Turning the Tables

The frequent mixing of **fine** and **decorative** arts has led to a growing appreciation for **postwar** and **contemporary** design, fueling the market and sending auction prices into the millions

BY JEANNIE ROSENFELD

When Philippe Ségalot, then worldwide head of contemporary art at Christie's, boldly interspersed five cutting-edge design objects by the likes of Marc Newson and Shiro Kuramata with paintings and sculpture by Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst in an evening sale in spring 2000, the market wasn't quite ready. The auction generated only lukewarm results, both in terms of sales and overall reception. But Ségalot was clearly on to something. In the past six years, the commingling of postwar and contemporary art and design has become a common occurrence.

It's a pairing well suited to the newest wave of collectors and their eclectic decorating style. "Whereas their parents bought Art Deco and mixed that with Impressionist and early modern paintings," says James Zemaitis, director of Sotheby's 20th Century Design department, they are focusing more on contemporary art and a wide array of 20th-century designers, from Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand to George Nakashima and Oscar Niemeyer.

Fueled in part by this sensibility, the design market is on the rise. Italian master Carlo Mollino's 1949 oak-and-glass table set a record for 20th-century furniture last June when it fetched an astounding $3.8 million against a $150,000/$200,000 estimate at Christie's New York. Even lesser-known names are commanding startling amounts. Prices for works by French designer Maria Pergay have more than doubled in the past two years—a circa 1975 dining table in stainless steel and glass sold for a record $126,000 at the Wright auction house in Chicago last September. Such steep prices reflect a growing appreciation for postwar and contemporary design, a market

Marc Newson's "Lockheed Lounge," 1985, from an edition of 10, realized $105,000 at Christie's May 2000 contemporary art evening sale.

that has matured tremendously over the past decade and is now seriously challenging the hierarchy that places it in a distinct realm from fine arts.

The design-as-art movement began gaining momentum in the mid-1990s when Simon Andrews, now a senior specialist at Christie's London, initiated biannual sales dedicated to mid-market design. While results were mixed, Andrews maintains that these sales "encouraged people to look at things differently," adding that the sale and study of 20th-century design is a relatively new phenomenon. "There were virtually no books 20 years ago, so it's taken a while for information to be disseminated into public consciousness. But it has transformed into understanding, and that has turned into new curatorial attitudes and more collecting."

One pioneer was Richard Wright, who founded his boutique auction house in Chicago in 2000, shortly after Ségalot's landmark evening sale. He redefined and revitalized modern design by presenting it in stylish catalogues and weaving in complementary art "to create a dialogue among the works," he says. At the same time, Phillips, de Pury & Company (then Phillips, de Pury & Luxembourg) was rebranding under new ownership and holding groundbreaking auctions accompanied by glossy, large-format catalogues that Alexander Payne, director of 20-21st Century Design Art, describes as an "absolute celebration of the object."

But the most obvious sign of a shift in attitude came with the new parlance: modern and contemporary design objects that were once grouped into a broader 20th-century decorative-arts category have been given their own platforms. At Phillips, Payne and Zemaitis—who was integral in shaping the design department there before he transferred to Sotheby's in 2003—changed their area's name from 20th-Century Decorative Arts in 2000, a move that Zemaitis repeated when he took over at Sotheby's: he changed his department's title from 20th Century Decorative Works of Art to 20th Century Design. In 2004 Christie's added the word "Design" to 20th Century Decorative Art. This repackaging also translated to a new mode of operating, with collaboration between design and fine-art specialists from the same period becoming the norm. Says Joshua Holdeman, director of 20th Century Decorative Art and Design at Christie's in New York, "I talk to my colleagues in the contemporary-art department a hundred times a day."

In recent years, Christie's has expanded its decorative arts offerings and began to cross-market design with contemporary art. "It doesn't matter if they're paintings or furniture," says Andrews. "They are snapshots of a particular esthetic moment and shouldn't be characterized according to their medium." In London the house continues to experiment: a Pop art sale in June 2004 mixed fine art with design, and an upcoming Nordic art and design sale this October will include high-end 19th- and 20th-century pictures and contemporary art, as well as design objects. Meanwhile, at Sotheby's Zemaitis has noticed that the boundaries between design and contemporary art "are getting so blurred that we're seeing many iconic designers going back and forth between the categories." He cites Harry Bertoia, whose sculptural objects are being included in contemporary-

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LEFT Ron Arad created the installation *Paved with Good Intentions*, for design.05, a satellite fair to Art Basel Miami Beach.

RIGHT At the first Saturday@Phillips sale last September, a ca. 1950 sideboard by Vladimir Kagan and two groups of Herbert Krenchel's "Krenit" bowls, ca. 1950s, were displayed underneath three photographs from Bettina Rheims's "Modern Lovers" series, 1990.

LEFT: COURTESY JOHN FRIEDMAN LTD., NEW YORK; RIGHT: COURTESY PHILLIPS DE PURY

art sales, and artist Donald Judd, whose furniture is now more likely to be offered as design.

Phillips has also advanced its strategy since moving to Chelsea from 57th Street in 2003. It holds integrated sale previews of contemporary art, photography, and design offerings; and last year, an insert with highlights from the December design sale was placed in the November contemporary catalogue. The crossover is also evident in the quarterly Saturday@Phillips sales, launched last September, which offer more affordable works from all three categories in the same auctions.

This new approach isn't as pervasive in the galleries, perhaps because they don't have specialists in different areas working under the same roof. But if a recent slew of exhibitions is any indication, dealers are also beginning to blur the boundary between art and design. In spring 2004, Luhring Augustine presented the first New York show of works by Swiss designer Mattia Bonetti, featuring 20 commissioned pieces, as well as studies for the brightly colored furniture in organic shapes. Last winter New York dealer Sean Kelly collaborated with R 20th Century, a Tribeca gallery specializing in midcentury modern furniture, on the first major American survey of Danish designer Poul Kjaerholm's pieces presented alongside works by 20 artists, including Yves Klein and Rineke Dijkstra. "Rather than have the furniture accessorize the art or put the furniture on a pedestal, you could actually sit on the furniture, and the art was almost a backdrop," says Kelly, noting that most of the Kjaerholm pieces went to his regular clients, while R 20th Century's patrons were drawn to the art.

Last spring the Chelsea gallery Lehmann Maupin invited private art dealer Josh Baer and Suzanne Demisch, a specialist in European decorative arts of the 1960s and '70s, to curate the group show "L'Art de Vivre," a dialogue among works by such artists as Marcel Duchamp and Jenny Holzer and designers like Gerrit Rietveld and the husband-and-wife team of François-Xavier and Claude Lalanne. "We tapped into something people had been thinking about," says Demisch. "The show amplified that crossover and got clients excited."

Demisch and her Paris-based partner, Stephane Danant, opened their own gallery, Demisch Danant, in Chelsea in October, on the same street as heavyweight contemporary-art dealers Matthew Marks, PaceWildenstein, and Marianne Boesky. "We're trying to fill big shoes," Demisch says, emphasizing that they aim to be a design gallery rather than an antiques store. On the 30th of this month, Demisch Danant and Lehmann Maupin will open simultaneous shows of new pieces by Pergay, featuring limited-edition furniture, to coincide with the publication of a major book about her work. Both shows are on view through the 29th of next month. A couple of blocks away at Gagosian Gallery, plans are in the works for a Newson exhibition later this year.

One of a "Pair of Drape Cabinets," 2005, designed by Maria Pergay, whose solo shows at New York galleries Lehmann Maupin and Demisch Danant open at the end of this month.

The precedents for presenting art along with design were established by dealers like Barry Friedman and Ileana Sonnabend in New York and Patrick Seguin and Philippe Jousse in Paris. Friedman, a 20th-century decorative-arts specialist for 30 years, has incorporated Symbolist and Constructivist paintings and even contemporary Chinese photography into his gallery's program. Sonnabend, who in the early 1970s used her uptown space to showcase design while exhibiting contemporary art in SoHo, has staged several design exhibitions in recent years at her Chelsea location.

Seguin and Jousse, champions of such French modern masters as Prouvé and Perriand, have organized numerous design shows in art venues, including Kunstverein Ludwigsburg in Germany, Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills, Corso Como Comme des Garçons in Tokyo, and Kukje Gallery in Seoul. "Roughly 95 percent of my clients are contemporary-art collectors," says Seguin, who has also integrated design pieces into shows at Galerie Max Hetzler in Berlin and Galerie Paul Andriesse in Amsterdam. Seguin staged his second design exhibition at Sonnabend last month, featuring plans by Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier for buildings in the city of Chandigarh in Punjab, India. Jousse, whose three Paris galleries each

have a different focus—namely, furniture designed by French Modernist architects, contemporary art, and, most recently, 1960s and '70s furniture—often creates an interplay among the various aspects of his business. For example, in 1995 he invited 18 artists, including Franz West, Rudolf Stingel, and Bertrand Lavier, to create complementary works for a Prouvé show held at the two galleries he owned at the time.

A decade later, pairing design with art has caught on among gallerists, and the big international contemporary-art fairs are eager to follow suit. For the second time, the Foire International d'Art Contemporain (FIAC) in Paris last October featured a wildly successful design section. In December, when collectors flocked to Art Basel Miami Beach, 5,000 of them also attended the inaugural edition of design.05, a satellite fair that included 15 international dealers. According to the design fair's codirector Ambra Medda, several galleries posted results totaling more than $1 million, and more than a third of them had sales topping $500,000.

A maple chair designed by Poul Kjaerholm in 1982 complemented Frank Thiel's print *Stadt 2/69 (Berlin)*, 2003, at a show last winter at New York's Sean Kelly gallery.

The fair also featured site-specific installations by architect Zaha Hadid and artist-designer Ron Arad. His *Paved with Good Intentions* was a labyrinth of 69 mirror-polished stainless-steel tables that could be purchased individually or in groups and used as either furniture or art. Meanwhile, even general art and antique expos are following the example set by Sanford L. Smith & Associates's pioneering Modernism fair in New York—which celebrated its 20th anniversary in November—by seeking out dealers to help them incorporate design into their offerings.

Museums, on the other hand, have been slower to integrate design with art. "On the curatorial level, there's almost a complete divide," says Wright, noting exceptions like the Toledo Museum of Art's juxtaposition of a Rietveld chair and a Piet Mondrian painting. But there are signs that things are changing.

Barbara Bloemink, curatorial director of New York's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, says, "We're getting many requests from art museums all over the U.S. to take our exhibitions on tour." The 2004 show "Design ≠ Art," which showcased overlooked design pieces by such artists as Rachel Whiteread and Judd, traveled to the Aspen Art Museum; and the 2005 exhibition "Extreme Textiles: Designing for High Performance" will open on the 7th of next month at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio. Bloemink also notes several art museums with "particularly active" design departments, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the Art Institute of Chicago. The recent announcement by the Pompidou Center and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation that they plan to build a museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art, moving images, and design in the West Kowloon Cultural District in Hong Kong attests to the movement's expansion.

Despite this momentum, design is very much a developing market, says Demisch, given that "most material can be had for under $100,000, a lot for under $50,000." A disparity remains between the overwhelming number of galleries for contemporary art and the few that are dedicated to design, and integration of the two genres is still in the experimental stage at the auction houses, with marketing proving to be more effective than the mixing. It's the rare themed sale that transcends this general rule, such as Christie's May 2005 auction of postwar and contemporary art and design from the collection of Barbara Jakobson, a longtime board member at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

"Somehow, in America design has never been as privileged as fine art," laments Bloemink. But if rising prices and a growing number of specialized galleries and fairs are any indication, this way of thinking may soon be outdated. Younger collectors are bringing a fresh perspective to the design market: they no longer see merely the furniture of their youth but rather design objects that can be shown seamlessly alongside contemporary art in museum and gallery settings, as well as in their homes. "People want a coherent collection," says Christie's Holdeman, "to live with objects that resonate with the art they collect." ■

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