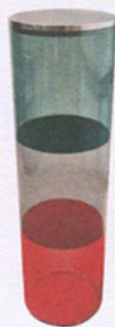


INVENTARIO

Tutto è Progetto / Everything is a Project



01.



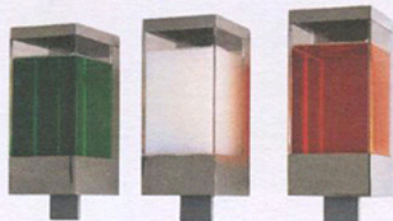
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I — 02. Inventario / Everything is a Project

Il secondo numero è un passo importante per ogni creazione: deve confermare quanto fatto con il primo e far capire la direzione verso cui si sta guardando. È quanto ci auguriamo troviate in questo nuovo Inventario, da noi promosso e sostenuto. Inventario non parla di Foscarini: siamo solo in apertura e in chiusura. In questo numero con due scatti di Max Rommel, che ha immaginato le nostre lampade in una chiave insolita, fotografandole all'interno della cabina di un Tir. Un'ambientazione singolare che si trasforma così in un angolo di casa. Uno sguardo inedito, ironico e divertito che è il nostro augurio di buona lettura! / The second issue is an important step for every creation: it has to confirm what was achieved in the first issue and pave a way to the future. This is what we hope you will find in this, the second edition of Inventario, which Foscarini promotes and supports. Inventario is not about us: you will find Foscarini only at the start and close. In this issue, two photographs by Max Rommel place our lamps in a curious setting: inside the cab of a truck, which is thus transformed into the corner of a home. These pictures, ironic and entertaining, are our wish for you to enjoy Inventario.

Carlo Urbinati / Alessandro Vecchiato
Foscarini

Carlo Urbinati *Alessandro Vecchiato*

I — 28. Nuovi Maestri / New Masters

Fernando & Humberto Campana

di / by Marco Romanelli

Tre amici si incontrano a Murano, due arrivano da San Paolo del Brasile e sono fratelli, il terzo arriva da Milano. Si sono conosciuti 21 anni fa e da allora, spesso a distanza, si confrontano. / Three friends meet in Murano. Two of them arrive from São Paulo, Brazil, and are brothers. The third comes from Milan. They first met 21 years ago, and since then they have often shared their opinions with each other, sometimes over long distances.

F.C. C'è anche la maglietta per Lacoste nel 2009 e soprattutto, nel 2007, ci sono le scenografie e i costumi per la *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio con il balletto Nazionale di Marsiglia: con un filo di plastica abbiamo creato i costumi direttamente sul corpo dei ballerini. E poi c'era una grande medusa assemblata con le bigiotterie turchese da mercato... Ma in fondo abbiamo fatto poche esperienze sul corpo. Forse la più importante sono le scarpe di Melissa. Recentemente siamo tornati al gioiello per Gijis Bakker con pelli di cavallino patchwork.

M.R. E se parlassimo del kitsch? In Europa è una dimensione molto sentita, nel senso che si arriva sempre a chiedersi quello che "si può fare" e quello che "non si può fare", a ricercare un equilibrio tra "buona forma" e kitsch...

F.C. È un filo sottile anche per noi, ma in fondo l'hai detto tu una volta molti anni fa: il nostro progetto è come un percorso su una lama sottile sospesa tra regionalismo e kitsch. Penso che stiamo ancora camminando su quella pericolosissima lama.

M.R. E non avete timore di cadere dal lato del kitsch?

F.C. Ma venendo dal Brasile è impossibile! Il nostro paesaggio fisico non è, come il vostro, bianco nero e grigio per una lunga parte dell'anno. Da noi c'è un'invasione di colori, di forme, di stravaganze, di travestiti, di musica, di banditi, di gente buona e di gente cattiva.

H.C. Vivere in un simile contesto è molto energizzante: bisogna stare attenti in ogni momento, a ogni elemento.

F.C. Soprattutto vivere a San Paolo: non è una città che ti permette di essere "bilanciato", piuttosto totalmente "sbilanciato"!

H.C. Ogni giorno è un giorno di caccia! Non ci si rilassa mai!

M.R. E se, per concludere, dicessi la parola eleganza, ovvero citassi un altro grande problema europeo e soprattutto italiano?

H.C. Penso che l'eleganza sia la verità. Portare la propria verità: non fingere di essere ciò che non si è.

F.C. Eleganza è onestà. Essere onesti con se stessi.

H.C. Denudarsi!

M.R. E se dico "memoria e futuro"? Noi Europei sentiamo fortemente il problema di doverci confrontare con la storia, il peso enorme di tutto quello che è stato prima, che bisogna conoscere, che bisogna studiare, con il quale bisogna parametrarsi.

F.C. Oh no! Noi facciamo l'archeologia del futuro! Il nostro è un paese nuovo rispetto al vostro. Siamo bambini! Siamo più liberi! Più liberi di venire qui da Venini e prendere i frammenti e metterli tutti insieme. La libertà di non avere memoria. Non ci sono inibizioni!

M.R. E quindi il futuro lo si costruisce davvero giorno per giorno?

F.C. Da noi si diceva sempre il "Brasile è il paese del futuro" e questo futuro non arrivava mai. Adesso forse qualcosa sta cambiando. È finalmente un momento di "inclusione" sociale e non di esclusione. Mentre sotto la dittatura militare, quando ci siamo formati, era un paese solo di esclusione!

H.C. Vorrei raccontarti un ultimo aneddoto: quando Brasilia è stata inaugurata, negli anni Sessanta, i nostri genitori come tanti altri sono partiti per visitare la nuova capitale, per "vedere il futuro" e quando sono tornati a casa ci hanno portato solo oggetti indiani...

F.C. ... perché quella era una terra di indiani e quindi sulla strada tra San Paolo e Brasilia c'erano solo indiani che vendevano i loro prodotti artigianali. E noi ragazzini che ci aspettavamo un'astronave, o almeno un modello della cattedrale di Niemeyer, abbiamo ricevuto archi e frecce!

I — 28.

Nuovi Maestri/New Masters

Fernando & Humberto Campana

Conversation with Marco Romanelli
Murano, 2 December 2010

Marco Romanelli When we met, twenty years ago, one of the arguments I had used to justify publishing your work in "Domus" – work that was completely different from the cultural project of the magazine and "wrong" in a moment that called for getting beyond the Postmodern – was the "design of difference". Or namely the way "difference", when it is sincere, can help us to start from another point, to create a shift that catches you off guard. That was my view, but of course I was inside the system. On the other hand, for you, being outside the system, what was the premise that led you to design in a different way?

Humberto Campana I believe it all started with manual work. Manual skill gives you the possibility to work with materials industry would never think about using. This was the beginning: our things come from manual work, from being able to take the time to construct an object. The result is great freedom.

Fernando Campana It's as if we had tried to institutionalize randomness, because for us randomness has a very precise meaning. It is not pure chance. Consider, for example, these big appliques we are making here at Venini: the problem is certainly not that of putting one piece of glass here, another there, it is to choose the pieces of glass according to our vision, or namely to institutionalize randomness. We have never begun a project with "mathematics". Learning mathematics can take a lifetime, while poetry, on the other hand, is short and quick. If we don't catch the instant, it will be gone.

That is why when we begin a project we never concentrate on measurements, functions, price, but on poetry. On making poetry concrete. Then there will be a whole lifetime for the "mathematics" of that project. There will be time to add details, to make it less expensive or more comfortable.

H.C. Another very important part of our work lies in the attempt to construct unity by means of fragmentation. It is the starting point of all our pieces: you can work with any material when you use fragmentation as your principle.

F.C. And finally, you have to draw a parallel with our country. Today Brazil is beginning to take form as a relatively unified country, but until a short time ago it was extremely fragmented, the sum of a number of distinct cultures. You couldn't tell if it was a serious country or not, violent or not violent. I believe we translate all this in our work.

M.R. Judgment of your works often falls into the trap of confusion between "assemblage" and "crafts". In my view, there is no operation of crafts in your work, because craftsmanship is not simply something done with the hands, it is a complex system with a rich tradition and precise rules that lead to the transformation of material through manual intervention. Your operation, on the other hand, is one of "collection of fragments" that has nothing to do with crafts,

especially with traditional Brazilian crafts, which as far as I know Brazil seem to be extremely limited.

H.C. What we do is the exact opposite of crafts. Precisely to avoid becoming regional or ethnic, we want to proceed with a way of looking at things that is very far from that of crafts. Even when the inspiration comes from a crafts attitude, it is always filtered by a rational process.

M.R. You work by gathering pieces, fragments, but if we think about it, some of the materials you use are somehow "international" as well. In the sense that the simplest things are also the most common and universally widespread: automobile tires, plastic garden hoses, rope. Things that can actually be found in every country in the world. So is your work really Brazilian design?

F.C. I think the way we process these already existing elements, that effectively belong to all societies, is very "Brazilian": a sort of "emergencial" design, "of the emergency". For example, right at the start, we wanted to make a plastic chair, but we didn't have the wherewithal to invest in a mould, and in any case there wouldn't have been any companies willing to take us up on it. So, driven by the need to show our idea, we chose packing bubblewrap and then, later, garden hoses. In this way, we obtained a sophisticated design even though we didn't have a mould. In fact, strangely enough, with a mould we would never have been able to make such products, with such textures. When we realized it was possible to use already existing materials, or to reprocess materials to make exuberant, rich objects, then we had found our path! There is undoubtedly a precise relationship with Brazil in this awareness, or namely with the "creation of things by necessity". Many people say our inspiration comes from the favelas, but that is not exactly true. We are not attracted by the image of the favelas, but by their constructive process. We look at other people who are lacking in means, like us, but manage to make things anyway, even in a sophisticated manner.

H.C. This mechanism certainly comes from Lina Bo Bardi, because Lina saw Brazil with the eyes of a European, elegant, sophisticated eyes. When I began to be interested in design I would have given anything to have her gaze. To try to have Lina's gaze, to make the most banal things in an elegant way. We still carry this extraordinary lesson with us today.

M.R. Did you have direct contact with Lina Bardi?

H.C. No, never! We were scared: she was a legend for us!

F.C. But we did meet with Pietro Maria Bardi, twice. Actually our first exhibition, "Desconfortáveis", was supposed to happen at the MASP in São Paulo, in a small space. It was Maria Helena Estrada who convinced us to do it in a gallery, that of Adriana Adam.

H.C. I think that if we had done that exhibition at the museum our lives would have taken another direction. We would have been sculptors! Thanks to Maria Helena and Adriana design entered our lives. And then, of course, thanks to you, because you saw us and brought us to Europe. Back in 1990.

M.R. Getting back to Lina, could we say she was your "mentor"?

F.C. We lived the construction of the MASP firsthand, and then Humberto, as a student, always went there to see the shows. I also spent time at the museum when I arrived in São Paulo, years later. They were not only art exhibitions!

H.C. That is precisely what I liked about Lina: Lina did everything: set design for the theater, architecture, objects. She was a curator. I was intrigued by such pluralism.

M.R. Pluralism deduced from the lesson of Gio Ponti. Lina, before leaving Italy due to the political problems of her husband after the fall of the fascist regime, had been the very young right-hand woman of Ponti at "Domus" and above all at "Stile", the magazine Ponti founded and directed from 1941 to 1947.

H.C. When she reached Brazil Lina was very "different", she didn't want to stay locked up in the prison of a single discipline. She had no barriers: already, back then, she proposed a fusion of art and design. For her, creation meant freedom. Freedom to come and go, to visit other disciplines and to return with more maturity and sophistication.

F.C. Lina combined Brazilian ethnic and European sophistication. She was willing to see our culture in its different forms, Brazilian culture, Afro, native American. Even "caipira" culture, that of the countryside.

M.R. So could we say that São Paulo is your source of inspiration, rather than Brazil?

H.C. Not exactly, actually we proceed by combining two universes: that of nature (we were born on a farm and we lived there until we were 18: our grandfather came to Brazil to grow coffee) and that of the city, of São Paulo. Two completely separate universes.

F.C. Halfway between them, in metaphorical terms, there is a cinema. It's a story similar

to the one in *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*, the film by Giuseppe Tornatore: in Brotas, where we were born, there were just 10,000 inhabitants, and until the 1970s there were no paved roads and, of course, no television. But there was a movie theater and a train that arrived every day, bringing two or three films. So we saw all of Italian Neorealism. I saw *Teorema* by Pasolini, when I was 14, with my parents (I bought the DVD the other day, I almost started crying). I saw Fellini, but also American cinema: Polanski, *The Tenant* and *Rosemary's Baby*. I saw Kubrick, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. I remember that as soon as I got home I went into the courtyard and cut one of those star-shaped cacti called madacarù and put some bamboo sticks into it to make the interplanetary starships. That was in 1968. Cinema was very important for us, especially Italian films. Just think, at the matinees they showed Totò, Franco Nero, Rita Pavone!

H.C. Instead, I dreamed of being a Brazilian Indian, of living in the Amazon, so I built tree houses with bamboo. I already had a very strong interest in manual things. For me, play and intuition were more important than rationality.

F.C. Cinema played a fundamental role in our life because we were not the sort of kids who wanted to play soccer or go horseback riding all day long. We did those things, but films really grabbed us.

M.R. So your link to the outside world was through cinema?



F.C. Exactly. Thanks to cinema, when I reached São Paulo I already had a certain amount of knowledge of the world.

H.C. At São Paulo, those were the years of Tropicalism and Concretism, very lively movements, absolutely opposed to the military dictatorship.

F.C. Actually, without knowing it, we had the good luck to be raised, or more precisely "cooked", in a situation of total nonconformism.

M.R. But this initial path, given your age difference, was not done together...

F.C. No, though we did see and experience the same things. Even if I was eight years younger, we were immediately like accomplices. Today it seems like a mysterious link.

H.C. When the time came to go to university I chose to study law. I couldn't take architecture, due to political problems: at the age of 18 I was still immature, and in that period being a creative person, an artist, was very dangerous. Lina Bardi was considered a subversive, a communist. She was persecuted.

Like Niemeyer. So I took the easier path, though I didn't really like the idea of becoming a lawyer. Actually, I didn't want to be a designer, either, I wanted to be an artist. I believe we began to think of design as a job only when you wrote the first article about us, saying we should shift our poetics towards industry. A recommendation that has stayed with us until today, until this work here, at Venini, this morning.

M.R. Let's go back to analyze, for a moment, how this initial moment connected to the countryside combines with a second, very long period linked to the city. In the objects you design, can you understand when the reference to nature is stronger than to the thought of social life, and vice versa?

H.C. In the "Vermelha" chair, for example, there is a lot of São Paulo: the chaos, the deconstruction of the metropolis. In this case, from the start, we wanted to translate the life of São Paulo into a project. Intentionally!

F.C. I think the "Favela" chair is even more urban: the lack of a regular pattern, the simultaneous presence of different levels, the absence of any planning, of a clearly traced route...

H.C. The "Favela" is "cubist"!

M.R. And from nature? It doesn't seem to me that you get an inspiration of beauty, of pure lyricism...

H.C. Of course not! We deduce exactly the opposite: the ugliness. Dirty things. I think Brazil is an "impure" country due to its fusion of races: whites, blacks, reds, Europeans, Asians, Indians. This is what we want to translate in our work: this mixture, this overlapping texture, this "ugliness".

F.C. When we look at nature it is never the nature of meadows, flowers, idyllic nature, but that of the jungle: cannibalistic, man-eating, dangerous. We're not interested in the "good savage", but in the "bad savage". For example, I closely sense the reference to the paintings of the natives of Brazil, with their blood red color. They convey something strong, primitive.

M.R. Effectively, if I think about wood, which in the end is one of the few materials used with deep know-how in Brazilian design, I understand how far you are from that poetics, which is nevertheless recognized by all critics as "contextual"...

H.C. Until the 1980s design in Brazil was synonymous with wood, especially jacaranda, crafted with great skill, as in the work of Sergio Rodrigues, for example. But we have looked for another path from the start: we didn't want to cut down trees in the Amazon. Don't forget, our father was an agronomist. So this too is a precise influence that comes from our history and life in the country.

F.C. Our father, already in the 1960s, believed in protecting nature. He didn't allow plants to be cut down, and as a result he made many enemies. But he managed to leave us a farm with many, many trees.

M.R. So for you wood is "a fallen branch", that you might find at the foot of a tree?

F.C. Definitely. We would never want to cut down a tree. Already, in our first works, like the "Costela" fruit holder or the "Jabuticaba" tray, we used dry branches. This total respect for nature probably not only comes from our father, but also from our maternal grandmother, who came from

Rovigo and had an inborn sense of recycling: all the tin cans were transformed into vases. At our house we made almost no trash!

H.C. Living in a nation that simultaneously belongs to the Third World and the First, from the start I have tried to produce a translation of this reality. The basis of our work was this: to construct with a little, to not copy other cultures. To proceed with humility.

M.R. This was not just the characteristic of your work, it was also the key to your success! On the trail of advanced technology and "bel design" you would probably have come in "second", but instead you proposed, as I was saying at the beginning, something that caught people off guard, a beginning based on other premises.

H.C. It is fundamental, though, to remember that for us this was something very intuitive, from the "gut" [*sic*]. There was no reflection, no strategy.

F.C. We realized this in an almost violent way in 1995, during that round table discussion at Palazzo Reale in Milan to which you had invited us together with new European design talents. I remember Konstantin Grcic and Sebastian Bergne and many others, and then there was Rolf Fehlbaum, and they were all talking about minimalism and technology. That evening I felt like a native, an Indio!

M.R. But you did not experienced that as a handicap, it was more like a strong point...

F.C. I must admit, at a certain point in that conference I thought you had set a trap for us, that you had invited us to humiliate us. Then I understood that I just had to calmly explain the things my brother and I knew how to do. I certainly wasn't minimal: and everyone laughed! I was really sweating that night!

M.R. I'd like to apologize, then, years later, but as you see that too was helpful, and in the end "the world has understood"! But let's get back to the topic of the objet trouvé: we have determined, then, that the principle works for you in relation to both industrial and natural materials. So we can deduce that the starting point of your work does not lie – as many people insist – in the material, but instead in semi-finished



Tegola / Attese Edizioni, 2010

products: in other words, you do not start with plastic, but with a plastic hose. Not with wood, but with "a" piece of wood...

H.C. Yes, it's always like that: we are interested in transformation, alchemy. This is our big challenge: to give a second life to existing things...

F.C. ... to recode, the change the aesthetic genetics of things.

M.R. We mentioned the period of the dictatorship and the way architecture, great architecture, basically resisted, remained in opposition. And design? Was its presence less tangible?

H.C. Much less tangible. Again, I looked to Lina Bardi and her chairs... Very uncomfortable... In São Paulo the critics were enraged!

F.C. The others, all the others, were copying Milan...

H.C. ... and before that, in the 1960s, they copied the Scandinavians! Brazil was famous for copies!

F.C. Until 1965 we can find some original things, especially in wood, but after that there are practically only copies.

H.C. Even today Brazilians try to make cool, "imported" design. Instead, we wanted and want to make dirty, emotional design, full of tensions.

M.R. But when you work with the students at school, at the university, are you able to transform this philosophy of yours into a method, rather than a manner?

H.C. I think the right method is to encourage students to seek freedom in the creative act, never offering them a formula. It is fundamental to try to open the doors, and the head, to freedom. Because in the end, being an artist means being free, above all else. I have tried to be a designer precisely to be free, to not have a boss. This is the basis of the way we teach: to urge the kids to find their own paths.

M.R. And do you manage to convince them to be free, not "à la Campana"?

F.C. Namely not to use the Campana recipe for the "wedding cake"? To see things with their own eyes, not ours? Starting, perhaps, with our concepts of freedom, assemblage, objet trouvé, but always with their own gaze. After all, until a few years ago improvisation, the art of making do with what you have, were synonymous with shame in Brazil, not with ability...

M.R. Meaning that people improvised because they did not have the right resources to come to grips with situations?

F.C. Exactly. Today, on the other hand, due to the worldwide economic crisis, Brazilian improv has become a model, and it is becoming more and more refined. People are learning to improvise in a smart way, not out of laziness. We can offer you an example by looking at the Vitra/Centre Pompidou workshops at Boisbuchet, France. We set up one workshop on "recycling of nature" or, more precisely, we asked to make a work with bamboo; but the bamboo never arrived, so we were faced with 20 students and no materials! Imagine what a German designer would do: no bamboo, no workshop! That night, though, there had been a storm with strong winds, and there were many fallen branches in the forest nearby. So the situation called for Brazilian improv, and that was the "recycling of nature". For us too, every time it is an exercise. A fundamental exercise of recycling: recycling ourselves.

H.C. Among the students, two young Swiss guys made a gorgeous work, sewing the branches together: absolutely minimalist! From "our" starting premise, in the end, "their" vision clearly emerged. Actually, the secret is to never be afraid of the material. With a computer you can abstractly create anything, but working by hand is very different: it requires knowledge of the DNA, the limits of the material

with which you are working. And this is very useful, even when you go back to designing with the computer. So, when we teach, the basic concept is to not be afraid of the material.

M.R. So can I assume that in Brazil there are not many "small Campanas"?

H.C. Anything but that: there are a lot of them! For us, today, it is hard to be the "Campanas": by now there are designers who do the "Campana thing" better than we do! So what should be done, to keep on creating?

F.C. At times, in the streets or on the walls of São Paulo, I see reinterpretations of the "Favela" collection, and then I wonder: "Who did this? Why"? Similar photographs reach us from all over Brazil.

M.R. So you do think about the problem of a "manner", then? At a certain point in the life of every artist a degree of confidence arrives, which is positive, in a certain sense, but also brings a negative risk, because it leads you to solve problems in a predictable way, and above all a way that will appeal to collectors.

H.C. Always! I always wonder what our next step will be! It's a nightmare!

F.C. I believe the most important thing, which few people do, is to conserve your generosity. To not be egocentric. To open. To open yourself. This is another reason why we teach, and conduct workshops. On the other hand, the more you close up, the more you defend yourself, the harder things get, even for yourself.

M.R. But then, where does the next step come from?

H.C. From another material!

F.C. This is what happened, for example, with glass, coming here to Murano! A very difficult material, for us: we cannot blow it, we cannot touch it. What should be done? This is why we began to work with fragments. Fragments of works by the masters, by Gio Ponti, Ettore Sottsass, Tapio Wirkkala. These are the "sudden change of scenario" I always pray to God to be able to have! At Alessi, too, scrap materials played a major role in our work...

M.R. So if you are "in danger" you look in the "trash"?

F.C. At Alessi we saw scrap from the manufacturing and we said to ourselves: maybe this is what we can use. I would never have imagined that a company like Alessi would want to work with the Campanas. We brought crafts to Alessi. And to Edra. We encourage them to rediscover a typically Italian root, but one that had been forgotten. To humanize production.

M.R. And this permitted you to get beyond the inertia of crafts. Let me explain: the expert artisan, the master glassmaker, for example, is "one who knows", and therefore often has a very difficult relationship with the designer who tries to make him do things "in another way". Do you think that the fact of proposing a completely alternative method, as you have, excluding glass blowing, for example, and simply thinking about assemblage, has in a way allowed you to by-pass this obstacle?

F.C. We showed the master craftsman that we could "do without him" and then, incredibly enough, the craftsman felt free, and has become our best accomplice. We gained credibility! The first times we came here the tune was always the same: "That can't be done!". We wanted to make the "Campane" [bells] for Moss, but we arrived only with cut plastic cups, which for us were the model of the bells: you can imagine the reaction. They were expecting technical drawings!

H.C. But then, little by little, they begin to understand our method and even, somehow, to fall in love with it!

F.C. Today the craftsmen love this work of ours. I believe that a sort of Brazilian ability, or ability of ours, is also a part of it; that of bringing contamination into the factory. I also think our humble approach was important. We never fail to greet and appreciate all the people we meet, from the kid sweeping the floor to the president of the company. We always had a smile for everyone, and today when we show up it's a real party. Then there is also the music...

M.R. Music? What does music have to do with Murano?

F.C. Brazilian music is very important: it is a "diplomatic gift". The last time we were here it was carnival time and we brought some CDs: we worked with Brazilian music, played very loud, and everyone went crazy. In the end they were dancing and singing. So today, as soon as they see us, they shout: "Here they are!". I don't think that happens with all the designers who come here. Maybe we've been able to preserve, over time, a sort of country spirit, a bit naïf.

M.R. But don't you ever get sick of always being asked about your relationship with Brazil? What I mean is, I've never heard anyone ask Starck about the consequences of his being French, or Parisian, for his work. Though I am convinced that he is French, and Parisian, to the bone. Actually, we all base our thinking on a stereotype, that says that "correct" design is what is done in Europe, and then come the "particularities", the exceptions. Something similar happened to me recently with Donata Paruccini, who after the umpteenth question about what it means to be a "woman designer" responded: "But have you ever asked a man what it means to 'be a man', for his design?" Don't you think it is time for you to get beyond a certain Brazilian cliché?

H.C. Actually, wherever I am, here in Venice, or in Turkey, certain peculiarities that have still not succumbed to globalization always catch my eye. All I need is a curtain, seen from the street, in front of the door of a normal house, made of pieces of bamboo or strands of plastic...

F.C. We look for the most fragile points of the society, we are only interested in those points: a manual procedure, an improvisation. What counts is that it should be a human process.

H.C. And this is undoubtedly very "Brazilian": in Brazil it is a widespread attitude. But "emergency" situations can also be found elsewhere, in Italy or the United States.

F.C. I am interested in particular things, things you will never be able to buy in a Brico Center!

M.R. Another very common observation regarding your work is that it is not mass produced, in a "series". But this too is a stereotype, in the end: experimental design, when it still exists, is very seldom industrially produced.

F.C. In Brazil, for this reason, we are still getting literally massacred today. They accuse us of not being industrial designers. In the South of Brazil we are not even considered designers!

H.C. One very particular example of this situation is the "Vermelha" chair: when Edra put it in the catalogue they thought it would only be an image object, and instead, especially in Brazil, it has been industrially produced and sold for 12 years now. Having said this, however, the issues of "mass production" are definitely something I would still like to develop: I would like to be able to conserve the poetry, but to gain a true democratization of the project. Maybe, to

some extent, we have managed to do that with the "Melissa" shoes, produced in Brazil, and perhaps with the fruit bowls made by tires by Artecnic. In the end, we've also done something like that with Alessi. But I think industry has a sort of fear of us, so they don't want to assign us more "industrial" projects, they think of us as being connected with crafts. For example, in the past there was an opportunity to make a chair in papier mâché, with Vitra, which really had the possibility of being mass produced. But at a certain point the project was dropped!

F.C. Even though it was a magnetic chair, full of force...

M.R. As a result of what's been said, it seems clear that your work is impacted by another very timely problem: that of "art design", of design "for galleries"...

F.C. I told you about the initial encounters we had with Pietro Maria Bardi at the Museum of Art of São Paulo. It is true, that is just how we got started, wanting to make art, wanting to be artists. The first iron chairs of the "Desconfortáveis" collection were art operations, a manifesto of art more than design: we wanted to ironize about the desire of Brazilians to make "perfect", purist things, as if they were Germans or Scandinavians... We wanted to be provocative. In short, we have already had the "gallery" experience, that's where we come from! After all, the space "A Arquitetura da Luz" of Adriana Adam, where we had our first presentation in 1989, was also a gallery!

H.C. I think the secret of this century lies in achieving a fusion of the different disciplines: art and design, design and music... In the end, I am interested in creating and, even if it is a piece for a gallery, along that path I learn how to establish a dialogue with industry. One very clear example is our screen-sculpture in aluminium tubing from 1993, a very complicated piece, but one that Alessi has taken as a model to derive, in 2004, the "Blow-up" collection. So working on one-offs is always a great school: maybe, later on, I'll come back to that idea, with more mature eyes.

F.C. We began with one-offs and only later did we go to the industry, so we can also backtrack and sell things in a gallery: for us it's not strange. It would never occur to us to proudly say: "We sell in galleries!". In fact, if you hadn't urged us to shift towards industry, we might still be there, at the gallery!

M.R. But what is happening today is rather different, it is a substantially commercial phenomenon that tries to find an alternative to the fact that pure art has reached impossible price levels, while with design you can stay within more acceptable quotes.

F.C. But it's not just that. Actually, for design it is easier to become "art for everyone". Design shows in Brazil are crowded with visitors. Our show at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo in 2000 had, on any given Sunday, almost the same influx as an important exhibition of Miró. Design is more legible: everyone understands that an object is useful for sitting, lying down, lighting...

H.C. And then, where prices are concerned, a sofa like the "Sushi", which can take up to a month to be made, should cost a lot! We shouldn't forget the time element!

M.R. Is it like high fashion?

F.C. Exactly. Instead, it's a whole other story for those who just change the color or the material of an object in industrial production, and then call it a "limited edition". I just don't agree with that: it's pure opportunism. Some of our pieces take incredible amounts of time to make.

ESPERANÇA
Lampada a sospensione/Ceiling lamp
Produzione/producer: Venini, 2010



A long, complex process that justifies the final price tag.

H.C. We are very lucky to work in Brazil, where labor costs are quite low. You can work with artisans of all kinds. And then we have the spaces, big spaces: we don't have to stay closed up in a studio with a computer. Our workshop is an open place, for experimentation. In a certain sense, our studio has become a little design school. Craftsmen come from all over, and together with them we try things out, we search. We try to create new techniques. This happened, for example, with wicker for the "Trans" collection. Do you remember it? I sent you the very first images, for some feedback, to legitimize that very particular process with you. But at first glance, when I told the artisans I wanted to make a weave by starting with existing pieces of plastic they responded: "But how? How is it possible?". I didn't know the answer either. It took us almost six months to find a path, a common path.

M.R. Were the artisans already trained?

H.C. Yes, of course, but they only knew how to make baskets. All their lives, baskets and more baskets. To offer another example: the people who make our armchairs with stuffed animals or dolls come from fashion and had never done that type of stitching. This is important: to develop techniques that are ours!

M.R. I really loved the "Trans-plastic" project, which in the end, though, got less acclaim than it deserved. I think it contains a new force, a new concept, also with respect to other things you have made that are undoubtedly very beautiful, but already very "sure"...

H.C. The idea came from the image of a world in which nature starts to be reborn from plastic. A sort of adaptation and then revenge of nature.

M.R. Like the forest that gradually covers architecture and makes it become nature again?

H.C. And like the sea! Just think, I read that the seabed of the Mediterranean is completely covered with plastic refuse, and natural organisms are born and develop from the plastic.

M.R. But this "trans" concept is also very strong in another way...

F.C. ... above all because it comes from Brazil: it is one of the country's biggest exports!

H.C. The idea also come from that world.

M.R. So there is precisely the desire to understand if an existing organism, like a plastic chair, can transform into another organism?

H.C. It's a hybrid.

M.R. This concept brings you closer to the human body, as in 2001 when you designed jewelry for Stern. To me, it seems like one of the few times your work establishes a direct relationship with the body...

F.C. There is also the shirt for Lacoste in 2009 and, above all, in 2007, the sets and costumes for the performance of Ovid's "Metamorphosis" by the National Ballet of Marseille: with plastic line, we created the costumes directly on the bodies of the dancers. Then there was also the large "jellyfish" assembled with Turkish costume jewelry found at the market... But it is true, in the end, we don't have much experience with the body. Maybe the most important work in this area are the Melissa shoes. Recently we got back into jewelry for Gijs Bakker, using patchwork ponyskin.

M.R. And what about kitsch? In Europe it is a very perceptible factor, in the sense that you always reach the point

of asking what "can be done" and what "cannot be done", looking for a balance between "good form" and kitsch...

F.C. It's a fine line for us, too, but in the end you said it once, many years ago: our design is like a walk along a sharp ridge, perched between regionalism and kitsch. I think we are still walking on that very dangerous ridge.

M.R. And you are not afraid of falling onto the side of kitsch?

F.C. Coming from Brazil, that's impossible! Our physical landscape is not black and white and grey for much of the year, like yours. In Brazil we have an invasion of colors, forms, oddities, transvestites, music, bandits, good people and bad people.

H.C. Living in such a context gives you energy: you have to be alert at all times, to all things.

F.C. Especially if you live in São Paulo: it is not a city that lets you be "balanced", instead you have to be totally "unbalanced"!

H.C. Every day is a day of hunting! You can never relax!

M.R. And if, to conclude things, I were to say the word "elegance", pointing to another major European and, above all, Italian concern?

H.C. I think elegance is truth. Bringing your own truth: not pretending to be something you're not.

F.C. Elegance is honesty. Being honest with yourself.

H.C. Stripping!

M.R. And if I say "memory and future"? We Europeans are very concerned with the problem of having to come to terms with history, with the enormous weight of what came before us, things we have to know, to study, that set the parameters of any operation.

F.C. Oh no, we do archaeology of the future! Our country is new, in comparison with yours. We are children! We are freer! Free to come here to Venini and grab fragments and put them all together. The freedom of having no memory. There are no inhibitions!

M.R. So one can really construct future, day by day?

F.C. In our country they would always say that "Brazil is the country of the future", and that future never arrived. Now something might be changing. It is finally a moment of social "inclusion", not exclusion. Under the military dictatorship, when we were growing up, it was only a country of exclusion!

H.C. I'd like to tell you one last story: when Brasília was opened, in the 1960s, our parents, like many other people, set off to visit the new capital, to "see the future", but when they came home they only brought us Indian artifacts...

F.C. ... because that was a land of Indians, so on the road between São Paulo and Brasília there were just Indians, selling their handicrafts. We were expecting a spaceship, or at least a model of the cathedral of Niemeyer. Instead, we got bows and arrows!

