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Lake Como Design Festival explores design's past and present

Lake Como Design Festival (until 10 October 2021) showcases modern and contemporary design masters throughout a series of historical locations

The area around Lake Como is famous for its charming, historical buildings, which this week come to life for the latest edition of the Lake Como Design Festival (until 10 October 2021). Based on the theme of 'History Repeating', the compact design event takes place in Como's Teatro Sociale with an exhibition curated by Triennale Design Museum director Marco Sammiceli, as well as displays in nearby palazzos exploring the meaning of designs from the past century.

History Repeating: how designers and companies look at history

Curated by Sammicheli, 'History Repeating' is a collective design exhibition analysing the role of history in key modern and contemporary design moments. 'The exhibition is a recognition of how much history is, on the one hand, a commercial and creative lever and, on the other, a dialectical rebound to innovation if it is not interpreted as a run-up to read the present,' says Sammicheli.

The display is set within Sale del Ridotto (Via Vincenzo Bellini 1), a lavishly decorated 18th-century background to the modern design works. On show are pieces by some of the 20th-century masters, including Alvar Aalto, Charlotte Perriand, Gio Ponti, Gino Sarfatti and Piero Portaluppi, shown alongside contemporary design figures, from Patricia Urquiola and Giulio Ridolfo to Chiara Andreatti and Cristina Celestino. The exhibition is designed by local architects Stefano Larotonda and Niccolò Nessi, whose professional mission is to enhance Como's architectural heritage and landscape.

To curate the group of works, Sammicheli explored the way contemporary design companies, from Molteni & C to Azucena, Apecasa and Flos, relate to the past. 'The theme emerged from a conversation with Lorenzo Butti, artistic director of the event, who wanted to explore re-editions. From this came the idea of showcasing how designers and companies approach history,' Sammicheli continues. 'We asked ourselves what is the legacy of history and how it has been passed on and absorbed right through to the present day.'

The exhibition presents creation in relation to the readymade, so that, Sammicheli explains, 'the context of the historical object is shifted in a way that overturns the paradigm, or where many small stories join together to make up a larger story'.



'History Repeating' at Sale del Ridotto: 'Nina' chair by Chiara Andreatti for Arflex, 2020; 'Osaka' sofa by Pierre Paulin, reissued by LaCividina, 1967/2013; 'Gothik - A' cabiney by Ferruccio Laviani for Fratelli Boffi, 2017

A dialogue between 20th and 21st centuries

Elsewhere in Como, Palazzo Valli Bruni (Via Rodari 1) forms the backdrop to '20/21', a series of pieces by independent contemporary designers who were inspired in their work by 20th-century craft and aesthetics. Creatives in this selling exhibition include Duccio Maria Gambi, Draga & Aurel, Sara De Campos and Pietro Russo among others. The works will be sold via a dedicated online auction (until 10 October 2021) and presented through a site-specific intervention by Draga & Aurel.

Finally, Palazzo Mantero (Viale Varese 2) is open to the public for the first time, hosting a series of re-editions of historical pieces by the likes of Azucena, FontanaArte, Ginori 1735, and Molteni & C. The exhibition is a way to explore design icons as a source of inspiration in contemporary design.

Reflecting on the overarching theme of the event, Sammicheli concludes: 'Repetition of that which is found in history is not copying or plagiarism but rather a reference to the continuous rising and setting of a sun that intoxicates and inspires an industrial and cultural community, where manufacturing and creativity have enabled design to flourish for at least 150 years.' ✱