

The Museum of Modern Art

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ITALY: THE NEW DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE

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INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTS SECTION by Emilio Ambasz

Introduction

The environments were designed and built especially for the occasion on the basis of a Design Program prepared by the exhibition's director. This Design Program formed the basis for an invitation extended to a number of well-known Italian designers, as well as for a competition among young (under 35 years of age) Italian designers.

List of Environments

Commentary:	"Archaeological Environment" Gaetano Pesce	16' x 16'	small gallery adjacent to Garden Wing
Design as Postulation:	"House Environments" Gae Aulenti	16' x 16'	
	Joe Colombo	16' x 16'	Garden
	Ettore Sottsass	16' x 16'	Wing
	"Mobile Environments" (trailer house-type)		
	Richard Sapper	{ 20' x 7' (closed) 20' x 14' (open)	
	Marco Zanuso		
	Alberto Roselli	{ 8' x 17' (closed) 17' x 34' (open)	
	Mario Bellini		
		{ 7' x 16' x 5' high (closed) 7' x 16' x 7' high (open)	

The ceremonies and rituals and the modes of use contemplated for each environment are shown on color television screens that present four- to five-minute films prepared by the environments' respective designers.

Counter - Design

as Postulation:	Ugo La Pietra	16' x 20'	
	Archizoom	14' x 14'	East
	Superstudio	14' x 14'	Wing
	Gruppo Strum	14' x 14'	
	<i>Zeno Mari (text only)</i>		

The viewpoints of the designers who have adopted a counter-design approach are presented by means of three-dimensional and audio-visual display techniques.

The results of the competition will be shown in photographic form:

Designers: Gruppo 999
G. Mari and Collaborators

(more)

The environments illustrated in this section have been specially researched, designed, and produced for the exhibition 'Italy: The New Domestic Landscape' by Italian designers and manufacturers. They represent two opposite attitudes to environmental design currently prevalent in Italy.

The first attitude involves a commitment to design as a problem-solving activity, capable of formulating, in physical terms, solutions to problems encountered in the natural and sociocultural milieu. The opposite attitude, which we may call one of counterdesign, chooses instead to emphasize the need for a renewal of philosophical discourse and for social and political involvement as a way of bringing about structural changes in our society.

In order to bring these two design attitudes into focus, the director of the exhibition prepared a special Design Program, with specific and general considerations to be borne in mind by designers of microenvironments and microevents to be presented in the show. It was intended to provide the greatest possible freedom of inquiry. This program was submitted to a number of invited designers of established reputation and also formed the basis of a competition, open only to Italian designers under the age of thirty-five, so that they might have an opportunity of expressing their points of view.

The Design Program (pp. 139-45) asked the participants to consider the recent history of design, in whose first, heroic period modern architects and designers were mainly concerned with arriving at the 'prototypical solution,' that impeccable conceptual vision that animated one generation's long journey from an imperfect *today* to a harmonious *tomorrow*.

But, in their quest for the prototypical solution that might justify the long journey, the pioneer modern architects and designers overlooked the fact that the succession of new perceptual experiences that occur between today and tomorrow would inevitably modify those constants with which they were preoccupied.

It becomes evident that neither the experiences of today nor the vision of tomorrow can be emphasized at the expense of one another, and that the search for quality in daily existence cannot afford to ignore the concomitant problems of pollution, the deterioration of our cities and institutions, and poverty. The task, therefore, is to reconcile the overview with the exigencies of the moment, to be aware of both the goal of the long journey and of the day-to-day activities along the way.

The Design Program for this exhibition was prepared with the specific intention of exploring possible approaches to these problems. One approach is to search for the long-range meanings of the rituals and ceremonies of the twenty-four hours of the day, in order to design the spaces and artifacts that give it structure. The complementary approach is to divest ourselves of the spaces and artifacts inherited by our present culture, in order to arrive at a redefinition of the ideal way to live.

The group representing designers who believe in design as a positive activity were asked to explore the domestic landscape with a sense for its places, and to postulate the spaces and artifacts that give them form, the ceremonies and behaviors that assign them meaning. Special attention was to be paid to new forms and patterns of use emerging as a result of changing life styles, more informal social and family relationships, and evolving notions of privacy and territoriality; as well as to the exploration of new materials and techniques of production. The Design Program also asked the designers to conceive of their environments not as self-contained units, but to explore their ideas further in terms of dwellings, with explicit concern for the context of housing.

By contrast, the exponents of the counterdesign position were invited to elaborate on their designs for destruction of the object and to expound their strategies for cultural change. They were then provided with a platform from which to present their philosophical and political manifestos.