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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

April 6, 2021



An untitled Lisa Ponti collage from 2008 that is now on view in Tribeca. Photo: Courtesy of Galleria Federico Vavassori, Milan and Ortuzar Projects, New York / © Archivio Lisa Ponti

## Gio Ponti's Daughter Was an Accomplished Artist in Her Own Right

And now her whimsical drawings are the subject of a New York show

By Alia Akkam

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When she was 19 years old, Lisa Ponti's father, the dexterous Italian design visionary Gio Ponti, published a collection of her poems, *Gio Ponti Agli Amici* ("From Gio Ponti to His Friends"), and gave them out as Christmas gifts. Interspersed with illustrations by Gio's prominent painter and sculptor pals, including [Giorgio de Chirico](#) and Arturo Martini, the book foreshadowed the long, deep relationships with the artists that Lisa would cultivate until her death in 2019 at age 97. But Lisa was a talent in her own right, and the New York gallery [Ortuzar Projects](#), in Tribeca, is putting her oeuvre in the limelight with "Lisa Ponti: Drawings, 1993–2018." The show—her first solo exhibition to be staged in the U.S.—opens today and is set to run through May 22.

Both the influential design magazine *Stile* and the architectural journal *Domus* were Gio's creations, but Lisa, working at the former during the 1940s and leading the latter as editor-in-chief and deputy director for nearly 40 years, organically helped shape a vibrant postwar Italian art and culture scene. "She was a key Milanese figure," says Ortuzar Projects director Kari Rittenbach, who organized the exhibition in collaboration with Lisa's son Salvatore Licitra, Milan gallerist Federico Vavassori, and the Archivio Lisa Ponti. Lisa herself may not have been famous, "but behind the scenes she was active and involved as a friend and interlocutor of artists for almost her entire life, and to some extent she inherited that from Gio."



*Eredità*, a watercolor and collage work. Photo: Courtesy of Galleria Federico Vavassori, Milan and Ortuzar Projects, New York / © Archivio Lisa Ponti

Lisa's vast artistic circle encompassed Arte Povera luminaries such as Alighiero Boetti, Emilio Prini, and Mario and Marisa Merz. Just as important as the content she nurtured at *Domus* were the informal, salon-like gatherings that unfolded at her Milan residence on Via Randaccio. Gio built it in 1925 as his first private home, and Lisa lived there most of her life, attracting a motley stream of critics, collectors, and intellectuals. Art and design powerhouses such as Ettore Sottsass, [Christo](#), and Ray and Charles Eames were also known to drop in.

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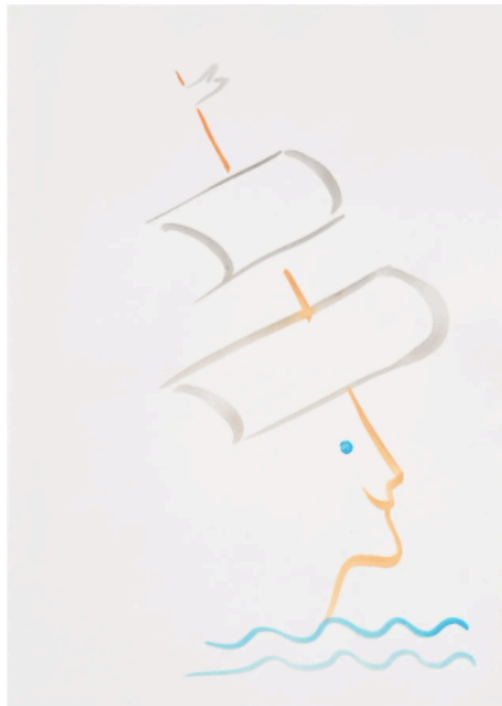
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Although she had designed covers for *Stile*, Lisa only started drawing in earnest during the *Domus* years, a passion that manifested in her first exhibition at Franco Toselli's gallery in 1992, when she was 70. All of her works possess a whimsical and delicate spontaneity, a simplicity that is echoed in her utilitarian medium of choice: A4-sized paper. She embraced slim pencil lines, colored stickers, and thick markers alike, and incorporated recurring floral and cherubic motifs.

She also made excellent use of everyday materials like eggshells and cotton wool to produce designs that are at turns enchanting and melancholy.

Often blurring the lines between art, poetry, and the epistolary tradition, Lisa drew rapidly, the titles of pieces frequently “drifting into her drawings and playing with the images,” as Rittenbach puts it, while pointing out how even the single-stroke sketches are meditative. The 50 drawings now on display in Tribeca are not meant solely to introduce American audiences to Lisa's legacy outside of a certain “Milan milieu,” but, in the words of Rittenbach, “allow for another reading of the history of Italian art.”



Another untitled Lisa Ponti creation. Photo: Courtesy of Galleria Federico Vavassori, Milan and Ortuzar Projects, New York / © Archivio Lisa Ponti