

IAS-Sponsored Session at the 107th CAA Annual Conference, New York, Feb. 13-16, 2019

INHABITING MODERNITY: HOME AND HOMEMAKING IN POSTWAR ITALY

When: Saturday, February 16, 2019, 4:00-5:30

Where: New York Hilton Midtown, 2nd Fl., Gramercy West

*So, having chosen a random point of the map,
We'll be able to say my house will be here
For three days two months or ten years.
Superstudio, A journey from A to B, 1969*

As historian Paul Ginsborg suggests in his influential 'History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943-1988' (1990), protests for housing rights were among the most participated social movements in late 1960s and 1970s Italy. At the same time, the spread of consumerist culture contributed to the reconfiguration of the domestic space and homemaking. In this context, whilst Italian design gained its momentum with the exhibition *Italy the New Domestic Landscape* (MoMA, 1972), a number of Italian artists and designers interrogated notions of home, habitability, and, more generally, of dwelling through different media.

Architects either complied to the requests of the market, criticized contemporary society's obsession with commodities or, as in the case of Superstudio or Archizoom, orchestrated systematic utopias based on the very ideal of mobility. Meanwhile, artists explored the rhetoric of alternative spaces of existence by rejecting sedentary dwelling and the idea of home understood in terms of fixed domestic architecture, as in Carla Accardi's *Tents*, Mario Merz's *Igloos*, and Emilio Prini's *Camping*.

Following from these premises, this panel explores concepts of home and domesticity in postwar Italy as they emerge in relation to the contemporary socio-political circumstances. Taking into account not only artists' practices but also designers, architects and theorists, it likewise aims at contributing to the emerging art historical discourses about homemaking and the everyday, and at promoting a multidisciplinary dialogue.

Speakers

Dr Elisabetta Rattalino (Free University of Bozen)

Dr Teresa Kittler (University of York)

Dr Silvia Bottinelli (School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University)

Chairs

Dr Lara Demori (Goethe-Institut postdoctoral fellow at Haus der Kunst)

Dr Elisabetta Rattalino (Free University of Bozen)

FULL SESSION INFO:

Introduction: Home and Homemaking in Postwar Italy

Dr. Lara Demori, Haus der Kunst

Bringing the Change Home:

Artists, Countryside, and Domestic Space in 1970s Italy

Dr. Elisabetta Rattalino, Free University of Bozen

After the end of the war, Italy, a freshly instituted democratic Republic, saw its very landscape, as well as its inhabitants' ways of life, undergo profound transformations. Several interrelated processes of change, namely industrialization, urbanization, internal migration, land reform, agricultural mechanization and the spread of consumerism, together created conditions which changed the topography of the country and unsettled the relationship between city and countryside.

Shifts in these two interrelated realms manifested in the ways in which domestic space was conceived. On the one hand, rural clues found space in the modern home: Arte Povera artist Piero Gilardi's *Tappeti Natura* (1965-1968), Gruppo 9999's *The Vegetable Garden House* (1972), and Superstudio's *Cultura Materiale Extraurbana* (1974-1976) integrated distinct facets of countryside in their designs. On the other hand, rural dwellings were pointed as virtuous models of non-alienated existence, as in the case of the works of Ugo La Pietra (*I gradi di Libertà*, 1969-1976), and Claudio Costa (*Museo di Antropologia Attiva di Monteghirfo*, 1975).

Discussing these works in the changing landscapes of 1970s Italy and considering the blurred boundaries between art and design at the time, this paper explores the ways in which artists endorsed rural ways of life, and suggests that they drew on the countryside to envision alternative relationships between the domestic space and the environment.

HABITAT

Dr. Teresa Kittler, University of York

It is the last Sunday in March 1970, and *Habitat* is going on air for the first time. Produced by Giulio Macchi, the show features alongside some of his best-remembered programs produced for state television in Italy. Asking after the relationship between man and environment in the broadest of terms, including individual and collective forms of dwelling, each weekly one-hour show consisted of on-set discussions with invited guests and pre-recorded interviews or documentary-style features with architects, artists, designers as well as scientists and politicians. In the first year alone, amongst the guests included were Gino Marotta, Gaetano Pesce, Archigram, Joe Colombo, Manfredo Tafuri, Mario Ceroli, and Pierre Restany.

Habitat has since won the accolade of first television show to address concerns that could be understood as specifically 'ecological', and belonged to a growing trend of programs produced throughout the 1960s and early 1970s which turned their attention to the question of the environment. This paper takes *Habitat* as a point of departure for thinking about the question of home, housing and domesticity in postwar Italy as it was intersected by questions of the environment and ecology at a time when such concerns were taking on a particular

urgency in the face of alarming predictions of population growth and a growing appreciation of the detrimental effects of industry on the landscape.

Visual Interpretations of Domestic Activities in Postwar Italian Art
Silvia Bottinelli, SMFA at Tufts

This paper examines the representation of activities that were associated with domestic life in Post-war Italian Art. My perspective is grounded in Henri Lefebvre's argument that it is through such actions that we appropriate and produce space, and shape our identity in relation to it.

Housekeeping as well as food preparation and consumption are the main focus in this paper. I will look at case studies that represent each group of actions in the span of three decades, roughly from the 1950s to the 1970s. The discussion of housekeeping will be inspired by the following works: Fillide Levasti, *Giorno del Bucato in una Casa Popolare* (1950); Luciano Fabro, *Pavimento-Tautologia* (1967); Mirella Bentivoglio, *Lapide Per Una Casalunga* (1974). Food preparation and consumption will be discussed through: Maria Lai, *Il Pane*, 1955 ca.; Lucia Marcucci, *L'appetito Vien Mangiando* (1963); and Global Tools (Survival), *Workshop in Sambuca* (1974).

The analysis will consider how shifting socio-cultural contexts, or at times the reaction to them, were interrelated with artistic interpretations. In order to show how artworks were in dialogue with contemporaneous discourses on the domestic, I will compare them with visual culture (advertisements, commercials, magazines, film), which can offer an understanding of normative models of home-life. In addition, I will compare artistic interpretations with personal narratives, which can be sampled through home movies, diaries, and annotated recipe books.

My overall argument is that the immediate post-war aspiration to the comfort of the private sphere, especially for women, went hand in hand with an enhanced condition of vulnerability, which was questioned by both feminism and counterculture in the late 1960s and 1970s.