This paper focuses on the formative period of “Italian design” which, as documented subsequently by historians, reached its apogee in the early 1960s. It sets out to unpack the complex relationship between art, craft, artisanal production and design in these years concentrating on the role played by the third category in the early 1950s, especially as manifested in the exhibition *Italy at Work*. It seeks to recontextualize what was referred to, at the time, as “handicraft” or “folk art” within the economic and ideological framework of the period and to show its important role both in providing a necessary continuity and in enabling innovation of a certain kind to take place. An emphasis is placed on the role of the USA in these years and of individual architect-designers, especially Gio Ponti and Ettore Sottsass, who positioned themselves within current debates. The paper argues that the mature neo-modern Italian design movement took on board some of the defining characteristics of handicraft, and that a respect for tradition was crucial in the formation of the new aesthetic.

Viewed in retrospect the image of a small toy donkey made of straw, illustrated in the pages of the catalogue to an exhibition which toured the USA in the early 1950s, entitled *Italy at Work,*[1] almost certainly raises a smile on the faces of those who associate the concept of “Italian Design” in that era with the more familiar images of sleek motor scooters, sculptural furniture items and sophisticated electronic goods.[2] The donkey is a much more innocent object evoking an image of a country in a condition of pre-industrialization and pre-urbanization, in touch with its rural and artisanal past. In the context of our generally received picture of Italian material culture in these years it has no apparent part to play.

The years 1945-60 were ones of rapid industrial, urban and economic expansion for Italy in which the country reconstructed itself on a number of levels; in which peasants migrated from the South to the North in search of labour and a new affluent lifestyle; and the graph of consumption soared dramatically upwards.[3] The contrast of the Northern picture with the poverty of the South presented a dramatic dualism which penetrated many aspects of Italian life in these years. Design, it seems, if the donkey has any significance in this context, was not without its apparent internal contradictions as well. In the context of *Italy at Work* the straw donkey stood, in fact, in the middle of a wide spectrum, one end of which was occupied by objects such as the industrial designer Marcello Nizzoli’s “Summa”, an electronic calculator for Olivetti encased in a sleek body-
shell,[4] and on the other by self-consciously avant-garde “art-craft” objects, among them ceramics by the sculptor Lucio Fontana.[5] Aesthetically innovative these latter artefacts, emanating from the world of fine art - which was situated unquestionably (with decorative art just below it) at the top of the cultural hierarchy at that time - mingled openly with designed products emerging from the new, high-technology, mass-production industries, goods which were only just beginning to acquire an input of cultural capital in these years. Somewhere in the middle of these two were situated a wide range of traditional goods of artisanal manufacture, some of them acknowledging the existence of a contemporary aesthetic to a certain extent, others completely unresponsive to it. A question is inevitably raised about the relationships between the different faces of Italian material culture in the early post-war years and the reasons for their co-presence in an exhibition which was organized, primarily, to present an image of post-war Italy to potential American consumers.

Italy at Work was as much a trade show as a cultural event: it was part of the programme of economic support with which the USA was providing Italy at that time - in 1948, for example, almost five million dollars were made available to stimulate the work of the Italian craft industries - under the umbrella of the Marshall Plan.[6] Italian artefacts were being shown in the USA as a means of stimulating consumer desire in the American marketplace, thereby assisting in promoting trade links between the two nations and helping the economies of both countries.

Given this framework, the inclusion of the straw donkey alongside goods of a much more obviously contemporary nature can be interpreted in a number of ways. Clearly it suggested the possibility of access through consumption to a country and a culture which was still seen to be in touch with its rural and artisanal traditions.[7] With this went the retention of hand-making, the use of natural, indigenous materials, and the concept of small-scale, family-based, regional manufacturing. For the enormous numbers of immigrant Italians in the USA - undoubtedly a large constituency of the hoped-for body of consumers - these links were clearly important ones.

Beyond this obvious “nostalgic” significance the emphasis on artisanal work in this period can also be seen as a means of legitimizing, and indeed making “Italian”, a role “primitivism” within contemporary visual culture which was visible in much international avant-garde art at that time, especially in the ceramic work of Pablo Picasso which was so widely admired and emulated in Italy and elsewhere [fig. 4].[8] Furthermore, it could be seen as a way of easing the traumatic effects of the sudden transformations in Italian life and culture at this time, of bridging a gap between the past, the present and the future, and of alleviating the “shock of the new” at a time when Italy was rapidly defining both a new Modernity and a new cultural Modernism for itself.

The promotion of the artisanal crafts, both for economic and ideological reasons, was not a new phenomenon, however. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the Catholic Church had encouraged the development of regionally based, small-scale manufacture as a means of sustaining the importance of the family unit in Italian life, an encouragement that was supported by the élite sector of society which feared the potential militant power of the urban proletariat. Under fascism, Benito Mussolini had imbued craft work with a special status by establishing the artisanal firm as a special legal category, and introducing a number of exemptions for it, including tax benefits.[9] His initiation of regional syndicates to stimulate the regeneration of the economy was another
demonstration of his belief in the importance of the “local” as an essential constituent of the “national”.

Within the climate of autarchy and nationalism that existed under fascism, however, the support given to the crafts played a role quite other than the one it performed after 1945. After the war the emphasis was, simultaneously, upon both continuity and change. Within the new Italian republic artisanal work played a cultural, as well as an economic role, its continued presence helping to define, for Italy, a new sense of modernity which was inward-looking and nationally defined in nature but international in its visibility and purpose. Also, whereas up until the Second World War craft had had primarily conservative and traditional connotations, within post-war Italy one of its faces looked clearly in the direction of innovation and the future. In this guise it can be seen to have played, in fact, a key role in the formation of a new modern design movement which became fundamental to Italy’s cultural and economic identity in international eyes from the mid-1950s onwards.

The janus-faced role that craft played in the formation of Italian modern design in the years after 1945 was highly significant. One of the ways in which it was played out was through the multi-levelled use of indigenous, artisanal materials such as straw, cane, wicker, cotton, linen, brass and copper. In the artisanal context products made from these materials had clearly delineated geographical areas of origin. Straw work, for example, was manufactured extensively in Florence and Naples (Rogers, 1950, pp. 19-20). These were production centres rather than merely sites of access to the material in question as straw was widely available in all rural areas. It was a material which had long been used by the poor as a substitute “to emulate the expensive crafted products available to the rich” (D’Amato, 1977, p. 79) but in the years after 1945, as it became increasingly integrated into what Meyric R. Rogers, in the *Italy at Work* catalogue, called “the craft arts” (Rogers, 1950, p. 19) – an area of contemporary cultural production characterized, essentially, by aesthetic innovation – it came to be valued as much for the cultural as for the economic capital that it brought with it [fig. 5]. Rogers saw the “craft arts” as being distinct from artefacts deriving from traditional artisanal manufacture and believed them to be in evidence only in “Piedmont, Lombardy, the Veneto and Liguria in the north, Tuscany, Emilia and the Romagna in the center, and the region of Naples in the South” (Rogers, 1950, p. 19). For him, therefore, it was a phenomenon linked with the urban and industrialized areas of Italy to a significant extent. The use of straw work as a mark of the way in which traditional artisanal work was being brought into the more self-conscious world of “craft art”, a phenomenon which, in the late 1940s and early 1950s provided a foundation and legitimation for the emerging modern design ideology and aesthetic of these years, was visible at the Milan Triennale of 1951 where a highly aestheticized display of what were described as “folkloric” baskets, hats and other items of straw work, all made in Florence, was put together by the architects Eugenia Reggio and Emma Calderini (*Domus*, 1951, July-August, pp. 36-37). In addition to its sections dedicated to Italian ceramics, textiles, glass and enamels, this Triennale also housed the much documented “Form of the Useful” display, designed by L. B. Belgiojoso, E. Peressuti, Franco Ceriani and Max Huber, an installation which showed a clear link between the contemporary abstract sculpture of artists such as Max Bill and Huber himself and the forms of Nizzoli’s industrial designs for the Olivetti company, among other innovative products. The aestheticization of industrial design was overt in this
section but its presence alongside “craft art” objects and artefacts of artisanal manufacture, transformed into art objects through their arrangement in this setting, served to reinforce this sophisticated strategy. The diversity within the Italian material culture displayed in the 9th Triennale suggested that there was still an open-endedness at this time about the image of Italian material culture, and by extension of Italian society and culture as a whole, that was to be communicated internationally. It was still possible, in 1951, for Italy to have chosen to emphasize, within its newly constructed cultural self-image, its fine art work, its “craft art” work, its work in the area of the traditional decorative arts, its “handicraft” work or “folk art” – i.e. its work of artisanal manufacture – or the sophisticated products of its newer high technology industries. In the event, by the end of the decade it had become clear that they had all come to be subsumed under the umbrella of “industrial design”. As Alberto Rosselli, the editor of the periodical Stile Industria, which ran between 1954 and 1963, and which did more than any other Italian periodical of those years to concentrate exclusively upon the formalist aesthetic of high-technology products, wrote as the magazine came to its end in 1963: “Industrial design in Italy is no longer a phenomenon to be discovered as it was ten years ago when our first number of Stile Industria came out, but a fact to be organized and consolidated through appropriate institutions” (Rosselli, 1963, p. 1). By that date, although the Italian industrial designers’ professional association – the ADI – had been created and the influential design exhibition – the Compasso d’Oro (the Golden Compass) – had been established, the Italian modern design movement was still relatively uninstitutionalized. By the time of the 10th and 11th Triennales of 1954 and 1957, however, it had become apparent that, along with that of furniture, the design of the products of the new industries – electrical appliances, televisions, motor bikes, etc. – was receiving the greatest attention internationally and that the market for craft work, with the exception of textiles, ceramics and glass which were being pulled along in the wake of the new concept of “Italian design”, was less prominent. Artisanal work had almost faded from view.

The links between artisanal traditions and modern Italian furniture design in the 1950s remained visible for a while, however. Once again the relationship was frequently expressed through the selection of materials used and straw, rush, raffia, cane and wicker were once more to the fore in this context. While the trend for the use of such materials in contemporary furniture design was not restricted to Italy – examples could be found in the USA, Scandinavia, Great Britain and elsewhere in these years – given their role in Italy’s past, they took on a special significance for that country at this crucial moment in its political, industrial and cultural reconstruction.

Among numerous examples which could be cited – including pieces by Roberto Mango, Gastone Rinaldi, Carlo Santi, Vittoriano Vigano, Ico and Luisa Parisi, Marco Zanuso, Raffaella Crespi, Vittorio Gregotti and others[10] – the work of Franco Albini and Franca Helg, especially the “Margherita” armchair made of malacca and Indian cane (there was no need for the material to be sourced locally given the internationalism of the market), and manufactured by Vittorio Bonacina in 1950, is the best known [fig. 6]. The combination of its modern form and the traditional materials of which it was made provided a strong icon for the emerging modern design movement of those years and it was widely illustrated both in Italy and elsewhere. Its presence at the 9th Triennale alongside strikingly contrasting pieces which utilized new materials in an equally
dramatic way—among them Marco Zanuso’s “Lady” armchair which was a result of experiments in rubber foam undertaken through his company Arflex which was funded by Pirelli – reinforced the twin pulls and pushes within this formative period of Italian modern design. At this stage, however, it was not yet clear which one would win. The architect-designer Gio Ponti had been a central figure within the craft/decorative art/design alliance since the 1920s,[11] and his little “Superleggera” chair, work on which began in the early 1950s although it was not finally manufactured by the Cassina company in Meda until 1956 [sic but 1957], is another prominent example of the use of artisanal materials and references integrated into an essentially modern design in these years. In existence since the eighteenth century [sic but 1927] as a wood-working workshop responsible, among other things, for making the pews in the local church, Cassina had grown from being a small family firm which, by the early twentieth century, combined the craft skills of joinery and upholstery. After the war it expanded its production base in response to orders from the Rinascente department store in Milan for furniture items to meet the growing needs of consumers and to commissions for the supply of furniture for ships between 1947 and 1952 for which the firm was supplied with designs from, among others, the architect-designer Gio Ponti (Santini, 1981). The strong relationship that was established between the designer and the firm culminated in the design of the “Superleggera” which was based upon traditional chairs from the fishing village of Chiavari, the rush seat being a characteristic of the original, although the forms of the wooden elements were subtly changed to suit the aesthetic of the day. Another rush-seated chair, this time designed by Vico Magistretti, another leading member of the generation which set up their practices in Milan in 1945, was also produced by Cassina, but not until 1963, for the interior of the Carimate Golf Club. It contained a similar dualism – the basic outline and materials in this case being inspired by a traditional country chair but the red gloss paint on the woodwork clearly moving in a different, non-natural direction. As Magistretti’s biographer, Vanni Pasca, has explained, “Tradition is thus respected, but at a certain distance: Italian design of the period, this piece included, was looking towards the future” (1991, p. 59).

While the tradition/modernity and material/form dualisms within Italian furniture of these years were widespread they were not theorized in any way but emerged, rather, from designers’ own intuitive tastes and preferences and from the possibilities within manufacturing which, given its craft basis, was, and largely remains, highly flexible and able to adapt to change very quickly. What theoretical discourse existed emanated from the world of architecture. Given the architectural backgrounds of all the designers working at this time, however, they were not immune to the ideas that were in the ether. Central to the many debates that were in circulation at this time within the architectural community was the burning need to find an alternative to what was widely perceived to be the systematic rationalism of the international Modern Movement which had reached an impasse in Italy with the defeat of fascism. Its ambivalent relationship with that regime made it difficult to revive it within the context of the new democracy. In spite of attempts by Ernesto N. Rogers, through his editorship of the periodical Domus from 1945 to 1947, and others, among them Piero Bottoni, to revitalize the Modern Movement in the context of the practical requirements of the bombed-out and homeless of the early post-war years, there was a strong sense that other options needed to be formulated. Among the alternatives that rose to the surface were organicism, championed by Bruno
Zevi who based his ideas upon those of Frank Lloyd Wright which he saw as the appropriate ones for what he called the “new democratic civilization” (Doordan, 1995, p. 588). Another route out of the Modern Movement was seen in what Dennis Doordan, using a term most commonly associated with Italian cinema in these years, has called “Neo-realism” (Doordan, 1995, p. 588). It denotes that tendency within post-war Italian architecture which sought to bring the past to bear on the future avoiding, however, the élitist, and indeed fascist, connotations of neoclassicism. Neo-realism rooted itself, instead, within the Italian rural and folk architectural traditions. It was to such traditions, for example, that the young architect-designer Ettore Sottsass turned in his work for housing in Novara and Savona, undertaken as part of the INA-Casa scheme, funded by Marshall Aid, in the early 1950s. His designs included a central courtyard and individual balconies for hanging out washing. Sottsass, his own father a leading rationalist architect of the inter-war years, was strongly inspired by folk or peasant culture in his early post-war search for an alternative Modernism (Sparke, 1982). Clearly these ideas moved, if only by osmosis, into the arenas of interior design and furniture as well. According to Vanni Pasca Magistretti, he had a “lifelong interest in simple traditional objects” and felt the need, for Italian post-war culture as a whole to move beyond the “intrinsically schematic” (1991, p. 18) international Modern Movement of the inter-war years towards a new Modernism.

While materials played a key part in helping to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation in this context and to allow for a transformation in design which enabled the two to come together in a new synthesis which saw them as part of the same formula rather than in opposition to each other, there were other aspects of Italian artisanal and craft work which also fed positively into the modern design movement that reached its apotheosis in the early 1960s. Among them the notions of quality and individualism were para-mount. The retention of these values within the emergence of a new design image and ideology, which owed much to the Fordist mass-production/mass-consumption model that was injected into the Italian context along with the US funds that made it possible for the country to reconstruct itself, were crucial in order for Italy to position its modern products alongside other areas of élite cultural production. It was particularly important to encourage the growth of a limited but wealthy and sophisticated marketplace to suit the restricted scale-given its artisanal base-of its indigenous manufacturing set-up. The seemingly contradictory idea of serial production goods-furniture, electrical and electronic products and even cars-as both dramatically modern in appearance and luxurious and individualized in nature was a new one in the world of modern design. In order for it to become a reality, it had to pass through a number of intermediary stages, its alliance with artisanal and craft work-with its fine art associations-being a first stage. It was a phase which was transitory, however. By the early 1960s the straw donkey had undoubtedly been relegated to the world of “kitsch” – Modernism’s “other” – but for a while it was a base-line from which a new image of modern design could in time, like a butterfly out of a chrysalis, emerge and discard. In the 1940s and 1950s, Italian artisanal and craft work was also closely linked to the Italian decorative and figurative traditions, yet others of its faces do not sit easily with the much more familiar, strikingly undecorated, abstract image of modern Italian design of the post-war years. Italy at Work boasted numerous figure and animal forms and decorated artefacts, the iconography of which had either rural or religious roots, which flowed from the hands of
 artisans working across a wide range of materials and media-ceramics, glass, enamels, metals, mosaic and pietra dura among them. Decorated leather goods were also much in evidence in the forms of handbags, shoes and belts, manufactured in Florence for the most part. Patterned textiles were also in plentiful abundance, silk, cotton and hemp printed with dramatic floral, figurative and more abstract motifs. While some were destined for the furniture industry others were used by the growing Italian fashion industry. The latter grew in emulation, to a large extent, of its Parisian counterpart, but also in response to the demands of a hungry American market which, having already devoured increasing quantities of Italian leather fashion accessories, linens, embroideries and infant knits in the years just before and after 1945, saw the emergence of Italian fashion garments as a natural development.[12] Florence was the centre for the early post-war trade in artisanal goods, and the fashion industry developed there in the 1950s on the basis of the skilled manufacturing of silks, wools, embroideries and straw which was already there.[13] The later shifts, first to Rome and thence to Milan in the 1970s was yet another recognition of the presence of the “design industry” in that latter city and the dominance, in market terms, of the cultural concept of design over the economic and technological faces of manufacture. Between 1945 and 1960 the international trading image of Italy shifted from being one based on the skilful manufacture of materials to one in which the aestheticized notion of “design” became pre-eminent. It was a transition, in some ways, from a pre-modern to a post-modern culture in which the Modernist phase was so rapid as to be almost totally eclipsed. Within that process of transformation craft acted as an important catalyst. There was a role for decoration in Italy’s early modern design industrial design movement of the 1950s but it was restricted to furniture, interiors and the other industrialized applied arts. The work of Gio Ponti, especially the results of his collaboration with the designer Piero Fornasetti, is highlighted in this context. One thinks especially of an interior they collaborated on in 1950 and a cupboard covered with architectural drawings of the same year. It is important to remember, however, that Ponti was also a pioneer Italian industrial designer with innovative products such as his widely illustrated espresso coffee-machine for La Pavoni of 1949 and his cutlery for Krupp of 1951 [fig. 7] to his name. Indeed his personal spectrum of activities mirrored that of Italian material culture as a whole in these years. Of the designers who had sympathies with the artisanal base of modern industrial design Ponti and Sottsass stand out. The former advised a number of craft/ decorative art firms about the ways in which they could move into serial production and update the aesthetic of their products accordingly without sacrificing the positive aspects of small-scale, skilled manufacture. Among many other things, he created copper products for Nino Ferrari in Brescia; textiles for Manifattura Isa, based in Busto Arsizio just north of Milan; and ceramics for Richard Ginori in Doccia outside Florence, a firm with which he had worked since the 1920s. As editor of Domus from 1947 onwards he campaigned to bring artists, craftsmen and architects nearer together and he published many articles on Italian ceramics, glass and metalwork.[14] Ettore Sottsass was less significant as a public campaigner but his private work in the early 1950s reflected a strong interest in both fine art and craftsmanship. He experimented extensively with handmade modern forms, constructed from plexiglass and metal foil, creating simple bowls and lights which blurred the boundaries between art,
craft and design [fig. 8]. His early ceramic designs, beginning in the mid-1950s for the Raymor store in New York, betrayed a strong commitment to indigenous traditional materials – terracotta in particular. From the late 1950s, when he became a consultant to the Olivetti company he sustained a “double life” as a designer working on forms for high-technology products and as a creator of designs for manufacture, by craftsmen, in clay, metal and wood. Pieces of jewellery designed by Sottsass were on show at the 11th Triennale in 1957. He later ventured into glassworking with Murano craftsmen. His retention of links with artisanal and craft culture played a significant role in allowing him to keep a distance from the design formalism which characterized the Italian design movement in the early 1960s, allowing him to become the focus of what came to be called the “Anti-design” movement of the late 1960s.

Several collaborations between architects and small-scale manufacturers, which resulted in the modernization and reorganization of products and production systems in addition to a reorientation where their markets were concerned, occurred in the area of lighting. Italy at Work contained examples by the company, Fontana Arte, whose lights had been revolutionized by the work of Paolo Chiesa in the inter-war years. In the 1950s it was the turn of Stilnovo, Arredoluce and Arteluce, the last turning to the architect Gino Sarfatti for inspiration, who borrowed forms from contemporary sculptors (especially Alexander Calder) in an attempt to revitalize and modernize Arteluce’s products [fig. 9]. Furniture workshops, many of them based in Brianza, north of Milan, the city where so many architects set up their practices after the war, adopted the same strategy with numerous success stories, among them the collaborations between Gio Ponti and Cassina and between Franco Albini and Bonacina, which have already been mentioned, as well as those of Carlo Pagano and Giancarlo De Carlo with Arflex and of Osvaldo Borsani with Tecno. The role of catalyst that these architect-designers played in these years was only possible within the economic and demographic context of the period. Manufacturers in the furniture, lighting and electrical appliance industries concentrated on the Italian home market to a considerable extent in the early 1950s, especially the expanding market in the North which was becoming increasingly aware of the notion of modernity through the films and television programmes that were being imported from the USA. The USA also provided Italy with an important market in these years, as we have seen, especially for handicrafts and fashion and fashion-related goods. With the entry of Italy into the European Community in 1956, however, other European countries began to become customers for Italian goods. This was one factor in the shift that can be discerned within Italian design in the second half of the decade. Hungry not so much for tradition, of which the rest of Europe already had plenty of its own (and which had accounted for the strong appeal of Scandinavian design in Europe in the early 1950s), but for a new image of modernity which could reflect the optimism of the technological revolutions of those years-the space race, the expansion of new materials, synthetics in particular-as well as the dramatic consumer boom and the new-found faith in modern goods, Italian design took on a new desirability in the eyes of a new marketplace. In turn, post-war design in Italy had completed its first phase of development by this time and had reached a level of maturity and consolidation. Leaning, at first, on its artisanal traditions it had established for itself an association with the concepts of quality and individualism which was unequalled elsewhere. Relating, through “art-craft”, to contemporary fine art it had acquired an unprecedented level of cultural capital. In need
of a new identity to symbolize the death of fascism and the emergence of democracy it had had to reconstruct itself very quickly with what it had available to it, i.e. the heritage of Italy’s past. Finally, depending upon the skill of craftsmen and the innovative ideas of a new, hitherto untested generation of architects who were forming their own professional identities at the same time as that of the new Republic was being created, it had rapidly constituted itself and communicated its values to as wide an audience as possible.

By 1960 the toy straw donkey had become little more than an appendage of the Italian tourist industry-one of the country’s biggest assets alongside its trade in designed products. It had lost its promise of international prestige and modernity and was relegated to the world of the parochial and the trivial. Its potency as a model for a new modern design movement had been irrevocably lost.


References
CERCARE CITAZIONI
NOTE
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1. The *Italy at Work* exhibition was the culmination of a set of developments which are
documented by Meyric R. Rogers, the curator of the exhibition in the introduction to the
catalogue which was published in Italy by the Compagnia Nazionale Artigiana (CNA) in
1950. In brief, in 1945, a non-profit organization called Handicrafts Development
Incorporated was formed in the USA by Dr and Mrs Max Ascoli to help Italian artisans after
the ravages of the war. At the same time CADMA was established in Italy. In 1947 the
House of Italian Handicrafts was set up in New York as a retail outlet for Italian crafts and
in the following year money was made avail- able to help Italian craftsmen under the
Marshall Aid scheme and CADMA was merged with the larger CNA of which the House of
Italian Handicrafts was an American subsidiary. Through contact with the latter in 1949
the Art Institute of Chicago began to investigate the possibility of an exhibition of Italian
crafts in the USA and funded research took place to this end. Eleven other American
museums were invited to co-operate and an American Selection Committee was formed
which included the well-known American industrial designer, Walter Dorwin Teague. In
1951 the exhibition was ready to tour the USA. The CNA was also responsible for an
exhibition entitled *Modern Italian Design* which was held at Manchester City Art Gallery in
1956.

2. The literature on Italy’s modern design movement after 1945 is extensive, mostly in
Italian. It tends to repeat itself and to highlight the same objects by a handful of
designers. Among the first accounts was an article by B. Alfieri entitled “1939-1959:
Appunti per una storia del disegno industriale in Italia” which appeared in *Stile Industria*
in May 1960. Nothing followed this up in the 1960s but a number of articles and books
appeared in the early 1970s, among them one by Vittorio Gregotti (1972), writing in the
catalogue, edited by Emilio Ambasz, to the exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in
New York entitled *The New Domestic Landscape*. It focused on furniture and industrial
design and although it illustrated Ponti’s “Superleggera” chair and Albini’s “Margherita”
chair, no artisanal or craft objects are included. Paolo Fossati’s *Il Design in Italia
1945-1972* (1972) focuses on the work of ten key architect-designers, the majority of
whom remain the best documented of this period. Books and articles following these-
among them Grassi & Pansera’s *Atlante del design italiano 1940-1980* (1980) and my own
book, *Italian Design 1870 to the Present* (1988)-have tended to cover the same ground,
albeit in a variety of ways, and to ignore the importance of the crafts.

3. For more detailed information on the economic, industrial, political and demographic
background of Italy in these years, see Baranski & Lumley (1990), Duggan & Wagstaff
(1995), Mammarella (1965), and Sassoon (1986).

4. For further information of Nizzoli’s collaboration with the Olivetti company, see the
5. The move by Italian fine artists into the area of the applied and decorative arts, especially ceramics, was widespread in these years and is widely represented in the *Italy at Work* exhibition. The effect was a blurring of the art/craft boundaries in a manner which was reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance. The heritage of Futurist artists, such as Tullio Albiola, moving into ceramics was also significant in this context, as was that of the painter Mario Radice who collaborated with the architect Giuseppe Terragni in the 1930s. Other artists who moved in the direction of “handicrafts” at this time included Luigi Brogini, Aligi Sassu, Agenore Fabbri, Piero Fornasetti, Giorgio Morandi and Pietro Cascello. Several of them worked in a post-Cubist style producing figures and animals with a rough, unfinished, primitive quality to them.

6. Funds from the Marshall Plan proved vital in sustaining Italian craft in the late 1940s. Money was, for example, put into the training of potters at the art school in Faenza. Exhibitions and competitions were also implemented with this money to help revitalize the crafts. ‘Italy at Work’ was heavily supported by money from the Marshall Aid scheme. It had a huge influence, therefore, on the development of Italian design in the years in question.

7. For details concerning Italian industrialization during these years, see Spesso (1980).

8. Picasso’s work was frequently published in *Domus* magazine in the late 1940s when the magazine was under the editorship of Gio Ponti. One issue in which it featured was no. 226 of 1948.

9. Much of this information was transmitted in a lecture (unpublished) given by Jonathan Zeitlin to the RCA/V&A History of Design students on 25 April 1985 entitled “Diffused Industrialisation in the Third Italy”.


12. Details concerning this early US/Italian trade in these areas are contained in an M.Phil. thesis by Nicola White (1997).

13. For more details, see Settembrini (1995).

14. See Ponti (1990), for more details.