

VOGUE

LIVING

The First Edition of Design Miami Paris Was Staged in Karl Lagerfeld's Former Home

BY AMY VERNER

October 20, 2023



While fashion weeks in Paris are a phenomenon without compare, the city also blitzes art for several days through October. What was once Fiac, the leading French contemporary art fair, has been replaced since 2022 by Paris+ par Art Basel. Now, with everyone seizing on the cachet of the world's hottest art gathering, the events and programming throughout the week are delivering even more stimulation, inspiration, and awe.

Consider this small sampling: a monumental Mark Rothko retrospective at the Fondation Louis Vuitton; Hauser & Wirth's arrival to Paris with a solo show on Henry Taylor (coinciding with the Whitney Museum exhibition); Paris Internationale, a younger fair that overflows with experimental and eclectic art; the display of sculptures throughout the Tuileries gardens in association with the Musée du Louvre (discover works from Zanele Muholi, Gaetano Pesce and General Idea); a staggering presentation of more than 1,000 drawings by Picasso at the Centre Pompidou; plus a number of niche engagements, such as the Reiffers Art Initiative that has Lorna Simpson mentoring Gaëlle Choisne, and Ago Projects' ¡Hola Paris! hosted by India Mahdavi.



Then there's Design Miami, the fair affiliated with Art Basel whose galleries specialize in rare design pieces that are museum-quality and achingly covetable. A Paris edition had been a long-held dream for both its co-founder and chairman, Craig Robins, and current CEO, Jen Roberts.



On Tuesday, Design Miami made an auspicious debut, not only owing to its ne-plus-ultra roster—many of the galleries showing in their hometown—but also to its extraordinary venue: the Hôtel de Maisons, an 18th-century mansion near the Musée d'Orsay that Karl Lagerfeld called home for roughly two decades (last month, it drew attention as the location for the Marni show).

“It’s an obvious city in so many ways with all its experts in 20th and contemporary design,” Roberts said from the garden where the grass became an outdoor gallery. In one direction, Jean Prouvé’s Maison Démontable 6x6 reconstructed by Galerie Patrick Seguin; in another, the angular metal Chaises La Villette by Philippe Starck from Ketabi Bourdet. Over by the parterre, the Tsubo rotund vases by Kazunori Hamana care of Pierre Marie Giraud.

Inside, unlike a tented space that could have been staged in any city, there is no mistaking the anachronistic grandeur—think damask wallcoverings, gilded moldings, and intricate boiserie—as Parisian. This required the 27 exhibitors to recontextualize their offerings—some, like Galerie Kreo embracing the dissonance, while others such as Downtown-Laffanour adjusting for it as though imagining a private home. Glossy ceramic vessels by Torbjørn Kvasbø in the Hostler Burrows space stood out like alien forms under an ornate chandelier. In the Paulin Paulin Paulin room, the Pierre Paulin teal leather and rose lacquer desk and cane chair conceived in 1983 for French President François Mitterrand at the Elysée Palace appeared as striking as ever in front of a silver glitter screen by John Armleder.



“The galleries have brought incredible material and took what was perceived to be a more difficult situation and figured it out in a brilliant way,” said Robins. “Everything works. It almost feels like the house was built for this.” He was standing within arm’s reach of Galerie Mitterand’s myriad bronze flora and fauna works by Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne.

Unsurprisingly, the preview day attracted a first wave of curious connoisseurs, local business and culture bigwigs, and avid international collectors. On the main level, they wandered through the enfilade of salons and drawing rooms, past Charlotte Perriand’s Mexique bookcase at Jousse Enterprise; onward to the impeccable suite of Jean Royère’s Ours Polaire seating in vivid red from Galerie Jacques Lacoste; further beyond to Friedman Benda’s sculptural tables from Samuel Ross and Daniel Arsham; finally reaching the future-leaning and gleaming silver furniture by Max Lamb arranged under a Calder mobile at Salon 94 Design.



Lagerfeld's apartment was located on the upper floor, where R & Company, Lebreton, and Sarah Myerscough were among the exhibitors redefining each room in their style. What would he have made of this total immersion in collectible design? "He would like it because he was a fantastic collector but also, I don't know because it's different when you have lived somewhere," said Didier Krzentowski, whose Galerie Kreo was one of Lagerfeld's mainstays for furniture from Marc Newson and Konstantin Grcic. He added that he conceived this presentation—from the marble marquetry table by Jaime Hayon table to the black flower holder by Ronan Bouroullec—with Karl in mind.



Also among the earliest visitors was Pharrell, along with his wife, Helen Lasichanh. They spent a moment with Patrick Seguin inside the Prouvé house and gradually made their way through the rooms with Robins; perhaps unsurprising, given that the multi-hyphenate artist has been attending Design Miami since its earliest years. He paused to chat with friends—notably, Louis Vuitton’s Michael Burke—and engaged gallerists whenever something caught their eye.

Cue the tubular steel and leather sofa from 1970 by Michel Boyer in the Demisch Danant space. But had he come to acquire or simply absorb? “I am here as a student and I’m here as a buddy to my friend, Craig Robins,” Pharrell answered. “[He] continues to make this experience incredibly enlightening and always so friendly and welcoming to people who want to learn more about the history of design and art and all of its amazing contributors.”



With Design Miami running through October 22, Roberts said they are welcoming students to experience the fair with hopes that a wider public will find both inspiration and escape (and for sustenance, the Milanese café Cova has set up a chic counter).

Asked how she will determine the success of this inaugural event, Roberts replied, “By how well the galleries do and whether they are happy.” But already, one mark of validation has mattered more than any. “We have had the amazing privilege to receive the patronage of the Ministry of Culture,” she glowed. “To me, this means Design Miami has been officially welcomed and accepted as part of the cultural fabric of Paris. Is there a greater honor? I do not know.”