

# Concrete PLAN

DESIGN — RESIDENCE — Rome



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Octogenarian Italian painter Lucia di Luciano's home and studio, which her husband, artist Giovanni Pizzo, designed for them in the early 1970s, is testimony to a long and creative life devoted to visual art in all its forms.



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"Painting is as important to me as waking up each day," says Lucia di Luciano, the 89-year-old artist whose kinetic abstractions were part of a breakthrough postwar movement from Italy. "My thoughts are all on the surfaces of my paintings. To stop working would have brought my mind to a halt and probably my life as well."

Alongside her husband, artist Giovanni Pizzo, she's been painting for 75 years, most of that time in the modernist concrete house Pizzo designed for them in the rural greenbelt Formello district of Rome. The work stacked in the couple's home and adjoining studios attests to a long and productive life.

Di Luciano has no intention of slowing down now and no reason to, with an extraordinary spotlight on her work at the Venice Biennale this year as part of the exhibition's main pavilions. She describes her monochromatic works, which hang in Rome's National Gallery and sell at auction, as "a mental game, where the geometries seem to move and spin, that produces variations similar to music" – like a visualisation of the sensorial effect of a song.

At home in Formello, in the brick shed housing her studio and Pizzo's next door, Di Luciano stands by a window-lit table jammed with jars of pigment. The paint-splattered men's button-down shirts she uses as smocks are piled on the nearby couch. Di Luciano and Pizzo continue to work at their easels for eight hours every day.



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1. Lucia di Luciano and Giovanni Pizzo's living room  
2. Pizzo explaining the geometry behind his paintings  
3. Collection of glass vessels on the sideboard  
4. The couple in front of their home

“We need our separate studios and to be alone with our art out here where no one can distract us,” she says. The two workshops look out at a broad mulberry tree and sloping green hills with hardly another home in sight. A flock of sheep grazes in the valley, their tinkling bells the only sound above the breeze.

Di Luciano met Pizzo in the 1950s while studying at Rome’s fine arts academy and struck up a creative partnership that would endure for a lifetime. Being married to a male painter gave her entry to artistic circles that were still closed to women in those days. The pair helped form the short-lived but influential Gruppo 63 of like-minded creators of Programmed art.

Pizzo worked as an architect, designing a slew of banks and beach houses in cutting-edge styles that blended brutalism with geometry, as well as the couple’s home, which he conceived in 1960. Its roof combines concrete planes that seem to float and defy the heaviness of the material, with unexpected angles juxtaposed together and walls turning inwards to avoid straight corners. Surrounded by blackberry bushes and umbrella pines, the house is an unexpected exemplar of the mid-century vanguard in a countryside town. It is filled with the couple’s collection of pioneering 1960s design furniture: a monumental column table in white marble by Carlo Scarpa, a chrome tube couch and mesh-covered Patroclo lamp by Gae Aulenti,

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the iconic blooming wire Platner chair by Knoll and more. “We bought for beauty and it was a time when there was a lot of beauty,” says Pizzo. The magnificent pool, constructed when the couple’s two children were small, is habitually empty now. They’re too busy painting to swim.

Pizzo also made countless jewels for Di Luciano, hanging out with goldsmiths to learn to forge, solder and emboss metal. Today she is wearing a necklace made of folded ribbons of silver that he designed. “I dress a bit strangely,” she says, showing off the triangular patches of florals and lace she’s sewn onto her sweater and scarf. She pulls out an old magazine from a cabinet featuring a photoshoot of her designs styled by the legendary Anna Piaggi. In the 1960s Di Luciano ran a clothes shop in Rome, Mondo Giovane, selling garments as trailblazing as her paintings. She sewed miniskirts from thin sheets of the then-novel material, plastic, designed transparent Perspex purses and made outfits for Rome’s famed Piper Club.

Di Luciano’s mother had also been an artist but in the early 20th century she found no opportunity in her native Sicily, so she sewed and taught her daughter how to. “Women didn’t have any importance then but slowly we’re arriving at representation,” says Di Luciano, glancing at the studio in anticipation of returning to her easel. “Working away at art continues to open up new horizons.” Her own and ours. — K

1. Marble dining table by Carlo Scarpa
2. Blue skies over the garden
3. Di Luciano working in her studio
4. Custom-designed fireplace in the living room



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