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## Galerie Patrick Seguin celebrates Jean Royère

By Henrietta Thompson



Jean Royère, Elephanteau armchair, 1947

The London outpost of Galerie Patrick Seguin stages exhibition of French 20th-century design maverick Jean Royère.

If you go down to Mayfair today, you're sure of a few big surprises at Patrick Seguin's wonderful new exhibition of Jean Royère. Though a bear – or rather L'Ours Polaire - the most famous ursine-inspired sofa and armchair set by the designer – isn't one of them, there is a Tour Eiffel Table, a Persan 8-branched wall lamp and, happily, an Elephanteau armchair in the room. And it's joyous.

One of France's leading designers of the 20th century, Jean Royère's fun and original style won him high profile fans and royal clients across the world. Over the course of his career, which saw him ditch a secure job in international trading in 1931 (aged 29) to follow his design dreams for the next four decades, the self-taught Royère rode deftly through design movements from the prewar years to modernism and beyond, never pandering to the masses or lapsing into the bourgeois good taste trap.

Having recently opened the Brook Street gallery last October, Patrick Seguin felt the time was right to celebrate Royère in London. "Our wish for the London space is to alternate exhibitions about architecture, design and art from the selection of designers the gallery is known for: following the inaugural Jean Prouvé show, we continue to uphold our mission with this exhibition dedicated to Jean Royère," he says. "Ever since we opened a gallery in Paris in 1989, then there has been a worldwide recognition of mid-20th-century French design: Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Jean Royère all managed to create a unique vocabulary, which appeals to contemporary art and design collectors today."

What immediately appealed to Seguin, and doubtless also to London-bound collectors, was the enormous freedom that Jean Royère's work manifests, he says. "In terms of forms, materials, and techniques this was clearly someone bent on pursuing an aesthetic quest to its logical conclusion."

Though he never traditionally trained as a designer, Royère picked up his craft in the cabinet-making workshops of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine; and with Gouffé, the exclusive designers and decorators nearby which specialised in making copies of antiques and French period furniture. Having never learnt by the rules, he was all the more free to break them, says Seguin, comparing Royère to that other French 20th-century legend, Jean Prouvé. "All Royère's designs are both timeless and unique in their genre. While it can be said of Jean Prouvé that his constructional principle imposed form as part of a rationalising quest, Royère's stance was the direct opposite. They did have one thing in common, however: the undeviating exigency they brought to their work."

Unlike his modernist contemporaries, Royère didn't design for mass production, preferring to make only a few editions or one-offs of his pieces. Today their scarcity is reflected in the prices they fetch. His best known piece, L'Ours Polaire - as rarely as it does come out of hibernation and onto the market - has become one of the most covetable examples of 20th-century furniture, now fetching up to \$1million.

Royère's interior designs were also prolific, his reputation cemented in 1933 with his first project, the Paris café-restaurant Le Carlton on the Champs-Élysées. He was also a regular participant in the great Parisian design shows of the time, such as the Salon d'Automne and the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs, where his innovative and fresh liberal style and free-form shapes stood out from the crowd.

For collectors and the simply curious, a visit to Brook Street will be an enlightening one on the style and works of this irreverent free agent. Just don't go looking for the bear.

Jean Royère is at Galerie Patrick Seguin London until April 23

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Map



Jean Royère, Tour Eiffel table, ca.1963 / Jean Royère, Pair of 5 branched Jacques wall lamps, ca.1948, Picture: Hervé Lewandowski



Jean Royère, Croisillon Armchair, ca.1950 / Jean Royère, 3 arm wall lamp, ca.1950, Picture: Hervé Lewandowski



Jean Royère, Pair of blue croisillon chairs, ca. 1950 / Jean Royère, Hirondelle Standing lamp, ca.1953, Picture: Hervé Lewandowski



Wall lamp / Jean Royère, Desk, ca.1949