



## Now Showing | 'Mobilier National'

DESIGN | By PILAR VILADAS | NOVEMBER 8, 2011, 12:00 PM



A sofa and table designed by Pierre Paulin and produced by Alpha International. Paulin's original designs were commissioned by the Mobilier National for Georges Pompidou's private apartments in the Élysée Palace. *Photographs courtesy of Demisch Danant*

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FULL SCREEN

Today, the [Demisch Danant gallery](#) in New York opens “Mobilier National,” the first American exhibition to examine the furniture that was created in the 20th century for the Mobilier National, a centuries-old entity of the French Republic that was conceived for the decoration of its palaces and official residences, and to promote the best in French decorative arts and design. Among the more than 20 pieces on display (which were made between 1964 and 1981) are Olivier Mourgue’s Montreal chair and table, which were designed for Expo 67, and furnishings designed by Pierre Paulin for Georges Pompidou’s private apartments at the Élysée Palace.

In 1964 the Mobilier National, which has existed in one form or another since the 17th century (and which also includes factories that produce famous French luxury goods like Gobelins tapestries and Sèvres porcelain), formed the Atelier de Recherche et Creation (ARC) to support the work of contemporary French designers — from Mourgue and Paulin in the 1960s to Martin Szekely and Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec in recent years — by subsidizing the research and development of designs that would then be produced commercially by French manufacturers. As Pompidou said in 1969, “There is no reason to leave the monopoly of research and creation to the Italians.”

Demisch Danant’s show focuses on the ARC’s earlier output, when the hard-edged designs of the Modernist era gave way to a more sinuous, organic approach. Suzanne Demisch, one of the gallery’s owners, said that she and her partner, Stephane Danant, had wanted to mount an exhibition on the Mobilier National for several years but that now seemed an especially good time, since the Mobilier National is exhibiting 400 years of its creations at [Versailles](#) until Dec. 11, and since, as Demisch explains, the subject is not well known here. That may be because when commissioned pieces are no longer used (for instance, when François Mitterrand succeeded Pompidou, he didn’t like his predecessor’s taste in furniture), they are added to the Mobilier’s permanent collection, which now numbers over 100,00 pieces. And even designs that were commercially produced tended to be made in relatively small numbers, and are therefore now fairly rare. Among the latter are Mourgue’s Montreal tables, which were made just for the Expo, or Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne’s Grains de Café (Coffee Beans) chair, which was originally designed in 1965 for the director of a French coffee company, and which was later produced commercially.

*“Mobilier National” continues through February 2012.*