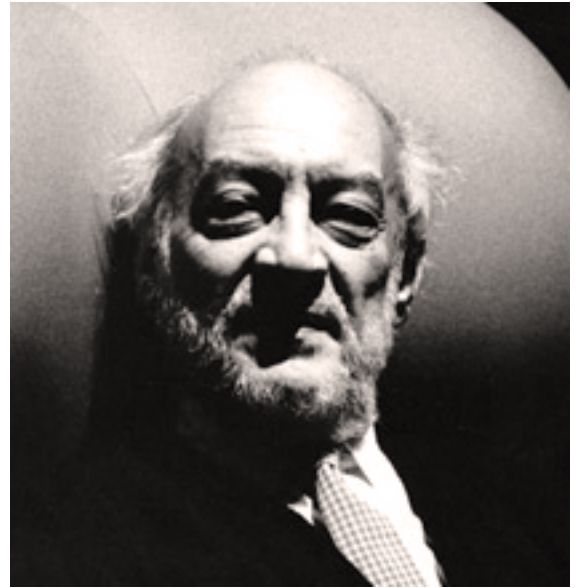


Gaetano Pesce: Ideas and Innovation

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“A very serious problem is that most of the people have lost the connection with the society, they don't work for the needs of soceity.”

-Gaetano Pesce



Thesis:

The ideas that are realized by Gaetano Pesce, in the form of contemporary Italian design, are influenced by the context in which he works and lives. His inspiration is drawn from personal experiences, relationships, and from the design, art, and architecture of the past. His motivation is drawn from his curiosity and from response to culture and economy. Together, the attributes relating to the motivation and inspiration of Gaetano Pesce are key in understanding the impact of his work in Italian design from the late 1950's onwards.

Inspiration:

During his early years, Pesce was introduced to Cesare Cassina, who took interest in the works of Pesce and the message that he were trying to convey. For this reason Cassina gave Pesce a monthly salary with which to continue research with materials and to come up with prototypes. Over the years, their relationship deepened, as Pesce quotes: *“Cassina became a kind of father to me.”* (Gaetano Pesce) It was Cassina who actually inspired Pesce to not only make inspiring works of art, but rather to embed this quality into industrial products. *“Cassina helped me understand that contemporary creativity was associated with the new reality of our times. It did not subscribe to the romantic ideal of art, but rather to industrial production.”* (Gaetano Pesce)

The relationship that Gaetano Pesce had set up with Cesare Cassina, and the ideas that inspired his more contemporaries to support him, granted Pesce access to the resource of production and experimentation.

The death of one of his contemporaries, Milena Vettore, while they were touring the Cassina factory, inspired visions of blood in Pesce's work. *"I'm sure over the next years, all the work I did where blood was very present had to do with this."* (Gaetano Pesce)

It was because Pesce had support from Mario Bellini and Vico Magistretti, which were then already well established designers, that he was able to produce works inspired by the previously described tragic event. One such case was when Cesare Cassina was sceptic about fabricating the *"Fiore in bocca"*, which depicts part of a face with a flower in the mouth and blood streaming down from the nose. In addition, the contrast between contrast of love and suffering, that can be observed in this piece, served to emotionally affect viewers.

However, looking further back in the life of Gaetano Pesce, we can learn of the feminine influence that has manifested itself in some of his works. During his childhood, Pesce was expelled from various educational institutions (due to his rebellious nature), and as a result was *"briefly [enrolled] in a convent academy for girls. There he was happy"* (Marisa Bartolucci, pp.9) This happiness sprung while he developed his taste for art during *"conversations about music and art"* (Pesce) with the head nun.

"Wherever he went, he was in the company of women, his mother, her cousin, his paternal grandmother." (Marisa Bartolucci) Pesce's mother worked hard and raised him on her own, and Pesce had a deep appreciation for that. As a result of this part of his personal life, there has been a deep feminine influence embedded in his ideas.

For example, his *"La Mamma"* chair has a distinct feminine quality in its form that sets this work apart from other chairs. This form is meant to be expressive, to both viewers and sitters, of the love and care that a mother has for her child. This work also ties in with Pesce's ideals; *"We have to answer people's needs, create something useful, give joy and happiness."* (Gaetano Pesce for Designboom)



La Mamma

“Human beings are full of mistakes. For me it was important to use the mistake as a quality. To find a different kind of beauty.” (Gaetano Pesce pps.15-16)

It was this human characteristic, that inspired Gaetano Pesce to take advantage of defects created by manufacturing errors. For example the “*Carenza*” bookshelf was made by allowing bubbles to form in the plastic material that it is made of. This caused parts of the plastic to break off from the edges, making each individual “*Carenza*” unique. This aspect gave the bookshelves a human characteristic, allowing them to better integrate in human culture as more than just design objects.



Carenza

This desire to instill a unique quality to the individual copies of a mass-produced product was inspired by his learnings and interpretation of the art of previous eras. This art was regarded by Pesce as: *“a set of products designed to meet the needs of a select clientele, an applied art where the portrait, the landscape or the nude corresponded to a well-defined demand”* (il Modo Italiano). It was with this in mind that he went about working in the domain of industrial design, making unique products that were not meant for everyone. This was a very important step for Italian design during the late 1960’s, when, for purely economic reasons, generic products were being made for the general populace.

This study of previous masters and their methods allowed Pesce to learn beyond the design work that was happening during his time, and bring something fresh and innovative to the table. *“Many of Pesce’s early designs refer to the perfectly proportioned human form of the Renaissance”* (Marisa Bartolucci, pp.15)

Motivation:

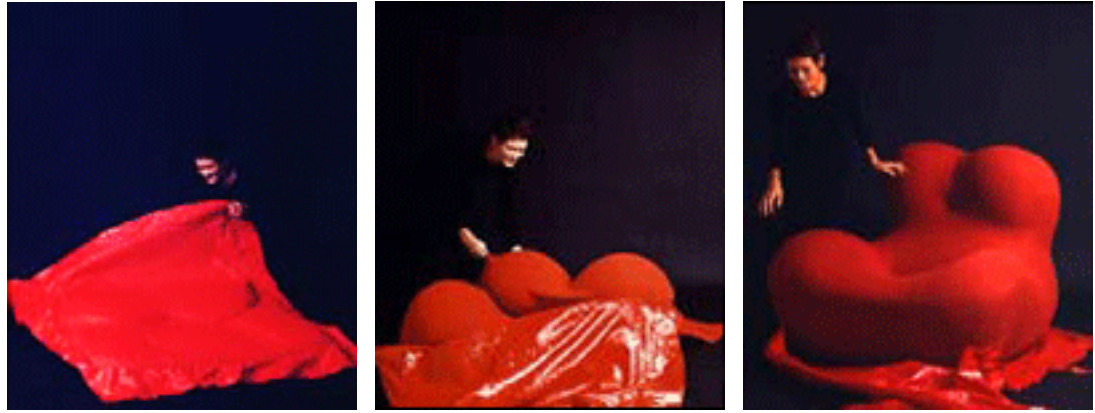
Gaetano Pesce was motivated to appeal to cultural values through design, when he observed a lack thereof in the profit-driven products during the mid 20th century. He understood that products should not simply be fabricated for function alone, but also for how they affect society and culture. *“Design alone was not enough for me. I thought objects should be about more than function.”* (Gaetano Pesce, pp.11) Pesce was unsatisfied that design pieces only fetched money; they needed a purpose; a meaning. It was the aesthetic and cultural dimension to his works that made them relevant to their time.

During the Radical Design/Architecture movement of Ettore Sottsass, groups such as Archizoom and Superstudio, and others, Pesce found ways of instilling emotional qualities through the various elements of which his works were comprised. At this time the purpose of his works was to spawn discourse with his contemporaries, on the aesthetic qualities of design pieces and their function. It was through this discourse and experimentation that Italian design was able to capture both functional and aesthetic qualities that lead to a genuine human response such as surprise, or joy of use.

However, it was the curiosity of Gaetano Pesce lead him to experiment with many materials that were relatively new during his time, such as polyurethane and other plastics. These experimentations allowed him to form a knowledge base of materials, from which he could draw forth innovative ideas when inspired by everyday experiences.

In fact, this had been the case with the previously described *“La Mamma”* chair, where the idea behind the fabrication and materials for this chair came from an entirely different context than the feminine and maternal qualities that it portrays. While taking a bath, Gaetano Pesce was inspired to use polyurethane by observing the qualities of the sponge that he was using. Here, we can observe the *“La Mamma”* chair from the point of view of the materials of its making, and their significance in terms of innovation. The sponge-like material of the chair allowed it to be placed into a sealed bag, and all the air to be vacuumed out. This left behind a flat bag which was not only easy to store, but also to bring into a new living location for example, where the bag could be opened and the chair could inflate on its own. This inflatable quality is what further inspired and encouraged Pesce to make an entire series of chairs known as *“Up”*.

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Steps of unpacking La Mamma

We can observe this rich exploration of materials yet again with Pesce's "Feltri" chair, that was made out of a very thick wool felt and polyester resin on the exterior and quilted down on the interior seat area. The materials allowed for a strong and comfortable base on which to sit, and an adjustable backing and armrest that could be reconfigured to change one's sitting experience completely. The innovation behind this choice of materials lies not with the quilted padding of the interior, but with the single large piece of wool felt that the rest of the chair is made of. A more speculative view of the base of the chair reveals further innovation in the form of a miniature Roman amphitheater, complete with arches to give it the strength required to support the weight of a person. Here, we note that Gaetano Pesce has once again looked back at the art and architecture of times passed, seeking inspiration, combining it with his knowledge of materials, and ultimately resulting in an innovative product.



Feltri

Conclusion:

The close relationship with key design houses, such as Cassina, have allowed Gaetano Pesce to materialize his ideas, and to experiment, expressively, in the domain of contemporary design. The combination of ideas, inspired by various experiences, has allowed Pesce to come up with emotionally as well as technologically innovative and inspiring works. In Marisa Bartolucci's book, "*Gaetano Pesce*", she compares Pesce with designer/architect Frank Gehry, as having "*pushed materials to their expressive limit*". With our previous examples of the "*La Mamma*", "*Carenza*", and "*Feltri*" we can see this quote come to life in full effect. Pesce's observation of culture and economy, his curiosity of materials, his study of art and architecture of the past, his personal experiences, and his ideas, have defined him as an intellectual designer who has played a major role in defining what we know today as Italian design.

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