EXHIBITIONS

Ettore Sottsass Exhibition to Open at The Met Breuer

The radical designs are juxtaposed with objects that inspired the artist as well as works created by his contemporaries.

By SELIN ASHABOGLU

Best known for his pivotal role in the creation of the Memphis Group—a famously bold furniture and product design collective in Milan whose daring shapes and colors arguably defined the 80s aesthetic—Ettore Sottsass is the subject of the upcoming Met Breuer exhibit "Ettore Sottsass: Design Radical" in New York. The 20th-century Italian architect and designer's unconventional geometric pieces will be displayed alongside objects that influenced him, objects that were inspired by him, and objects by his design contemporaries, from July 21 to Oct. 8.
Now primarily known for his Memphis Group days, Sottsass began his career with modernist designs that contributed to practical furniture systems and even computer design in the 1950s. However, he soon stepped away from functional forms in the 1960s and eventually founded the Memphis Group comprised of 20-year-old international artists in 1981. Its name a reference to the Bob Dylan song “Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again,” the collective created pieces with materials, colors, and shapes that seemingly clashed to create loud and, at times, unsettling designs. Sottsass' contemporary, English furniture designer Jasper Morrison was once quoted as saying, "It was the weirdest feeling, you were in one sense repulsed by the objects... but also immediately freed by the sort of total rule-breaking."
The exhibition will cover a wide variety of Sottsass' work including architectural drawings, machines, furniture, ceramics, jewelry, textiles, paintings, and photography. It will also incorporate ancient and coeval objects that inspired Sottsass' pieces, as well as objects he began designing before the collective, such as the *Menhir, Ziggurat, Stupas, Hydrants, and Gas Pumps* (1965–1966) project, and a system of modular cabinets called the *Environment* (1970).

Some of the artist's later work will also be displayed in conjunction with work by four influential 20th century artists: French interior designer Jean Michel Frank, Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, Italian architect and designer Gio Ponti, and Japanese designer Shiro Kuramata.

The contrast between what inspired Sottsass, who he inspired, and how he differed from other designers of his age is meant to illustrate just how radical of an artist he was and remains.

*For more information on the "Ettore Sottsass: Design Radical" exhibition, visit The Met's website.*