

Marcello Nizzoli

Born 1887. Artist, architect, graphic designer and Olivetti product designer.
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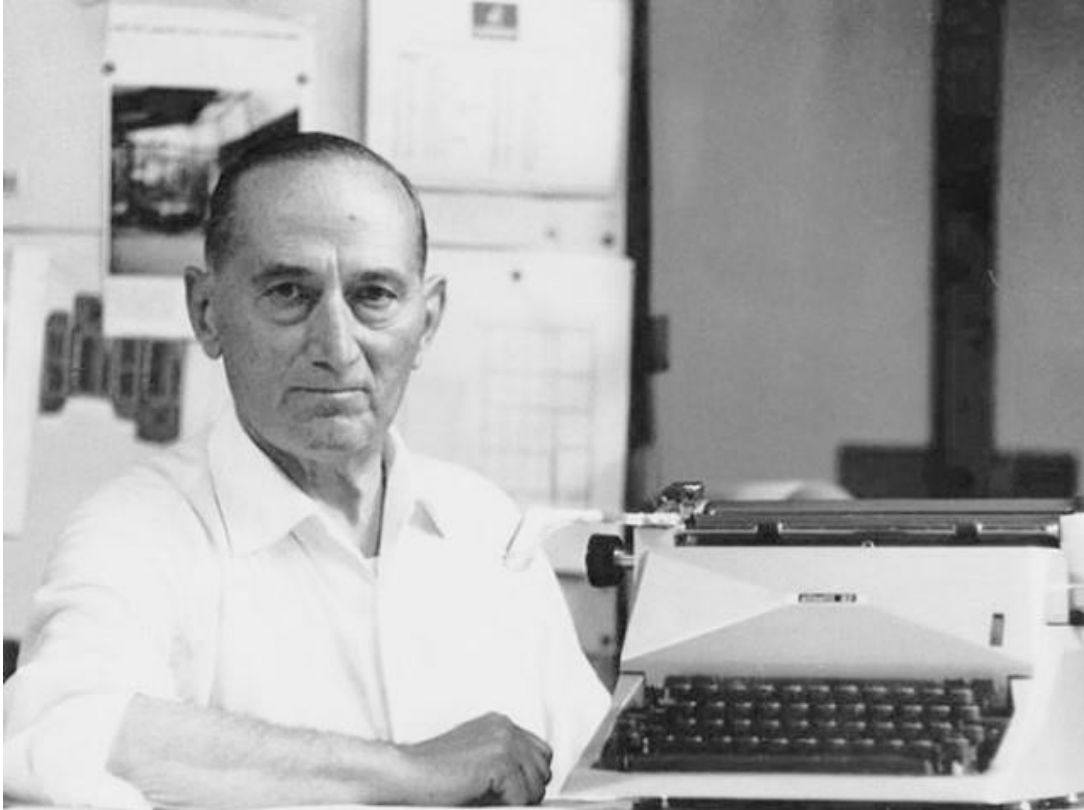


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1. Introduction

The following chapter was archived in 2024, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Wikipedia website at www.en.wikipedia.org.



Marcello Nizzoli was an Italian artist, architect, industrial and graphic designer. He was the chief designer for Olivetti for many years and was responsible notably for the iconic Lettera 22 portable typewriters in 1950.

After graduating from the Accademia di Belle Arti of Parma (1913), he worked as a draughtsman in Milan until World War I. The influence of Futurism and, particularly, the work of Fortunato Depero were fundamentally important in his cultural formation. His success as a draughtsman was established at the Prima Esposizione Internazionale delle Arti Decorative in Monza (1923), but he continued to diversify, designing fashion accessories such as handbags, shawls and poster advertisements for famous names such as Campari and Martini.

During the 15 years after World War I, Nizzoli demonstrated his remarkable talent for handling the most diverse forms of the avant-garde movements, from Futurism to Cubism, from the Viennese Secession style to Novecento Italiano, adapting them to the taste of his cultivated middle-class clientele. Nizzoli had already designed (with Fausto Melotti) mannequins for Baldessari's early Rationalist Craja Café (1930) in Milan when he met Edoardo Persico (1931) who, with Giuseppe Pagano, had

begun to transform the magazine *Casabella* into the main forum for architectural debate. Persico's theoretical approach complemented Nizzoli's more practical orientation, and some of the most significant artefacts of Italian Rationalism emerged from their collaboration.

The Sala delle Medaglie d'Oro, in which the achievements of Italy's gold-medallist aviators were fêted at the Mostra Dell'aeronautica Italiana in Milan (1934), was an important symbolic use of the Rationalist three-dimensional grid visually to enhance as well as define function. The use of linear elements was further extended for decorative as well as spatial purposes in the Parker shop (1934–5), Milan. With Giancarlo Palanti they designed the Salone d'Onore at the Triennale of 1936 in Milan, a brilliant reconciliation of the contemporary call for a national neo-classical style with European modernism. The meeting with Persico was influential in drawing Nizzoli, his meeting in 1938 with Adriano Olivetti was equally significant as far as industrial design was concerned.



The first of a long series of calculating machines, the MC 4S Summa, was created in the Olivetti planning and research office, surroundings highly favourable to collaboration between artists and technicians. It set the pattern for future projects. In-depth consideration was given to technical and ergonomic aspects of the product and to easy user-identification of its parts, resulting in a unified concept, based on careful analysis rather than on an a priori formula.

He continued his architectural work, along the lines laid down by Persico in the early 1930s, working towards the integration of the arts with architecture, as in the E.N.I. office block (1956–8; with G. M. Oliveri) at San Donato Milanese, Milan.

2. Architect

The buildings below are two examples of Nizzoli's architectural work. In most cases Nizzoli worked in co-operation with other architects.



View of the Salone d'onore, by Edoardo Persico, Marcello Nizzoli, and Giancarlo Palanti, at the 1936 VI Milan Triennale. In the background is the Athena Nike by Luciano Fontana. Archivi Triennale Milano.



Athena Nike photographed by Luciano Fontana. Archivi Triennale Milano.

Designed by Marcello Nizzoli and Giuseppe Mario Oliveri in 1954, this is the last of the residential building projects in the area implemented up to the start of the 1960s. The building is made up of three blocks with flats designed in such way as to provide access to the eastern interior areas. On the west side, these three blocks have a single façade compared to the eastern front where different formal and compositional solutions can be observed on the façade on which the horizontal segments contain the entrance and the stairs on the south side, the fan folds on the north side and the use of prestigious materials such as blue clinker in the central block.

The independent entrance has visible pillars covered in different coloured ceramic tiles and a mosaic artwork representing an elephants and other forest animals, designed by Nizzoli. A type of projecting roof with a central oculus is supported by cast iron balusters. In front of the building is a bench and a cement kerb that borders off the perimeter of a sand pit that hosts a children's playground also designed by Nizzoli.

3. Artist



Landscape, Dolomites. 1924-5.



Paessagio. 1924-5.



Landscape. Watercolour on paper. 1948.

4. Graphic Designer

Marcello Nizzolli was a prolific designer of advertising posters for clients including Campari and Martini. After graduating from the Accademia di Belle Arti of Parma (1913), he worked as a draughtsman in Milan until World War I. The influence of Futurism and particularly, the work of Fortunato Depero were fundamentally important in his cultural formation.



5. Product Designer



Alongside his work as an architect, artist, and graphic designer, Nizzoli was a prolific product designer of calculating machines, typewriters, textiles, and leather goods. His main client, for many years, was Olivetti. His most famous design for Olivetti was the Lettera 22 portable typewriter – an international design icon which is treasured by collectors of vintage typewriters, and is included in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. With its slim form and its elegant casing it set a new standard for portable typewriters. In 1959, a jury of 100 designers promoted by the Illinois Institute of Technology chose the Lettera 22 typewriter as the first of the 100 best design products made in the last 100 years.



Other examples of outstanding product design by Marcello Nizzoli include the Summa calculating machine, the 1956 Mirella sewing machine (in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York City), a petrol pump and an office telephone.

