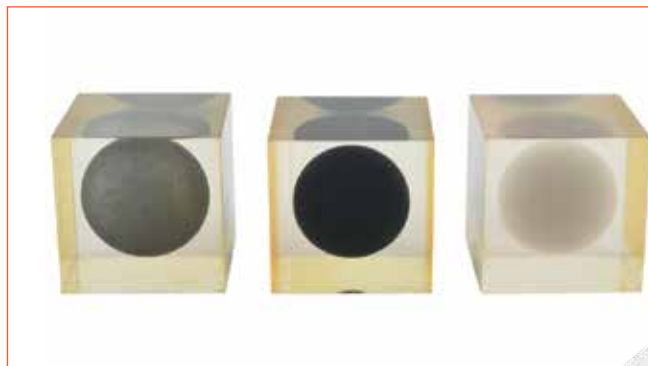




## COLLECTING



The Italian company's inimitable products—an exhilarating brew of art, industry, and cutting-edge design—are more desirable than ever



**The legendary Italian** design firm Danese Milano, which last year celebrated its 60th anniversary, quickly achieved critical and commercial acclaim for its minimalist yet expressive objects. Founder Bruno Danese, in close collaboration with artist-designers Bruno Munari and Enzo Mari, created an experimental workshop patterned on the Bauhaus. Intensive formal investigations sparked mass-produced utilitarian objects, limited-edition art multiples, and educational toys—even extending to packaging, graphics, photography, display windows and systems, catalogs, advertising, and exhibitions.

In attaining gallery status, the Danese atelier-cum-factory proposed that aesthetic needs were as vital as practical ones. Munari's

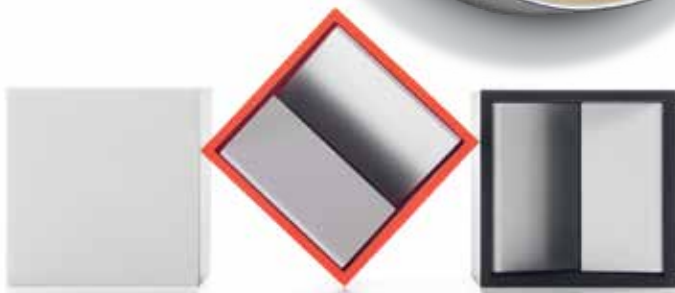
Portable Sculpture of 1959, produced in an edition of 1,000, set the tone of playful seriousness: The cardboard-cutout folding artwork could be packed in a suitcase for travel. The same thinking underpinned Munari's 1958 to 1964 folding lamps in plastic, opalescent fiberglass, and aluminum, which shipped flat to cut costs. The perceptual ambiguity at the core of such exploration allowed for multiple intellectual and sensorial responses as well as for user participation. That extended to fabrication, as with Munari's Continuous Structures (realized in 1967), a kit of L-shaped steel components that could be assembled in myriad ways. For children, Danese set the bar even higher with >



**Clockwise from top left:** Visual Games, a children's learning activity designed by Bruno Munari and Giovanni Belgrano in 1968. Enzo Mari (b. 1932) with a Putrella objet. The Danese logo from the 1961 catalog. Recent production of Timor, in PVC and ABS plastic. Mari's Relation of Four cubes, in polyester resin.



## COLLECTING



**Clockwise from upper left:** Enzo Mari's marble *Paros* vase models *AY* and *L*. Bruno Munari's *Ora X* with four overlapping semi-circles. Mari with his aluminum *Structures*, circa 1961. Mari's 1969 *Pago Pago* vase in purple ABS plastic. Current production of Munari's *Cubo* ashtrays.

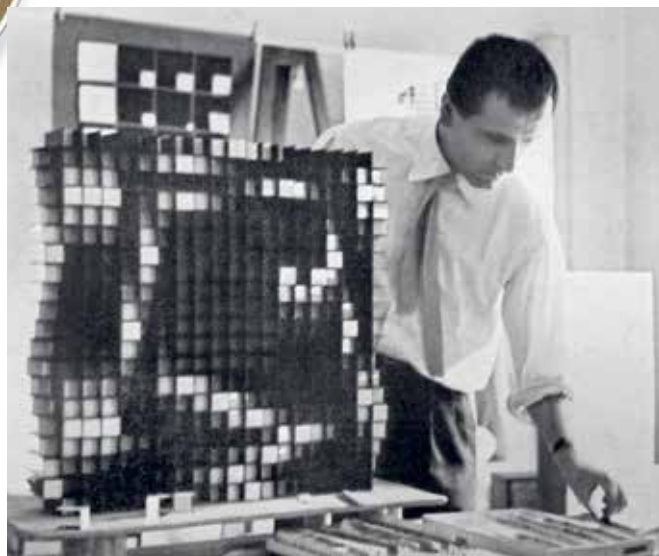
games, toys, and books intended to unleash autonomous creativity.

By the time Danese sold the company in 1992—it is now under the Artemide umbrella—it had become an international fixture, with products in over 40 categories (and 26 materials) by such contributors as Angelo Mangiarotti, Achille Castiglioni, and Franco Meneguzzo, who designed the logo and the initial line of handcrafted ceramics. Recent re-issues help perpetuate a legacy of timelessness in what was a daringly

Timor, which looks a bit like a toucan. Up the ladder is Mari's 1969 *Pago Pago*, a reversible vase of injection-molded ABS—and Danese's first truly industrial product. No longer manufactured, examples in desirable colors such as purple start at around \$500.

### intermediate

Opt for three Enzo Mari designs. Made between 1959 and 1963, his polyester-resin cubes, with spherical or cubic inserts in various materials and colors, were nominally paperweights but today are prized as small op



original program merging art publishing and design production. Here, what to acquire—whether you're a Danese dabbler or diehard.

### beginner

Perhaps the best place to start collecting is at the beginning, with Danese's first utilitarian object: Munari's 1957 *Cubo* ashtray, in melamine with an aluminum insert. Inexpensive materials and simple fabrication methods combined with geometric reductionism to produce one of Danese's best sellers. Vintage examples in red, gray, or black can be had for under \$100. Also at entry-level prices are Mari's iconic perpetual calendars: *Formosa*, from 1963, with its bold Helvetica font, and the 1966

art sculptures. The exacting hand polishing required to achieve the refractive effects made them expensive, hence their scarcity. Prices now range from about \$700 to \$1,000 each. Expect to pay at least twice that for abstract limited editions with polyester-resin cylinders and spheres embedding a grid or geometric slivers. Originally, the 1957 jigsaw puzzle 16 *Animali* was a hand-finished continuous cutout from a single piece of wood; this proved too costly, so the game was later molded in expanded resin (although it has now been re-issued in oak). Search for first-run examples in palisander or wenge, especially the larger version in the ➤

# RICHARD FRINIER

celebrating 30 years of award-winning design | furniture | textiles

richardfrinier.com

**From top:** Bruno Munari (1907-1998). Current production of Enzo Mari's 1957 puzzle/game *16 Animali*.

## COLLECTING

white wooden box. Look also for Putrella (Italian for "girder") trays and center-pieces, a brutalist series from 1958 resembling refashioned iron I-beams with exposed rudimentary welds—a marriage of allegorical form and inexpensive production. Pursue the models no longer being made; the current catalog can be found on the Danese website. Also desirable: early iterations of the 1964 Paros vases, architectural cylinders of hand-polished, machine-cut statuary marble.

### advanced

Consider some of the rarest and most interesting production models, such as Munari's triangular folding lamp in blue fiberglass from 1961, one of Meneguzzo's unique hand-crafted ceramic vases from 1957, or a hand-built porcelain Samos vessel designed by Mari in 1963 as a re-engagement with craftsmanship. And, of course, the heart-stopping limited-edition art multiples: Munari's *Air Machine*, a 1930 kinetic experiment with wooden balls and steel rods, issued in an edition of 10 in 1971; his 1963 *Ora X*, a motorized clock produced in an edition of 50; and almost any of Mari's early-1960s *Structures*—wall sculptures composed of cubes in natural and black-anodized aluminum.



### the verdict

There is ample opportunity to collect early Danese creations with open production runs. Pay attention to condition, especially with plastics, which can scratch or discolor, and look for original packaging when possible. Competition will be stiffer for the limited-edition items and rarities, as Danese enthusiasts are sure to run up prices at auction. Be prepared to act when these pieces crop up on internet platforms, and keep checking European, and especially Italian, sources.

—Larry Weinberg



COURTESY OF DANESE MILANO