Achille Castiglioni

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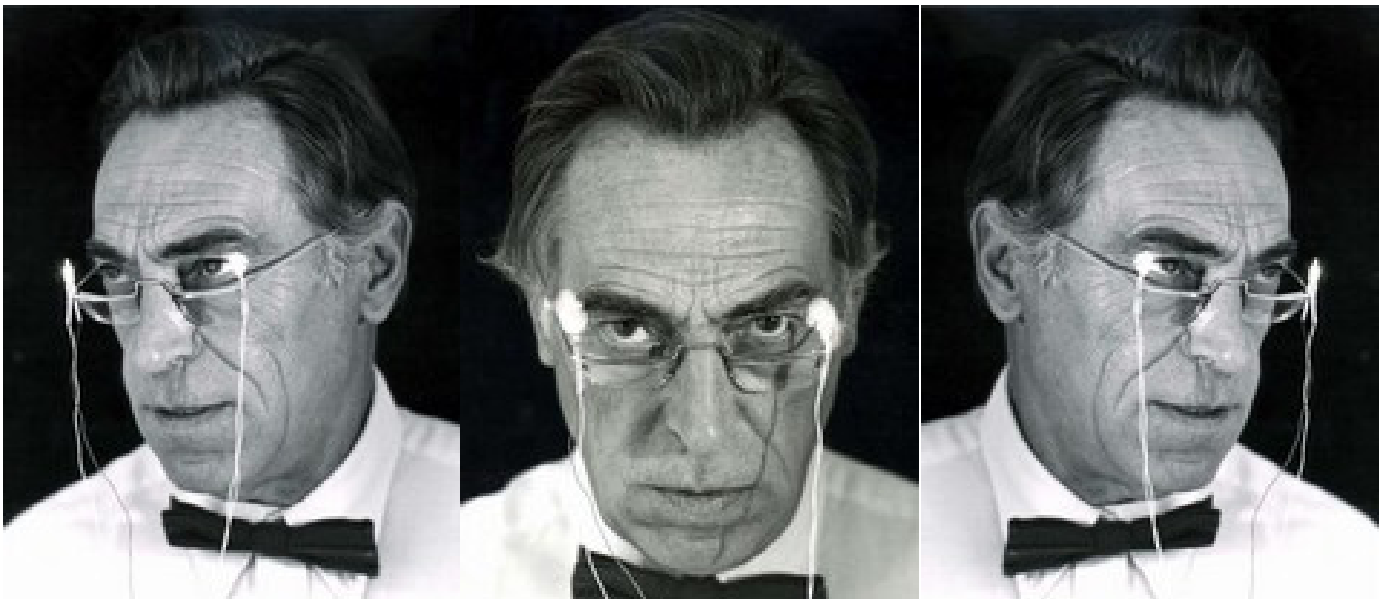

Il Vecchio Maestro: Achille Castiglioni

Italian design is a process that has constantly been changing in context and form. These changes did not however occur within a day's time. Generations of architects and industrial designer have devoted their life's work in hopes to guide future generations to root themselves in Italian tradition. Among them, is Achille Castiglioni. Achille Castiglioni, also known as the father of Italian design was one of the few people privileged to guide the direction of Italian design. His contributions as an industrial designer and a professor have not only provided inspiration for newer generations, but also produced objects that have become passively embedded into the daily lives of people.

With understanding from previous papers regarding intellectuals, designers, and agglomeration, this paper hopes to reinforce the idea that Achille Castiglioni, a maestro of second generation has played a crucial role in Italian culture and sponsored the generation of innovative ideas in the present time. Such can be seen through understanding the context in which Castiglioni was part of, his background as a teacher and as an intellect, and the design methodologies he follows.

Rooting in context of WWII

Castigilioni's work is best understood within the context of post world war II. After the Second World War, minimalist design was in play. Due to the economic downfall, appliances that were functional, yet low in cost to produce and purchase, were in demand. Castiglioni, being a young

designer recently graduating in architecture from University of Polytechnic in Milan, joined with his elder brother to accepting commissions for exhibitions and set designs. Due to the lack of larger commissions from the economic downfall, Castiglioni developed products for Italian manufacturers that were hoping to rebuild their businesses.

The Castiglioni brothers thus produced functionalistic products for mass production. These items were cheap to produce but reluctant to reduce Italian quality. One of these most memorable devices include the Spalter Vacuum cleaner. A bright red plastic vacuum cleaner suitable to be slung across one's back like a leather strap bag. Simple, functional, affordable.

Family Based Companies

The importance of family in Italian design should not be foreign to us. Family companies collaborating and sharing in a deeper level has provided the keystone of Italian design. Due to the economic downfall and rapid growth in the economic miracle, small family based companies became more willing to invest in their time and money with designers like Castiglioni. As a result, designers and manufacturers shared personal time and take extra time to further enhance the quality and reduce usage of materials in a product. These family oriented companies were willing to take more of a risk, and thus able to create long-lasting relationships between designers and manufacturers. Family-based companies also built upon the idea of slowness, addressed in Italia papers of 2005; pushing the idea of taking the time between designers and manufacturers to enhance the quality of production. Castiglioni and Flo for example, understood light fixtures based on a shared creative vision and understanding. (Italia, 2005)

In an interview he writes: "A designed object is the result of the common effort of a group of people with different and specific technical, industrial, commercial and aesthetic skills. The work of the designer is the synthesis that expresses such common effort. The peculiarity of design lies in the continuous relationship among a number of players, from the entrepreneur to the worker in the factory." (depadova, 2007)

Design Methodology

Born in Milan 1918, Castiglioni studied architecture and graduated in architecture from Milan Polytechnic in 1944; later only to return as a professor to spread his knowledge as an industrial designer teaching a course known as 'Artistic Industrial Design'. Castilgiano was privileged to win the Compasso d'Oro award, a prestigious Italian product design award a total of eight times. While designing for major companies such as Alessi and Flo, Achille Castiglioni found joy in teaching as a professor in the very university he graduated from. As a teacher, he constantly challenges their thinking, with his idea:

Sella Stool 1957

Spalter V 1956

Archo 1962

Mazzadro 1957

"Start from scratch. Stick to common sense. Know your goals and means." Moreover, he pushed to inspire his students by bringing multiple objects into class. Castiglioni would bring in a black sling bag filled with his quirky collections of objects and toys made from a variety of items. These may have included odd sunglasses, parts of wooden stools, etc. These objects held only one thing in common, certain aspects of the object and its purpose inspired Castiglioni. He chose to show these objects that seemed to have life of its own, emphasizing that the success of these objects resulted from each fulfilling a single functional tasks that in return could be combined with other unlikely objects. With this, he encouraged students to collect and notice the small intricate details that may be a spark towards inventing something with end users in mind.

Castiglioni encouraged the idea that designers should never stick to a style, but base their style on the function and the needs of the user.
"What you need is consistent way of designing, not a style." (designboom, 2008)

In this, Castiglioni addresses the problem as an Intellectual, pushing the understanding of object, while stating that form and function may be important factors of a product design but that there is of underlying concerns to be addressed.

"With his functional and purist yet playful objects, Castiglioni has shown that form and function, while certainly the main ingredients for successful design, cannot be a designer's only concerns." (MoMa, 1997) A good example of this in Castiglioni's collection is the Sella stool. Conceived of the seat of a bicycle on cast iron base, the Sella stool was derived from Castiglioni's understanding of people who desire comfortable seating when they are talking on the phone. It confirms his idea of starting from scratch, seeing basic functions of a chair derived in a bicycle seat, and placing it into another context. This performs excellently with people who are on the phone, allowing them to pace around it, until needing a quick comfortable seating arrangement for a brief moment of item.

Archo Lamp 1962

Castiglioni also drew his inspiration based on the concept of avant-garde, pushing the boundaries of what is accepted as norms. Gaining inspiration from Marcel duchamp, who was well known for the 'urinary', Castiglioni pushed the ideas of lighting to a new level. Arco light, produced in 1962 is a fine example of Castiglioni pushing the limits of normal interpretation of industrial elements into the home. Like fitting lights on Italian roads, the Arco lamp does not have a fixed point on the ceiling. Its long neck and floating lamp emphasized on movement and mobility of lighting in the course of one's living room. The Arco lamp also used a heavy slab of marble as counterweight to provide a base of weighted elegance. (Film Media group, 2008)

Catagorization

Castiglioni classifies his work in a specific style. Understanding his means of categorization allows us to understand the purpose of specific works better. Moreover, it helps us visualize the way Castiglioni sees.

Ready-Made Objects: Objects are gathered from pieces of objects that seem to have a perfectly resolved relationship between form-function. Castiglioni takes such objects, retaining their original form, and places it in an entirely different context. Thus, the combinations of forms evolve into a new form-function relationship.

Cumano Table 1979

Redesigned Objects: Redesigned objects are in my preference, the easiest of forms that exhibit Castiglioni's influence to everyday life. Castiglioni redesigned traditional objects without claiming that they were not designed well, but in a sense of improving them based on technological advances and needs of modern life. A great example of this is the Cumano table, redesigned in 1978. By developing foldable legs on an ordinary coffee table, Castiglioni redesigned an already well-made coffee table into something easily transportable and decorate able. Similar products continue to exist in today's culture without ever knowing where it's origin of design came from. These include the inline light switch in 1968, and the spirale ashtray in 1971.

Minimalist Objects: Influenced by the culture and historical background of his time, Castiglioni pushed for a higher level of synthesis by eliminating everything unneeded to an object. He notes to "Delete, delete, delete and at the end find the 'core aspect of the design'". (depadova, 2007) This core aspect of design, also known as the primary design component becomes the bare bones of a minimalist object. An excellent example of this is the Dry cutlery set.

Expressionistic Objects: Simply a set of objects where a component of this object is dominant over the rest, without neglecting the functions and constructive elements of the whole. In completion, it becomes the play in character inside an object.

Integral Objects: Projects that included interdisciplinary influences in the work or separate parts of the project.

Castiglioni's Worries

In an interview, Castiglioni speaks to the audience of young designers, warning them in several aspects.

He begins by claming that designers of this generation are not trying to clean up objects, and thus they are becoming overloaded with connotations and are

removing from their pure functions, fearing the loss of minimalist design.

Castiglioni continues by explaining the importance of creating a relationship between the designer and the end-user, emphasizing that design is not entirely about functionalism. Moreover, Castiglioni emphasizes on the essentials of working as a team and never as an individual. "Good design projects never originate from the ambition to leave one's own mark, but from one's willingness to build a relationship with the unknown end-user." (dapadova, 2007) But is this possible with where the direction Italian design is heading? Moreover, the study of interaction design is highly conceptually based on collaboration and ideals of Italian design. With the removal of family-related business, the structure behind interaction would likewise fall apart.

Concluding

As an intellectual designer and as a teacher, Castiglioni offered his life to spreading knowledge and inspiration to the younger generation. His objects, furniture and architectural structures can be seen as a collection of inspiration objects, emphasizing on a quirky minimalist approach. More importantly, Castiglioni encourages ideals of family relationships within Italian design that has been rooted within since the first generation.

It's been noticeable that Castiglioni along with the maestri of the older generation have similarities. Each maestro has their own ideas, but similarly, they all round up with the same solution. That is, the idea that design must be humanistic, serving the context of its time, and the culture of the people is essential. However with the idea of globalization coming into picture, many of the new generation's maestri are now being gathered from the outskirts of the city. Milan itself has become a place of exhibition rather than a place of innovation and some of the ideals focused by the maestri of older generations are being lost. It is even arguable that innovation in Italian design is even being uprooted from the orientation of family businesses due to a new generation of design. What happens can only be determined by the new generation of maestri.

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