

BRESCIA, ITALY

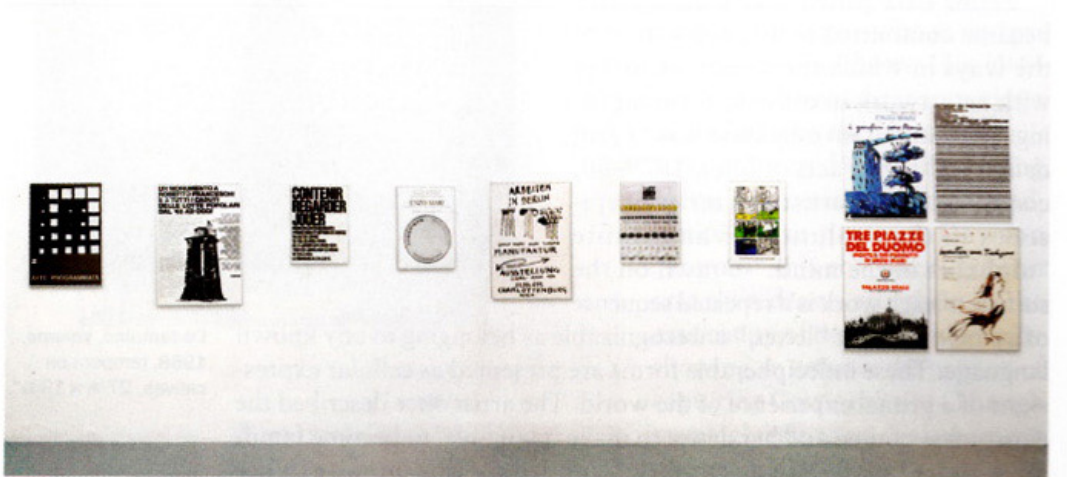
Enzo Mari

GALLERIA MASSIMO MININI

It is almost impossible to write about Enzo Mari the artist without writing about Enzo Mari the person—not just because of his eccentric character, but also because of his commitment to a methodology and because of the deeply political nature of his analytical, transformative, and redemptive work in art and design. For more than half a century, Mari has been working on a holistic design concept that incorporates every aspect of human experience: a project he calls a “system of creation.” Mari studied classics and literature at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan from 1952 to 1956. Over the course of his career he has explored Concrete art, design methodologies, and perceptual structures, and has continually taken on a diverse range of research endeavors in the sciences, mathematics, and literature. He has constructed a taxonomy of his output, classifying each work by style in a constant attempt to see a given design through to its most successful end. His work and methods make a compelling case for the productive tension that always underlies the process of learning through doing.

The interweaving of art, life, and design was the driving theme of Mari’s recent exhibition at Galleria Massimo Minini. Titled “*Eliminare il superfluo per ritrovare l’essenziale*” (Discarding the Superfluous to Get Back to the Essence), the show offered a sampling of the artist’s prints, furniture, and objects, all from his private collection. The exhi-

View of “Enzo Mari,”
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bition, which unfolded in four stages spanning four rooms, brought to the fore the ways in which the various languages and forms Mari employs come together in a single, coherent vision.

The show opened with a series of works on paper—lithographs, heliographs, silk screens, and posters—that dated from 1952 to 2000. Many of these pieces are interconnected with the research and ideas Mari generated for his book *Funzione della ricerca estetica* (The Function of Aesthetic Research), 1970, which deals with the “project of aesthetic research, that analytical process that, through exemplifications and models, tends toward the clarification of language and its purposes.” In particular, *Progetto 923, Struttura 923* (Project 923, Structure 923), 1968, and *Progetto 1167, Atlante secondo Lenin* (Project 1167, Atlas according to Lenin), 1976—the latter a work done in collaboration with the Italian poet Francesco Leonetti—convey Mari’s interest in the cognitive structures that shape awareness.

Several examples of Mari’s seating designs from the ’70s and ’80s were installed on the gallery’s mezzanine level. We saw the 1974 *Delfina* (Dolphin) stackable chair, the 1985 *Tonietta* chair (a plain cast-aluminum-frame chair), the 1974 *Autoprogettazione* (do-it-yourself projects), the 1971 *Sof-Sof* chair (comprising a single removable cushion on a simple welded frame), and the 1971 *Sedia Box* (or Box Chair, a consumer-assembled piece that came apart to fit into a box, like a puzzle). These evince the designer’s critical and thorough interrogation of the social, aesthetic, and economic requirements and constraints of each design, in terms of both concept and production. An inner room of the gallery jumped back to the first half of the ’50s, when Mari was making conceptual paintings. A series of 1967–99 paintings featuring various renderings of a white goose head remind the viewer of the playfulness with which he produced *The Apple and the Butterfly* (1969), a wordless children’s book about an apple and a caterpillar. The final two rooms of the exhibition included works on panels from the 1950s, anodized-aluminum structures from the 1960s, and the five-part *Oggetti a composizione auto-condotta* (Objects with Do-it-Yourself Composition), conceived in 1959 and produced in 2006. Though very few of the works in these rooms were ever produced on a large scale, they powerfully attest to a moment in the early ’60s when Mari’s work constituted the transition between kinetic and Concrete art and developments in Conceptual art. Indeed, the consistent logic of Mari’s approach has allowed him to produce a unique combination of typically opposing concepts and strategies—from idea and form to industry and craft. Articulated as a dense weave of cultural reference and pragmatic functionality, his work always aspires to embody those qualities that are truly essential.

—Paola Nicolin

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.