



**CASTELLO DI RIVOLI**

*Museo d'Arte Contemporanea*

Piazza Mafalda di Savoia, 10098 Rivoli (Torino)

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<b>Exhibition</b>	<b><i>Armando Testa</i></b>
<b>Curators</b>	Ida Gianelli Gemma De Angelis Testa Giorgio Verzotti
<b>Catalogue</b>	Charta, Milan
<b>Press office</b>	Massimo Melotti Alessandra Santerini, consultant tel. 011 9565 209 – fax 011 9565 231 e-mail: <a href="mailto:promo&amp;press@castellodirivoli.torino.it">promo&amp;press@castellodirivoli.torino.it</a>
<b>Press preview</b>	Monday, February 19, 2001, 11:30 a.m.
<b>Opening</b>	Tuesday, February 20, 2001, 7:00 p.m.
<b>Dates</b>	February 21 <sup>st</sup> – May 13, 2001
<b>Hours</b>	Tuesday – Friday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. – 7 p.m. 1 <sup>st</sup> and 3rd Sat. of the month, 10 a.m. – 10 p.m.
<b>Entrance</b>	12.000 Lire, full price; 8.000 Lire, reduced price
<b>Location</b>	Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art Piazza Mafalda di Savoia 10098 Rivoli (Turin)
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## **The exhibition**

### **Armando Testa**

**Curators: Ida Gianelli, Gemma De Angelis Testa, Giorgio Verzotti**

**Catalogue: Charta, Milan**

**February 21 – May 13, 2001**

On February 2001 the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art will dedicate a retrospective exhibition to the work of Armando Testa (200 works), installed in the new museum wing known as the Manica Lunga. The exhibition is curated by Ida Gianelli, director of the Castello di Rivoli, Giorgio Verzotti, curator of the museum, and Gemma De Angelis Testa.

Armando Testa is considered the founder of modern advertising in Italy. Through his work, he explored a wide range of languages of visual communication, inventing new ones and adopting the most technologically advanced means. The exhibition will present many of Testa's most important creations, in a selection that documents his entire span of activity, from his earliest to his latest works. The show will include his first advertising posters and related drawings, from the 1940s and '50s, along with illustrations of a different nature, as the silk-screen printing. Then there will be his advertising poster from the '60s and '70s. Testa's greatest innovative contributions to the language of advertising were created for television. These will be documented with both filmstrips for the early TV commercial segments and later spots and the objects used for visual animations, depicting his most famous characters, from Carmencita to Papalla and Pippo. In certain cases the characters and sets for the animations will be reconstructed specifically for this exhibition. The presentation then will continue with Testa's work that was less strictly tied to advertising commitments, such as posters and trademarks for cultural events, institutions and organizations and social causes, created over the course of the '80s. The retrospective will conclude with Testa's own creative work in graphics, no longer linked to advertising or social communication, which he pursued during the Eighties and Nineties.

The catalogue that accompanies the exhibition will contain critical texts by Gemma De Angelis Testa, Giorgio Verzotti, Jeffrey Deitch, independent curator, and Mauro Ferraresi, professor at the I.U.L.M., Milan. In addition to these critical contributions, contemporary artists such as Michelangelo Pistoletto, Giulio Paolini, Haim Steinbach, Joseph Kosuth, Grazia Toderi and Francesco Vezzoli will contribute about their experience of Testa's work. The catalogue will finally include principal statements of Armando Testa's poetics, expressed through texts and interviews, a detailed bio-bibliography and the statements of the artists Michelangelo Pistoletto, Giulio Paolini, Haim Steinbach, Joseph Kosuth, Grazia Toderi e Francesco Vezzoli.

## Armando Testa

### Biography

Born in Turin in 1917, Armando Testa attended the Vigliardi Paravia Printing School, where Ezio D'Errico, an abstract painter, introduced him to contemporary art, which he would follow with great interest from then on.

In 1937, at the age of twenty, he won his first competition, for a poster that featured a geometric design, conceived for ICI, a company that produced printer's inks.

After the war Testa worked for important companies such as Martini & Rossi, Carpano, Borsalino and Pirelli. He also worked as an illustrator for the publishing industry and opened a small graphics studio.

In 1956 the Studio Testa was founded. It focused on advertising, not only for printed media, but also for television. Some of the companies that used the services of Studio Testa soon went on to become leaders in their fields: Lavazza, Sasso, Carpano, Simmenthal, Lines.

In 1958 Testa won a national competition for the official poster for the 1960 Rome Olympics. His design was rejected in a second round, and another competition was held in 1959, which Testa also won.

From the '50s to the '70s Studio Testa created images, animated films and television spots that have become part of advertising history and are tied to slogans that have entered everyday language: the graphic play between white and black and between positive and negative for the digestive Antonetto (1960); the perfect geometries of the sphere suspended above a half-sphere for the aperitif Punt e Mes, which in Piedmontese dialect means "a point and a half" (1960); the conical puppets Caballero and Carmencita for Lavazza's Café Paulista (1965); the spherical inhabitants of the planet Papalla for Philco (1966); Pippo the blue hippopotamus for Lines diapers (1966-1967); the actor Mimmo Craig struggling with nightmares about obesity, to music by Grieg, for Sasso olive oil (1968); the attractive blonde Solvi Stubig for Peroni beer (1968).

The first institutional recognition of his work occurred when he was invited to hold the chair of Graphic Design and Composition at the Polytechnic Institute of Turin, from 1965 to 1971.

In 1968 he received the Gold Medal from the Ministry of Public Education for his contribution to the Visual Arts; in 1975 the Italian Advertising Federation honored him with their Gold Medal for Merit, in recognition of his success abroad.

In 1978 Studio Testa became Armando Testa S.p.A., and in the years that followed opened offices in Milan and Rome and continued to create extremely successful advertising campaigns.

Beginning in the mid '80s, Testa began to focus less on advertising and more on the creation of posters for events, cultural institutions and social causes, from Amnesty International to the Red Cross, and from the Spoleto Festival to the Royal Theater in Turin. He also created trademarks for cultural organizations, such as the Book Fair and the Young Filmmakers Festival in Turin, as well as the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art.

His agency became the largest in Italy in this sector, with offices in the most important countries of Europe. During the '80s and '90s he also focussed on his own creative graphic design and painting.

Advertising is now studied as an autonomous form of expression and communication, and various institutions in Italy and abroad have devoted retrospective exhibitions to Testa's work, including his paintings. These include exhibitions at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan (1984), the Mole Antonelliana in Turin (1985), Parsons School of Design Exhibition Center in New York (1987), the Circulo de Bellas Artes in Madrid (1989) and the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence (1993).

In 1989 Testa received an Honorary Degree from Colorado State University at Fort Collins.

Armando Testa died in Turin on March 20, 1992, three days before his seventy-fifth birthday.

[...] I had been toying for a while with the idea of creating spherical characters who lived on a certain planet: Papalla seemed the right name for it.

The inhabitants of this world were supposed to represent a rich, opulent lifestyle and the round Papallians were the ideal subject for graphic and poster designs. Besides, as everybody knows, fat creatures also tend to be nice and very friendly, yet they aren't normally used in food advertising because people are worried about their figure. But in the case of TVs, fridges and washing machines the figure isn't particularly relevant and so we had the chance to work with a character who was totally round, just like a ball (...).

**From an interview with Armando Testa for "Tempo Philco", 1968**

[...] In my posters and ads I've always tried to arrive at a point of synthesis, of expressive impact. I'm sometimes envious of so-called pure art for the way it can play on ambiguities, on the non-defined. This is why in my graphic works that are not strictly designed for advertising I've allowed myself the freedom to play with signs and with the ambiguity of images, amusing myself by freely interpreting the kind of products that are constantly celebrated by the advertising world.

In advertising, whether you're talking about a poster, a commercial or a page, one can immediately grasp the real value of a creative idea. On the other hand, with art it's far more difficult to decide on the spot, say among ten paintings by ten different artists, which is the most beautiful. In advertising it is immediately clear who is number 1, whereas painting allows more freedom both to the creator and to the critic. I confess that sometimes I've seen myself looking at some paintings without being able to judge them immediately. Fortunately this hasn't happened very often, otherwise I would have started doubting myself and I would probably have ended up seeing a shrink or Federico Zeri for comfort.

I have this constant restlessness, what I like today I can't say if I'll still like it tomorrow, but then again when I'm in a bad mood I just scribble something down and immediately I feel better [...].

**Armando Testa, *Ho sempre cercato la sintesi*, in "Arte e Cronaca", Bari, September 1988**

I remember around 25 or 30 years ago when color photography came to earth: for graphics it was an event as important as the invention of the airplane. It was like being able to take off after years of being tied to drawing: for the first time in history, creatives unable to use a pencil could say to a photographer: "I want this image".

All of a sudden, it became possible to do without many "craftsmen" specialized in drawing small hands and kiddies' faces but completely lacking in taste, whose images had for many years filled the pages of magazines. At last it was possible to have serving suggestions that a painted poster was absolutely not able to give, such as wet tomatoes, trembling jelly or roast beef ready to be eaten.

Since then, photography has multiplied presenting us with orgies of close ups of tight jeans and provocative blondes. Pictures everywhere, thousands and thousands of pictures: nowadays, wherever we lay our eyes we see a color photograph. 25 years of photographic realism have looked at men, women and spaghetti from every possible angle, scrutinizing every single pore in a way that 2000 years of painting had not been able to do. Color photography has reached sublime peaks, the streets are absolutely chock-a-block with it.

The real thing, by which I mean what we see, is something that we all understand but which after a while starts getting boring, just like a woman who is too up-front in her looks and intentions. It starts by being boring for the intelligent and restless mind, but as the years go by even morons begin to be fed up with it. These years dominated by realism have made us dream of the chance to go back to a more ambiguous form of creativity so as to make things more interesting and to renew our memories.

Color photography has allowed us to see distant islands, lively gorgonzola cheese and mayonnaise in a way Seurat and Renoir would have never dreamt of. Imagine what would have happened if color photography had been invented 150 years ago. In the prevailing aspiration to see everyday reality in color, not only Delacroix and the Impressionists but also all the *pompieri* painters would have found themselves competing with color photography. In saying this I don't mean to underestimate the value of color photography. Indeed, when it first appeared at the beginning of the Fifties, it allowed admen to represent steaming soups through tantalizing dreamlike images that had never before appeared in history, not even during the time of Flemish painting. It was such an important conquest that even during the second-half of our century people have often compared certain black-and-white portraits unfavorably to color ones. When I say that it was a mistake for photography to start with black-and-white (meaning that it should have been in color from the beginning) people always answer: "Come on, it would have been technically impossible!".

With black-and-white you're already dealing with artistic interpretation, it transforms pink bodies, apples and landscapes into rigorous gradations from white to black. In its monochromatic philosophy it becomes violent and provocative.

As a creative, I'm always looking for the new: I've lived through the period when color photography was all the rage, and the subsequent recuperation of black-and-white. I even loved it when Warhol brought his approximations of badly printed monochrome photographs to art galleries.

In 1968, when in our city squares the myths of tradition were crumbling around us, for me an old postcard I received from a soldier was at least as revolutionary as what was happening then.

After so many creative greeting cards, usually huge-format, why not go back to the honest, homily poetic granny-style postcard? Measuring yourself against a set, traditional or even obsolete format might be fascinating.

In my job I have to continuously make food stand out among precious cutlery, greedy mouths and sparkling clean dishes but sometimes I feel the desire to drop everything, embrace kitsch and interpret spaghetti, fruit, ham and eggs in terms of voluptuous free associations, in other words to make visual art out of food.

Since then, every year greeting cards have for me been a moment of pleasure and investigation into trivial aspects of everyday life, where two olives can become a couple of lovers or a piece of Parmesan cheese the rock stacks of Capri.

**Armando Testa, *Due olive lussuose*, in "Nuova Cucina", Milan, December 1989**

[...] Until the Fifties, posters had always been drawn. It was only afterwards that there was this orgiastic explosion of color photography. At the beginning it was used quite rarely but gradually it became more and more prevalent until now when it dominates around 95% of advertising posters. (I remember that in 1953, for example, to be able to make a color posters for "Sasso" I had to intervene on the black and white versions with an American technique called Flexicrome).

Before the advent of television, designing posters was an extremely fascinating job since posters were the main visual form of advertising and therefore one had to try to create an image that would stand out from the pack and embed itself in the public's memory. It was an effort which not only involved looking for the right idea but also required great pictorial skill and a good sense of balance and proportions.

[...] The greatest poster designers of the past had a clearly-defined drawing style, whereas with the advent of color photography in the Fifties and Sixties the artist's imprint began to take on its own character. Nonetheless, the idea of working with photography appealed to me immediately since color photography offered new and more effective possibilities. The power of truth and visual immediacy that come with photography, especially in food images, allow for a more direct impact on public. But at the same time I still feel a great sense of nostalgia for the hand-drawn poster! Whenever I can, I try to distance myself from the idea of market research to carry out studies of my own that aren't linked to big consumer products, when I dedicate my time happily to exploring the pictorial sign [...].

**Armando Testa, *I manifesti ci guardano*, Introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition *Manifesti pubblicitari torinesi 1900-1960*, Galleria Principe Eugenio, 16 March 1989**

I've always loved crosses for their formal beauty and their structural strength that goes beyond any religious iconography.

According to a study carried out by the English archaeologist Miranda Gree, who gathered information on hundreds of crosses from the Bronze and Iron Ages, the cross was used as a religious symbol in Europe for 2000 years before the birth of Christ and was often been associated with an ancient religion based on the cult of the sun. So for many centuries the cross was a strong emblem of pagan religions and it was probably only because it was an element that had already been assimilated by human memory that it was subsequently easily accepted as symbol of Christianity, a symbol that today has acquired even greater intensity through the realistic image of Christ's body.

As a graphic designer I'm attracted by all the simple signs that exist in the world, of which the cross is one. I find it particularly fascinating as a shape that allows for many different interpretations, from the most essential forms like the famous image created by Malevic, to the vivid painted expressions of Rainer to Richard Serra's huge sculptures and so on.

"Defamiliarizing" this absolute symbol, I've tried to transform a pure sign into emotion, alluding to the inclined head of Christ on the cross, an image that has lived on in our memory for 2000 years

**Armando Testa, 1991**