

**The show that never showed**

*J. Roger Guilfoyle, recently promoted Editor-in-Chief of INDUSTRIAL DESIGN magazine, contributed this eye-witness report of Milan's abortive Triennale Design Exhibition.—Ed.*

In light of recent developments in Czechoslovakia, it almost seems irrelevant to discuss the student seizure of the 14th Triennale the day after it opened in Milan. The grievances the students cited are expressions of the dichotomy which exists between the quality of Italian design and its inaccessibility to consumers. But the freedom which permitted the students to close the Triennale only marks the contrast with Warsaw Pact's actions toward Czechoslovakia.

The Triennale had been plagued with difficulties ever since it was postponed for a year because of Expo 67. The feeling at the time of the postponement was that it was better not to interfere with Expo since many of the participating nations would be placed under too great a strain. Unfortunately, as things worked out, the postponement was one of those mischances of history. In the year which passed, student ferment grew and an exhibition like the Triennale provided an excellent target.

An Italian friend of mine dismissed the seizure of the Triennale by "Oh the Italians! Anything the students do in Paris, the Milanese will copy." Actually, however, the problem is more complex. The quality of Italian design is light-years ahead of American design in its use of plastics. Beautiful goods, designed for mass production, are one-of-a-kind. Italy has not the manufacturing capability to produce the goods its design artisans create. The irony is that only the United States, even in its present semi-war economy, has the capability to mass-produce vast quantities of goods profitably.

In going through the ruins of the Triennale, I was struck by two things. One, of course, was the amount of damage the students had done in their two-week occupation. The other, more notably, was that on June 21, two days before the Triennale was scheduled to reopen (it apparently reopened on June 23, but the Swedes had gone home and a lot of damage remained unrepaired), it was obvious that the Triennale could not have been finished on opening day.

After I returned to New York I spoke to David Rowland, the designer of the 40/4 chair, who



Exhibit by New York architects Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates in the International sector of the Triennale, being occupied by rioters.



Lived-in look after the rioters. Triennale chair (below) is exception to the "cube" form predominant throughout.

had attended the opening. He witnessed three workmen splatter red paint over a white wall. So perhaps the problems of the Triennale were deeper than students' denunciation of fascism.

Perhaps, an additional difficulty with the 14th Triennale was its theme, "The Greater Number." Walking through the national exhibits one did not see much evidence of the concern for man which its theme expressed. In general, one carried

away a memory of a trade show — a very well-designed trade show—evincing concern it did not feel.

The Canadian exhibit was devoted primarily to the architectural landmarks which are beginning to spring up in Canada's cities. Rumania displayed its crafts. Finland displayed its manufactures. Mexico presented an expanse of its graphics program for XIX Olympiad. Japan silk-screened art of its



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classical past to stainless steel screens. Switzerland evoked chalets with its yellow pine environment. Yet, and this is ironic in light of recent weeks, I was particularly struck by the quality of the Czech exhibit. Even before World War II, Czechoslovakia was the most highly industrialized of the East European nations. The evidence at the Triennale was that Czechoslovakia still retains the same level of industrial sophistication. Particularly notable, in the glass-enclosed Czech exhibit, was an ergonomically designed dentist chair.

Naturally, since the Triennale is an Italian show, its flavor and seasoning lay with the host nation. Outside the Palazzo d'arte, the Italians built a temporary pavilion—really nothing more than a roof—to house the Triennale version of futurama. Joe Colombo, Pietro Derossi, Riccardo Rosso, Raimondi, and Enrico Castellani were among the Italian designers represented, and Quasar Khan of France designed one of those transparent plastic environments which one is beginning to see everywhere. A cocktail lounge which Colombo designed had a long plastic bar and foam cubes covered in brightly colored oil-cloth for furnishings.

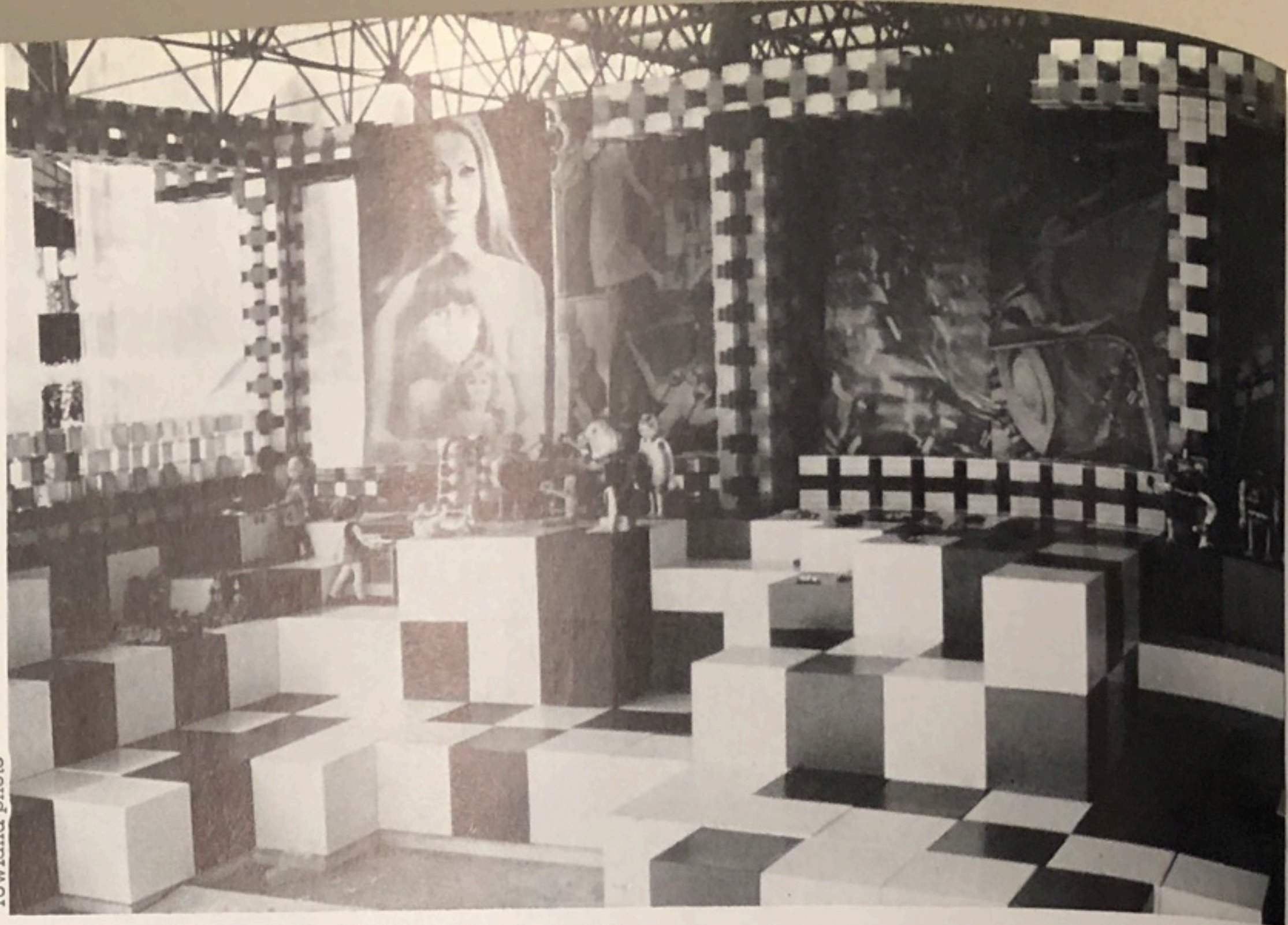
In the end, one is left with a mixture of regret and disappointment regarding the 14th Triennale. Amid its ruins, there were traces of the concern which its sponsors had in mind when they planned "The Greater Number." The theme exhibit, although excessively wordy, was also visually challenging. In truth, the quality of design never lagged and perhaps a trade show is the wrong place to look for compassion.—R.G.

*The following comment on this summer's ill-fated Triennale was contributed by David Rowland. Mr. Rowland designed the 40/4 stacking chair for General Fireproofing known to our readers as the winner of many awards including the 1964 Triennale—Ed.*

The May 30 closing of the Triennale by students and other dissidents which some of us witnessed might be seen to be one part of a present world student movement or development which says if you don't agree with the "establishment" it's time to riot.

After wars are fought and riots subside, the real revolution always takes place finally back at the drawing board.

If we look at the issues with more reason and less emotion we are sure to recognize that



Doll and toy display, again the Italian preference for cubism.

the real revolution takes place in the quietness of men's minds. The recent article in *Fortune* entitled "The Decline of Industrial Designers" should give all of us designers reason for concern. But if youthful designer-rioters are pushing for better design, the place to begin is not in the streets, but in the fertile ground of their own minds. After all the noise is over, the real truly meaningful revolution lies in the inventiveness of the individual.

In the case of rioters throwing puke bombs in the Museum of Modern Art, the closing of the Cannes Film Festival, the trouble at the Venice Biennale and the Milan Triennale (where exhibits were splashed with red-paint slogans including the name of Mao), the criticism was that the management was "fascist." I confess at knowing nothing about the operation of the Italian Section, though having heard some disapproval of it by people who said it included favoritism.

I would like to report that my own experience with the Triennale involved no "who-you-know" politicking, for the very reason that I knew nobody. In 1957 I entered a chair, photos of which had been approved in Italy by people I didn't know and it was exhibited. It won no prizes. In 1964 there was again no politicking. The 40/4 chair was left for the U.S. Triennale Committee to consider. I was later told that they sat on it for 4 or 5 hours while considering other entries and approved it for the U.S. Section. In Milan it was honored with the award of the Grande Premio by a supreme committee composed of several other people I did not know, from several nations. For my part, I can say that the receipt of the prize was not in

any way dependent on knowing someone. Rewards in previous years to such people as Bucky Fuller, are probably acceptable to most of us as having been especially appropriate.

We must at some point realize that better design doesn't come from marrying the Boss's daughter or playing golf with the company president, or through riotous social upheaval either. It takes place in our own minds at our drawing boards and in our workshops. That is where the real revolution for the material betterment of man's lot in this world takes place. If the Triennale can thus encourage this kind of thinking, viva la Triennale!

#### Les assises

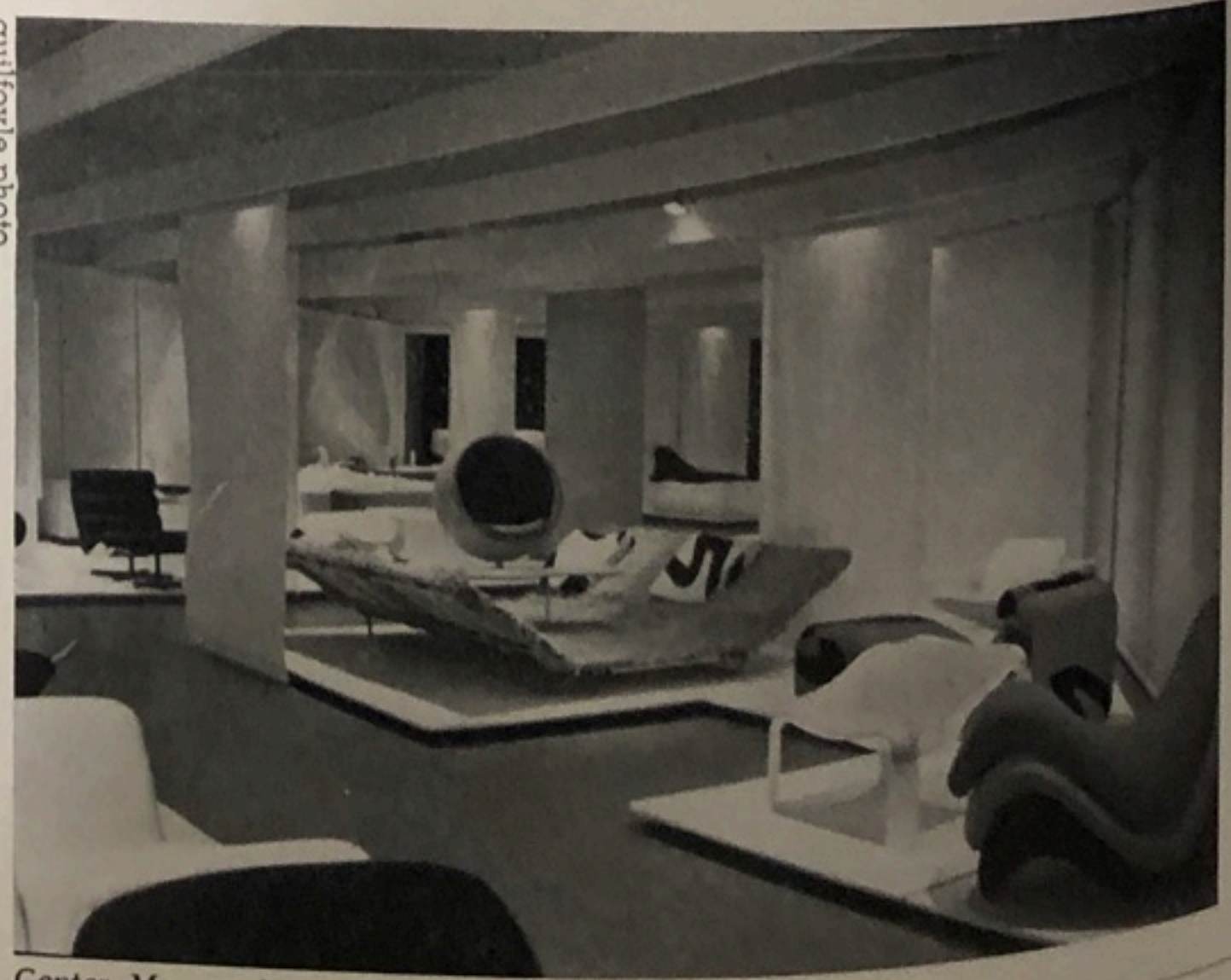
Midst all the turmoil in Paris early this summer, life in the art galleries and museums went on as usual. At the Musee des Arts Decoratifs at the Palais de Louvre a retrospective chair exhibition drew a great deal of attention in spite of the fact that, in the United States, at least, chair exhibits are becom-

ing "tres ordinaire." Not so in France, however, where the long dormant furniture industry is making a comeback with some startling designs and the exhibition itself points to renewed interest in the whole furniture field.

The exhibition traces chair design from a Finnish tree-stump shape of the Middle Ages to twentieth-century designs. Most of the show is contemporary in feeling (the first item to strike the visitor is the chair designed specifically for John Glenn's suborbital flight) with just enough historical material to justify its being called a retrospective show.

Among the most interesting pieces on view (the show ran from May 3 to July 29): Verner Panton's colorful sitting cubicles, a bathtub structure filled with 200 foam balls which the sitter arranges to suit his own shape by Gerard Torrens, Olivier Mourgue's new environmental seating design, and Joseph A. Motte's stainless steel chair.—R.G.

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Center, Mourgue's carpet seating.

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