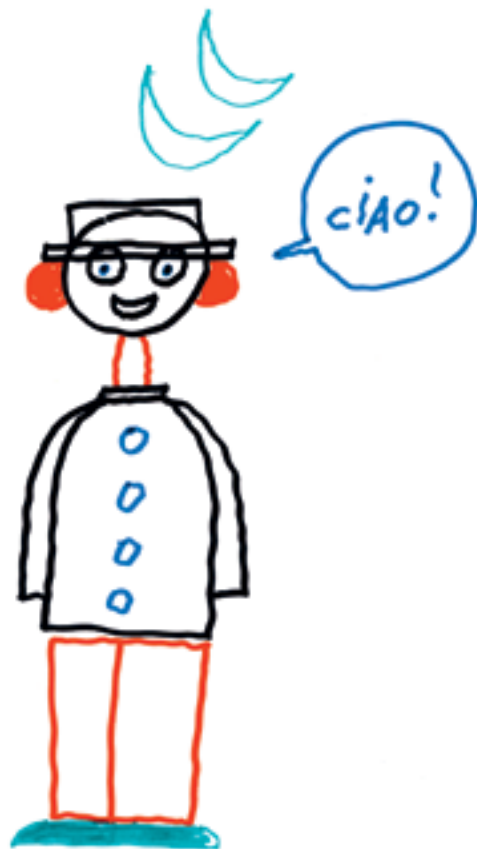


Taking its cue from one of Alessandro Mendini's most emblematic self-portraits, *Io sono un drago* (I am a dragon), this publication, which accompanies the exhibition of the same name organised by Triennale Milano and Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, traces the stages of a career that began perhaps as early as his childhood projections and continued until the last lines traced at the drawing board.

Rejecting the logic of late Rationalism in the 1960s, Mendini blazed a path that can only superficially be described as eclectic. His approach should rather be understood as an admission of the complexity of Modernity, an inextricable tangle of flows and attitudes that cannot be seen as a univocal and stable identity over time.

The "Proust method"—as he termed his creative approach inspired by the poetic of *rêverie* of his beloved writer—expressed in an iconic way his gaze on the world, his empathy with everyday things, the mystery of poetry and the leaven of irony, transforming the "banal" into a surprise that revealed its hidden and human face.

His immense *oeuvre* ranges from design to architecture, drawing, graphics and fashion, in the titanic effort to rewrite the world, in the footsteps of Balla and Depero's "Manifesto of the Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe."



euro 45.00



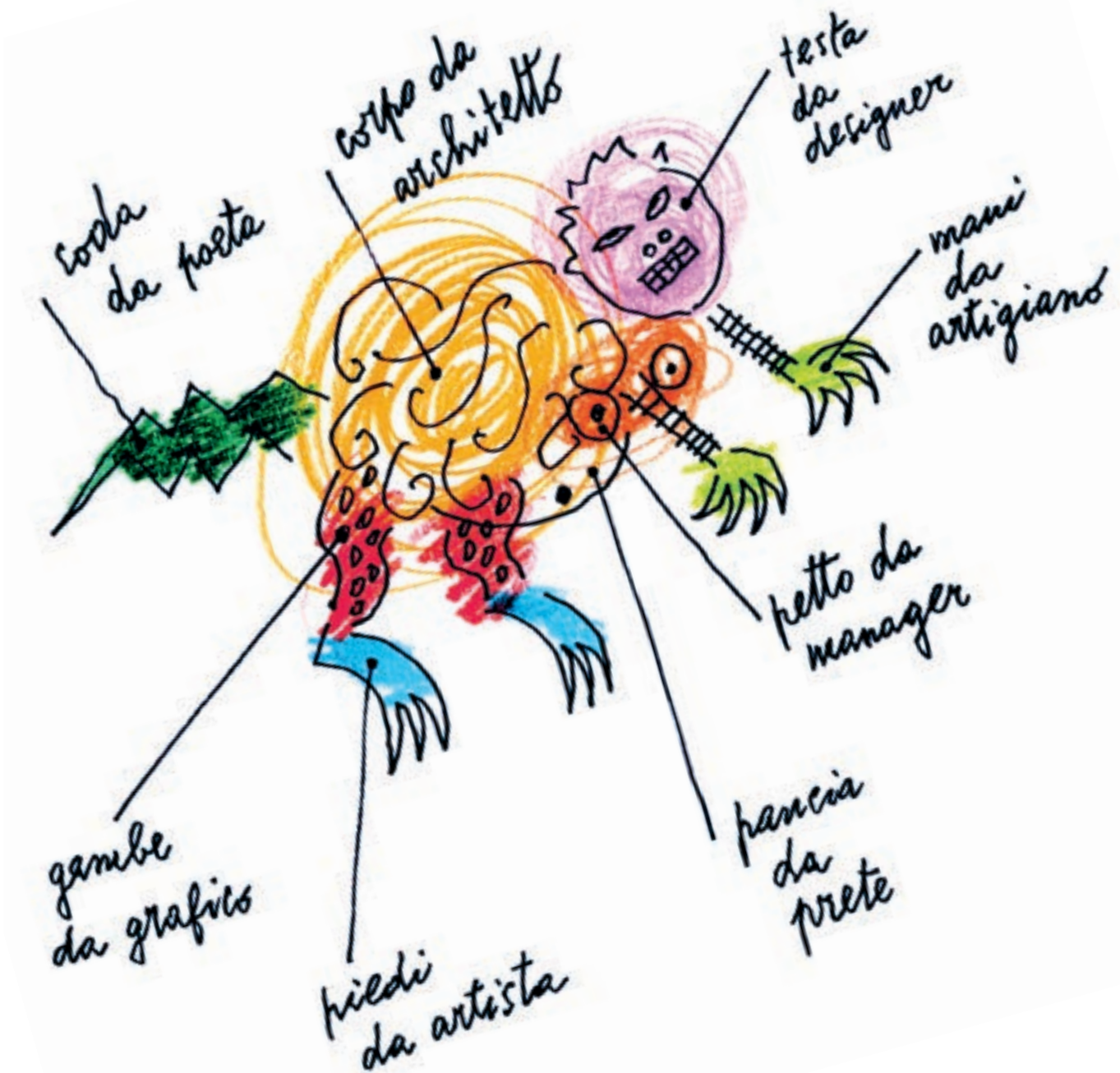
ALESSANDRO MENDINI

Fondation *Cartier*
pour l'art contemporain



IO SONO UN DRAGO

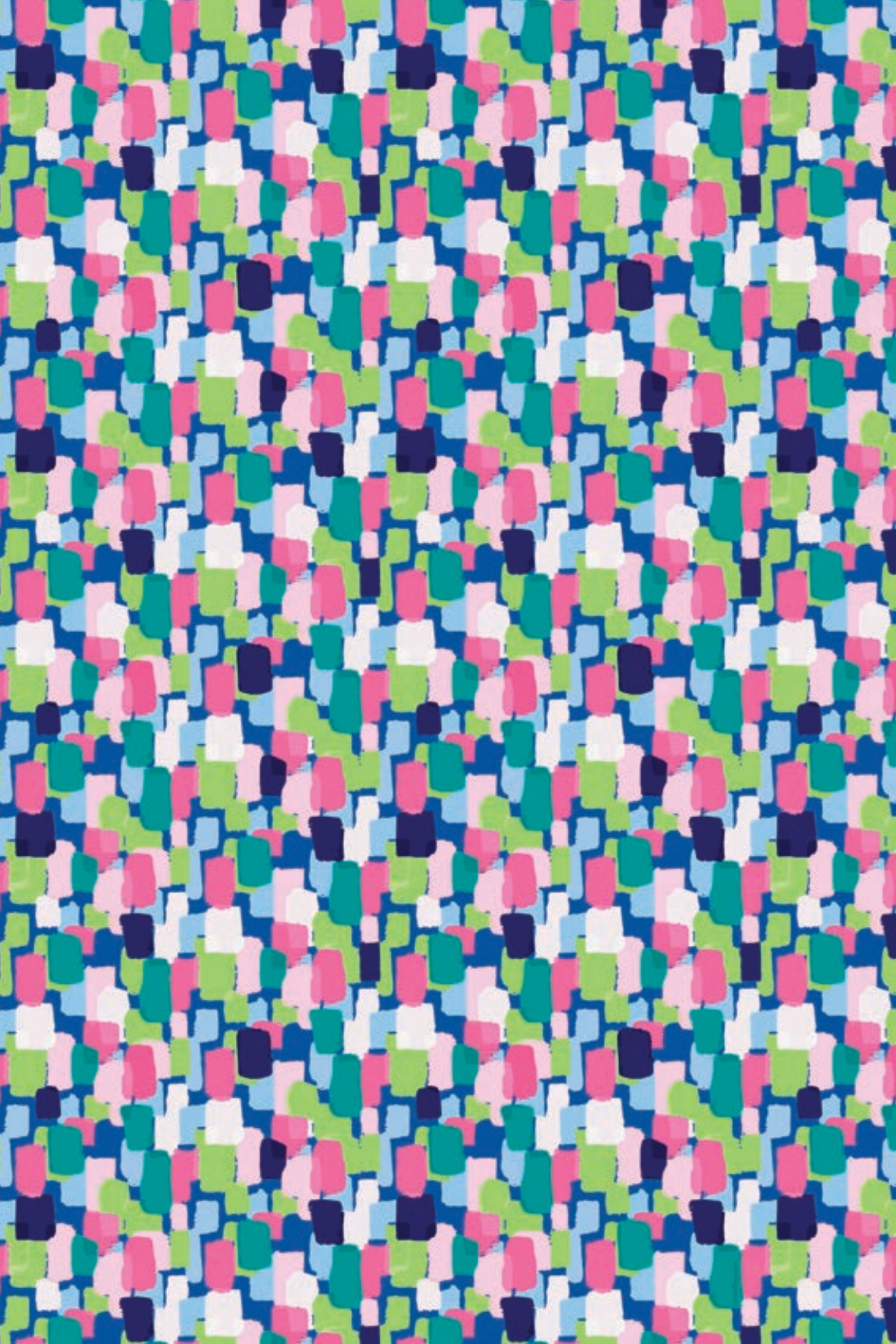
THE TRUE STORY OF ALESSANDRO MENDINI



Triennale
Milano

Fondation *Cartier*
pour l'art contemporain

Electa



**IO SONO UN
DRAGO**

**THE TRUE
STORY OF
ALESSANDRO
MENDINI**

**EDITED BY
FULVIO IRACE**

Volume published on the occasion of the exhibition by
Triennale Milano and Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain



**Triennale
Milano**

Fondation *Cartier*
pour l'art contemporain

Electa

**STEFANO
BOERI**

**HERVÉ
CHANDÈS**

SB

Ciao Hervé, I cannot forget that afternoon in September 2021, in Venice, during the Biennale del Cinema, in which we started talking about Alessandro Mendini.

It was somehow natural, almost inevitable that, fantasizing about common projects between us and between the two institutions we lead—Fondation Cartier and Triennale—we would talk about Alessandro.

Alessandro was not a Dragon, as he would have liked very much; I believe he was certainly a Prince, but endowed with magical powers.

Acute, extremely sensitive, capable of sipping his genius and concentrating his miracles, Alessandro was able to leave luminous traces of his light and portentous creative intelligence everywhere: at *Domus*, at *Casabella*, at *Modo*, at the Fondation Cartier, at Triennale, at Compasso d'Oro, in Milan, Seoul, Paris, Groninger, Tokyo...

That September afternoon, sitting on the steps of the church of San Giacomo in Rialto, we simply let that magical presence make itself felt again.

And here we are, today, presenting this dutiful tribute to the Wizard Alessandro.

HC

I always remember that moment when we shared our common passion for Alessandro and decided to celebrate and bring to life his art and perception of things.

His work was both singular and universal, playful, yet keenly aware of historical eras, warm, yet enigmatic.

I met Alessandro in the early 2000s in Milan. We immediately bonded. At the time, I was preparing the exhibition *Un art populaire*, which instantly brought us together and, in the almost twenty-year period following that first meeting, projects with Mendini and the Fondation grew in number. We can find them in this exhibition.

The relationship between Alessandro and the Fondation went far beyond the conventional institutional framework.

It was as if we had built a house or as if a current of sensitivity and thought,

or a world aesthetic, had inspired the twists and turns of the Fondation's program. Following a hypersensitive current, according to Alessandro. The work of Alessandro Mendini beautifully embodies the spirit of the long-term partnership that Triennale and the Fondation Cartier have together.

SB

You're right to talk about hypersensitivity, a sort of restless vibration, released by his very attentive gaze and his never banal thoughts.

It was as if Alessandro was x-raying in real time the spaces and emotions that surrounded him; after which, with his works—whether designed, written or built—he knew how to produce formidable aesthetic and conceptual accelerations. Which also had the subtle and relentless flavour of paradox.

I think of different and distant works such as the *Poltrona di Proust*, the "Paradise sky-scraper" for Hiroshima, the corkscrews of the *Anna G.* family for Alessi or the *Torre del filosofo*.

Unlike two other giants of irreverent and creative Italian thought, capable like him of acting on different levels—I am thinking of Ettore (Sottsass) and Andrea (Branzi)—for Alessandro the paradox was an essential and immediate component of the project, almost intuitive.

Alessandro Mendini's "Alchimia" (Alchemy), thanks to which he was used to distill everywhere his creative intelligence, was perhaps born from this combination of extreme aesthetic sensitivity and the taste for a paradox that is never a goal in itself. A magic enigma, which this exhibition investigates with worthy empathy.

HC

I am happy that you refer to Ettore and Andrea; it gives me immense pleasure to think of them when talking about Mendini.

Yes, Alessandro was an enchanter, a pied piper, a seducer who saw far ahead and far into the past by exploring the deep memories of civilizations, making them visible again.

He offered us a vision of the world of all times, a way of being, an aesthetic. In his wonderful map of *Fragilisme*, Alessandro included the expression "ancestral future" as a path to explore. Everything about him leaned towards this, and was characterized by grace, beauty, and humor.

SB

Our thanks also go to the teams of Triennale Milano and those of the Fondation Cartier who were fully committed to the creation of this project; a commitment that goes far beyond the classic framework of an exhibition in that we have come together in friendship and in honor of Alessandro's art.

This is what we talked about in Venice, Mendini's vision of the world calls for this kind of emotion, which is to make oneself available to the gaze of others.

In addition to thanking Fulvio Irace and Pierre Charpin, for the quality and contents of the exhibition, and Elisa and Fulvia Mendini with Beatrice Felis, for the great help of ideas, we cannot, Hervé, forget that this project of ours also has a sort of golden satellite: a special tribute to Alessandro Mendini that together, you and I, just that afternoon in Venice, decided to ask Philippe Starck! ●

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ANNA GILI

IT ALL STEMMED FROM NOTHING



Anna Gili, backstage test for portrait of Alessandro Mendini
Persone Dipinte, performance, 1986

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149 I first met Alessandro Mendini in 1983 due to a series of circumstances involving *Domus* magazine, as my project, developed together with my university classmates at the ISIA in Florence, was to appear on the cover. The draft featured a photo of everyone in the group except me. Embittered by my classmates' behaviour, I arranged an appointment with the editor of *Domus*, Alessandro Mendini. I was struck by his willingness to devote time to a student. He received me and listened closely, understanding my disappointment, which was very unusual for someone of his institutional profile. It was also an opportunity to show my work to one of the most influential and charismatic men in the design world.

It was Alessandro Mendini who proposed having an exhibition with him in Bari at Tarshito and Sharma's Galleria Speciale in March 1984. It was the beginning of a very long adventure and a creative partnership that lasted our entire lives. I immediately set to work, went back to my paper origami that I painted and folded to form a small sculpture, which I replicated in several copies because it had to be placed in the pencil-drawn colonnade that lined the gallery walls.

It was the first stage of the performance *Nulla, un'idea per un ambiente*, which was shortly followed by other editions in Florence at the PAC in Milan, November 1984 and at the Kunstmuseum in Düsseldorf in 1986.

The *Nulla, un'idea per un ambiente* installation at the Memorie e Luoghi del XX secolo gallery in Florence was presented with the performance of *Abito Sonoro*, which I had designed for my degree thesis at the ISIA in Florence.

1985—I moved to Milan, at a time when the new avantgarde air that would change the vision of design was being glimpsed and breathed in the universities, while the Magazzini Criminali new Italian wave were born in Florence, becoming one of the most non-conformist Italian theatre groups with *Crollo Nervoso* (1980), the first to apply a postmodern aesthetic to theatre. The leading art critic of the 1980s, Francesca Alinovi, came from the DAMS in Bologna, while the avantgarde design movements Alchimia and Memphis were active in Milan.

Although it is often remembered as superficial and referred to as a "Big Party," that period was characterized by a restlessness that led the protagonists of the art scene and the design avantgardes to constantly search for new visions that extended the dimension of the "human body."

The connection with different creative disciplines such as design, art, theatre, experimental music, and poetry, was not accidental but the result of a structured approach, an outpost of research. A cross-cutting reading of contemporary culture was fundamental to understanding what was being done and participating in it was not as easy as it might seem, but was instead risky. Art could not be separated from life. Exhibitions expressed the emotional states and tensions of design through performances. The many events that

followed one another involved gatherings of artists, designers, musicians and poets who looked to the suburbs as places to seek new "modus vivendi et operandi."

For the design avantgardes, industry tended to empty the object of its historical memory, its anthropological identity. Avantgarde design exhibitions were held in venues other than exhibition spaces. The new galleries shared the designer's thinking, making room for the new needs of a changing world, whose complexity could no longer be circumscribed to the world of furniture. The resulting objects were usually one-offs or limited series. I was lucky enough to be passing through Milan at the time, where I encountered the total willingness of the Alchimia group and Mendini to accept my performances such as *Persone Dipinte*, presented at the Museo Alchimia in 1986.

In Milan, meeting like-minded artists and designers, frequenting trendy bars and clubs, we tuned into the wave of creative energy typical of that period. I lived with the idea of having to express and theatricalize the moment through the performance event, so I would ask young people with interesting faces, whom I found on the street or in cult places like the Pois bar in Milan, if I could photograph them for a performance project I was working on. I chose Milan's large doorways as backdrops for my portraits. They were settings with historical decorations and fascinating textures, even in the ruined surfaces. I started with photographic portraits of Alessandro Guerriero and Alessandro Mendini pictured in front of the doorway on Via Gabba, where the Alchimia studio was located at the time. Alessandro Guerriero used the project on his face as his official portrait. Everything seemed simple thanks to the logistical support and the scope of the creative production machine that the Alchimia studio, led by Alessandro Guerriero and his sister Adriana, was able to provide. For me it was like dealing with a micro Cinecittà where one could build and promote any event or object one could dream of, an extraordinary place made up of people of great integrity, ethical, poetic and artistic depth.

I remember Alessandro Mendini's ability to visualize the future of design in advance. This simultaneous gift and obsession, linked to our endless discussions on young designers and their directions, was one of the reasons that led me to take charge of the census on the new generation of designers that resulted in the exhibition I curated in 1992: *Nuovo Bel Design, 200 nuovi Oggetti per la casa*.

The event would not have been possible without the support of the fledgling Atelier Mendini, which he opened with his brother Francesco in 1989. Atelier Mendini hosted other young pioneers in the studio space in addition to myself, with whom I worked for the entire duration of the event.

The exhibition at the Fiera di Milano was a great media success and generated one of the biggest press reviews of its time, yet the Italian trade media delivered a negative verdict on the new

furniture presented by the new generation. The new objects on display were compared with historical and contemporary objects by the Masters of Design. The issues that emerged, projected on a loop in the videos showing the results of the census, were not considered.

I still don't quite understand how the meeting and deep connection with Alessandro Mendini came about. I ascribe it to fate, because our energies seemed to be remarkably similar, despite the great differences in age, education, social standing and institutional/professional power. Although we have always maintained separate working practices, from the day we met in 1983 we never stopped sharing and exploring the world through ideas until 18 February 2019.

As a multifaceted figure, Mendini's life involved comprehensive research and an enormous amount of work. He was a catalyst and point of contact for many design movements, individual artists and designers whom he generously involved in cultural initiatives and exhibitions and with whom he collaborated throughout his life. His legacy travels into Affective Infinity and will never end. ●

BRUNO GREGORY

I lived in Linz, in the *Modello di Architettura Banale*, I walked the streets of the *Città*, I moved in the dark among the *Oggetti Senza*, I entered the *Stanza Filosofica*, I saw the *Urbolante* hovering above the city, I slipped on the *Scivolavo* chair, I was in Rimini that summer at the *Pensione Ideale*, I saw a chair burn *Lassù*, I ate grapes with death on the *Mobile Infinito* table, I was one of the mouths of the *Architettura sussurrante*, I talked to the *Robot Sentimentale*, I lost my brother in 1995, I hid a pencil in the drawer of a *Credenza di Redesign*, and an eraser in the *Ollo* cupboard, I designed my *Cucina Neospaziale*, climbed the Suncheon tower, lifted the *Valigia per l'Ultimo Viaggio*, sat on the *Poltrona Proust* for just a moment, planted my metallic and sonorous flowers in a park in Genoa, my son arrived in 1998, and again I lived in the model of *Architettura Banale*, this time in Venice, there I put in order luminescent *Oggetti Banali*, I walked slowly in the deserted streets of a painting by Arduino Cantafora, I wore the *Pointillism* Swatch on my wrist, I wondered why make a *Vaso Utopico*, and what shape it could have, I accompanied Alessandro in his magnificent Utopias. ●