

FRIEDMAN BENDA
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ETTORE SOTTASS: IL VETRO
TEFAF MAASTRICHT | BOOTH 447
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“From the soft comes the fragile, from the fire comes the color, from the glow comes the transparency. What do I know, it's all very strange.”

– I Vetri di Ettore Sottsass, 1976

“I tried to move away from the everyday object and attempted to create Glass with a capital letter. Of course, it's a risky approach because I don't want to be an artist, much less a sculptor, but in the end, the objects that are produced seem like they are, yet they're not: they're a mix that isn't quite understood.”

– Ettore Sottsass



Kachina 16, 2006



Xiangzheng, 1999

New York – On the occasion of TEFAF Maastricht 2025, Friedman Benda is honored to present *Ettore Sottsass: Il Vetro*, a presentation dedicated to the Italian architect's decades-long exploration of glass.

This intimate survey of Sottsass' glass offers a rare opportunity to see the most comprehensive presentation since the retrospective at the Stanze del Vetro (Venice, 2017)

“Sottsass' glass pieces are complex organisms, designed as if they were characters,” says Luca Massimo Barbero, curator of the exhibition at the Stanze del Vetro. “The artist-architect breaks through the technical boundaries of the objects using materials such as glass, plastic and polycarbonates and brings them to life. They are beings made of many elements that create a lively yet imaginary world.”

Sottsass began his exploration dedicated to the possibilities of glass in 1974 spurred by a request of Luciano Vistosi. His investigations continued in Murano and at CIRVA in Marseille until the final year of his life.

For nearly four decades, he challenged the conventions of glassmaking, transforming both its methods and mindset. In doing so, he expanded the medium, creating a singular body of work that stands as a milestone within his own career as well as in the broader history of glass.

While glass represents a distinctive chapter in Sottsass' career, it also embodies the hybrid and unique approach to materials and life that defines his oeuvre.

About Ettore Sottsass

Born in Innsbruck, Austria in 1917 and raised in Turin, Sottsass graduated from Turin University in 1939 with a degree in Architecture. Immediately upon graduation, he was drafted into the Italian army during WWII. In the early part of his career spanning six decades, Sottsass moved skillfully between industrial design and independent experimentation. His bright red Valentine portable typewriter (1968) is only one well known example from a huge range of products he realized for his most important corporate client, the office goods manufacturer Olivetti for whom he also realized prescient designs for computing workstations. During this time he was creating ceramics and furniture of great spiritual intensity, synthesizing modernist abstraction with forms from ancient cultures.

This syncretic approach, at once progressive and primordial, informed his contribution to the seminal exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1972, and his involvement in a number of avant garde groups and projects, including Global Tools, Studio Alchimia, and the famed Milanese project Memphis, which he founded in 1981. Through his design firm Sottsass Associati he also maintained a practice as a product designer, for Alessi among others, and as an architect, in a series of retail spaces for Esprit as well as private residences.

In the last fifteen years of his life, Sottsass achieved a new level of heightened craftsmanship moving away from the industrial materials and methods that were his focus for the majority of his career. During this time, he realized bodies of work marked by an appreciation for rarefied materials—from blown-glass and ceramic objects to large-scale wooden and metal cabinets. Informed by his careful observation of design traditions and mastery of form and proportion, each work continued his exploration into the social and cultural implications of contemporary design that characterized his career.

Through these diverse activities, Sottsass established a distinctive and expansive design vocabulary, composed of seeming oppositions up until his death. His work is extraordinarily deep in its cultural references, yet delighted in a beguiling play of surfaces. Sottsass' abstractions had latent anthropomorphism; his forms are both playful and monumental. The dialectical complexity of his thought—grounded in the idea that design can have an remarkable range of expression—was revolutionary. Sottsass left behind a prolific compilation of essays and scholarship, all of which continue to influence designers around the world today.

Sottsass' work can be found in the permanent collections of dozens of international museums, including the Centre Pompidou, Paris; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Victoria & Albert Museum, London. Sottsass died in 2007 in Milan, Italy.



Vase no. 13, 1995



Vase no. 7, 1996-98



Vase no. 9, 2006



Vase (The Last Pieces Series), 2006

About Friedman Benda

Friedman Benda represents prominent established and emerging designers, as well as historically significant estates that span five continents and five generations. With the goal to expand the dialogue in design and explore perspectives that have previously been marginalized, Friedman Benda identifies and advances key narratives that intersect contemporary design, craft, architecture, art, and technological research. Since 2007, the gallery's exhibitions, publications and collaborations with institutions have played a vital role in the development of the contemporary design market and scholarship. With locations in New York and Los Angeles, Friedman Benda's engagement with the global design community promotes synthesis between leading thinkers and makers and seeks opportunities to advance new connections across the field. For further information please visit www.friedmanbenda.com and the gallery's Instagram @friedman_benda and YouTube channel @FriedmanBenda.

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