# News Release

ARTIZON MUSEUM | ISHIBASHI FOUNDATION

May 27, 2026
Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation

# Ettore Sottsass
## Design begins where magic begins

June 23 [Tue] - October 4 [Sun], 2026

The title of the artwork has been updated.

Ettore SOTTSASS, *Carlton*, 1981 (design / produce), Produce: Memphis Milano, Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation © Erede Ettore Sottsass

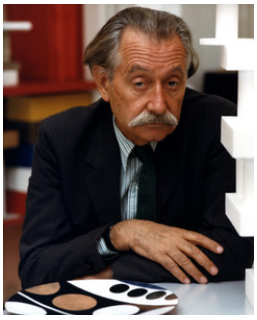
The Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation (Director: ISHIBASHI Hiroshi), presents *Ettore Sottsass: Design begins where magic begins*.

Ettore Sottsass (1917-2007) was a globally acclaimed master of twentieth-century Italian design. Starting in the 1950s, he created masterworks as a designer for Olivetti and Poltronova. In 1981, he organized the Memphis Group, an international design collective. He and other Memphis members created designs that were regarded as postmodern and that had a great influence on their generation.

Sottsass questioned pursuing excessive rationalism and sought to restore the sensation of people living freely and vibrantly. Through fresh designs filled with humor, he aimed to shine a bright light on the lifestyles, lives, and fates of the people of his time. This exhibition, the first Sottsass retrospective in Japan, will display more than 100 works, from his early to later periods, that the Ishibashi Foundation has collected and introducing an abundance of designs brimming with creativity.

In recent years, the Ishibashi Foundation has launched a new initiative, collecting works in the field of design. Our collection now includes more than one hundred pieces spanning from Sottsass's early period to his later years. This exhibition is the first major Sottsass retrospective in Japan and presents these works in their entirety—as well as being the museum's first-ever design exhibition.

## Ettore Sottsass



Photography Erik & Petra Hesmerg ★

Born in Innsbruck, Austria, in 1917, Sottsass moved with his family to Turin, Italy, because of his father's, an architect, work in 1929. He earned a degree in architecture from the Polytechnic University of Turin in 1939. Then, after military service during World War II, he began his full-fledged career as a designer and architect based in Milan.

From the 1950s through the 1960s, he created a series of celebrated designs for companies such as Olivetti and Poltronova, establishing his international reputation. In the late 1960s, amid the global wave of countercultural movements and the emergence of "Radical Design," he drew inspiration from East Asian art and Pop Art to produce strikingly original works.

In the early 1970s, he abruptly stepped away from his professional activities in Milan and spent time wandering the rugged landscapes of Catalonia, Spain, photographing conceptually driven subjects and pursuing a philosophical inquiry into the nature of "design."
In the 1980s, he became the founding figure of the international design collective Memphis, which created a sensation with its bold use of color and form. After parting ways with Memphis around 1985, he continued to produce playful and daring works until his death in 2007 at the age of 90.

In 2017, major retrospectives marking the centenary of his birth were held, primarily at museums across Europe and the United States, further cementing his critical acclaim and growing legacy.

## Highlights

### 1. Japan's First Major Ettore Sottsass Retrospective

Ettore Sottsass is renowned as one of the foremost figures in 20th-century Italian design, and in recent years numerous retrospectives of his work have been held across Europe and the United States. Often described as postmodern, his design approach did not seek rationality or functionality, but aimed instead to stir the deeper, more essential sensitivities of human experience. His spirit of innovation exerted a powerful influence on his contemporaries and continues to astonish and inspire today. He also interacted with many Japanese designers and artists, including Kuramata Shirō and Tateishi Tiger, visited Japan frequently, and became familiar with Japanese culture. The Memphis design collective, which Sottsass led, also had a huge impact on the design world in Japan.

As the twentieth anniversary of Sottsass's death nears, we have reached the right moment to look at the entirety of his design work and reconsider its true value. This exhibition, the first large-scale Sottsass retrospective in Japan, introduces his creative trajectory by presenting over a hundred works by Sottsass, from his early to late periods, together with works by close associates such as Kuramata Shirō and Michele De Lucchi.

### 2. Exploring What "Design" Meant to Sottsass

Throughout his career, Sottsass constantly questioned the very meaning of "design," refusing to be bound by conventional thinking. Deeply engaged with art and literature from both East and West, from antiquity to the modern era, and guided by a sharp critical awareness of the political and social issues of his time, he pursued a vision of design that would enrich modern life with vitality and joy. His creative stance—liberated from the

rationality and functionality that had long defined modern design—is encapsulated in his remark, referenced in the subtitle of this exhibition: “Design begins when magic begins.” This exhibition explores what design truly meant to Sottsass.

### 3. Over One Hundred Sottsass Works from the Ishibashi Foundation Collection

In recent years, the Ishibashi Foundation has placed special emphasis on collecting the works of Ettore Sottsass. This collection spans a wide range of media—including furniture, ceramics, office equipment, glassware, photography, and drawings—and now numbers over one hundred works. Visitors can experience Sottsass’s unmistakable creative spirit through works that include uniquely shaped and vividly colored cabinets, towering ceramic column objects reaching heights of up to three meters, glass works that combine bold structural design with delicate beauty, and conceptual photographs that challenge the very notion of design.

This exhibition marks the first occasion on which the museum will present its entire Sottsass collection and related materials to the public—and is also its first-ever design-themed exhibition.

## Composition of Exhibition

### 1. The Latter Half of 1950s: Collaboration with Italian Companies

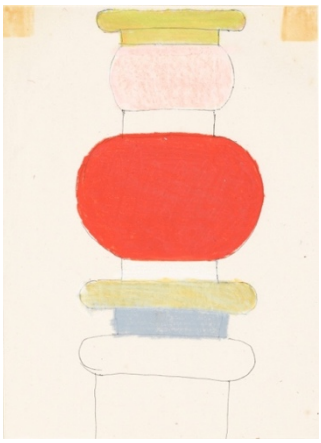
Upper left. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Mobile,* 1957-58 (design) / 1959 (produce), Produce: Poltronova © Erede Ettore Sottsass

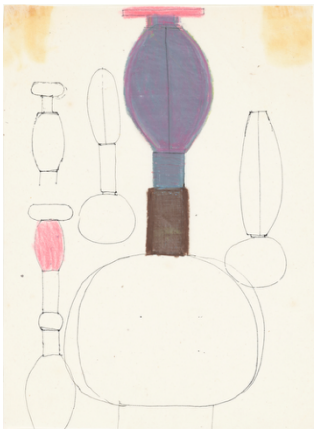
Upper right. Ettore SOTTSASS, Perry KING, *Valentine,* 1968 (design / produce), Produce: Olivetti © erede Ettore Sottsass, JASPAR, Tokyo, 2025 C5248 ★

Bottom. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Mobile MS. 180*, c. 1959-63 (design / produce), Produce: Poltronova © Erede Ettore Sottsass

All works are in the collection of the Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation

## 2. The 1960s: Experimental Design





Upper left. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Superbox*, 1966 (design) / 1968 (produce), Produce: Poltronova © erede Ettore Sottsass, JASPAR, Tokyo, 2025 C5248 ★

Upper right. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Odalisque*, 1964-66 (design) / 1986 (produce) , Produce: Mirabili Arte d'Abitaire © erede Ettore Sottsass, JASPAR, Tokyo, 2025 C5248 ★

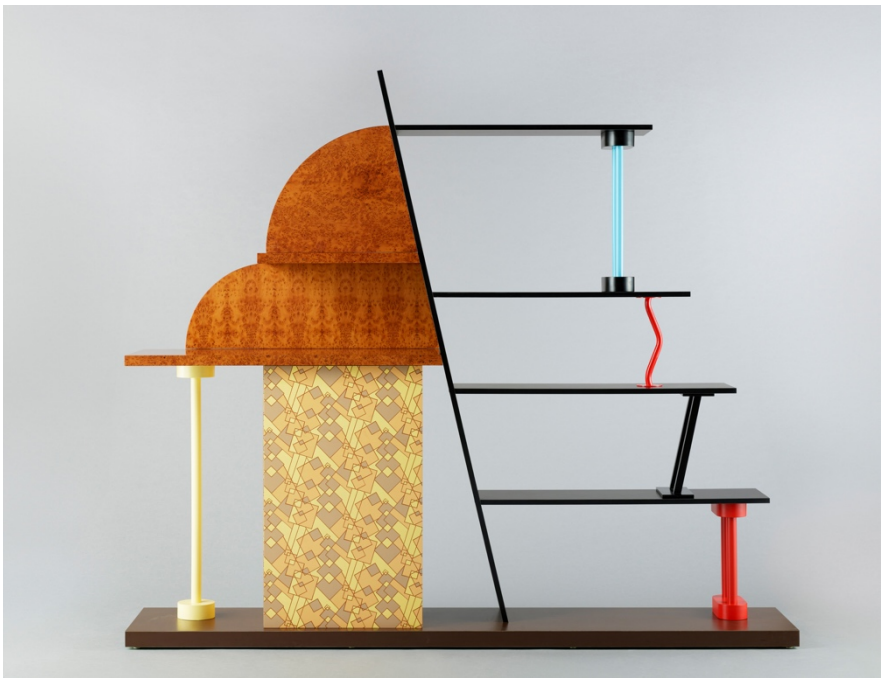
Bottom left and right. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Drawing for Totems*, 1964 © Erede Ettore Sottsass

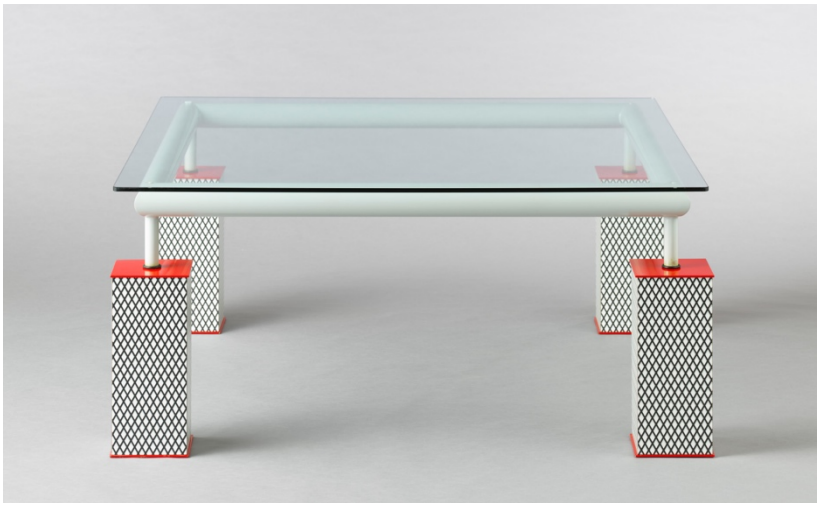
All works are in the collection of the Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation

## 3. The 1970s: A Journey Through Design

Ettore SOTTSASS, *Metaphors: Design of a door to enter into darkness*, 1973, Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation © erede Ettore Sottsass, JASPAR, Tokyo, 2025 C5248 ★

# 4. The 1980s: The Memphis Period





Upper left. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Casablanca*, 1981 (design / produce), Produce: Memphis Milano © erede Ettore Sottsass, JASPAR, Tokyo, 2025 C5248 ★

Upper right. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Malabar,* 1982 (design / produce), Produce: Memphis Milano; Bitossi © Erede Ettore Sottsass

Bottom left. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Mandarin*, 1981 (design / produce), Produce: Memphis Milano © Erede Ettore Sottsass

Bottom right. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Alcor*, 1983 (design / produce), Produce: Memphis Milano; Toso Vetri d'Arte © Erede Ettore Sottsass

All works are in the collection of the Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation

## 5. Since the 1990s: An Endless Adventure in Design

Left. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Cabinet No. 71,* 2006 (design / produce), Produce: Gallery Mourmans © Erede Ettore Sottsass

Upper middle. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Vase no. 4*　Upper right. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Vase no. 10*　Bottom left. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Vase no. 16*　Bottom right. Ettore SOTTSASS, *Vase no. 17*
2006 (design / produce), Produce: Gallery Mourmans; Gino Cenedese e Figlio; Van Tetterode Glass Studio © Erede Ettore Sottsass

All works are in the collection of the Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation

## Exhibition Overview

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|---|---|
| Exhibition title: | Ettore Sottsass: Design begins where magic begins |
| Exhibition period: | June 23 [Tue.] - October 4 [Sun.], 2026 |
| Opening hours: | 10:00 - 18:00 (until 20:00 on Fridays) |
| | *Last entry 30 minutes before closing. |
| Closed: | Mondays (except July 20, September 21), July 21, September 24 |
| Venue: | Artizon Museum, 6F Gallery |
| Organized by | Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation |
| Under the auspices of | the Embassy of Italy in Tokyo |
| Admission (incl. tax): | Timed entry system |
| | (Online booking starts from May 23, 2026) |
| | Online ticket: 1,200 yen |
| | In-Person ticket (purchase at museum): 1,500 yen |
| | Students: Free entry (Advance online booking required.) |
| | *In-Person ticket may be purchased at the museum, if the time slot is not full. |
| | *Advance booking is not required for children up to junior high school age. |
| | *This admission fee gives the visitor access to the concurrent exhibition. |

Curator: SUGIMOTO Nagisa, TADOKORO Natsuko
Special website: https://www.artizon.museum/exhibition_sp/sottsass2026/en/

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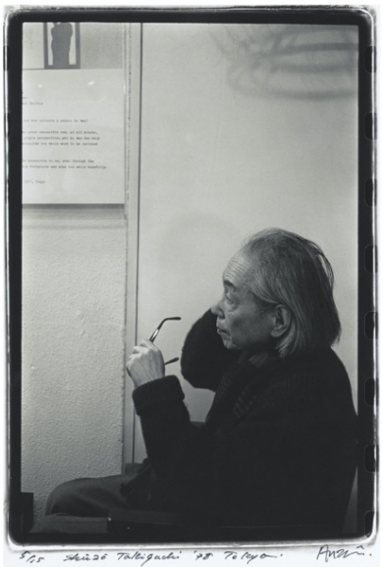
https://www.artizon.museum/en/
Directions: 5 minutes on foot from JR Tokyo Station (Yaesu Central Exit); Tokyo Metro Ginza Line Kyobashi Station (No.6, 7 Exit); Tokyo Metro Ginza Line, Tozai Line, Toei Asakusa Line Nihombashi Station (B1 Exit)

## Concurrent exhibition

## TAKIGUCHI Shuzo: Writing and Drawing

Venue: Artizon Museum, 6, 5F Galleries
Organized by Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation



ANZAI Shigeo, *Takiguchi Shuzo, Jiyugaoka Gallery, Tokyo, January 1978,* 1978/early 1980s, Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation © Estate of Shigeo Anzai

The Artizon Museum, operated by the Ishibashi Foundation is pleased to present the exhibition *Takiguchi Shuzo: Writing and Drawing*, together with *Selections from the Ishibashi Foundation Collection* in the museum's fifth- and fourth-floor galleries, featuring highlights of the collection with a focus on modern art.

The Ishibashi Foundation collection contains 163 works (including collaborations with others) by Takiguchi Shuzo (1903–1979), a leading poet and art critic of the 20th century. This exhibition will be the first to present roughly half of these works together since their acquisition.

For Takiguchi, who had long engaged with the world through writing, what did it mean to draw instead? With this question as its point of departure, the exhibition surveys the full scope of his activities, from poetry and art criticism to exhibition planning and exchanges with other artists, presenting approximately 140 items in total. These include Takiguchi's visual works, produced using a wide range of experimental techniques, alongside works by related artists such as Paul Klee, Marcel Duchamp, and Joan Miró.

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