

24 September - 16 October 2011

The Sign

and the Spirit

Multiple furniture, sculpture and jewellery

Gabriella Crespi

PALAZZO REALE

Piazza Duomo 12, 20121 Milan

Monday 2.30pm to 7.30pm

Tues-Weds-Fri-Sun 9.30am to 7.30pm

Thurs, Sat, 9.30am to 10.30pm

FREE ENTRANCE

PRESS RELEASE

“... although schools are an important part in the training of any creative process, the first and essential principle is inherent in the artist and, as wrote one of the leading art critics of the Sung era, Kuo Jo-Hsu: ‘It grows in the silence of the soul’.....”

Gabriella Crespi

The tribute to the artistic life of **Gabriella Crespi** begins in Milan, her home city and the fulcrum of her creative journey. Artist, designer, sculptor, but also inspiring muse of major international fashion designers, and ambassador of Italian style to the world, Gabriella Crespi is a powerfully charismatic figure who, in two decades of intense activity during the 1960's and 1970's, left a permanent mark in the design culture of our time.

The great anthology “**The Sign and the Spirit**” dedicated by **Palazzo Reale** to Gabriella Crespi, promoted by the **City of Milan - Culture** from **24 September to 16 October 2011** and curated by **Elisabetta Crespi**, daughter and close associate of the artist, and **Cesare Cunaccia**, was conceived and organised by **Ottavia Landi di Chiavenna**, sponsored by the **National Chamber of Italian Fashion** and made possible thanks to the exclusive sponsorship of the **MEDIOLANUM Farmaceutici S.p.A. Group**, thanks to which it will also be open free to the public.

Gabriella Crespi now more than ever is celebrated by numerous publications and the most sophisticated international galleries, auctions, and collectors. This exhibition is a well-merited recognition of this prominent figure of Italian creativity and also offers a perspective on contemporary artistic languages with a free and passionate and poetic point of view. The show unfolds as a coherent tale that covers all the areas of creativity of Crespi's art, including furniture,

objects, lighting, sculptures and jewellery. All the work is signed, and still jealously guarded in the private homes of enthusiastic international collectors, who, for the first time ever, have agreed to share and show these masterpieces to the public during the course of this exhibition.

The common thread that links the various works of Gabriella Crespi is a very personal style, based on the dialogic nature of apparent contrasts, like a play of mirrors, which references a utilitarian philosophy of space and a purity of formal aesthetic sense. She combines the spontaneity of nature and artificiality of thought, matter and light, achieving simplicity only through great inner complexity. Gabriella created out of her own vision, studying, working, demanding that her materials yield all their expressive potential, pushing them to their most extreme possibilities, to make thought tangible, creating innovations she believes important for our time.

“In the furniture of Gabriella Crespi we feel the pleasure of the natural but still precious material ...

Highly mobile furniture finally becomes multiple furniture.

Surprising furniture that like a magical game opens, closes, changes, and becomes: ‘Open Sesame’.”

Vanni Scheiwiller

Gabriella Crespi conquered the international scene with her original ideas, with the articulated forms that meet the needs of contemporary design, and with her amazing ability to transform objects by adding openings, closings, and changes in function. Her creative journey still strongly inspires the expressive creativity of the current generation of artists.

After studying architecture at the Polytechnic of Milan, in the 1950s she began to produce objects, initially lamps and sculptures, such as the “Small Lune Collection”, steel moon-shaped sculptures, in which the stylistic influences of the period converge and are transformed. This was the start of her intensive research and experimentation, spanning the words of design and sculptural abstraction, in which she experienced *design-project-product* as points in a unitary process. In the early 1970s, Gabriella presented her first furniture, a perfect synthesis of multiple reflections. This furniture is not static but is packed with “life”, free in space and in constant metamorphosis. The famous “Plurimi” (Multiple) series, whose name is a tribute to Emilio Vedova, is a play on volumes and evolutionary possibilities of a form that changes in space, in perpetual dialogue with the environment and light.

At the peak of her success, in 1987 Gabriella went to live on the slopes of the Himalayas in India, to follow a spiritual path under the guidance of Sri Muniraj. She has only recently returned to Italy after a long voluntary break from artistic activity. After more than 20 years away this return is like a second start. In 2008, demonstrating an extraordinary conceptual vitality and contemporaneity, she accepted **Stella McCartney**'s invitation to create a limited re-edition of five metamorphic jewels in bronze, hard and semiprecious stones, crystals, made in the 1970s, to be presented in Paris on the occasion of the opening of the British

designer's new flagship store. The proceeds were donated to the Haidakhan Charitable & Research Hospital in India, a specialist ophthalmology clinic, founded by her spiritual master Sri Muniraj.

The arrangement by D.A.W. studio of the four Tapestry rooms of the Palazzo Reale, under the artistic direction of architect Carlo Perosino, "aims to enhance the work of the artist with a light, airy, almost transparent setting, which focuses attention above all on the exhibits." The exhibition structures combine the iron rods of the frames, a synthesis of power and simplicity, with special ceramic plates that become a refined and discreet stage on which the works have total centrality.

The exhibition covers thematic areas that make Gabriella's creative talent and personal, cultural and life journeys very easy to see: "**Moons and Stone**", a leitmotif of the poetics of Gabriella Crespi, sculptures that have given rise to a creative approach to design; "**Plurimi**", the famous 'metamorphic' furniture series; "**India**," the spiritual path through Gabriella's sculptures and photographs; "**Jewels and Gold Drops**", free castings conceived using the ancient and precious lost wax process, chalices, candlesticks and the extraordinary flatware service, in an evocative arrangement; "**Rising Sun**", almost a poetics of living; "**Unicum**" works, an excursus between objects, intersections of form and matter: sculptures, tables, chairs, lamps, appliques; "**Animals**", fairy-tale bronze sculptures that reveal Gabriella's abiding interest in the natural world. "**Showcases**" is a small but significant section of the exhibition that shows her close and long association with Paolo Paganini, a true master and brilliant creator of still life, who unfortunately died prematurely.

The exhibition shows the connection between Gabriella and **fashion**: a liaison that takes special and different forms and values. Early in her career, Gabriella Crespi established a lively creative relationship with **Christian Dior**, creating a collection of objects for the home and table. Dior of course was first designer in the modern sense, whose creativity and experimental vision was way ahead of his time.

Fashion for Gabriella Crespi has also meant creative association with the top designers of yesterday and today, but not only that. A woman of epochal and unmistakable style and beauty, as we can see in the beautiful photographs alongside the exhibition, she was a constant source of inspiration and one of the favourite glamorous icons of the major Italian and foreign fashion designers. This was true above all for **Valentino** in the fabulous 1960s and 1970s when Italian fashion finally and definitively gained recognition on the world stage.

A bilingual **catalogue** published by **Mondadori Electa** will accompany the exhibition. The book uses text and images to outline the themes of the exhibition. It contains contributions from: *Ambra Medda, Stella McCartney, Natalia Bianchi, Massimo Martignoni and Cesare Cunaccia.*

The forewords are by Alessandro Del Bono and Cristina Del Bono Ferruzzi of MEDIOLANUM Farmaceutici S.p.A.; the President of the National Chamber of Italian Fashion, Mario Boselli and Franca Sozzani, editor of Vogue Italia.

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GABRIELLA CRESPI

Biographical notes

Born in Milan in 1922, Gabriella Crespi grew up in Tuscany near Florence, where she developed her love of nature. Gabriella has been a designer and an artist: a brilliant creator.

In the 1960s and 1970s she produced her best creations, which furnished the homes of famous people such as George Livanos, Thomas Hoving, Princess Grace, Gunther Sachs and the Shah of Persia.

Gabriella Crespi established itself on the international scene with her different and distinctive style.

The multi-functionality of Crespi's furniture is a trademark. Her production ranges from 'metamorphic' tables, to libraries that become room dividers, to innovative seats convertible into beds, while her focus on nature led to an entire collection made from natural materials, and the creation of zoomorphic objects in silver or gold, with bellies made of real ostrich egg or in hand-blown glass. Crespi's work has always evinced a 'search for the infinite', which is the theme of her whole life.

CURATORS

Elisabetta Crespi

The daughter of Gabriella Crespi was born in Milan and grew up in Milan and Rome. After graduating in 1971 she worked for her mother, becoming a close associate. Passionate about cinema and the visual arts, since the mid-1980s she has promoted film festivals. Since 1990 she has worked in fashion in Milan and has also focused on the applied arts such as weaving and mosaics. Since 2010, she has been mainly focused on the Crespi Archive.

Cesare Maria Cunaccia

Writer, journalist, curator and lecturer, he mainly works with art and costume. He has worked for many years with prestigious Italian and foreign magazines including Vogue Italia, Ad, L'Uomo Vogue, Il Giornale dell'Arte, L'oeil, Panorama, Connaissance des Arts. He mainly lives in Milan, Paris and the Tyrol.

TECHNICAL SHEET

EXHIBITION

Title	The Sign and the Spirit. Multiple furniture, sculptures and jewellery. Gabriella Crespi.
Location	Palazzo Reale, Milan Piazza Duomo 12
An exhibition	City of Milan - Culture Palazzo Reale Group MEDIOLANUM Farmaceutici S.p.A. - Sole Sponsor
Curation	Elisabetta Crespi, Cesare Cunaccia
Design and Communication	Ottavia Landi di Chiavenna
Artistic Direction	
Organisational Coordination	Sara Mesiano
Duration of the exhibition	24 September to 16 October 2011
Press preview:	23 September 11.30am
Inauguration on invitation	23 September 7.30pm
Opening Hours	Monday 2.30pm to 7.30pm Tuesday - Wednesday - Friday and Sunday 9.30am to 7.30pm Saturday and Thursday 9.30am to 10.30pm
Tickets	Free admission
Information	mostra.gabriellacrespi@mediolanum- farma.com www.comune.milano.it/palazzoreale
Graphic design	Francesca Botta
Exhibition Design:	Carlo Perosino (architect)
Set-up	D.A.W. - Design Archs Work, Turin
Support material	Prisma Srl - www.tabulaskin.it
Display	Gianluigi Arditi and Roberto Zucchetti

CATALOGUE

Publisher	Electa bilingual Italian/English catalogue Size 24x24 cm, 144 pages, 120 colour images Cover price of 23 Euros, www.electaweb.it
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**Mediolanum Farmaceutici
at Palazzo Reale, Milan
is the sole sponsor of “The Sign and the Spirit”,
the big retrospective dedicated
to the creative talent of Gabriella Crespi.**

Milan, 23 September 2011 - Mediolanum Farmaceutici is the **sole sponsor** of the big retrospective at Palazzo Reale from 23 September to 16 October 2011 dedicated to Gabriella Crespi, eclectic artist designer, style icon, a muse for major international fashion designers, and an ambassador of Italian style in the world.

Mediolanum Farmaceutici and Gabriella Crespi have a special connection, which has grown since the beginning of this project. Firstly, we share a common geographical but also intensely cultural identification with Milan. The company sees in the special history of this imaginative and versatile artist, a reflection of the stages and “style” of its own adventure in the world of pharmaceutical research. The company was founded in Milan in 1972 and through the efforts of its young founder Rinaldo Del Bono, soon became an international concern. The two apparently distant worlds of Gabriella Crespi and a pharmaceutical company are in reality very close and in perfect harmony in terms of the continuous research and planning that accompany any vision, in an ability to make ideas tangible, and in the typically Italian energy and determination to succeed in the world.

Today, Mediolanum Farmaceutici, led by **Alessandro and Cristina Del Bono**, children of the founder Rinaldo, includes a dozen companies in Italy and Europe and employs over 600 people. Our small multinational maintains the flexibility and rapid decision-making of a family enterprise. We make tremendous efforts through major and continuing investment to confirm, with vigour and pride, our identity as an agile, dynamic and highly professional Italian firm, competing with the chemical and pharmaceutical giants on what is now a “single world market”.

“When, by chance, we heard of the still embryonic idea of an exhibition on the work of Gabriella Crespi - said Alessandro Del Bono, chief executive of Mediolanum Farmaceutici - for us it was a brilliant idea and the connections were instantly apparent. Our family’s passion for art and beauty, a love of nature, a need for freedom and independence, our recent ambition to use one of our companies to spread knowledge about the many Italian arts, not predominantly out of patriotic or nationalistic pride, but rather to make Italian genius and excellence widely recognised, appreciated and known abroad as well as in the wonderful, eccentric and mercurial Italy ... But, above all, the strongest connection was encapsulated in

a single word: Milan. This extraordinary and contradictory city of ours, that people either love or hate, created out of commitment, work and humility, an unrelenting powerhouse of ideas, businesses and often hidden talents, like its gardens and courtyards, was our real link with Gabriella.”

“Our contribution - he continued - is therefore uniquely and powerfully inspired by and aimed at this exhibition entirely dedicated to the exciting and magnificent work of an eclectic, quiet, refined and extraordinary woman from Milan, who, we believe, embodies many of the facets of the city and those who live there. We are proud and honoured to have been able to take part in this adventure, playing our part in making possible this tribute to the refined elegance of Gabriella Crespi, a singular lady who exudes both great strength and delicacy, a unique contemporary icon of our Milan.”