

CULTURE

This New York power couple is bringing Scandinavian art and design into focus

By Siobhan Reid
December 9, 2022



Meet American art dealers and couple Kim Hostler and Juliet Burrows, who have both been captivated and involved with the Nordic art scene for decades

On buying trips to Stockholm in the '90s, Kim Hostler and Juliet Burrows combed antique shops and flea markets in search of rare and beautiful objects – porcelain vases by Berndt Friberg, Axel Salto ceramics, colourful tableware by Birger Kaipainen. The couple was astonished by the quality and craftsmanship they encountered, and would return to New York with trunks full of unique finds. “We’d even carry things back on our shoulders,” recalls Burrows.

The more they traveled back and forth, the more engaged they became in Stockholm’s design scene. The pair recounts being invited to dinner parties hosted by local dealers and attending local cultural and industry events such as the Antikmässen antiques fair. These experiences were formative in shaping their understanding of Scandinavian culture and expanding their knowledge of craft and design.

But when it came to selecting which objects to bring home, Hostler and Burrows let their well-honed instincts and distinct sensibilities guide them. From her years dealing in American mid-century furniture, Hostler had a rich knowledge of vintage materials and craftsmanship. And Burrows, a former dancer with the Dutch National Ballet and Mark Morris Dance Group, had grown up with a literary professor as a father and a grandmother as a designer.



Kristina Riska.

Fortunately for their fledgling business (and romantic relationship), Hostler and Burrows found themselves gravitating toward the same objects and designers. “We’d be in a shop and reach for the same vase,” recounts Hostler. “The thing that made it work is that we really put our taste on the line.”

In 1998, after a few years selling privately, the pair opened a gallery in TriBeCa devoted to vintage Nordic furniture and decorative arts. It wasn’t long before they were hosting major shows – including the first U.S. exhibition of Axel Salto and Berndt Friberg – and getting coverage in major publications like the *New York Times*. “People hadn’t seen that kind of spareness and Scandinavian quality,” says Burrows. “The general public had very little exposure to the great masters such as Finn Juhl and Axel Salto.”

In the years that followed, as Scandinavian art and design became all the rage, Hostler and Burrows shifted away from the more obvious expressions of the movement (i.e., blonde wood and mid-century lines) and embraced more esoteric forms and earlier, rarer productions, like the furniture of Swedish architect and designer Axel Einar Hjorth. They also sought out objects with a deeply handmade, tactile quality, evoking the landscapes and spirit of Scandinavia.



Eva Zethraeus.



Marianne Nielsen.



“These artists are drawing directly from their environment – the changing light, the trees, the snow, the passage of time and the seasons – and capturing that in the work,” explains Hostler. “They’re creating work by hand with specific intention, and doing things in an extremely thoughtful, grounded way.” Over time, Hostler and Burrows also began championing more female designers and artists, partly because of the underrepresentation of women in the design world. But they also found themselves drawn to the work: “There’s something about the history and intentionality of the work that pulls us in,” says Hostler. Agrees Burrows: “Eight times out of 10 the work I’m drawn to is made by a woman.”

In 2019, the gallery became bicoastal, opening a 3,000-square-foot gallery on Los Angeles’s Melrose Avenue. Then, in spring 2022, the gallery debuted its third location in TriBeCa, called HB381. The new Manhattan space is exclusively devoted to contemporary work and solo exhibitions, with primary focus on sculpture and ceramics by female artists including Kristina Riska, one of Scandinavia’s foremost contemporary ceramicists, and the Helsinki-based artist Marianne Huotari, a finalist in the 2022 Loewe Foundation Craft Prize. Both new spaces grew organically: “The impetus was simply to give the artists more exposure,” says Burrows.



Kristina Riska.

It's an exciting time for the couple, with three permanent locations and a recent solo booth of Danish artist Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen at the Untitled Art Fair in Miami. Increasingly, however, Hostler and Burrows are striving for balance and to spend more time with their two daughters, ages 17 and 21, and their four dogs. As they look ahead to this next chapter of their lives, the couple is turning (where else?!) to their work for inspiration. Specifically, they're taking a page from some of their more carefree clients: "We meet people in their seventies who are selling all their belongings and downsizing," says Hostler, "and then we have clients in their nineties who are buying land and building new houses. That's the energy we hope to maintain as we grow older."