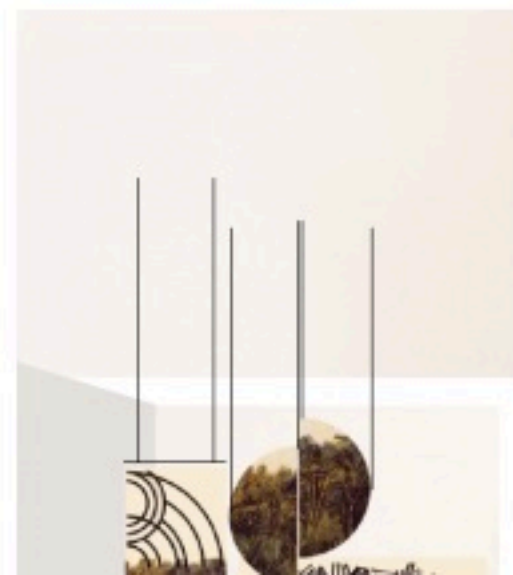


Milan 2013: Formafantasma on Design Nationalism

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Formafantasma mixes fact with fiction to create a critical homage to Italian designer Robert Sambonet. It's witty, poignant and remarkably relevant given how design suffers from our desperate need to define and label.



By Gabrielle Kennedy /asdf 09-04-2013

Italian-born, Eindhoven-based design duo **Formafantasma** is presenting a very critical project at the **Triennale Design Museum** in Milan.

"Cucina Sambonet" is Formafantasma's dedication to Italian master designer, Roberto Sambonet (1925 – 1994), and is part of a broader exhibition celebrating the work of ten Italian design Masters.

Perhaps it is because they are emigrant Italians, but Formafantasma have been able to cast a critical eye on the whole notion of curating a show based on national identity. Their homage to Sambonet mixes fact with fiction using the designer's iconic tableware objects.

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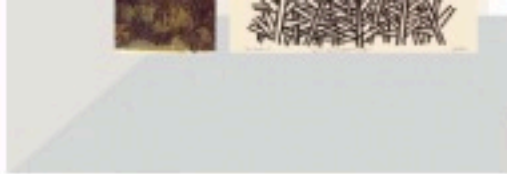
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"The Triennale doesn't have a permanent collection," says Simone Farresin, "so instead they do these exhibitions to discuss what Italian design is. I often wonder whether it would be better to just own a collection, which defined the past, and then have new exhibitions to reveal more about what is happening now ... I just find it limiting to think about design in terms of a particular culture. Design needs a broader framework."

Farresin also makes the point that whether something is typically Italian (or Dutch, or Scandinavian) becomes the dominating criteria of the work, not whether it is good or bad design. "And I don't think that helps the next generation of young designers," he says. "Collating lists of Italian designers and celebrating what they did – how does that discuss whether they were good or bad?"

Using that position, Formafantasma has curated an installation and video that sees Sambonet imagining design in the 21st century, free from national constraints. "He looks on his own work as part of history and part of the museum world," says Farresin, "and then he predicts something different for the future. Different urgencies and needs."

The film is also a comment on what the role of an institution can and should be. "Thinking of design in terms of specific cultures can be great for promotional or marketing purposes," says Farresin, "but it has gone too far, particularly in Italy. A museum should not be about promoting design."

Our chat moves to institutions like the MoMA, which discusses and presents design within a broader context, but also to the Netherlands.

Here the brand "Dutch Design" sort of fell apart, but the industry recovered well and moved on. "I think Holland is more open than Italy and it definitely looks at design with a broader view," Farresin says.

"Are we Italian or Dutch designer," he asks rhetorically.

Both Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin were schooled at the Design Academy Eindhoven.

"La Sindrome Del'influenza" runs at the Triennale Design Museum in Milan until February 2014

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