

## Press release

OSVALDO BORSANI, Exhibition  
Triennale di Milano  
16 May – 15 September 2018

Exhibition Curated by Norman Foster and Tommaso Fantoni  
Design and Content by Norman Foster Foundation and Archivio Osvaldo Borsani with Triennale Design Museum

## Madrid, 23 April 2018

Osvaldo Borsani was a visionary figure of twentieth-century design; an architect, designer, and entrepreneur who transformed his father's furniture atelier into an international brand, co-founding Tecno in 1953 with his twin brother Fulgenzio. Borsani embodied a pivotal moment in Italy's design history and the dominating role of Milan during that era: a confluence of economic might, technological advancement, and flourishing artistry. At its core, this is a story about a family's legacy that spans over a century. Osvaldo's daughter Valeria and son-in-law Marco Fantoni, both architects and designers, worked closely with him until his death in 1985. Today, his grandson--architect Tommaso Fantoni--continues to spearhead the preservation of the family's illustrious history through his leadership of the Archivio.

16 May 2018 will see the launch of a retrospective exhibition, the first of its kind, at Milan's Triennale Design Museum. 'Osvaldo Borsani' is curated by Norman Foster and Tommaso Fantoni. The show will trace the arc of Borsani's trajectory, presenting over 300 objects: from handcrafted pieces to industrial icons, alongside an incredibly rich array of archival materials including drawings and photographs. The exhibition design, created specifically for the venue, and contents have been developed by the Norman Foster Foundation and Archivio Osvaldo Borsani with the Triennale Design Museum.

The connection between Foster and Borsani was first established in 1983, when Marco Fantoni approached Foster's London studio to offer Tecno's services for the interior fit-out of one of their projects. Although that particular collaboration was never realized, the initial meeting eventually led to the development of the acclaimed Nomos table and related workplace systems. The Nomos was also the last design Tecno design that Osvaldo put into production before his passing.

The story continued in 2000, when Tommaso Fantoni joined the practice of Foster + Partners before leaving in 2011 to establish his own studio in Milan. It was around this time that Tommaso and his parents, Valeria and Marco, began discussing the idea of a retrospective on the life and work of Osvaldo; a figure whose boundary-pushing yet artisanal approach revolutionized industrial design, and whose significant contribution to the field has been largely unexamined by scholars and overlooked by the public.

After securing a partnership with the Triennale Design Museum, the Borsani family decided to approach Foster and introduce another chapter in their story of collaboration. The curatorial aim for the exhibition was deceptively simple: to select the most exemplary objects from each period of Osvaldo's fifty-year career, beginning in 1925. Tapping into an international network of dealers and private collectors, the Archivio was able to gather an unprecedented number of rare works, including unique collaborations with artists such as Arnaldo Pomodoro and Adriano Spilimbergo. Featured prominently in the exhibition is a concentration of remarkable pieces created with Lucio Fontana between 1949-54, a period that captured the apex of their collaboration and shared transition from Baroque to Modern. Other highlights include the Graphis desk, which debuted in 1968 and was radical in the sense that it was the first modular, all-white office furniture.

In terms of the exhibition design, Foster notes: "The central theme of a timeline...will enable the visitor to walk through the different periods in the work of this not so well known but significant design pioneer and along the way to find insights into the wider process of design." The cubic display system, inspired by the architectural sculptures of Sol LeWitt, required over 30,000 pieces of wood to assemble. The flexible and monumental system spans the entire length of the Triennale's U-shaped gallery, with the opposite wall featuring original drawings and photographs. This chronological and continuous display echoes Valeria's prediction that her father's retrospective would be "in one line."

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue designed by the Archivio, with text by Giampiero Bosoni, author of the recently released monograph *Osvaldo Borsani: Architect, Designer, Entrepreneur*, published by Skira.

# Norman Foster Foundation

## About the Norman Foster Foundation

The Norman Foster Foundation promotes interdisciplinary thinking and research to help new generations of architects, designers and urbanists to anticipate the future. We believe in the importance of connecting architecture, design, technology and the arts to better serve society and in the value of a holistic education that encourages experimentation through research and projects.

The Norman Foster Foundation holds the Norman Foster Archive and Library, which provide a window into the larger narrative and history of our built environment through the work of Norman Foster.

The Norman Foster Foundation is based in Madrid and operates globally.

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## About Archivio Osvaldo Borsani

The Archivio Osvaldo Borsani (A.O.B.), which has existed since the 1930s, was reconfigured in 1991 with the primary aim of preserving and cataloguing the archival records of a leading figure in twentieth-century Italian design. Located inside the Villa Borsani in Varedo, the Archivio houses material from the 1920s onwards, including thousands of original watercolors, technical drawings, and photographs. It also contains the epistolary testimonies of Borsani's relationships with the most celebrated artists, architects, and exponents of Italian culture of his time. The Archivio is the only institution authorized to certify the authenticity of Osvaldo Borsani's work. The A.O.B.'s board of directors includes Valeria Borsani Fantoni, Marco Fantoni, Tommaso Fantoni, and Federico Borsani.

## About Norman Foster

After graduating from Manchester University School of Architecture and City Planning in 1961 Norman Foster won a Henry Fellowship to Yale University, where he was a fellow of Jonathan Edwards College and gained a Master's Degree in Architecture. In 1967 he established Foster Associates, which has since evolved as Foster + Partners, where he continues as Executive Chairman. He became the 21st Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureate in 1999 and was awarded the Praemium Imperiale Award for Architecture in Tokyo in 2002. In 2009, he became the 29th laureate of the prestigious Prince of Asturias award for the Arts and was awarded the Knight Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. In 1997 he was appointed by the Queen of the United Kingdom to the Order of Merit and in 1999 was honoured with a peerage, taking the title of Lord Foster of Thames Bank.

Norman Foster is the President of the Norman Foster Foundation. The Norman Foster Foundation, based in Madrid and operating globally, promotes interdisciplinary thinking and research to help new generations of architects, designers and urbanists to anticipate the future.

## About Tommaso Fantoni

Tommaso Fantoni established TOMOARCHITECTS in 2011, returning to Milan after more than a decade working in the London and New York offices of Foster + Partners. During his tenure with the firm, Fantoni participated in a number of international projects including several in New York City: Tower 2 at World Trade Center, the Sperone Westwater Gallery, and Lord Foster's private residence. TOMOARCHITECTS was founded on the principles of sustainability and simplicity in contemporary architecture. The practice is multidisciplinary, and projects span from residential interiors to cultural institutions--most notably the Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro in Milan--as well as product design presented at the Salone del Mobile.

## PRESS ENQUIRIES

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