

AUGUST 25, 2020

WORDS
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COVER IMAGE
JEAN PROUVÉ, PRÉSIDENTE DESK NO.
201, CA. 1955, AND DIRECTION NO. 353
AND 352 OFFICE CHAIRS, 1951. ALL
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GALLERY, PARIS



Galerie Patrick Seguin, Paris. The champion of mid-20th century French design

In conversation with gallerist Patrick Seguin, who in 1989, founded his Jean-Nouvel-designed gallery in Paris's La Bastille neighborhood — 300 square meters of Jean Prouvé, Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, and Jean Royère

It was during the early 1990s global recession that Patrick Seguin was expanding his newly-launched gallery, a period that he credits for granting him his purchasing power of the first pieces he acquired under the gallery name, which would have otherwise been unaffordable.

All his five represented architect-designers are French: Jean Prouvé, Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, and Jean Royère. The roster is fixed; since the opening of the gallery, no designer has been added, and none removed; they are the five pillars on which the gallery has been based from the outset, a strategy that has established Seguin as a revered scholar on their life practices.

The sixth name synonymous with the gallery is Jean Nouvel, the Pritzker Prize architect of the La Bastille gallery — a good friend too; Seguin is the godfather of his daughter.

It comes as no surprise that Galerie Patrick Seguin is also an active publishing house, notably behind the most complete monographs on Jean Prouvé (whose work Seguin has been particularly advocating since day one). Continuously full of surprises, they have a children's book on the way.



JEAN PROUVÉ, TROPIQUE NO. 501 TABLE, 1951, CAFÉTÉRIA NO. 300 CHAIR, 1950, SUN-SHUTTERS, 1962-65 AND DACTYLO CD 11 CHAIR, 1947

Bana Bissat: Do you consider your designers (Jean Prouvé, Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, and Jean Royère) to be "craftspeople"?

Jean Prouvé gained from his start as a blacksmith's apprentice an understanding of metal and its limitations that lead him to explore the qualities of materials such as steel and aluminum and diverse processes, designing demountable houses and pieces of furniture. In his practice, he used some of the most modern technologies but he operated in an almost craftsman way. The creation process involved many back and forth with his Ateliers and he mostly produced in small series. He incidentally stated that working as a blacksmith *had been a calling since the age of ten* and considered himself as a worker or a constructor rather than an architect or designer. That calling turned into a passion for mechanics and an urge to build.

Jeanneret was revealed as a craftsman and handyman in the numerous archives he left behind him. In India, he would spend hours fabricating baskets and hammocks or even boats from locally sourced materials.

At first apprentice to an engraver, Le Corbusier soon abandoned watchmaking to attend a course in art and decoration.

Perriand, faced with the challenges of wartime, turned to traditional materials used by Japanese craftsmen after her stay in the country. She discovered qualities that brought her to adapt the furniture she designed, investigating a new realm of possibilities with unconventional materials like bamboo.

As for Royère, he trained with Pierre Gouffré who taught him the craftsmanship of cabinetmaking.

In that sense, all designers I represent are more or less "craftspeople".

BB: What's your idea of "craft" in architecture and design? Do you think admirable work could exist in the absence of craft?

There is also a strong tradition of craft in the history of architecture: it has been an essential element in the work of numerous talented architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Alvar Alto. The skills and involvement of craftsmen in both design and architecture processes are fundamental: resorting to craft in a project, whether architectural or for the completion of a design, add more depth and character to a project. Furthermore, it can be quite humbling to address the challenges of working with different materials.

Jean Prouvé had the same approach to design and architecture. The design of his creations continued to evolve even after the phase of the drawing and involved a continuous dialogue with his ateliers. His furniture and works of architecture bear the traces of these evolutions to this day.

The façade panel with porthole windows he developed for the Casino de la Grande Côte in the city of Royan (1951) is a perfect example of an element of architecture that is a pure product of machinery and the aluminum industry, yet an admirable object. When taken out of context and placed in contemporary interiors, the delicacy of its smooth and at times corrugated surface is sublimated.

BB: Much of this year's fairs have been called off. In a world oversaturated with fairs and biennales, many have called these cancellations a relief. Where do you stand on that?

One may indeed have felt overwhelmed by the proliferation of fairs over the past years. Collectors can at times find it challenging to navigate within a fair and forge new relationships with galleries. Especially when the time they spend at fairs is decreasing, we cannot expect them to visit all booths within a few hours. Fewer fairs facilitate unexpected encounters for collectors and help sustain galleries, designers and artists.

Yet I believe that collectors still value the efficiency of visiting fairs and as a gallerist, I do appreciate attending these annual gatherings that provide the opportunity to meet or reconnect with collectors, artists, designers, and fellow gallerists from around the world, and embrace a wide range of works. Art fairs do remain the predominant economic model for the art and design market even though business models will continue to evolve.

BB: Any thoughts on the primary design market? Have you been impressed with what you have been seeing recently, whether works, artists, or galleries?

There are some incredible pieces on the primary design market such as the "Table au km" by Jean Nouvel from 2011, made of an assembly of crosspieces of solid wood from diverse species that lead us to imagine a table of any given size that could go on indefinitely. I don't stay abreast of contemporary design that much. I like it when it involves new techniques or materials.

BB: How do you think that gallerists can be more involved in global environmental sustainability efforts?

A shift from the physical to the digital world with virtual exhibition spaces can be instrumental in shaping a more sustainable environment. Galleries can also consider greener shipping options such as recyclable light packaging, alternatives to bubble wraps, and delivery. Some of the largest shipping companies offer direct charter flights or carbon credit programs.

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