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"It's definitely slightly polemical about what is art, who is an artist and why we expect a certain celebration of a certain type of artist."—Massimiliano Gioni

DESIGN DIALOGUE

Through his thoughtful biannual gallery exhibitions, Pascal Cuisinier educates as he deals.

BY LINDA O'KEEFE

“I don't think of myself as a dealer,”

says Pascal Cuisinier sitting in the 6th arrondissement gallery he opened just over a year ago on a Parisian street known for its throng of avant garde antique shops. “My mindset isn't particularly commercial.” The premise for his latest space is very succinct. Here he'll exhibit the work of several designers who were born during the 1920s, many of whom socialized and collaborated together. They all produced lighting and furniture for French companies during the 1950s and subsequently received various degrees of notoriety for their interior design or architecture projects. Aside from Pierre Paulin and Pierre Guariche, most are relatively undiscovered, but Cuisinier's ultimate goal is not to solely focus on drumming up sales. “I want to prove they were the best because that fact will be evident in years to come,” he says.

Cuisinier also doesn't see himself as a collector, and unlike a lot of his contemporaries his chosen profession doesn't stem from an acquisitive nature. It stems from his love of study and research. “What's true of modern art is true of the objects I show,” he says. “You can't appreciate either from a purely emotional standpoint. Historical context and the creator's intention are all important, which is why I devote so much time to verifying provenance.” His scholarly approach is evident in the Dirk Jan Rol and Janine Abraham monograph he's in the midst of writing and in the catalogues he publishes for each of the gallery's biannual exhibits.

Guariche and Paulin, along with the group's lesser-known designers—Alain Richard, Joseph André Motte, Geneviève Dangles and André Monoprix, as well as Rol and Abraham—were more conceptual than their Scandinavian, American and Italian counterparts. The paucity of postwar materials pushed them to experiment with plastics, veneers and lacquers, and they aimed to bring functional ease, technical innovation and monetary value to the mass market. However, due to small production runs and limited editions, it's rare when

their pieces surface.

From the beginning their collective attitude towards shape, volume and form resonated for Cuisinier, a trained architect, as did their impulse to equate beauty with simplicity. “I refer to them as the first French designers because they didn't pick up the stylistic threads of their predecessors, the cabinetmakers from the 1930s and '40s who founded their own ateliers,” he says. “Their process was intellectual and their collaborations with talented manufacturers like Pierre Guariche were significant. They established the precedent designers still follow today.”

As someone who has no art whatsoever in his Parisian apartment, Cuisinier prefers to theorize about a painting rather than own or live with it. “I wouldn't think of hanging a canvas or photograph to decorate a room or to create a selling milieu for my furniture,” he says. “Art and design are two separate species.” He's aware of dealers who use the two words interchangeably and who are strict about preserving mid-century objects in original condition, but he's not one of them. “I'm not conflicted about reupholstering, replacing deteriorated foam and revarnishing if necessary. If we were talking about a hand-embroidered, 18th-century chaise, things would be different, but the original material on these pieces was industrial—and besides, prolonging a chair or sofa's lifespan and usage is a testament to its iconic design.”

Cuisinier plans to show a selection of Guariche's lighting including an exceptional yellow-and-coral-red version of the G23 where a pair of counterweighted arms qualifies as a feat of engineering. “I consider him to be a genius,” says Cuisinier. “He never made a lamp where the eye is likely to come in contact with the bulb which is extremely difficult to achieve.” Furniture will include Motte's woven rattan *Tripod* chair; Paulin's *118* hybrid sofa coffee table; Richard's elm-and-lacquer wardrobe and chest of drawers, which are both new to market and a sought-after pair of rattan *Soleil* armchairs designed in 1958 by Rol and Abraham.



Tripod chair, 1949, by Joseph André Motte.



Maison des Jours Meilleurs, 1954, by Jean Prouvé; *Fauteuil Soleil*, 1958, by Janine Abraham and Dirk Jan Rol.

Janine Abraham and Dirk Jan Rol

Designing couple Janine Abraham (1929-2005) and Dirk Jan Rol (1929-) met in 1955 while employed in the Paris studio of Jacques Dumond. Abraham had studied with Rene Jean Caillette, an influential modernist whose rigorous work reconciled genuine usefulness with a reductive aesthetic. Rol was a cabinetmaker, trained as an architect in his native Holland. By 1957 the two were established as Abraham and Rol, a collaborative firm with singular talents and a shared vision. Their *Soleil* armchair (1958), an architectonic sunburst constructed from rattan, is deftly engineered and wonderfully exuberant: The tightly woven center, cinched like a sheaf of wheat, provides a snug seat and secure base, while the sinuous reeds keep radiating out, performing backbends in the air and delivering a sense of pure joy. galeriepascalcuisinier.com

Charlotte Perriand

When Steph Simon opened his gallery on Boulevard Saint-Germain in 1956, he exhibited mid-century modernism as it was being created. Operating as Edition Steph Simon, he took on an even more active role and, for more than 15 years, produced furniture designed by Charlotte Perriand and Jean Prouvé. Among these projects was Perriand's *Rangement Bibliothèque*, a versatile series of bookshelves, each using the same five elements. Galerie Downtown, which owns the Steph Simon archives, will show *Bibliothèque sur pieds* (1957), an innately stylish bookshelf featuring simple wood plank feet and bold color blocks of red, white and cerise, at Design Miami/Basel. galeriedowntown.com

Pierre Paulin

Since its unforgettable 1970 debut at the Osaka World Expo, Pierre Paulin's *Amphis* sofa continues to be a showstopper. A dynamic three-dimensional stripe, *Amphis* exerts a mythic presence, a minimalist Loch Ness monster surfacing in a mod conversation pit. Paulin (1927-2009) was a virtuoso of space-age organic forms; his steel-framed chairs, upholstered in stretch fabrics, displayed garden variety inspirations—orange slices, mushrooms, tulips—and futuristic innovation. In a room imagined by Jousse Entreprise, Paulin's angular *Spider* table (1960) sidles up to the undulating *Amphis*. Set against perforated sheet metal panels (Jean Prouvé, Henri Prouvé, 1957), it's a surprisingly Edenic and distinctly modern tableau. jousse-entreprise.com

FRANCOPHILE

In postwar France, a new generation of architects and designers produced innovative works dedicated to modernity, utility and elegance. We explore some of the best the period has to offer, on view at Design Miami/Basel.

BY SUSAN MORGAN



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Antoine Philippon and Jacqueline Lecoq

During the 1950s, a group of young French architects and designers, including Antoine Philippon (1930-1995) and Jacqueline Lecoq (1932-), revived the functionalist ideals defined by the Union des Artistes Modernes in the 1930s. Infusing UAM values with postwar optimism, this next generation employed new materials and postwar technologies to produce designs that fully embraced notions of efficiency, comfort and the better life ahead. Philippon and Lecoq's work ranged from sleek office interiors and a suave drinks cabinet to a low-slung *Multifunctional Furniture* (1958-59), sporting a television, record player and bar. Their 1967 desk, a spare wooden rectangle accessorized with white laminate and set afloat in glass frame, brokers the perfect marriage between functionalism and understated elegance. demischdanant.com

Jean Prouvé

Jean Prouvé (1901-1984) was a visionary *constructeur*, rationalist thinker and ardent devotee of folded sheet metal and corrugated aluminum. His factory, established in 1945 and located near the city of Nancy, mass-produced furniture for schools and factories and built prototypes of pre-fabricated housing, necessary objects intended for the widest possible public. Dedicated to functionality, Prouvé claimed there was no structural difference between a chair and a building. In recent years, his iconic portable buildings have been reassembled in museums and galleries. The austere beauty of *Maison des Jours Meilleurs* (1954), designed with architect Maurice Silvy, bristles with ideas and social history. patrickseguin.com

Line Vautrin

In 1948 *Vogue* proclaimed Line Vautrin “the poetess of metal.” Born into a family of metal founders, Vautrin was enormously inventive and highly independent. One early job, as a greeter in Schiaparelli's boutique, lasted just four days. While still a schoolgirl, she had created a line of gilded jewelry, selling it under the guise of her father's business. Vautrin's astonishing jewelry and sculpted objects—silvered boxes etched with rebus messages, blown-glass buttons encasing tiny sailing ships—display a sophisticated wit and an alchemical talent. During the 1950s, she developed a new technique: carving molten resin and colored mirror-glass into the elaborate decorative objects she dubbed “witches.” The *Comète* mirror (1960) is a rare witch, uncharacteristically pink but altogether bedazzling. chastel-marechal.com