

From: *Carlo Mollino. Arabesques*, curated by F. Ferrari, N. Ferrari, exhibition catalog (Rivoli-Torino, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 20 September 2006 - 7 January 2007), Electa, Milano 2006, pp. 192-195.

## *The essential beauty*

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The genius of Carlo Mollino cannot be encompassed in a sole definition. Born in Turin from a celebrated background (his father Eugenio was one of the most eminent Turinese engineers of the first quarter of the century), he was an architect, a designer, a forerunner, a visionary, a prophet, an outsider, a non conformist and an "Einzelgaenger" par excellence, an enfant terrible, a "solitary bear inside a forest of ignorance" according to the definition given of him by one of his most talented students, Piercarlo Jorio. He was a complex, fertile and somewhat mysterious personality, who certainly was not so inclined to adapt to the rules of the market and communication, or even just to the rigid conventions of a poorly imaginative elite in Turin. In his highly imaginative versatility, which led him to focus his attention on buildings, furniture, interior decoration, photography, cars, skis, aeroplanes, he very much resembles a great man in the history of car design and not just that.

The other great man, Milanese by birth and Alsatian by adoption, born twenty five years before Mollino, was Ettore Bugatti, whose name identifies one of the most beautiful cars of the twentieth century; elegant, sporting, perfect. Bugatti was a genius, and was aware of this. He was also extravagant, or at least that was the impression he gave his contemporaries. He didn't restrict himself just to design vehicles in which mechanical excellence combined with aesthetic beauty, but cars in which beauty was excellence, merged together in a unicum. When we open the bonnet of a Bugatti we are faced with what cannot be otherwise. We will not find anything of no use, anything that could be different, or that could work better. The beauty of the engine design expresses its utmost functionality; it is an 'essential' beauty.

Yet Bugatti could not achieve his ideal of beauty solely through the cars that bore his name, and that he had built mostly for himself and for his driver friends rather than for his customers. He used to design his own clothing, magnificent Russian style riding wear, leather sandals, work shoes and cuff links; he designed his own house, his dining room furniture and his garden chairs; he outlined his horse's shoes and harness; he designed the pavilions of his factory and its machine tools; he commissioned the construction, according to his design, of railway engines, boats, cars, airships, weapons, combat aeroplanes; he designed his double bed complete with bedside tables and lamps.

Because those who strive to achieve an ideal of beauty cannot find satisfaction in seeing it achieved in just one object. Possibly, rather than beauty, geniuses of this kind are instinctively inclined to achieve an ideal of harmony on earth, in which each object interacts with its neighbour, in a never-ending harmonic "system".

This is why we believe Mollino's projects may be akin to those of Bugatti. Both men achieved an infinity of projects in a wide range of different fields. All 'unique' in their kind, since mass production was very distane from their world. Each of their creations remained such having been conceived in relation to their surroundings, and to the environment in which they would have been placed. Many people may have the ability to design something that is only beautiful. Carlo Mollino, Ettore Bugatti, both confined inside their own solitary worlds and possibly not knowing each other

(Bugatti reached the peak of his fame in the twenties and thirties and died in 1947, overwhelmed by the disintegration of a world crushed by the second world war), gave no importance to pure beauty, which can be sporadic and accidental, but strove to create a harmonic whole, where the subtraction of a single element would be sufficient for it to collapse. That is why, as Fulvio Ferrari writes, "we are pervaded by a sense of incomplete legibility ... of a piece of furniture when it is isolated from its own specific context... Mollino's furniture almost always consists of unique items conceived for a specific setting; (the same dressing table and stool) if we were to purchase them in an antiques store... they would certainly maintain their beauty but would be deprived of the aura Mollino bestowed on them inserting them in the room they were meant for".

Thus Mollino designed cars, and like Bugatti he designed racing cars, because if a car it had to be, then it had to be designed for speed, wind, lightness. As mentioned elsewhere in this catalogue, one of his cars took part in the 1955 edition of the 24 hours of Le Mans race. On the other hand, the vehicle portrayed in these pages only existed in Mollino's imagination, and today we can admire its clean cut lines thanks to the remarkable engineering skills and craftsmanship of Carrozzeria Stola, a traditional name amongst the modelling enterprises in Turin. Stola could only rely on the original model, produced by Mollino in the fifties in laminated wood and in an unconventional scale (maybe 1:8 or 1:10). Starting from its wheel dimensions, Stola engineers found a proportion that is six times that of Mollino's model. Following an accurate photogrammetric survey, which yielded a numeric definition of the model surfaces, it took five full weeks of work (which included numerically controlled milling of outer surfaces, manual modelling, preparation of painting surfaces with a polyester base coat, paint finish in shiny grey, according to Mollino's wishes) to produce a record breaking vehicle 5295 mm long, 1957 mm wide, 836 mm high with a front and rear track of 1400 mm and a weight of 1150 kg. The frame consists of a tubular metal structure, the internal packing is in polystyrene and the outer surfaces are in epowood (4 cm). DA QUI

When we look at these lines, which recall the idea of speed, our thoughts are taken back to the Sunbeams, the Bluebirds, the Thunderbolts, the Spirits of America that took the world land speed record from 200 km/h (Kenelm Lee Guinness, on Sunbeam 350 HP, 215.182 km/h reached in Brooklands, Great Britain in 17.05.1922 ) to over one thousand km/h (Andy Green, on Thrust Ssc, 1142 km/h reached in the desert of Nevada, United States in 16.09.1997). In fact, Mollino's model has the typical stylistic approach of its days, and its exasperated fairing specially recalls the profile of the 1961 IXG by Ghia, a prototype built by the Turinese coachbuilders based on an American dragster. Mollino did not foresee any rear fins (as mounted on the Fiat Turbina and the Renault Etoile Filante, both record breaking vehicles of 1954/55), that play an essential role for the stability of the vehicle, nor a tail wing with its aerodynamic function. In the sole written mention of this vehicle made by Mollino in a letter to his friend and photographer Alfa Castaldi on the 12th of December 1972, he describes the bodywork as "profiled as a negative-lift wing, a principle that was adopted many years afterwards by tail wings on racing cars". The main problem in designing these cars does not lie in getting them to reach astounding speeds but in avoiding they take off. "Any engineer is able to attach two jets to a car and make it take off", observed with deserved immodesty Richard Noble, holder of the world record achieved in 1983 on Thrust 2 jet, 1019.468 km/h - "but only a genius is able to keep it glued to the ground at one thousand kilometres an hour". This is the reason why all of these vehicles and even the formula one racing cars driven by Schumacher and his colleagues are designed as upside-down aeroplanes; to achieve a negative lift effect, as Mollino quite rightly wrote.

Surely enough Mollino could not foresee a jet-type propulsion for his vehicle; use of this type of engine spread at the beginning of the sixties. The engine housing was at the rear of the vehicle; the adopted stylistic approach would not have it otherwise. In fact two symmetrical engine-cooling air

intakes are located on both sides of the profiled ribbing that converges towards the tail. A rear drive had been envisaged as a consequence to this. The driver's seat is in a central position along the longitudinal axis of the car, right in the middle of the car's length. To access the cockpit the driver had to step on one of the footboards, composed of seven reinforced antiskid strips, located on the sides of the vehicle next to the driver's seat. Inside the cockpit, the driver laid almost flat on his back. Only the top half of his face would emerge from the cockpit allowing him to see the track through the tiny encompassing windscreen that outlines, without interruption, the central ribbing of the vehicle. Disk-faired wheel hubs and showily faired wheels are other noteworthy details.

We have no information as to the real CX, or aerodynamic coefficient, of this prototype. From this point of view, its profile seems ideally perfect, but sometimes scientific tests yield surprises and vehicles that appear aesthetically attractive from an aerodynamic standpoint prove to be disappointing when it comes to their actual capacity of penetration.

Neither do we know, in actual fact, why Mollino thought of a record breaking vehicle, immediately after having measured himself with racing cars with his Damolnar. With regard to his entire project work, Mollino stated "I hold that the best explanation for one's work is its silent display", and we will have to content ourselves with that. Content ourselves or feel inspired, because with these words Mollino is challenging us once again to investigate in depth the countless facets of the human mind and genius. Achieving a world record is quite different from winning a race. A race is a competition against other human beings. It is the victory of one person over others. Some may be content with that while others may not. Achieving a record means outdoing oneself, the air, the laws of physics and thus creation. It is a demonstration of almightiness.

It means rising above the world of swarming earthlings to advance into a different dimension where one converses directly with the core of universal harmony.

Ettore Bugatti created a "dwelling place of the spirit" in Molsheim. He created a finite world that was sufficient for his needs where he enclosed his stately home, a castle, a park, a pond, a factory, apartments for his factory workers and employees and their families, a foundry, workshops, a hotel, stables, warehouses, annexes, and even a shop and a museum. He thought that this would have satisfied the needs of his extended world. The 'Bugatti approach' would have then spread all over the world from here. An indefinable and yet tangible approach that thousands of enthusiasts recognise at a glimpse in the perfect machines that still remain.

As his post-mortem last will and testament, Carlo Mollino left his apartment in via Napione in Turin, meticulously furnished to suit the days following his departure from this world. Something that should have, perhaps, given consistency to his spirit, forever. Another way to surpass oneself and time.