

In 1972 MoMA New York paid tribute to Italian design with a major exhibition: *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape*, curated by Emilio Ambasz. Objects and installations by established and emerging designers were presented to narrate reasons, developments, contradictions, utopias and dystopias of contemporary design and the society as a whole. The exhibition, at the time the largest ever installed in the museum, ratified the worldwide success and influence of design made in Italy.

The show was organized in two complementary parts. The first, *Environments*, contained settings created by Italian architects and designers like Gae Aulenti, Ettore Sottsass, Joe Colombo, Alberto Rosselli, Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper, Mario Bellini, Gaetano Pesce, Ugo La Pietra, Archizoom, Superstudio, Gruppo Strum, Enzo Mari. The second section displayed 160 objects selected as emblematic of the historical, cultural and productive context of Italy at the time, revealing various and at times contrasting positions and reflections. Design, in short, was interpreted as a mirror of sweeping social, generational and technological transformations in Italy at the time, perched between the long wave of the economic miracle and the stimuli produced by the movements of 1968, while on the verge of the social and energy crises of the 1970s.

Vico Magistretti was one of the protagonists of the second section: as many as seven of his products were on view (Vicario, Stadio 80, Gaudi, Selene, Eclisse, Giunone, Golem), and the Stadio table in red plastic was even featured on the cover of the catalogue, becoming one of the icons of the exhibition.

Until today, however, there were no traces of Magistretti in the *Environments* section. Thanks to ongoing research in his archives, however, it has been discovered that he had indeed submitted a proposal to MoMA on the theme of future living, an idea that remained on the drawing board.

Though simply outlined in nascent form, with unresolved doubts and a few theoretical reservations – “I don’t know how this can be made” or “I do not believe in the problems of a very distant future,” Vico wrote – the project provides many insights into his approach to the theme of living space, through drawings and notes.

The central issue is “the conquest of space” – as Magistretti put it – namely reflections taken forward across a lifetime on the optimization of spaces in our homes, to offer better quality of life even in small spaces.

In his proposal for the museum in New York Magistretti imagined a setting where all the furnishings and service elements (wardrobes, bookcases, beds, tables) would be installed on the ceiling, and brought to the floor – if necessary – by means of a system of counterweights. The result was a house in which the floorspace was unencumbered, “conquered.”

In this way, a wardrobe lowered to the floor formed a boundary for a bedroom, as needed; the raised kitchen left room for a studio zone; a bookcase on the floor could create a corner for reading.

Vico succinctly described his project as follows:

“From analysis of the use of volume in the home we can observe that in comparison with a very suffocating utilization of floorspace, there is only very limited or completely non-existent use of the volume available in the upper part of rooms. In particular, we can say that most of the furniture we require (above all the most bulky items) could be positioned elsewhere with respect to the floor. I am thinking about all the storage furniture, such as wardrobes, bookcases and so on. I would like to experiment with the possibility of ‘parking’ these items in

the upper portion of the volume, creating a load-bearing ceiling from which to hang this furniture”.

The exhibition in Fondazione Magistretti features, for the first time, the sketches and notes for this project that was never carried out, seeing it as a starting point from which to investigate certain characteristic aspects of his oeuvre.

Besides the experience with MoMA, part of a wider-ranging relationship with the United States (in the wake of the success abroad, Magistretti had considered opening a studio in New York), the show presents other projects – from the post war period to the 2000s – that reflect Vico’s focus on the themes of space and habitation, flexibility, transformability and modular design.

These include the equipped lodgings for the company MBM (active in the field of heavy prefabrication applied to housing construction) in Milan, the result of reflections on prefabricated construction; the Residence Siloe in Milan, which approached the theme of temporary living; the folding, versatile and variable furnishings designed throughout his career, pursuing an idea of flexibility in domestic settings; and the project for an umbrella, Magistretti’s favourite object: “For its simplicity, its nothingness, its tension, the umbrella is the object, more than all others, I would like to have designed”.