

# INTERIORS

DESIGN | ARCHITECTURE | CULTURE

Special Issue:  
Living in the Past



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## Aims and Scope

*Interiors: Design, Architecture, Culture* brings together the best critical work on the analysis of all types of spaces. Interiors play a crucial role in the construction of identity and they represent power and control through the contestation or transgression of boundaries. Homes, offices, shopping malls, schools and hospitals, churches and restaurants are all embedded with meaning and evince particular, multi-sensory and psychological responses. This journal will investigate the complexities of the interior environment's orchestration and composition and its impact on the inhabitant from a trans-disciplinary perspective.

The interior is the journal's central focus and contributions from interior design practitioners and theorists are welcome. It will embrace perspectives from a range of disciplines including anthropology, architecture, art and design history, cultural studies and visual culture, and it will place no limits in terms of either geography or chronology. The journal sets out to challenge divisions between theory and practice and aims to provide an essential forum for all those with an interest in the design, history and meaning of interiors.

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## Exhibition Review

### What Things We Are (*Quali cose siamo*)

Triennale Design Museum, Milan, March 27, 2010–  
February 27, 2011

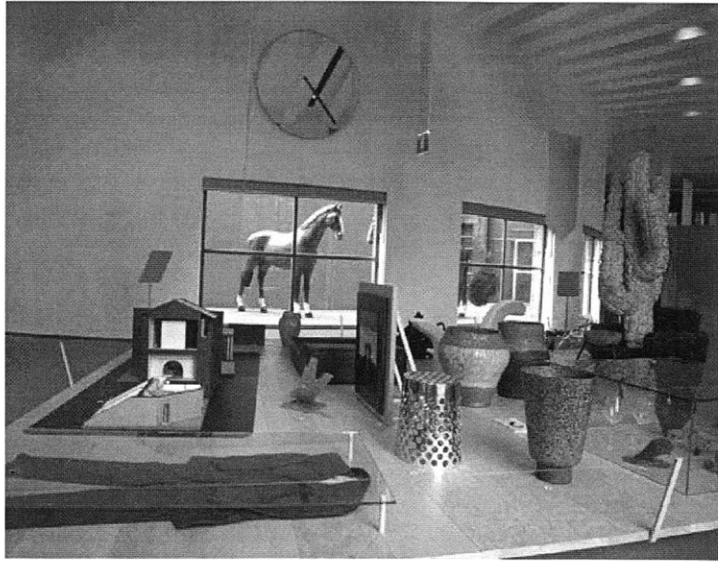
**Reviewed by Pierluigi Salvadeo**

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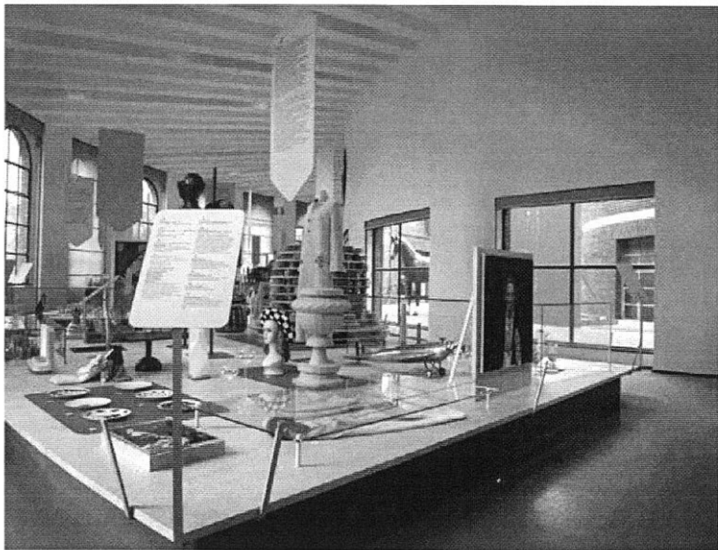
Museum or ongoing installation? ... The Milan Triennale Design Museum began in 2007 with the idea of having a changeable, dynamic, and constantly evolving museum, always with a differently designed installation. Now it is presenting a new interpretation of the very idea of “design.” “*Quali cose siamo*,” the title of this latest version, is the brainchild of the highly inventive Alessandro Mendini, and this version was supported by the foresight of the museum’s director, Silvana Annichiarico. The installation is by Pierre Charpin, while the graphic designer is Jean-Baptiste Parré.

Broadly speaking, now that museums have outgrown their nineteenth-century “classification” phase and stopped slavishly reproducing familiar and (more or less) history-rooted patterns, we have become comfortable with the idea that curating policies can vary independently of the museum’s own architecture. The Milan Triennale Design Museum’s space changes periodically as its curators decide, and the museum does not restrict itself to its geographical location but offers its own materials as belonging to a broad array of “deposits” (the curators’ word) available



**Figure 1**  
Platform C. Front: Suit of "Totò," model dress "Saraceni," 1940.  
Outside: Horses, "Splendart," 2007.

in its surrounding territory: public and private collections, company museums, specialist collections, and small single-theme museums. All this material is shown in rotation in the Triennale's rooms, which helps to generate dialogue between its own things and those from other museums. This museum is conceived as an ongoing process



**Figure 2**  
Platform B. Bottom: The ideal city, Guglielmo Mozzoni, 2000–10.

of innovation arranged in a nonlinear, disconnected labyrinth that embraces the intermittent and the exceptional, participation and exchange, breaking out and invading the surrounding territory. Mendini's selection goes beyond any ordinary classification to give objects new interpretative possibilities, unconstrained by evaluation in terms of their main purpose. Avoiding the formal series-bound presentation of institutional design, he shows fantasy objects, gaily multicolored, with more than one shape or function. Objects belonging to tales of everyday life, from working tools to useless things, from aesthetic objects to ugly or tacky ones.

The museum offers new scenarios, new scope for the imagination, new juxtapositions, new ideas on how to use or look at things. Even techniques and materials – the domain of the designer – appear to make way for spectacle, represented by the parallel world of objects and their unseen design. The museum/installation thus becomes a stage set, a performance space, a theater. So, Charpin's space, rather than an arrangement for exhibiting things, puts them on stage. Broad horizontal surfaces accommodate the objects like tables laid for dinner; and, as in real experimental theater, the visitor is drawn into a captivating play of logical reversals between real space and the scenographic space of the imagination. The exhibition's lack of hierarchical ordering generates spaces that spread and overlap, their boundaries no longer physical but mental. In this shape-shifting layout, objects tell their story aloud and a willing spectator can join in.

Objects in Mendini's version are no longer what they seem, but experienced from new angles providing unexpected dialogs with the visitor. As we move among the objects exhibited, and especially as we notice their unusual – sometimes even casual – juxtaposition, we wonder what kind of things we live among. What, really, are the things that cross our lives? What role does design have, when things can ignore it? According to Mendini “we are things among things”; but that poses the question, what things are we? This is the drama enacted by usable objects – by used objects, especially – through which this exhibition helps us understand what we are: it is as if we were actually unable to separate the things in which we live from what we really are.

As Mendini himself explains in one of the show's guide panels:

It is important to engage with objects not as things in themselves, but in relation to each other: to invent or discover relationships between things; not in the obvious sense of two things that go together like train and track, but when putting two independent and “unrelated” objects side by side creates a disconcerting tension that is actively creative. Two objects which are quite ordinary on their own become powerful presences when juxtaposed (a Richard Ginori figurine and a Geox shoe, for instance).

This obliges us to use our imagination. The display provides no answers, but tirelessly generates questions. From these things we make up stories, reconnect fragments, dream of future possibilities, make plans, and as if driven by an inescapable creative tension move around freely, bouncing from object to object, encountering a counterfeit Gucci leather handbag, then bumping into the perfect “Black ST 201” cube designed for Brionvega by Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper; then, further on, into a box full of debris from a house that collapsed in the Abruzzo earthquake, disconcerting and unavoidably arresting. Then something in the distance catches our eye: “Ines,” the robot/video created by Denis Santachiara for Kartel – but now a sudden desire to go back to the start makes us notice the intriguing model of Guglielmo Mozzoni’s ideal city we missed earlier, and we retrace our steps and realize how different everything we have already seen is if looked at from another viewpoint: we pick out Franco Albini’s “Cicognino” (Little Stork) with painted patterns by Andrea Sala, a model boat made by a tramp out of tinfoil, the Barilla pasta shape designed by Giorgetto Giugiaro to hold sauce better than other kinds of pasta – a paean to the taste of Italian cooking; it matters little what route our footsteps take, in what order or direction: the essential thing is to go on imagining.

## **DECODENCE: Legendary Interiors and Illustrious Travelers aboard the *SS Normandie***

Seaport Museum, New York, February 2010–January 2011

**Reviewed by Daniella Ohad Smith**

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The stark contrast between the touristic experience offered at the Seaport district of New York today, a destination known for mass tourism, and that offered in the 1930s by the extraordinarily elegant ocean liner the *SS Normandie*, the subject of an exhibition shown at the Seaport Museum, can be matched by the contrast between the lives of the millions during the Depression and that fantasy experienced within the magnificent spaces of the luxurious *SS Normandie* (Figure 1). It had it all. Not only was it the largest, heaviest, and fastest, but also the most celebrated ocean liner of the Jazz Age – a floating magnificent palace with interiors designed by the best minds of French Art Deco, such as René Lalique and Jean Dupas, to name just two (Figure 2). The ship captured the imagination of its generation, and in that age of nationalism the *SS Normandie* came to be a source of pride for the French people.



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