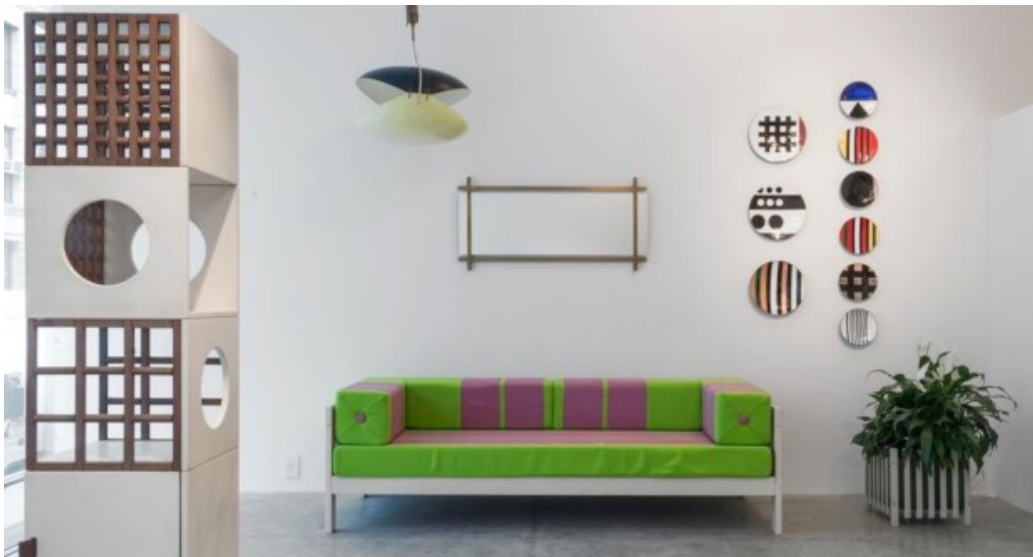




## Rare Works from Ettore Sottsass at Friedman Benda

Posted on September 19, 2015 by Tamara Moscovitz in [Playing Around](#)



Ettore Sottsass (1917-2007), a Postmodernist master of Italian design best known internationally for his central role in forming the Memphis group in the 1980s, is being revisited at Friedman Benda in a show of 100 select works from his early years, 1955-1969. Organized by Marc Benda who spent nearly ten years “chasing down” objects, this is one of the largest shows of the designer’s oeuvre on public display for the first time. A good range of furnishings, lighting, mirrors, paintings, rare ceramics, and vintage photographs offer an insightful look into the designer’s formative period preceding his shift into Radical Design, an anti-design movement starting in the late 60s.

Sottsass’s aims were revolutionary: counter the intellectualism of Modernism and develop a more humanistic approach accompanied by a language that represents this new era of modern design. Moving away from rigid forms and adherence to functionalism, he began experimenting with ceramics clay, which has a long history in Italy for utilitarian and decorative objects and is a material easy to manipulate in exploring shapes and color combinations.

Moscovitz, Tamara. “Rare Works from Ettore Sottsass at Friedman Benda,” *Woman Around Town*, September 19, 2015.

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**Rochetti Vase, Terracotta**

A fine example is “Rochetti” (1962) a cylinder vase in terracotta with an aqua glaze’s jagged edges referencing an abstract drip painting—one influence he brought back from numerous trips abroad. In the U.S. where Pop art reigned supreme he picked up on bold colors while the imagery of popular culture later informed the Memphis style.



**Ettore Sottsass, Grande Mandala, 1964-1965; Acrylic on wood**

Visits to India opened the door to Hindu mysticism profoundly affecting his thinking extending well beyond the artistic. One of several series, “Darkness” was originally conceived while recovering from a long illness, a rather bleak and sober period when Sottsass’s spiritual turn of mind looked toward a higher entity for answers. Relying on memory ceramics were predominantly black and muted blues with mandala ritual images.



**Tantra vase 1968; Stoneware**

Several series have been grouped together; notables include: “Tondi” (1959), “Tantra” (1968), and “Lava” (1957) among others, and “Shiva” (1964) stunning Offerta plates a symbol for a return to good health paying homage to the conqueror of death an Indian deity.

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**Poltronova, Mobile Barbarella, 1966; Walnut, laminate**

Scattered throughout are one-of-a-kind pieces made from wood, laminate, walnut, and bronze. One installation arranged as a living space is branded with a favored design motif – strips. Circular, vertical, or horizontal appear on planters, sideboards, plates, vases, and a bold colored upholstered sofa framed in lacquered wood. Also on view for the first time is large wall mounted book shelving held together with vertical bands Sottsass made for his client the director of Olivetti.



**Ettore Sottsass with Poltronova, Library, 1965  
Lacquered wood and walnut, brass**

The fourth in a series of exhibitions at Friedman Benda dedicated to showing the breadth and quality of this prodigious designer comes at an opportune time with Kartell kickstarting renewed interest by presenting reproduced objects with Sottsass themes during Milan's Salon del Mobile's furniture fair last April.

*Ettore Sottsass, 1955-1969 through October 17, 2015, Friedman Benda, 515 West 26 St., NYC, [Friedman Benda](#)*  
Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Ettore Sottsass Studio, Photography: Adam Reich

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