

## LOOKING BACK AT THE WINTER SALES

These last couple of weeks, auction houses unveiled sales with design works of outstanding beauty and quality. Before we finally turn this year's page, here are a few thoughts on what went down under the hammer during this winter.

**The main trends remained undisturbed.** The enthusiasm for the 1950s French design scene is still there and the protagonists are Jean Royère and his playful designs as well as Charlotte Perriand and Jean Prouvé. Unsurprisingly, works by the Lalanne couple are still very popular and although there were no world records this time, their prices remain robust. Diego Giacometti's sculptural works are still magnetic for the buyers and even door handles sold very much above estimates at Sotheby's Paris for €47,880 (estimate €10,000 - 15,000). However, this season the Art Deco movement, generally not considered as commercial, was well represented through collections but also individual consignments. The names in the spotlight were Jean Dunand and Armand Albert Rateau. Some other lesser known names such as Jean Goulden and his dashing cigarette boxes or Boris Lacroix and his modernist lamps came to light in the main auctions.



Vase by Jean Dunand, circa 1925  
estimate \$40,000-60,000  
sold for \$138,600 (hammer price \$103,950)



Armchair and low table *Grand Oiseau de Marbre*  
by François-Xavier Lalanne, circa 1974  
estimate \$200,000- 300,000 sold for \$214,200  
(hammer price \$160,650)



A pair of side tables *Au ruban et aux arbustes* by  
Diego Giacometti, circa 1982  
estimate: €200,000 - 300,000, sold for €678,000  
(hammer price \$508,500)



Pair of *Coeur* armchairs by Jean Royère,  
circa 1955, estimate \$20,000 - 30,000  
sold for \$163,800 (hammer price \$122,850)

**The well-orchestrated plays that are the auctions needed to be reorganized.** Indeed it was the second season for the art market to adapt to the COVID measures and restrictions. The catalogues – now only available in a digital version – became a crucial selling tool along all sort of online viewing room experiences. The well-orchestrated plays that are the auctions were reorganized. Therefore the sales were converted to an hybrid format where the auctioneer faced the telephones and online bidders only. However it seems that despite the empty chairs the thrill of the sales rooms survived. For instance, there was a true bidding war at Sotheby’s New York during the evening sale between online and telephone bidders for the Albert Cheuret *Aloe* sconces which sold for \$94, 500 (51% above high estimate). Or at Christie’s, still in New York, when an impatient client requested, on the very first lot, to bid \$40,000 when the bid was at \$18, 000 for a Jean Dunand exquisite vase that ended up selling for \$108,750 (148% above high estimate).



Vase by Jean Dunand, circa 1925, estimate \$25,000-35,000, sold for \$108,750 (hammer price \$87,000)



A pair of *Aloe* sconces by Albert Cheuret, circa 1925, estimate \$30,000 - 50,000, sold for \$ 94,500 (hammer price \$75,500)

**The top lots sold succesfully but the prices fetched at the auctions were close to their estimates.**

Amongst others; the exceptional commode by Jean Dunand offered at Christie’s Paris sold for €350,000 (estimate €400,000-600,000). In New York the Eileen Gray lacquer panel sold for \$612,500 (estimate \$300,000-500,000) whilst the cabinet went unsold at Christie’s. Uptown, Sotheby’s was offering a unique Eileen Gray screen panel that sold for \$2,137,500 (\$1,500,000-2,000,000) and a *Oiseaux* low table by Armand Albert Rateau that sold for \$2,016,500 (estimate \$1,000,000-1,500,000). In Paris the *Iolas* flatware service by Claude Lalanne sold for \$378,000 (estimate \$200,000 - 300,000).

Overall estimates were high but compensated by low reserves. Is this an indication that clients are more cautious or simply more aware of fair prices even when buying at a high level price?



An important and rare *Oiseaux* low table by Armand Albert Rateau, 1924 estimate \$1,000,000-1,500,000 sold for \$2,016,500



**The value of a work of design can be dictated by its rarity, the provenance or condition but from time to time it is – still - the thrill of a bidding war.** But what seems to be the lesson of this season is that exceptional lots of historical design do not go unnoticed. The desire to collect the best of beautiful design is still very present across all eras and categories. The lots that I considered to be the most outstanding were part of a Wiener Werkstätte section offered at Christie’s New York. Amongst this selection the rare set of three light fixtures by Joseph Hoffmann sold at \$774,000 (93.5% above high estimate). Another example is the contour rocking chair from the Kagan Estate sold at Phillips in New York for \$132,300 (561.5% above high estimate).

Important set of three light Fixtures  
by Joseph Hoffmann, circa 1906  
estimate \$200,000 - 300,000 sold for  
\$774,000 (hammer price: \$580,500)

**Follow your ‘red thread’, don’t be influenced by hypothetical trends.** Old is the new new, the 80’s are back, it is all about French designers, etc. Leave these sparkling statements for the magazines. If there is another lesson to take from this season it is that the great collections are not made of trends but of personalities. Furniture and objects take another dimension when they become part of an ensemble. They do not need to be rare, expensive or require great amount of scholarship, they mostly require your eye - with a little help to navigate the market - to elaborate the ‘red thread’ of a unique collection.



Detail of a unique Eileen Gray panel, circa 1921-1923