

### 3 Unsung, Pre-Memphis Designs From Ettore Sottsass

THE MEMPHIS GROUP FOUNDER'S EARLY WORKS WERE MARKED BY NATURAL MATERIALS, BOLD COLORS, AND HAND-CRAFTED DESIGNS.

Best known as the founder of the experimental Memphis group (1981-1987), Ettore Sottsass was a prolific designer who produced six decades worth of work that spanned every medium from furniture to ceramics, photography and painting. A show at New York's Friedman Benda gallery, *Ettore Sottsass: 1955-1969* celebrates the early stages of his career, which was marked by natural materials, bold colors, and hand-crafted designs.



"It was really the formative years of creating the persona of Ettore Sottsass in a way," says Marc Benda, owner of Friedman Benda. "It was a time when he traveled extensively, when he started challenging the norms of modernism, when he started to collaborate with the Italian furniture industry and the general industry, collaborate with Olivetti for the computer mainframe. Basically all the tenets of Italian radical design and of what later became high design were formed during those years. It's almost like you're looking through a kaleidoscope back in time."

Here, Benda highlights three of Ettore Sottsass's early works that deserve as much recognition as his famed Valentine typewriter for Olivetti or Memphis-era art-furniture.

Miller, Meg. "3 Unsung, Pre-Memphis Designs From Ettore Sottsass," *Fast Co.Design*, October 1, 2015.

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### Tantra Vase

"The ceramics from the Tantra period are very monumental and sculptural in the way that they present themselves. They're incredibly crafted and portray a lot of Southeast Asia influence. In general the ceramics are also his most personal pieces. He would have personally painted them, glazed them, sized them—I really love the personal touch to his ceramics. They're the most private and the most intimate works of his," says Benda.



### Bookshelf For An Olivetti Executive

"The bookshelf is really something outstanding and out of this world," says Benda. "It's from '65, it's unique, it was commissioned by someone who worked for Olivetti. It's completely functional so anyone could live with this piece but at the same time its subversive—bookshelves are horizontal and he kind of inverts the architecture of that piece by making it vertical."

### Lamp For Arredoluce

"At the time, if you were a lighting company or furniture company who went to Ettore Sottsass you would give him free reign of design. For Arredoluce he designed a line of lighting that were so revolutionary. They dealt with space. They were almost sculptures hanging from the ceiling," says Benda. "Those were made in the late '50s. They were widely documented and hugely successful at the time but I doubt that they were a commercial success. They were too radical."



*[All Photos (unless otherwise noted): Adam Reich, courtesy Friedman Benda]*

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