

# Decoration & Ornament



by Alessandro Mendini

*In the book La poltrona di Proust, published in 1991 by Tranchida editore, Alessandro Mendini (1931-2019) collected a series of micro essays in alphabetical order, like the headings of a dictionary, dedicated to people, ideas and things that were particularly important in his career as a designer, architect and artist. The two entries we publish here, "Decoration" and "Ornament," are taken from this book. They do not offer linear and definitive answers, but rather examples of happy incoherence, of skillful fusion between opposing modes of being: original and copy, authorship and anonymity, high and low culture. In this perspective, even the seemingly most questionable side effects (banality, imitation, counterfeiting, stylistic contamination, kitsch) are requirements inherent in creativity, in its unfolding in space and time. Even the most exclusive object, as soon as it enters the world, will take upon itself its weight and its contradictions, and will cover itself with meanings that are alien to the original plan. Decoration and ornament, understood by Mendini as widespread, horizontal practices, are an excellent thermometer of this order of phenomena. The current market edition of La poltrona di Proust is as follows: A. Mendini, La poltrona di Proust, edited by M. Galbiati, Nottetempo, Milan 2021. We wish to thank Elisa and Fulvia Mendini of Atelier Mendini and Beatrice Pozzi of Edizioni Nottetempo, for allowing this to appear.*

Decoration

To surrender to the total decorativeness of the world is to realize that men

are incapable of communicating in the depths, that they are essentially solitary, but that what can circulate well among them is the surface, the "depth of the superficial". Decoration is a mass show, a controlled chaos, where life is proposed on the front, which the rational world has denied.

## Ornament

The concept of "spontaneous" living and furnishing can prevail over institutional design and architecture and technically contrast with them through "ornamentation". Because everyone knows how to decorate, because ornaments vanish as quickly as they appear, and in that fleeting moment when they exist we like them magnificently, they make even the driest structures of our everyday life energetic and taut. To think of a total ornamentation of the world is to think of people who want to communicate more anthropologically than rationally, through myth, sign, smell, instinct. When I talk about ornamentation, I mean something "profound". In the sense that ornamentation is an act so deeply rooted in the mind of every human being that it is the starting point for any kind of project.

*Home page: Alessandro Mendini, Cioccolator, liquid-crystal calculator, Alessi production, 2000.*

*Below: Cover of Alessandro Mendini's book, La poltrona di Proust, Nottetempo, Milan 2021.*



# Alessandro Mendini La poltrona di Proust

A cura di Marisa Galbiati



*A. Mendini  
2009*

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