



# Luca Meda e l'architettura milanese

## Disegni e progetti

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*Luca Meda and Milanese architecture:  
Drawings, designs and projects*

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My thesis is on an extraordinary architect and industrial designer, Luca Meda, who has left a most valuable *oeuvre* of drawings, designs and other works. With the co-operation of his family and the support of Molteni SpA and other firms in the Molteni group where Meda worked for many years as a designer of furniture and other articles, my Doctoral Programme in Architectural Composition is currently reorganizing the archive of his material.

Luca Meda was born at Chiavari in 1936, and died in Milan in 1998. The early part of his life is the story of an intelligent, high-spirited and wayward lad who went through a series of academic failures: only a wider-ranging look at his education and interests can explain his cultural knowledge and awareness, or indeed his work. He attended – but did not complete – courses at Brera Art College in Milan and then the Design College in Ulm. Both ventures were interrupted: after he dropped out of the Milan college his father, on the advice of his friend Ernesto Nathan Rogers, decided to send him to the famous German design school founded by Max Bill. Rogers appreciated the young man's talent and liveliness, and believed this institution could give him a set of techniques and a way of working that was both practical and creative. He always kept a vivid and positive memory of his time at Ulm, short though it was: this was where, partly through the college itself, but above all through his friendships and personal relationships there, he developed his own point of view on architecture and – though he was not an architect – a highly personal approach to design.

In the early 1960s he started a practice with Aldo Rossi (five years older than him), in the Corsa di Porta Vigentina in Milan. A circle of friends formed, including Rossi himself, Gianugo Polesello and Giorgio Grassi: Meda was the youngest, and at the same time the most playful and chaotic. Quite a few joint designs were produced in those years: with Rossi, for the external layout of the Milan Triennale and for a fountain (1962); with Polesello and Rossi, for the Resistance Monument at Cuneo, and for executive offices in Turin (1962); with Rossi, Matilde Baffa and Ugo Rivolta for the

Museum of Contemporary History in Milan (1962); and with Grassi, for the Resistance Monument of Brescia (1965). His lasting friendship with Rossi was a very strong bond, and involved much sharing of ideas.

Meanwhile Meda began to work for the furniture company Molteni, and later for its sister firms, Unifor and Dada, which produced office and kitchen furniture. He designed their products, created their image and brought them steadily closer to the language of Modernism, not least by supervising the collaboration of many outside designers and architects. Later on, and for many years, he designed small household appliances – often very beautiful ones – for Girmi, an important firm at the time. His industrial experience and relationships with craftsmen developed his strong feeling for objects, their dimensions and their materials. Nevertheless he did not abandon architecture entirely, but worked with Rossi and others, entering competitions, procuring commissions, and designing buildings.

A close relationship grew up between his architectural designs and his designs for furniture and other objects. Both took shape on the basis of architectural principles and figurative worlds fed by architectural design. In his 1990s drawings for a residential building at Charlottenburg (in the block designed by Aldo Rossi for Berlin's Schützenstrasse), Meda designs the look of the frontage through a study of the typical proportions and symmetries of the Italian *palazzo*. We have many sketches of such palaces at night, lit from within, complete with their inhabitants' dark silhouettes; and we have drawings of constructional details of the façade, analysed on the basis of all the complications caused by the architectural proportions and their perspective. But we also have furniture (such as the "Piroscapo" bookcase), likewise conceived as *palazzi*. Furniture and objects always have their original basis in a made image. Consideration of the people who are to live in places he designs (present, if only as silhouettes) is evident in his architectural drawings and those for his furniture. The drawings are frequently very fine and fluid: strong images, rapidly drawn. Often they are the inventions of a playful imagination which has led to fantastic shapes and types; there is one particularly rich series of skyscrapers and towers. His relationship with a number of favourite painters – often first met at school or through his family – is evident.

I have sought not only to base my research in a concrete way on his drawings, designs and other works, but also to reconstruct an environment and a culture, a framework of belonging and a system of relationships. In Part Two of the thesis I have tackled the methodological issues involved in the organisation of an archive, taking as my reference-point the discussions of and techniques for the arranging and cataloguing of

contemporary architectural archives. I have discussed and adopted the methods proposed by the Italian National Association of Architectural Archives. Lastly, I have described the structure of the Meda archive, and indicated the extent of its resources and of other, external ones; and I have prepared an initial register. As always, research and interpretation form part of a search for a line of continuity in the subject's work.