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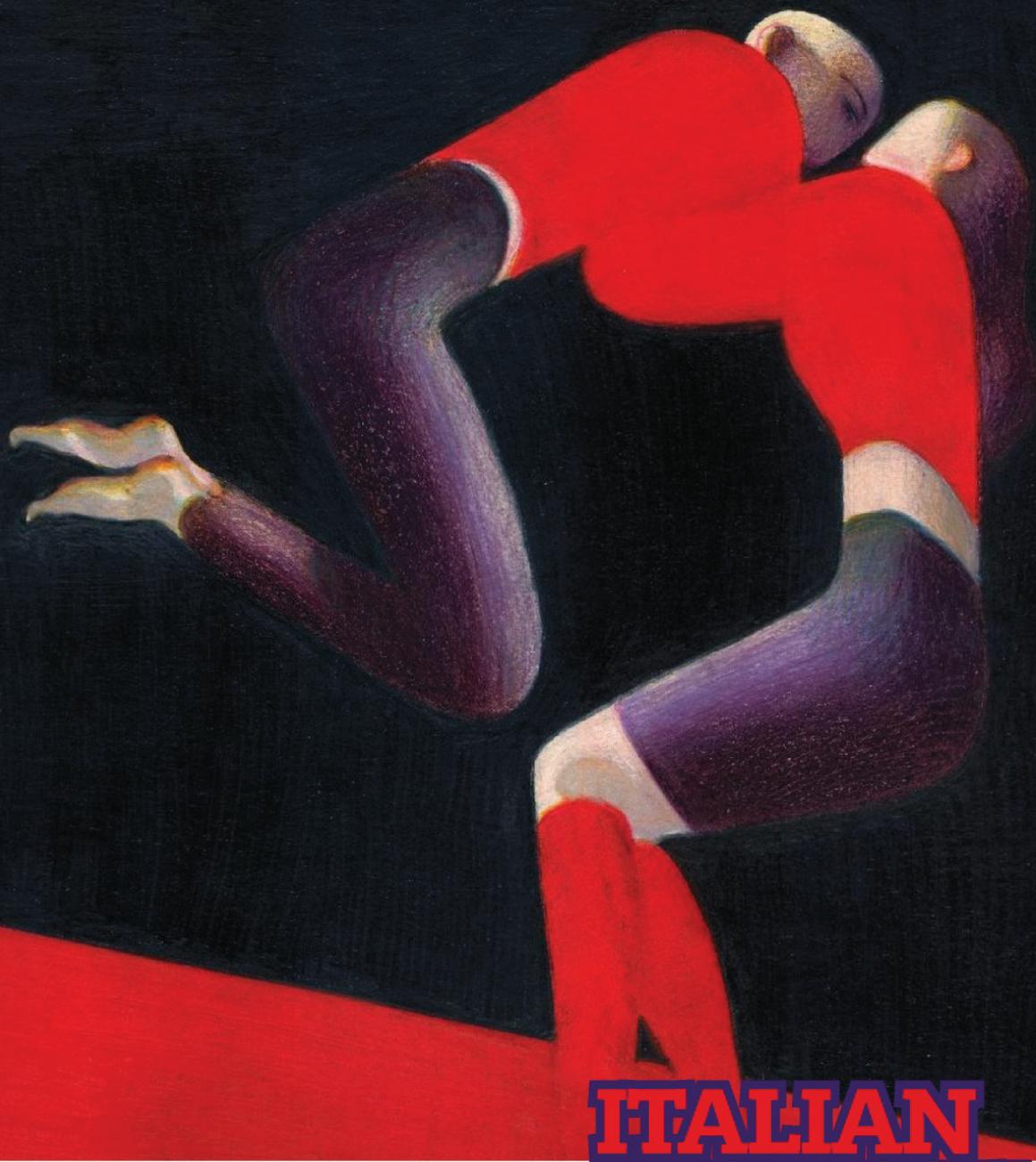
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# THE SENSE OF BEAUTY

Five of the six designers nominated for the **Rising Talent Awards** of Maison & Object 2018 are Italian.

A sign of the **influence of our heritage**, still full of vitality, capable of expressing the **metaphysical mystery** of the object in form

by Stefano Caggiano



Top, the *Equilibrium* bench by **Guglielmo Poletti** has a body in layers of lacquered birch, reaching a minimum thickness of 3 mm in the central part, combined with a hot-laminated steel arch for structural support (photo Giulia Piermartiri). Above, also by Guglielmo Poletti, *Sections* seats with geometric volumes, for the London-based gallery *Seeds*. Project developed in collaboration with the metal craftsmen of Berrone for Operae PHM | Piemonte Hand Made (photo PEPE Fotografia).

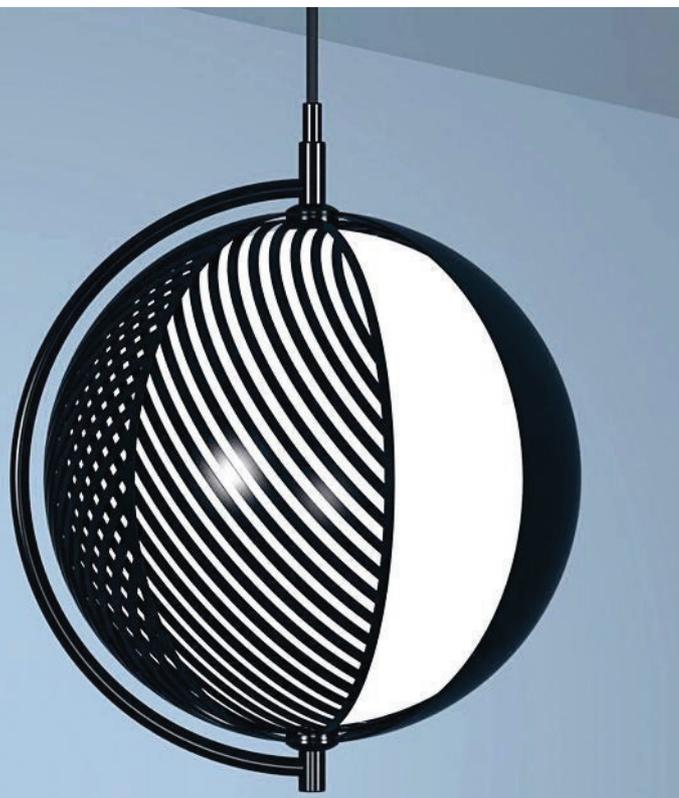
*The Petite collection of vases and mirrors designed by **Federica Biasi** for Mingardo is based on lucid, poetic control of optical geometry, revealing the abstract nature of forms embodied in the solidity of matter with refinement and elegance.*

**T**he success of the documentary *The Sense of Beauty* by Valerio Jalongo, which narrates the 'aesthetic' side of the physicists at CERN when faced with the fundamental laws of nature, proves that the yearning for beauty is not just an aspect of art, but something shared by all human efforts to interpret reality. It is no coincidence that the scientists themselves define the LHC particle accelerator (27 km) as a grand machine for beauty, conceived to investigate the meaning of things, not to perform some practical function.

In fact, just as matter can be perceived only through form, and form only if supported by matter (Aristotle already understood this), so the laws of physics can be glimpsed only when they are applied to reality. This is why in the Large Hadron Collider particles are accelerated to speeds close to that of light, reconstructing the matter-energy conditions just a few instants after the Big Bang. Only in this way is it possible to glimpse the hidden fundamental laws of the universe. It is precisely this evanescence that constitutes 'beauty.' The quivering of the form that reveals itself in the matter that conceals it, and which – given the fact that everything originates in the Big Bang – is found everywhere, in the most faraway stars and the closest objects: you just have to know how to prove it, grasp it, how to wait. Because this is the only way to establish relations with beauty: not perceiving it but awaiting it. Respecting its way of offering itself, which consists in denying itself.



Two projects by **Federico Peri**. Left, the Anello table in Aurisina Lumachelle marble and burnished brass. The visual weight of the material forms a counterpoint to the abstract precision of the geometric forms. Below, the Shapes suspension lamp with structure in burnished brass, keeping the glass bubbles in a state of suspension in space.



The Mondo suspension lamp by **Antonio Facco** for Oblure combines classical spirit and contemporary ambitions. The overlay of patterns permits control of the lighting effect by means of movement of the metal layers.



Charging the form of an object with this sensation of awaiting, then, means catalyzing the ultimate and primary sense of beauty. And it is what is held in common by the work of the five Italian designers nominated for the Rising Talent Awards of Maison & Object 2018 (with Kensaku Oshiro as the only non-Italian designer, though he does live and work in Milan). Antonio Facco, Guglielmo Poletti, Marco Lavit Nicora, Federica Biasi and Federico Peri are some of the freshest heirs to that artistic school that has been able to make the physical metaphysical, the useful object an aesthetic experience, as in the Italian piazzas of De Chirico, or the Atollo lamp of Zanuso. This can be seen in the poetic lucidity with which Federica Biasi has redefined the Mingardo catalogue, or in the rarified precision with which Guglielmo Poletti (based in Eindhoven) has designed the

Equilibrium bench. In these objects the echo of the Renaissance tradition lives on, when Piero della Francesca gave order to the material heterogeneity of the world, capturing inside terse, crystalline geometric structures, true 'mental machines' conceived (like the LHC) to reveal the invisible plot that grants meaning to reality.

Slightly more prosaic, but also aligned in this direction, Marco Lavit Nicora, trained as an architect and based in Paris, learned from Riccardo Blumer (the experimental scientist of Italian design) how to understand and respect the structural necessities of an object, as seen in his Reconverso table for the gallery Nilufar, "a synthesis of forces and tensions between materials of different nature and strength, held together by the solid transparency of the glass top."

The poetic approach to form and the prosaic

*The Reconverso table by **Marco Lavit Nicora** is part of a collection of furniture exclusively designed for Nilufar Gallery, based on the typical crafts skills of Made in Italy, deployed in an architectural development of furniture design (photo Daniele Iodice).*

approach to structure coexist smoothly in the works of Andrea Facco, like the Mondo suspension lamp for Oblure and the Unreal Perspectives designed for the Cappellini showroom, and in those of Federico Peri, like the Anello table and the Shapes suspension lamps (nominated for the German Design Award 2017). Mirrors, benches, tables and lamps guard metaphysical mystery of things today, moving forward with philological precision along the path of the 'sense of beauty' of Italian design. Not as a matter of repetition, but to take it into the difficult contemporary scenario, an evolution that is even more necessary because the digital awakening of objects (which have learned to speak, to feel, to think) seems to have secularized

their ancient existential spell. Nevertheless, below the data-driven buzz of 'intelligent' objects - which constantly stimulate the user to interact in a compulsive, alienating way - that spell is still there, because it is rooted in the very existence of things. So these 'metaphysical' furnishings have another character, another stature, solemn in their lightness, capable of waiting with superhuman patience for beauty to show itself, in the fleeting instants of eternity. This, in the end, is the great lesson of Italian design. This ability to think of the object not as a mere tool, but as an attempt to offer an aesthetic response (which would be impossible to express in words) to the existential question par excellence: why does being present itself to us, rather than nothing? ■

