

GALLERIA MASSIMO MININI

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Enzo Mari

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A METHOD ARISING FROM THE INITIAL RESEARCH INTO THE PERCEPTIVE AMBIGUITY OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE

It is almost impossible to define Enzo Mari. An artist, an industrial designer, an architect, a graphic artist, as well as a theorist, a pedagogue, an intellectual, possibly a philosopher, a utopian: a complex, multifaceted personality.

Enzo Mari was a constructor of grammar and an inventor of languages, and used both instruments to "communicate knowledge with improved quality and efficiency".

The root of his design methodology, which characterizes the process of all the studies he later conducted, originates in his initial research into the field of visual arts, i.e. the research into the perceptual ambiguity of three-dimensional space that he undertook in the early 1950s, when he was still a scenography student at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts. A scientific method made up of theses, the construction of tools and instruments, the comparison of models and the transcription of results deriving from his observations.

About his own method, Mari himself states: "I am aware of the mysterious processes of intuition. Decantation starts after a pause and it proceeds through continuous negation [...] the project, like every other intellectual activity in history, can only come about by negation. I negate everything that seems to be but is not. I could continue to do so endlessly, but a project must have an outcome. At that point, what remains is a project to be developed, even if new horizons with questions and hypotheses have opened up".

Having defined what all projects have in common, i.e. the method that turns into methodology, Mari's top priority is to design the transformation tools and instruments conducive to the progress of society.

The purpose of the show to be held in Galleria Massimo Minini is to give the public the key to understand the nuances of the research that led Mari into the field of Programmed Art, and the roots of the method that characterizes the process of the research later conducted by Enzo Mari.

INITIAL STUDIES AND RESEARCH INTO THE PERCEPTUAL AMBIGUITY OF INTERNAL THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACES

"Perception of three-dimensional space (in the sense of environment) is one of the most ambiguous since its understanding can only be gained by the complex interrelationships of the various messages received through our different senses. Especially so since each specific piece of knowledge is nearly always defined through only one of the senses, to which is later added the mere memory of what the others have experienced" (E. Mari, *Funzione della ricerca estetica* (The Function of Aesthetic Research) Edizioni di Comunità, Milan 1970). These are the premises that led the author towards different types of research, all tested and exemplified through the creation of drawings, studies and models.

Observing the individual variations resulting from the programming of the comparison models generates a sequence of visual memories.

By comparing and contrasting individual models, Mari developed a method that resulted in Programmed Art. For him, the programme is "a simple form project timed according to the internal laws of growth".

GOLDEN OR SYNESTHETIC SERIES

In these early researches, the intent is to create a work that can be enjoyed diachronically (in space and time), as is the case with music; the pictorial surface is marked by sequences of golden modules whose aim is to visually represent the passage of time. Mari experiments with the programming potential of the golden ratio in two-dimensional pictorial representations to verify the codification of visual language and its communicative potential.

INITIAL RESEARCH INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COLOUR AND VOLUME: TOOLS AND MODEL SEQUENCES

To proceed with the investigation into the phenomenology of three-dimensional space and its relationship with the surroundings: the environment, Mari creates in 1952 Equipment for research on colour and volume relations (*Strumenti per le ricerche sui rapporti fra colore e volume*), useful for analyzing the relationships between colour and volume, i.e. the observation of the coloured surfaces that determine a volume. This work was developed by the author to test —by means of models— his research for the thesis *Mutual influences on the relationship between colour and volume* (*Influenze reciproche sui rapporti fra colore e volume*) written in 1952.

The method he used in this continuing research was to build identical environmental models, and then colour their internal surfaces differently, noting the variations detected by observation and comparison of the said models.

INITIAL RESEARCH INTO DEPTH OR DIMENSION

"By altering the depth of a three-dimensional space, we alter its environmental perception". This premise gives origin to a new line of research, where the comparison models no longer maintain their original characteristics, but they alter one another by gradually varying the dimensions that refer to their depth. To expand this line of research, the author creates in 1965 a new Tool for the study of depth or dimension (*Strumento per le relazioni di profondità o dimensione*).

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

In order to exemplify the testing of the research, Mari created a series of models consisting of the programmed combination of prefabricated modular elements. The modularity of the prefabricated elements allows the designer to discover, during the testing stage, the potential of unforeseen relationships, inherent in their form and structure.