The Highs of Salon: Art + Design, From Art Deco to the Aztecs

By BLOUIN ARTINFO  15/11/13  5:06PM EST

Following its 2012 debut, the Salon: Art + Design is back at the Park Avenue Armory for a second round, delivering, as expected, all things modern. With design, pristine lines, right angles, and rich woods abound, one example being the beloved Eames storage units that mid-century specialist Mark McDonald has brought back; as well as the Art Deco of Galerie Vallois, where a hybrid circular bookcase and table by French architect Pierre Chareau packs such startling magnetism for its compact (double-duty and space-efficient, even) size; and even the wondrous tables, shelves, and lamp French designer André Sornay was able to craft out of mere rectangular slabs of wood in the 1930s, on view courtesy Galerie Alain Marcelpoil. In art, there was no shortage of Chagalls, Picassos, and Schieles (Waterhouse & Dodd brought two
out of three, and more).

For all its promised modern-centricity, the Salon offers far more to visitors; with its breadth of movements, media, and periods reaching into the distant past and extending to the near future, the new fair is an ostensive mini-museum with many, many different wings. Exhibits not dominated by Europe or the Americas include Lucas Ratton’s array of West African 19th- and 20th-century objects; another that reaches into a more ancient past is that at Galerie Mermoz, with pre-Columbian works by the Aztec, Maya, and Olmec, among them a slate-gray Olmec terracotta vessel engraved with a dragon dating back to 900 B.C. In the contemporary wing, Junko Mori’s urchin-like, matte-black ceramic sculptures are a highlight at Adrian Sassoon. And for the future of design, see the R 20th Century booth, featuring works by the up-and-coming Haas Brothers, whose hedonistic aesthetic somehow comes across in an object as simple a lamp, voluptuously sculpted and extravagantly laid with hexagonal brass tiles.

What’s interesting about the Salon is that, in addition to its mish-mash of time periods, visitors will also find a blurred distinction between art and design, and even architecture, so closely juxtaposed that they nearly seem to bleed into each other. New York’s Menconi + Schoelkopf’s solo booth of Charles Biederman, showcases colorful geometric abstractions made manifest in sculptural wall hangings and architectural paintings, with bold forms that bring to mind postmodern design. Similarly, at the entrance of the fair, brilliantly colored, blown-glass works of Italian architect Ettore Sottsass line the booth wall of the Friedman Benda booth. (Marc Benda, for the record, says that despite partner Barry Friedman’s recent retirement, “Nothing is going to change.”)

Nearby, “100 Years of Nudes” is written on the wall of Swiss heavyweight Galerie Gmurzynska’s booth, where the women of Pablo Picasso’s “Femme debout” (1969) and Yves Klein’s “ANT” (1960) hold court. There’s a surprise hanging on the wall directly opposite: Three of the little-known and seldom-seen collages of architect Richard Meier.

Stray observations, for the more whimsical: Mary Ryan Gallery has a collection of Laurent de Brunhoff and Jean de Brunhoff illustrations of beloved French elephant prince Babar. And furs — whether they be the cow hide on Galerie Downtown’s Oscar Niemeyer Low Armchair and Ottomon, the white alpaca on Vallois’s Chareau armchairs, or the sheepskin of Modernity’s Flemming Lassen armchairs — make excellent seating.