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EXHIBIT "Ettore Sottsass: 1955-1969"

The illustrious Italian architect-designer Ettore Sottsass was a hippy, a don of postmodern cool who hung out with the likes of Allen Ginsberg, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Bob Dylan. (The latter's "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again" inspired the name of the Memphis Group, the trendy-again movement Sottsass founded in Milan in the early '80s.) The designer, who died in 2007 at the age of 90, was known for bringing a love of Beat and Pop to his legendary consumer goods, like his famous bright-red "Valentine" Olivetti typewriter. A new show at Friedman Benda, "Ettore Sottsass 1955-1969" (through Oct. 17), seeks to look beyond the widget to the designer's earlier and lesser-known work for the home. From ceramics inspired by his travels to India, to a bookshelf that feels at once futuristic and organic, the exhibit is rife with furniture and design objects in odd shapes, bright colors, and crude materials. All of them notably predate Italian Radical Design, and none have ever before been shown in the U.S. The gallery is staged with furniture laid out as it would be in a home, rather than set out in individual displays as design shows often are. Marc Benda, the gallery's co-founder, says the show is a labor of love, a desire to "add to the vocabulary" of Sottsass in the States, and as such, only 80 percent of it is for sale. Benda himself is a particular fan of the work the designer did with radical manufacturer Poltronova, for whom the designer served as creative consultant. In this show, such work is seen mostly through jagged-edged Tavolino tables, a must-have for picnics on Mars. "They gave him free reign," Benda says of the brand. "And everything is always a little counterintuitive. It's always too big or too small; there's always something just a little awry." —Dan Duray

Duray, Dan. Exhibit "Ettore Sottsass: 1955-1969", Surface Magazine, September 2015.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001