

ETTORE SOTTASS: 1955-1969
September 10 – October 17, 2015



Tantra, 1968



Sideboard, 1959



Cabinet, 1965

“He focused on reforming the relationship between the material world and human beings by offering the world a radically new definition of modern design.”

— Penny Sparke, Ettore Sottsass: Architect and Designer, Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibition catalogue essay, 2006

New York, NY, June 2, 2015 – On September 10, Friedman Benda will open its eighth season with *Ettore Sottsass 1955-1969*. The fourth in a series devoted to the expansive *oeuvre* of the groundbreaking Italian architect-designer Ettore Sottsass (1917-2007), the exhibition ten years in the making will explore the breadth of Sottsass’ remarkable creativity in the early stages of his career. With a display of unique ceramics, rare furniture and lighting, and vintage photographs never before seen in the United States, the exhibition will also be the first in a newly configured exhibition space for Friedman Benda in Chelsea.

Ettore Sottsass 1955-1969 will serve as a gateway to understanding an extremely diverse and fertile 15-year period in Italian design and art, which precedes the years of Radical Design. These are the formative years for the designer who used ceramics as a laboratory for developing a new language of design. Rare ceramics on view will include work from every important series of this period and several are derived from Sottsass’s memories and reflections of his travels to India, to the U.S., and from personal life experiences. Among them will be examples of *Lava* (1957), *Tondi* (1959), and *Tenebre* (1963), the designer’s “Darkness” series in somber tones with mandala-like imagery, conceived during a protracted illness. Others will be from *Shiva* (1964), a series celebrating his return to good health with homage to the Indian deity, the great conqueror of death, and from the *Tantra* (1968), and *Fumo* (1969), series. All of these works have been extensively published and collected by museums worldwide.

Furniture and lighting will also include major one-of-a-kind pieces: the first showing in the United States of a bookshelf made for a director of Olivetti; front slatted rosewood cabinets, one in white and one in red; and examples of mirrors and lighting designed for Arredoluce. Sottsass, who worked in a variety of media, produced many of these works for his patrons, while others were created as artistic expressions in his studio practice.

About Ettore Sottsass

"I have tried as best as I can to gather together the terms of a new vitality and, where and how I was able, to collect the shapes, colours and symbols that could represent the change in the images of this century from an intellectual organization to a reality that must be lived, to a kind of pure and vital energy."

— Ettore Sottsass, *Domus Magazine*, 1963

One of the most significant counter-forces to modernism in design history, Ettore Sottsass made monumental artistic contributions to every decade of his working life since starting his practice in the late 1940's. His career produced a provocative body of work, including architecture, furniture, industrial design, glass, ceramics, painting, photography and a wealth of writings.

For Sottsass, creating a lexicon of design that incorporated emotive, sensorial and humanist concerns was a rebellion against post-war rationalist architecture that valued function over form, and left human nature largely out of the architectural equation. He was moved by the subjective gesture of American Abstract Expressionist painting and the direct resonance of Pop Art. He also looked to ancient eastern cultures for examples of how to create a spiritual connection between form and meaning. A central concern of much of Sottsass' work is the social, cultural and technical implications of architecture and design on the way people live and interact. Always counterintuitive and built on complex thought-patterns, the notion that a functional object could communicate an abstract idea was revolutionary and has emboldened legions of designers today.

Sottsass' work can be found in the permanent collections of international museums, including the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, NY; the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; the Design Museum, London, England; the Design Museum, Ghent, Belgium; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Montreal, Canada; the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France; the Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Italy; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Pinakothek der moderne, Munich, Germany; the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Netherlands; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK.

About Friedman Benda

Friedman Benda is a gallery dedicated to presenting established and emerging designers who create historically significant work and are at the forefront of their practice. Founded in 2007 by Marc Benda and Barry Friedman, the gallery's exhibitions and publications have played a vital role in the rise of the design market and education, and take a comprehensive approach to work that intersects the fields of design, craft and art. Friedman Benda represents an international roster of designers spanning four continents and multiple generations.

For further information, please visit, www.friedmanbenda.com

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