

From City to City, 20th-Century Art and Furniture

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December promises to be a big month for 20th-century furniture and decorative arts at fairs, auctions, exhibitions and events around the country. There is even a floating art gallery involved.

Twentieth-century work will be featured on the SeaFair, a new, 228-foot, \$40 million yacht designed to accommodate 26 art and antiques galleries from all over the world. The ship is docked at the Miami Beach Marina today through Dec. 9, with its own alternative to Art Basel Miami Beach. (Information on the yacht: expoships.com).

In New York, Antiques & Art at the Armory, a fair at the Park Avenue Armory at 67th Street, continues through Monday. At least six dealers are showing 20th-century works, including Jacques de Vos from Paris (specializing in Art Deco) and Jeffrey F. Purtell (vintage Steuben glass).

In from California, the Santa Barbara gallery Europa is displaying a red leather PK20 chair by the **Danish architect Poul Kjaerholm (1929-1980), who is the subject of a new book: “The Furniture of Poul Kjaerholm: Catalogue Raisonné” (Gregory R. Miller & Company), by Michael Sheridan, an American architect and authority on Kjaerholm.** While Fritz Hansen continues to manufacture Kjaerholm designs in Denmark, vintage pieces are more popular than ever. There will be two exhibitions on Kjaerholm, both opening on Dec. 15 in New York, at R 20th Century (82 Franklin Street in TriBeCa) and Sean Kelly Gallery (528 West 29th Street in Chelsea).

Also at the armory, Laurent Philippe Inc./Sarah Contemporary Art is showing a white marble console designed by René Lalique and Charles Bernel for the Lalique Pavilion at the 1925 decorative arts exposition in Paris that gave Art Deco its name.

Gallery Afrodite, a rug specialist from Turkey, has hand-embroidered vintage Sasani textiles from Central Asia, sought after by collectors and decorators.

In Chicago, presale viewing begins on Monday for the Important Design auction at Wright (through Dec. 8).

Richard Wright, founder of that auction house, organizes four 20th-century-design auctions a year. This time he has collections of works by Charlotte Perriand, Jean Prouvé, Pierre Jeanneret, Carlo Mollino, George Nakashima and Gio Ponti.

Mr. Wright was a dealer for 14 years before he opened the auction house in 2000. “When I began, this material was still affordable,” he said. “The field was virtually nonexistent 20 years ago.”

In 2001, for example, the photographer Annie Leibovitz bought some modern pieces at Wright. Now she is selling other examples, including a set of 1977 leather-lined Beaubourg chairs (designed for the Pompidou

Center by Michel Cadestin and Georges Laurent); a 1920s Czechoslovak desk with matching bookshelves; and three Westport chairs (a variation of the Adirondack chair) made by the Westport, N.Y., manufacturer Harry Bunnell about 1905.

Over the years Mr. Wright has championed specific architects, artists and designers.

“We’ve sold more than 300 sculptures by Harry Bertoiia, more than anyone else,” he said, adding that there are 14 in the upcoming sale. Bertoiia (1915-1978) was an Italian-born artist and furniture designer, creator of Knoll’s best-selling wire Diamond Chair. He is perhaps best known for his “sounding sculptures,” metal sculptures with masses of rods or wires that make chimelike sounds when touched or moved by the wind.

“Three years ago I made a big push for Italian design because I think it’s undervalued,” Mr. Wright said.

He is selling a model hotel room that Ponti designed for the ninth Milan Triennale in 1951. The price is estimated at \$300,000 to \$400,000. The room resembles the interior of a trailer, with pale yellow plastic laminated walls and a yellow and gray Pirelli rubber floor. A storage wall supports a desk, two drawers, two shelves, a bookcase, a reading light, a foldup table and the bed frame. An armoire with mirrored and laminated folding doors has five drawers and a brass shelf.

Finally, there are one wooden armchair, one side chair and a coffee table. Mr. Wright’s sale, with nearly 400 lots, has a few other surprises, including sleek furniture from the 1930s by Lajos Kozma, a Hungarian architect. “We like to do things that haven’t been seen,” he said.

One piece, a desk, was designed by the Chicago architect Samuel Marx. Marx (1885-1964) is the subject of a new illustrated biography, “Ultramodern Samuel Marx” (Pointed Leaf Press) by Liz O’Brien, a Manhattan dealer specializing in 20th-century decorative arts. Marx designed modern houses, and often their interiors as well, for wealthy Chicagoans and Hollywood royalty. Ms. O’Brien began collecting Marx pieces in 1994 and specializes in work that architects and designers made for specific commissions.

Mr. Wright will go to Miami next week to serve on the vetting committee of Design Miami, which runs from next Friday through Dec. 9. The 26 participating galleries include DeLorenzo 1950, Moss, Friedman Benda and Cristina Grajales, all of New York; Philippe Denys of Brussels; David Gill of London; Dansk Mobelkunst of Copenhagen; and Downtown-François Laffanour and Patrick Seguin of Paris. Before the fair opens, Mr. Wright and other experts will visit the 26 booths to see if the contents are genuine and correctly identified.

“In the past, we have had some pieces removed,” Mr. Wright said. “Sometimes it’s simply a question of having things properly described.”

Dec. 13 is Phillips de Pury & Company’s 273-lot design sale in Chelsea. On Dec. 14 Sotheby’s has three New York sales, with a total of 280 lots, including Tiffany lamps, prewar design and German design from the Werkbund to the Bauhaus.

On Dec. 18 Christie’s is having three sales in Manhattan: a Tiffany auction of 69 lots, a 20th-century design event with 252 lots, and a sale from the estate of Robin Roberts, founder of Clarence House textiles, with 132 lots. On Dec. 19 Bonhams New York has its 485-lot sale of 20th-century decorative arts and a 250-lot sale of Art Deco radios. Drivers, start your engines.