

## FEDERICA BIASI AND HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

"Design must be used and understood: *Design for All* must always be the goal." Federica Biasi is not only one of the most interesting emerging designers on the Italian and international scene, but first and foremost she is an innovator in her interpretation of what the role of the designer is today: she designs and follows up on the product development, but she is also a consultant, trend forecaster, art director, researcher and strategist. This is why she was selected to talk the students of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University - School of Design through their *SuperStack* project, which is part of the *Design Made in Hong Kong 2020-2021* programme.

PolyU Design students investigated the quality of life and everyday interactions in a post-pandemic scenario. What are the new normalities in family life? In contemporary times, sharing at home is becoming increasingly complex and layered. New activities - from online education for children to exercising and from new hygienic needs to telecommuting - overlap as never before. The young designers have imagined new scenarios of cohabitation through the design of furniture and accessories, which will be prototyped thanks to the support of Bamboo International (Group) Co. Ltd.

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Despite of her age, Federica Biasi (born in 1989) has already developed solid and fully fledged collaborations with several renown companies. The designer is the art director of two important Made in Italy brands: Manerba, a Mantua-based company specialising in office spaces, and Mingardo, an artisan design brand specialising in metalwork. Biasi is one of the leading figures on the Italian and international design scene, having collaborated with famous brands such as Fratelli Guzzini, CC-Tapis, Nespresso, Ditre Italia, Gallotti&Radice, Potocco... For a contemporary product to be successful it is necessary to investigate all those fields that revolve around its design. Biasi connects different ways to research the project with a grounding complexity and this from different points of view. Because of her direct relationship with Made in Italy companies, the designer has been able to consolidate these skills over a short period of time, enabling her to develop her ideas in line with the real dynamics of the market.

During her career, Biasi has interpreted the concept of stackability in various projects ranging from the scale of the object to that of its spatial strategy. She developed *A Place to Live* for Manerba, investigating the overlap between domestic and office spaces. We increasingly find ourselves working from home, but at the same time offices are being transformed into places to live, in which to feel good and share moments of conviviality. The concept developed for the Italian company is a space for the body and the psyche, flexible and dynamic, a mental gym as well as a nest for concentration. Her *Marianne* bookcase recalls the freestanding models of the Sixties, with deliberate Art Deco influences: the use of glass and the precious brass details are contrasting with the black painted iron uprights. It is a subtle and elegant piece of furniture, a modular system with multiple possibilities. Biasi designed a product whose aim is not only to contain but also to separate different areas with a certain refinement. Finally, stackability can also be looked upon in detail, as in the case of stacking coffee cups. Her LUME collection reinterprets the classical Italian cup in a contemporary way, thinking of new formats that adapt to the needs of an international brand - and audience.

"If I hear the words Italian design, I immediately think of the masters: Gio Ponti, Achille Castiglioni and Gae Aulenti." explains Biasi. Their legacy is always a heavy one for young Italian designers, but Biasi has been able to absorb it without losing her own identity and personal vision on the subject. It is no coincidence that Andrea Branzi - one of those masters who wrote a significant part of our design history - selected her for the 2017 Rising Talent Award, the Maison & Objet prize for emerging designers. For the PolyU Design students, Federica Biasi tutored the concept of stackability not only by looking back on her professional career, but also with a specific lesson on the subject, recounting some of the most successful case studies in the history of modern design and with a special focus on Made in Italy. Among the projects shown in one of the three webinars organised for the *Design Made in Hong Kong* programme: a set of stackable containers and crockery that Lella and Massimo Vignelli designed in 1964 for Arpe, the iconic *Pisolotta* armchair by Denis Santachiara which incorporates an inflatable bed to be used only when necessary and the modular container system *Mobil*, designed for modern housing and flexible office spaces by Antonio Citterio and Glen Oliver Löw for Kartell.

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Divided into six working groups, the students of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University - School of Design came up with different project concepts, starting from specific scenarios and real needs that have been highlighted over the recent months by the pandemic. Some have worked on the theme of the domestic playground, and how simple furnishings such as tables or chairs can be transformed into playing devices for children. Multi-functionality, modularity and transformability are some of the fundamental requirements for these products, which must facilitate living together in often very restricted living spaces.

Some students have been rethinking our wardrobe in an innovative way, mixing it up with other functions - seating, working, sleeping - and making the furniture adaptable to changing needs throughout the day. One of the projects developed investigates a hygiene system - personal and visual - set at the entrance of the home; a multifunctional and flexible piece of furniture made up of modular components, resolving the transition between the inside and outside of our home, following the new needs and rituals created by the pandemic.

One of the study groups worked on the opposition between connection and segregation of people who live in the same spaces but do not share them; the concepts developed are partitions that make it possible to model spaces and relationships in a complex way. Finally, there are those who - given the current pandemic crisis - have reinvented the entrance doors of homes, equipping them with mirrors, lights, compartments and various tools to transform them into real transitional furnishings.

This archipelago of proposals, conceived by PolyU students, shows how the contemporary home extends beyond its boundaries. Before, it was considered a refuge, a place to rest. On the occasion of a quarantine, it has become the site of the most diverse range of activities: it is a school, an office, a bar, a theatre... The furnishings of the future - screens, partitions, multifunctional objects - will have to be able to respond to this necessary flexibility.

The home has always been a multifunctional place, but in recent months - due to numerous restrictions on the use of public and collective spaces - it has reasserted its centrality in our daily lives. It is therefore necessary to take action - as both Biasi and the Hong Kong students have done - investigating these new needs, with furnishings and architectural designs which are flexible and adaptable.