

MODERN DESIGN



Auction

20 March 2005
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GIO PONTI AND PIERO FORNASETTI secretaire

Italy, c. 1950 | lacquered transfer painted wood, enameled metal, brass
88 h × 31½ w × 16 d in (224 × 80 × 41 cm)

Piero Fornasetti's contribution to Italian design is unparalleled in its variety, imagination, and style. Tackling objects from ashtrays to furniture to bathroom sets, he used imagery from classical Italian architecture to portraits of a fin-de-siecle courtesan. Spending his life in Milan, Fornasetti was surrounded by Italian art, design and architecture, and drew on these traditions in the creation of his own unique visual vocabulary. He extracted bits and pieces of culture and reinterpreted them to fit the modern objects he decorated.

Remnants of artistic and scientific history are seemingly scattered over the surfaces of everyday objects, but Fornasetti's creative process was one of deduction and filtration. No image or placement of decoration was random, rather the details were well considered and each choice furthered his artistic vision. The results are mysterious visual puzzles and surreal scenes that palpate with mnemonic weight. Fornasetti bridged the usually disparate design elements of form and decoration by incorporating the formal qualities of the object into the decorative details. By playing on the shape and scale of the objects, he reinforced his unique vision of a world composed of appropriated images. Metaphorically, this visual system stands in for a view of contemporary culture as united with the past and future. While he draws on the past, his pictures are distinctly forward thinking without a trace of nostalgia. Accrued values and meanings are inherent in the

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images but their cultural significance does not hinder them from taking on new directions in the context of Fornasetti's designs. His fictive space of borrowed images are playful and ironic, yet also represent his serious contemplations of history, culture, nature and humankind. This secretaire is one of only a few examples of this form, representing the historic collaboration between Fornasetti and Gio Ponti. Each composition stands as an independent illustration, though when read together the cabinet represents a distinct perspective on the relationship between man and nature. An array of images depict earth's bounties and the cultural and scientific developments that man has accomplished in concert with nature. Various images refer to architecture, mechanical engineering, astronomy, geometry and other intellectual feats, while musical instruments, hunting and fishing tools, animals, and fruit represent culture and everyday life. The interior illustration of a celebrating man represents Fornasetti's own celebration of the harmony between man and nature.

Estimate: \$90,000–120,000

Result: \$140,000

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