 Triennale di Milano, *Nona Triennale di Milano*, p. 23. ‘La necessità della sottomissione di pittori e scultori ai voleri dell’architetto. Qui, quello che contava, era l’impostazione architettonica delle sale, poco importava di quale opere figurative o non figurative si trattasse’. Baldessari in *ibid.*, pp. 40–1.
- 117 Vittorio Gregotti, *New Directions in Italian Architecture* (London: Studio Vista, 1968), p. 64.
- 118 Alessandro Rocca, *Atlante della Triennale: Triennale di Milano* (Milan: Triennale di Milano, 1999), p. 13.
- 119 For more on the earlier history of the *Triennale*, see Raimonda Riccini, ‘Disegno industriale italiano: la costruzione di una cultura fra istituzioni e territorio’ in Alberto Bassi,

- Raimonda Riccini and Cecilia Colombo (eds), *Design in Triennale 1947–68: percorsi fra Milano e Brianza* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2004), pp. 15–18.
- 120 'Il dio delle antiche Triennali'. Borgese, 'Si apre oggi a Milano la Triennale d'arti', p. 3.
 - 121 The Palazzo d'arte was designed in 1933 by Giovanni Muzio, a Milanese architect associated with the neo-classicist novecento movement, to which Ponti also belonged. For more on the novecento, see Marianne Lamonaca, 'A "Return to Order": Issues of the Classical and the Vernacular in Italian Inter-War Design' in Wendy Kaplan (ed.), *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885–1945* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1995), pp. 296, 212.
 - 122 Gio Ponti, 'Ceramiche' in anon., *Nona Triennale di Milano*, p. 149.
 - 123 Gio Ponti, 'La ceramica italiana', *Domus* (July–August 1951), p. 32.
 - 124 'Nel fausto spotalizio fra ceramica e artisti modernissimi, pittori e scultori, che della ceramica moderna Italiana han rappresentato la più vivace e valorosa avanguardia.' *Ibid.*, p. 32.
 - 125 Gio Ponti, 'Prefazione' in I. Zetti and L. Spreafico (eds), *Ceramica alla 9a Triennale di Milano* (Milan: Editoriale Domus, 1953), p. 8.
 - 126 'Volutamente rappresentativo che critico, per mostrare ... l'Italia ceramica come è, almeno sopra un certo livello di gusto, di capacità e di invenzione.' *Ibid.*, p. 8.
 - 127 Dorwin Teague, 'A Report by Walter Dorwin Teague', p. 116.
 - 128 'Dannoso il tentativo di Ponti, di portare gli scultori a fare ceramiche, non però oggetti, ma ancora sculture in ceramica' and 'incomprensione tecnica di alcuni scultori'. Albini and Gentili, 'Esperienze della T9', p. 23.
 - 129 'Un piano più modesto ma più concreto ed utile, alcuni artisti hanno collaborato con artigiani per tappeti, stoffe, metalli e altre materiali' and 'la strada più ricca di durevoli risultati'. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
 - 130 The six issues dedicated to the *Triennale* started in June 1951 and ended in January 1952.
 - 131 'I settori più difficili e più ingrati'. Corrado Mezzano in anon., *Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie* (Milan: Esposizione triennale internazionale delle arti decorative e industriali moderne e dell'architettura moderna, 1951), p. 6.
 - 132 'Campe delle paglie e vimini, per le sue origini folkloristiche pericoloso al gusto – come quello del cuoio, del vetro, dell'alabastro, ecc.' Gio Ponti, 'Le paglie alla Triennale', *Domus* (September 1951), p. 36.
 - 133 Tommaso Ferraris, 'Dove va l'artigianato', *Il mobile Italiano* (23 April 1960), p. 1.
 - 134 Eugenia Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Shirt* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp. 20–3.
 - 135 'Capace di bellissime produzioni'. Ponti, 'Le paglie alla Triennale', p. 36.
 - 136 According to a law passed on 19 May 1922, 'Small industries are those which are practised at home or in the workshop of limited importance for capital used, for technical methods or staff employed.' 'Piccole industrie, sono quelle che si esercitano a domicilio o in laboratorio di limitata importanza per capitale impiegato, per mezzi tecnici e personale addetto.' Vittorio Gregotti, *Il disegno del prodotto industriale: Italia 1860–1980* (Milan: Electa, 1980), p. 170.
 - 137 Stefania Sanguanini, 'I "mezzadri urbani": il sindacato fascista degli artigiani', *Italia contemporanea* 165 (1986), 35.
 - 138 For an example of the Fascist promotion of Italian crafts, see Piero Gazzotti, *L'artigianato del tempo fascista* (Rome: Centro internazionale dell'artigianato, 1941).

- 139 Lamonaca, 'A "Return to Order"' in Kaplan (ed.), *Designing Modernity*, p. 209.
- 140 For examples of Carà's metalware designs for ENAPI see 'Documenti e modelli per l'artigianato italiano: metalli per la casa', *Domus* (June 1939), p. 80. Buzzi designed some strawwork for ENAPI. See Anon., 'Artigianato: problema nazionale', *Domus*, September 1940, p. 20.
- 141 'Artisti di squisita sensibilità e di sicura esperienza ... i disegni o i modelli ... sono stati affidati per l'esecuzione agli artigiani più provetti.' Mezzano in anon., *Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie*, p. 6.
- 142 For a full list of those involved, see Mezzano in anon., *Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie*, pp. 9, 11–13.
- 143 Agnoldomenico Pica, 'English Summary of Text by Agnoldomenico Pica' in Triennale di Milano, *Forme nuove in Italia: stile, forma, colore nell'artigianato e nell'industria* (Rome: Bestetti, 1957), p. 23.
- 144 Dorwin Teague, 'A Report by Walter Dorwin Teague', p. 101.
- 145 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
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- 156 Michelangelo Sabatino, 'Back to the Drawing Board? Revisiting the Vernacular Tradition in Italian Modern Architecture', *Annali di architettura* 16 (2004), pp. 172–3.
- 157 Dorfles, 'Piccola guida', p. 41; Franco Buzzo Ceriani and Vittorio Gregotti, 'Contribuito alla storia delle Triennali: 2. Dall'vii Triennale del 1947 alla xi Triennale del 1957', *Casabella* (September–October 1957), pp. 7–12.
- 158 For more on the exhibition, see Sabatino, 'Ghosts and Barbarians', pp. 349–52.
- 159 Charles Holmes (ed.), *Peasant Art in Italy* (London and New York: The Studio, 1913).
- 160 Eleonora Gallo, *Arte rustica Italiana* (Florence: Giulio Giannini & Figlio, 1929).
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- 162 Benedict Zucchi, *Giancarlo De Carlo* (Oxford: Butterworth Architecture, 1992), p. 3.
- 163 'Essa ha anzitutto il merito di essere affatto originale nel nostro secolo, che ha totalmente dimenticato il lato buono delle teorie di Ruskin sull'architettura e di quelle di Morris sull'artigianato (fra l'architettura spontanea e i prodotti dell'artigianato autentico, esistono, com'è ovvio, strettissime analogie: la genesi ne è la stessa).' Giulia

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- 164 Christopher Wagstaff, 'Cinema', and Ann Hallamore Caesar, 'Post-War Italian Narrative: An Alternative Account' in David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (eds), *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 226–7, 249–51.
- 165 'La "verità", la sostanza, l'origine, la purezza'. Gio Ponti, 'L'Architettura è facile', *Domus* (January 1952), p. 1.
- 166 'Ai fatti economici, materiali, storici, geografici, culturali, ecc. del loro ambiente.' Giulia Veronesi, 'Architettura spontanea', *Metron* ([no date] 1951), p. 39.
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- 175 Paul Greenhalgh, 'The History of Craft' in Peter Dormer (ed.), *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 31.