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# 40 Years of Beautiful Objects and the Pictures that Sold Them

The **Bellevue Arts Museum** has recently opened a special exhibit entitled **Zoom. Italian Design and the Photography of Aldo and Marirosa Ballo.**



The Ballos at work.

The exhibit is a retrospective of **Studio Ballo**, the husband and wife photography team that successfully marketed Italian design from the mid fifties until the 1990's through gorgeous, and dare I say, sensual product photography. In collaboration with the Italian manufacturer of iconic design, **Vitra**, the exhibit fills the entire top floor of the museum with beautiful furnishings and products from the golden years of Italian design, paired with the images captured by the Ballos for magazines and catalogues published the world over.



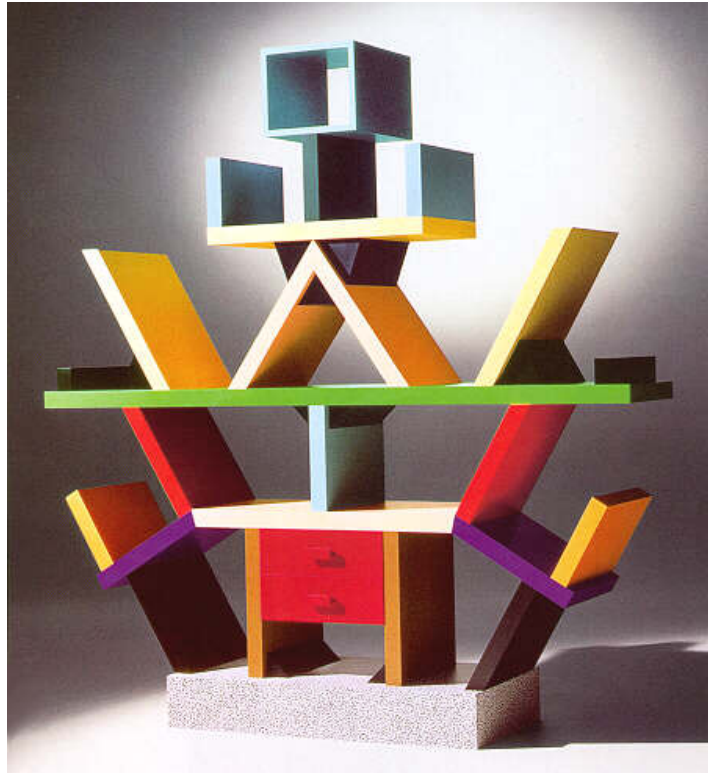
Using an overhead shot and just the right colors, an Olivetti typewriter becomes an object of beauty in this iconic image.

The story begins when a young Milanese photographer, Marirosa Toscani, collaborated with fellow photographer Aldo Ballo. This collaboration soon turned into a marriage and together they created Studio Ballo. Initially the couple were mainly focused on reportage photography, but soon specialized in product photography, a niche that became their life's work and their legacy. The Ballos began to make friendships within the design community in Milan and many of their now iconic photographs came out of collaborations with these designer friends. The Ballos were so talented at capturing the vanguard designs of their friend's creations that they soon began to be highly sought after. Their images turned chairs into sculpture and elevated teapots to near fine art status, appealing to the affluent design savvy professionals and young modernists.



This vignette houses Sacco, the original bean bag chair.

Italian design of this time lived by the credo **Utility + Beauty** and the everyday objects such as chairs and typewriters were not only extremely functional, but stood out from their contemporaries with highly stylized elements and eye catching bold colors, much of the time incorporating new materials never before used in products, like plastic. **In this show you will see the first bean bag chair, Sacco, as well as the first flip phone, the Grillo.** The exhibit follows Italian design through the sixties when furniture became contestatory, becoming multi-functional objects made for ever changing flexible environments, and perfect for swanky parties. In the seventies the designs adopted the newest materials, many of which were very experimental and didn't prove to last the test of time, but none-the-less were incredibly inventive for their time. The eighties saw the rise of post modern design and the outrageous and whimsical creations of the **Memphis Group**, a movement in design described as a shotgun wedding between the Bauhaus and Fisher Price.



An iconic example of the Memphis group style, this Ettore Sottsass bookcase is still available today.



The best looking fruit bowl known to man, also designed by Ettore Sottsass.

Vitra has neatly packaged this exhibit and the Bellevue Arts Museum is its **only stop in North America**, previously making stops at Vitra's very own museum in Italy, and then Brazil, and after Bellevue it heads to China. The exhibit features beautifully staged vignettes in saturated colors grouping together objects from similar times, wall rails filled with the magazine images from the Ballo archives, and loose groupings of objects and furnishings that question traditional ideas of function. You might even find a piece of design history that would fit right in at home among your belongings, like a cactus coat rack or a zebra patterned sectional.



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A collection of designer objects from the 70's.

The museum has also made the exhibit a destination to bring your young ones to, as it is never too early to introduce kids to great design. Not only will the exhibit's bold

colors and whimsical designs inspire, but the educational department has created a mock photography studio, the **Imagination Station**, complete with actual professional grade lighting for your little ones to take on the role of the Ballos themselves. A selection of designer furniture and well chosen objects allow for play with the creation of beautiful images as reward.



Some objects to choose from in the Imagination Station.



The mini Studio Ballo in the Imagination Station.

The Zoom exhibit is open now and is **up until June 16th**. There are a phenomenal amount of objects and images in this show, so be reasonable and plan several trips so as to take it all in. Many of the items on display are still produced by Vitra, and many others can be found in auctions and high end vintage boutiques. The exhibit was **curated locally by Nora Atkinson**, and if you wish to thank her for her tireless work, a gift of the feather light dining chair featured in the exhibit would be most appropriate.

For more information on **Zoom** and The **Bellevue Arts Museum** look here:

<http://www.bellevuearts.org/exhibitions/current/zoom/index.html>



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