

## KARTELL LUCE VIVA: THE KARTELL LIGHTING EXHIBITION WITH A FOCUS ON EMOTION AND FUNCTION

Lighting plays a significant role in the history of Kartell, and for Salone del Mobile 2023 this history is being explored by a temporary exhibition entitled “Luce Viva” installed in the central area of the ground floor of the Kartell Museum in Noviglio. The exhibition invites visitors to discover 25 of Kartell's most interesting lamps, past and present, arranged along a winding route that blends history and modernity and presents some of the best designed and most poetic creations in the history of lighting.

A mix of past and present, history and modernity, is one of the constants in the cultural offering of the Kartell Museum. Thanks to its status as part of a living company, the Museum is extremely well placed to tell the story of Kartell from a privileged point of view. It has access to Kartell's historic collection, comprising around 8,000 articles, and to a similar number of contemporary items that embody the values, technology and production methods that form an intrinsic part of the company's modern identity.

The **“Luce Viva”** exhibition explores the poetic nature of light and its ability to express beauty and generate emotion. The exhibition is divided into five sections that investigate the lighting design from the points of view of emotion and function. Luce Viva is curated by Elisa Storace, with a layout by Studio Laviani. In its first section, entitled **“Luce che svela”**, two small contemporary lamps illustrate the philosophical significance of light. The “Luce che illumina” section then explores the theme of lamps at the service of mankind and presents the latest functions made possible by technical innovation. The next section, **“Luce che si illumina”** presents light as a protagonist in a play of materials and colours. The **“Luce che racconta”** section examines lamps as decorative furnishings with textured and sculpted surfaces. Finally, the **“Luce viva”** section features a single lamp and returns us to the exhibition's metaphorical theme by way of conclusion.

### **“Luce che svela – Light that reveals”**

The exhibition's starting point in the **“Luce che svela”** section is provided by two archetypal lamps, a candle and a lantern in contemporary form. These are the “Goodnight” lamp designed by Philippe Starck in 2021 and the “Lantern” lamp designed by Fabio Novembre in 2017. Both exhibits hark back to lamps of a distant past and both illuminate only their immediate surroundings. Without casting light on distant objects, they offer a clear view and understanding of everything nearby. They can both be carried around easily and used to light the way. Their characteristics seem inspired by the thoughts of the philosophers John Locke and Diogenes.

The exhibition begins with “Goodnight”, a small rechargeable lamp that produces a soft, warm light. The design is based on the concept and form of a primordial candle, transformed into an object of high

technology and made from recycled material. This candle and its light catapult us back into the past, to the England of the 1600s and to the pages of “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding” by the doctor and philosopher John Locke. The candle symbolises the light that illuminates the mind, permits vision and brings an understanding of the world around us and, through it, of ourselves.

Next comes “Lantern”, the portable lamp designed by Fabio Novembre in 2017. This contemporary, rechargeable, coloured and transparent lantern is easy to carry thanks to a ring on the cover. On close examination, it seems to have jumped out of the late 18th century painting by Johann Tischbein of the Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope hurrying about with a lantern in search of an honest man. In the thinking of Diogenes, the metaphor of the lantern is associated with the idea of truth and honesty. It is used to describe the light that allows us to see through the illusions and falsehoods of social conventions and guides us to embrace the truth in our nature.

### **“Luce che illumina – Light that illuminates”**

The **“Luce che illumina”** section of the exhibition offers an interesting reading of a selection of lamps by master designers of the past and present. The section explores the main purpose of lighting appliances – illumination. Illumination can greatly improve the level of comfort in any space. If too glaring or too weak, it can be unpleasant or even bad for the eyes. Warm, welcoming light, on the other hand, makes people feel more relaxed and at ease. People therefore interact with lamps to adjust the intensity and the quality of the light around them.

Understanding this already back in the 1960s, Kartell began researching how people used lamps and developed the lighting modes and functions presented in this section. Exhibits include Marco Zanuso’s first “KD 58” column lamp of 1961, which emits a diffused ambient light. This is complemented by a selection of lamps that allow users to vary the intensity of light, like the small “4015” and “4024” table lamps designed by Giotto Stoppino and Joe Colombo in 1962 and 1968 respectively. Other exhibits, such as the famous “Vademecum” of 1970, again by Colombo, explore ways to direct the beam of light. The latest product in this section is the high-tech, folding and refined “Aledin” desk lamp by Alberto and Francesco Meda.

### **“Luce che si illumina – Light that is illuminated”**

Visitors to the exhibition next come to the “Luce che illumina” section which includes a selection of lamps by past and present designers and explores lighting as a protagonist in a play of materials and colours. The section hosts a series of suspension lamps with striking shapes and colours. These lamps are ideal for larger spaces and dominate their surroundings with their original forms and colour schemes. The shape of all the lamps on display here was determined by the limitations of the production technology and polymeric materials available at the time of their design.

Exploiting the transparency and low weight of polymeric materials, in 1957 Kartell began a series of experiments in the field of lighting. In the exhibition, these are represented by the small **“KS 10”** suspension lamp made from cellulose acetate using innovative technology developed in the UK. KS 10 was one of a series of models designed by Gino Colombini, then technical director and designer for Kartell’s Household Products Division. The section also includes the **“KD 5”** and **“KD 6”** lamps designed in 1958 by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, the first external designers to work with Kartell. The lighting appliances designed by the Castiglioni feature bright colours. In addition to being perfectly constructed, these original lamps incorporate excellent light sources and are pioneers of colour. The alluring hues of their hemispherical bodies make these lamps the focus of attention in any furnishing scheme. Though not a dominant factor, the decorative function of these articles represents their most characteristic quality and makes them protagonists in all settings.

From Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, our thoughts automatically go to Ferruccio Laviani, the pupil of Achille who went on to become a master of lighting design for Kartell. The most representative models in Kartell’s contemporary lighting collection are signed by Laviani and include the **“FL/Y”** suspension lamp with its hemispherical, clear coloured body. Back in **2002**, this product helped revitalise Kartell’s lighting division, becoming the first in a series of new products capable of combining the essence of classic lamp design with the latest tastes and heralding a period of unique, original creativity. The section closes with Philippe Starck’s “Angelo Stone” floor lamp of 2023 which seems to illuminate itself as the result of its ingenious shade and innovative LED light source.

### **“Luce che racconta – Light that tells a story”**

After the colourful, eye-catching lamps listed above, the exhibition moves on to the years of technological development that saw Kartell create pleated, folded and flowing surfaces capable of embodying kaleidoscopic themes and triggering a wide range of emotions. The **“Luce che racconta”** section opens with the iconic **“Bourgie” table lamp of 2004**, designed by Ferruccio Laviani. This creation transformed the classic brass-base lamp with cloth shade into a modern, plastic shape that illuminates the immediate area and projects iridescent reflections on to the walls.

“Bourgie” takes its place in the display alongside the historic and imposing **“Re Sole”** methacrylate and metal lamp designed by Gae Aulenti in 1969, featuring projected rays of light that became the forerunners of much formal research.

The reflections, shapes and patterns invented by today’s designers still provide the driving force behind Kartell’s efforts to go that extra step beyond the limits of moulding technology. Kartell is constantly striving to develop new technical solutions like those adopted by the extremely advanced moulds for the large “Kabuki” floor lamp, again by Laviani, or for the “Planet” family of lamps designed by Tokujin Yoshioka in 2019.

### **“Luce viva – Living light”**

The last section in the exhibition, entitled “Luce viva”, contains only one lamp, the **“Geen-a”** reading lamp of 2021 designed by Ferruccio Laviani and dedicated to his mother Gina, an avid reader. Given the sense of filial duty that emerges from this dedication, the “Geen-a” lamp could well be seen as a material embodiment of the philosophy of Luce Irigaray, the French thinker and psychoanalyst born in 1930 who wrote extensively on the mother figure and the relationship between gender and culture. Just as light reveals the beauty and complexity of objects in the physical world, so maternal love can reveal the beauty and complexity of human relations and of social and cultural structures.

“Goodnight”, “Lantern” and “Geen-a” therefore represent excellent reasons for looking at lighting design in a new way, and for dealing with illumination through the metaphor of light which, as philosophers have taught in all ages, informs our world-view and enables us to develop a deeper, more thorough understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

Having thrown much „light“ on the subject of Kartell lighting, the exhibition concludes by suggesting ideas and themes for future designs and materials in a company that has always been a creative workshop. Today as in the past, the shape and poetry of light still provide inspiration for Kartell and its designers. Creative talents like Ferruccio Laviani, Fabio Novembre, Alberto Meda, Philippe Starck and Tokujin Yoshioka are using increasingly high-performance materials like recycled polymers to follow in the footsteps of the great architects of the last century and to create luminous, illuminating and exciting appliances whose beams and reflections help us to understand, if only for a moment, the multifaceted and complex philosophical meaning of light.

#### **For further informations:**

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