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— *Mobilier Design Vintage* —

Gaetano Pesce, the Free-Flow Designer

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Posted, December 1st, 2016



Gaetano Pesce is a major personality of Italian and international design of the postwar period. Summarizing a body of work as rich and diverse as his is an arduous task. After all, if we take a look at the man's biography we read: architect, environmental designer, painter, sculptor, fashion designer, set designer, professor, and contemporary philosopher! His talent, which embraces various disciplines other than design, is a sign of his strong personality open to the world, which is then reflected in his own creations.

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Gaetano Pesce, portrait at his New York residence © civilianglobal.com

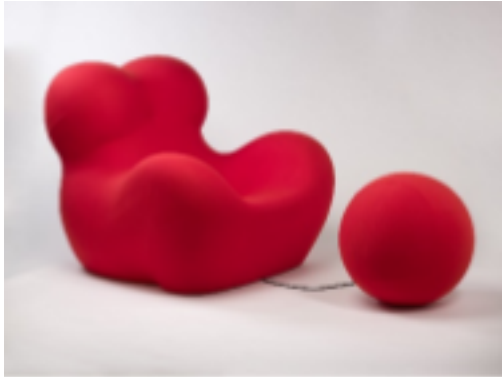
Born in La Spezia in 1939, Gaetano Pesce was closely involved in the countercultural movements of the 1960s. Often associated with the Radical Design ideology, Pesce far surpasses this label...Rather than reporting a series of projects completed over the course of a career which began in the 60s, we will attempt to approach the man and his work in light of his activism and social commitment, his desire for innovation, and, lastly, his achievements as an architect, another key aspect of the designer's persona.

In the twilight of his career, Gaetano Pesce can say he has revolutionized the history of design, in particular the way it is conceived. From the very start, he has asserted that design must go beyond the idea of functionality and become an object of analysis.

Thus, in 1969, the designer creates a piece, which is perhaps his most emblematic work, UP5 Chair, Donna, or Chair Up Dressed. This provocatively shaped armchair is an ode to femininity...imprisoned and kept under the yoke of male domination. This very comfortable and

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Gaetano Pesce, UP5 Chair & UP6 Donna, 1969 © joyana.fr

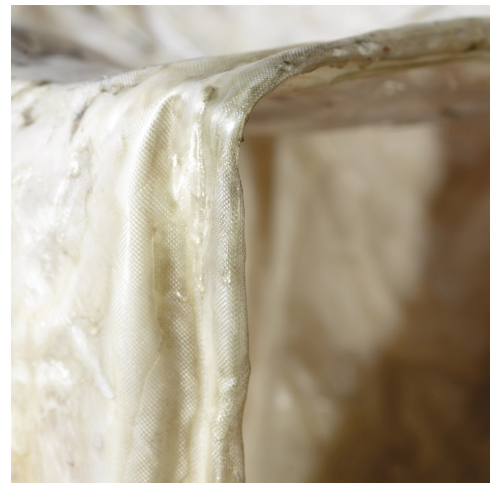


Golgotha chair, design by Gaetano Pesce, 1972. © interieurites.com

deep seated chair, perfect for snuggling, comes with a spherical ottoman attached to it with a chain. According to the Italian master “This project allowed me to express my view of women. Always sedentary, they nevertheless remain prisoners of their own making. The shape of this armchair, which evokes the voluptuousness of a woman, restrained by a ball tied to her feet, allowed me to convey the traditional image of a prisoner.



Golgotha chair, design by Gaetano Pesce, 1972. ©



If 1972 marks the creation of the Golgotha chair, it is also an important date in the history of Italian design of the postwar era. At that time, Gaetano Pesce was already an established designer. Together with [Ettore Sottsass](#), another leading figure of Italian design, and critic Ugo de la Pietra, he supports the Radical Design movement of the time. Collectives such as Archizoom or Superstudio

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participate in the groundbreaking exhibition entitled [Italy: The New Domestic Landscape](#) held at the New York MoMA.

Such was the purpose of the show: while Italy was undergoing social complications (strikes, inflation, real estate crisis), creatives – be they artists, architects, or designers – criticized consumerist society and an object manufacturing process, which they regarded as homogenized. Design must transcend the mere useful and aesthetic purpose of an object. It must denounce the financial inequalities of the time and respond to urgent social concerns as well as the challenges already arising in the modern world, such as the environmental issue.

At the famous New York exhibition, Gaetano Pesce tries to address the possibility of a large- scale environmental disaster impacting the Earth and proposes a living space for 12 people outside of our planet.

Throughout his career, the Italian master wished to transmit messages with his work. Most recently, in the early 2000s, he devised the Chador lamp, a manifesto against veiled women. For this particular endeavor, Pesce well deserves the title of “radical” designer, since the piece rests on two red resin feet crossing the whole lamp, which symbolize the blades of bloody knives cutting through the body of veiled women...An extremely lively manifesto released around the year 2000.



Gaetano Pesce, Chador lamp, 2000 © www.cornettedesaintcy.fr

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In 1997, Material ConneXion, an internationally renowned company in the research of innovative materials, organizes an exhibition devoted to Pesce, celebrating his audacious choices in the selection of materials. The evocative title of the show was *Is the Future now? Gaetano Pesce: Material Explorations*. Pesce has indeed become a master in the use of the most unconventional materials. He has extensively worked on resin and used mediums, such as recycled paper and plastic, in an original way. However, despite the various techniques employed by Gaetano Pesce, his works have a common denominator: they break the mold, both literally and figuratively.

With the completion of the Carenza bookcase in 1972, which means “scarcity” in Italian, Gaetano Pesce wonderfully illustrates his desire to break the mold of object standardization. The designer allows himself the freedom of creating free shapes. This is why, even though each specimen of the famous bookcase is created out of the same mold, every single one is unique.

Pesce finds a way of pouring expanded polyurethane in the mold lying on its back, so that the foam is applied in an unspecified manner. Pesce thus invents a technique based on which unique specimens are produced as part of a series of similar objects, which are created using the same mold! As a result, the Italian master qualifies this serial production as “diversified” or “pluralistic.” He could be criticized for making incomplete and imperfect design pieces. However, this is exactly what Pesce is after. Manufacturing flaws become the hallmark of his search for authenticity, as opposed to the standardization of models produced at the time.



Gaetano Pesce, Carenza bookcase, 1972. ©



Gaetano Pesce, Carenza bookcase, 1972. ©

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Other projects will legitimize the designer's search for imperfect design, a manifesto against mass production and standardization. This is apparent in the Sit Down chairs made of fabric and polyurethane foam (1975), the Sansone table built out of polyester resin in 1980 as well as the Dalila chair in polyurethane and epoxy resin. Furniture produced for [Cassina](#).



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Dalila chair, design by Gaetano Pesce, 1980

Gaetano Pesce's design is innovative and provocative, because he himself is engaged in the great social evolutions of his time. As a consequence, it would be wrong to reduce his influence only to the sphere of interior design. Pesce was also an architect carrying out very ambitious projects.

First of all, we should not forget that, between 1959 and 1965, Pesce pursued architectural studies at the university of Venice. In the City of Doges, he studied under Carlo Scarpa, Ernesto Rogers (Compasso d'Oro award in 1955 and 1962), and architectural theoretician Bruno Zevi. He was also professor at the Institut d'architecture et d'études urbaines in Strasbourg, held conferences, and was part of numerous board of examiners at design and architecture schools all over the world.

In 1982, he uses rigid polyurethane foam bricks to design a loft, the Vertical Loft. However, one his major works is a plant-clad building in Osaka (Organic building) constructed in 1993, which was a first at the time and has now become a banal attraction. The "vertical garden," as we nowadays call

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it, is a largely widespread concept in contemporary architecture, so much so that some architects have made it their specialty. The designer's idea was arranging prefabricated "pockets" containing soil, which are anchored to the wall thus creating a vertical garden. In so doing, Pesce wishes to create a living building, changing color as the seasons go by.



Gaetano Pesce, Organic Building, 1993.

Pesce holds the following view of contemporary architecture "Recent architecture has essentially been uninspiring, producing cold, anonymous, monolithic, aseptic, and standardized results. I have tried to convey feelings of surprise, discovery, optimism as well as stimulation and originality." This statement is in line with his opposition to functional and depersonalized design voiced in the 1960s.

As an architect Pesce likes to surprise and he did it again in 2007 for the Triennale museum in Milan. He proves that architects can use alternative construction materials to concrete, metal, or glass. He erects a very original pavilion, which does not go unnoticed, the Pink Pavilion. The building is designed exclusively in rigid polyurethane. Thanks to this excellent insulating

material, a cool temperature is maintained with outside heat and, conversely, heat is preserved in the event of very cold weather.

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Gaetano Pesce, Pink Pavilion, Milan Triennale 2007. © www.albertani.com



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