

MOD TO MEMPHIS

DESIGN IN COLOUR 1960s-80s



8 August 2002 – 30 March 2003

Colour — vibrant, glossy, transparent, patterned — was a defining element in design from the swinging 60s to the post-modern 80s.

Drawn from the Museum's collection of furniture, fabrics, wallpaper and lighting, this exhibition explores the way colour, in combination with innovative forms and materials, reflected the adventurousness of these exciting years.

This exhibition is relevant to high school students of Technology and Design, Visual

Arts (years 11 and 12), as well as tertiary students of design, architecture, jewellery, sculpture, interior design, graphic design and industrial design.

The notes contain the text of each of the exhibition theme panels, images of the key objects, focus questions to help your students study the exhibition more closely, follow-up activities to be set as extension exercises or classroom/tutorial discussions and an extensive resource list.

Image: 'Marilyn' sofa, Studio 65, 1970

The 'anything goes' 60s

Mod, pop, swinging, space age, groovy ... the 1960s and early 70s were years of unparalleled change. The new youth market, relative affluence, the rise of popular culture and the space race all contributed to a decade in which tradition was consistently challenged and the new embraced.

In many areas of design colour and newly developed plastics became the vehicles by which the new 'look' demanded by a youthful generation was achieved. Vivid colours expressed the exuberance of the times, while the mouldable qualities of plastics created unlimited potential for new shapes, colours and functions.



'Melooni' design by Maija Isola, Marimekko, Finland, 1963



'Expo mark 11 sound chair', Grant and Mary Featherston, 1967. Photo by Dieter Muller



'Globe' or 'Ball' chair, Eero Aarnio, Finland, 1965

Focus questions

Key object: 'Marilyn' sofa

- What new material allowed the development of the shape for the 'Marilyn' sofa?
- Select some objects in the exhibition that you would place with the 'Marilyn' sofa to create an interior.
- Who is the sofa named after?
- What does it reflect about the era in which it was made?

Context

- The designers of the 60s were able to both challenge existing design practice and in some cases act as a catalyst for social change. How did the 'Pillola' light by Cesare Casati and Emanuele Ponzio (Italy), the 'Gherpe' table light by Superstudio (Italy) and the 'Poli' chair by Grant and Mary Featherston (Australia) challenge the conventions of the time?
- What series of events in the 1960s caused an outbreak of 'futuristic' statements in design, fashion, film and furniture?

Technology

- Find the 'Globe' chair. What technology and materials made the 'Globe' achievable?

Designer

- Who was Florence Broadhurst? Describe her work.

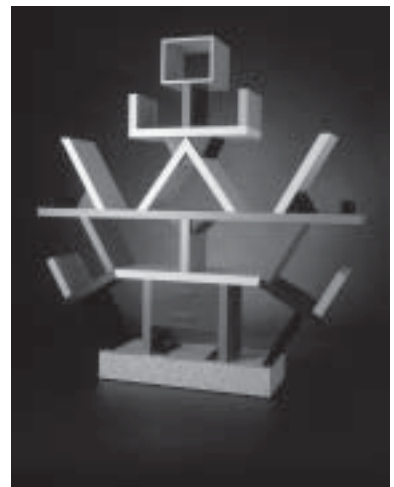
The 80s and the Memphis phenomenon

The optimism and uninhibited creativity of the 1960s was temporarily checked by the worldwide recession of the mid 70s. But by the early 1980s designers were once again experimenting with unorthodox colours, forms and materials.

Italy, and more specifically the Milan-based design group Memphis, played a leading role in this new challenge to conventional good taste. The colour, pattern and unusual geometric shapes that were trademarks of the Memphis post-modern style were influential internationally throughout the 80s.



'Sunset in New York', Gaetano Pesce, Italy, 1980



'Carlton' room divider by Ettore Sottsass, Italy, 1981

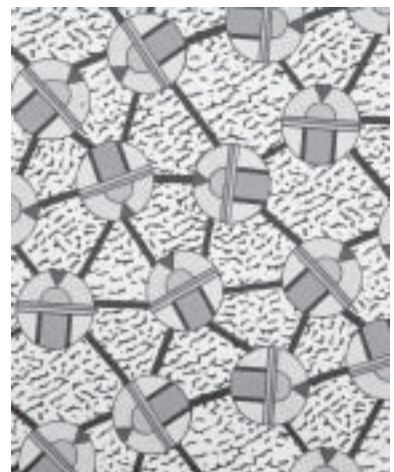
Focus questions

Memphis

- What was 'Memphis' and where was it based?
- Who led the Memphis group?
- Where is the name Memphis from?
- How does the meaning(s) of the name reflect the objectives of the group?
- In what way was their design philosophy similar to the times?

Designers

- Gaetano Pesce's career spanned the period from the 60s to the 80s. What similarities does his work 'Sunset in New York' of the 80s, have to the 'UP1' chair of the 60s?
- Ettore Sottsass has given his 'Carlton' and 'Treetop' designs comic and 'human' qualities to make them accessible and engaging. Describe how he has done this.
- Describe how the 'First' chair by Michele De Lucchi, the 'Colourblock' coffee table by John Smith and the fabrics of Nathalie du Pasquier are similar.



Detail of 'Cerchio' fabric by Nathalie du Pasquier, Italy, made by Rainbow for Memphis, Italy, mid 1980s

Post-visit activities

- Trace the history of plastics and their use in furniture design. Investigate how plastics can be used safely and in a sustainable way. Find designers that have used/are using plastics in this way. Include Australian designers in your research.
- Research the work of Gaetano Pesce and his past and recent experiments with colour and plastic.
- Create a cultural context for the 'Marilyn' sofa by listing some of the political, scientific and cultural events/happenings at the time it was designed in the late 60s and early 70s.
- 'Whilst functionalism was a prescriptive program, rational and unemotional, "decorativeness" was its reverse, without dogma, expressive and highly individualistic". (Anne Watson, *Mod to Memphis*, Powerhouse Publishing, 2002). What are the advantages and disadvantages of following 'decorativeness' in furnishings, wallpapers and interior design?
- Do a web search on the economics, politics, technology or science of the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s. How do you think this may have influenced designers of these eras?

Resources

Many of these books are available from the Museum Research Library, open weekdays from 9.00 am – 5.00 pm by appointment on tel (02) 9217 0533 or email researchlibrary@phm.gov.au.

The Powerhouse Museum Shop also stocks an extensive range of contemporary design publications, including *Mod to Memphis: design in colour 1960s-80s*.

Buck, Alex & Vogt, Matthias (eds). *Michele De Lucchi*, Ernst & Sohn, Germany, 1993

Eidelberg, Martin. *Design 1935-1965: what modern was*, Harry N Abrams, New York, 1991.

Garner, Philippe. *Sixties design*, Taschen, Cologne, 1996.

Greenberg, Cara. *Op to pop: furniture of the 60s*, Bullfinch Press, Little, Brown & Co, New York, 1999.

Hiesinger, Kathryn B & Marcus, George H (eds). *Design since 1945*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1983

Horn, Richard. *Memphis: objects, furniture and patterns*, Columbus Books, London, 1986.

Jackson, Lesley. *The sixties: decade of design revolution*, Phaidon, London, 1998.

Lane, Terence. *Featherston chairs*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1988.

O'Callaghan, Judith. *Gordon Andrews retrospective*, exhibition brochure, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 1993.

Powerhouse Museum. *Decorative arts and design from the Powerhouse Museum*, Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 1991.

Quinn, Catriona. *Sydney style: Marion Hall Best, interior designer*, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney, 1993

Sparke, Penny (ed). *The plastics age*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 1990.

Suhonen, Pekka & Pallasmaa, Juhani (eds). *Phenomenon Marimekko*, Marimekko, 1986.

Van de Ven, Anne-Marie. 'The only studio of its kind in the world: Florence Broadhurst wallpapers 1959–1977' in *Florence Broadhurst 1899–1977, Parallel Developments*, exhibition brochure, London Printworks Trust, 2001.

Watson, Anne. *Mod to Memphis: design in colour 1960s–80s*, Powerhouse Publishing, 2002.

Watson, Anne. *Take a seat: chair design in the 20th century*, exhibition brochure, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney 1989.

Websites

- <http://www.designmuseum.org/>
Design Museum, London, section on Memphis and other designers featured in the exhibition
- http://web.designaddict.com/design_index/index.cfm
profiles of Michele De Lucchi and Ettore Sottsass
- <http://www.design-technology.org/ettoresottsass.htm>
about Ettore Sottsass
- <http://www.designboom.com/eng/interview/pesce.html>
interview with and profile of Gaetano Pesce
- <http://www.designboom.com/eng/funclub/gufram.html>
profile of Gufram, makers of the 'Marilyn' sofa and other multiple objects
- <http://www.designboom.com/portrait/commedesgarcons.html>
in keeping with the theme of this year's Young Designer of the Year Award, this site shows images of the Comme des Garçons shop design

- <http://www.designboom.com/eng/funclub/memphisremember.html>
outline of Memphis philosophy, interviews and images
- <http://www.designboom.com/eng/funclub/cucchi.html>
artistic collaboration between Ettore Sottsass and Enzo Cucchi
- http://www.designmp.com/en/archivos_htm/magazine_htm/submag_9.htm#
tribute to Verner Panton and retrospective at the Vitra Design Museum, Berlin
- <http://www.mbam.qc.ca/madm/pesce/index3.html>
Gaetano Pesce's recent exploration into plastics
- <http://www.eero-aarnio.com/objects.htm>
catalogue of Aarnio products and designs
- <http://members.macconnect.com/users/g/gpesce/>
Gaetano Pesce home page
- http://www.scandinaviandesign.com/verner_panton/index.htm
profile of Verner Panton and images

Please note

These websites were available and suitable at the time of publication. We advise that teachers should check sites before recommending them to students.

MOD TO MEMPHIS

DESIGN IN COLOUR 1960s-80s



Exhibition book

Anne Watson

Includes the original bean bag, the 'Marilyn' lips sofa and the 'Expo talking chair' and designers such as Verner Panton, Eero Aarnio, Grant and Mary Featherston, Gaetano Pesce, Florence Broadhurst, Ettore Sottsass, and the Memphis group — from the Powerhouse Museum's outstanding 20th-century design collection.

**80 pages with over 70 fabulous colour images,
ISBN 1 86317 094 4, RRP \$24.95**

Available from the Powerhouse Shop, good bookstores and Powerhouse Publishing mailorder
tel: 02 9217 0129

Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name at the Powerhouse Museum

For more information about *Mod to Memphis*,
visit the Powerhouse Museum's website
<http://www.phm.gov.au>

For more information about education support
or your booking contact Education and Visitor
Services at the Powerhouse Museum:
Telephone — (02) 9217 0222
Fax — (02) 9217 0441
Email — edserv@phm.gov.au

Get regular updates about Museum programs
delivered directly to your computer by joining our
listserv. Email: edserv@phm.gov.au

ph^m powerhouse museum
science + design

500 Harris Street Ultimo
PO Box K346 Haymarket 1238
www.phm.gov.au