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Collecting

Design Miami/ Basel 2017 preview: what to see at the fair

Highlights range from Art Nouveau objects to contemporary furniture by architects



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Ettore Sottsass cabinet (2005) and Hanging Lamp (1957) at Friedman Benda

The European edition of the Design Miami/ fair returns to Switzerland this year, neighbouring Art Basel in Hall 1 Süd of the Messe Basel. With a focus on high-end collectible design, it encompasses furniture, lighting and *objets d'art* for sale through some of the world's leading design galleries. These galleries deal mainly in objects from 1900 to the present, with a few galleries specialising in 18th- and 19th-century antiques.

This year's edition is the most diverse to date, both geographically and stylistically. The exhibitor list features 12 founding galleries and six newcomers, including the first South American participant, the Rio de Janeiro-based Mercado Moderno.

Art Nouveau design pieces will be included at the fair for the first time with Robert Zehil, a specialist dealer from Monaco. Highlights on the gallery's booth include an Albert Cheuret bronze vase from around 1925.

A piece that, if sold, is likely to fetch one of the highest prices at the fair is a colourful tower cabinet of mahogany, durmast and cherrywood by the currently very fashionable Italian designer and architect Ettore Sottsass. It dates from 1961-62 and is on sale — for an undisclosed price — at Giustini/Stagetti Gallery from Rome. It comes from a rare house that Sottsass designed for close friends of his, an Italian engineer and his wife, and the cabinet was acquired by the gallery from the couple's daughter nearly 55 years after it was made.

Several galleries are dedicating their booths to a single 20th-century great — among them is Sottsass, the centenary of whose birth falls this year. Friedman Benda gallery is bringing a selection of Sottsass's rare early works to Basel, as well as several much later pieces. Galerie Alain Marcelpoil is showing furniture by the French Art Deco designer André Sornay; and the Paris-based Jacques Lacoste gallery, which deals in French design from the 1930s to the 1950s, presents mostly works by Jean Royère, including the sculptural Liane coat stand.



Oil Drop by Hans Hedberg (c1970) at Hostler Burrows

Galerie Patrick Seguin’s booth promises to be eye-catching, with a 6x9m Jean Prouvé demountable house from 1944. These structures, first produced in a small series in the 1930s, were designed to be assembled, modified, dismantled and moved.

Another theme to emerge strongly at this year’s fair, this time across the more contemporary galleries, is architect-designed furniture. The Beijing and Los Angeles-based Gallery ALL, which has a focus on commissioning fresh work by local practitioners, is bringing new furniture pieces by the Chinese architects MAD. The Japanese firm Sou Fujimoto is showing a series of round wire bookshelves, echoing the structure of a birdcage, called Forest of Books (2017).

Another architecture firm, the Basel-based Christ & Gantenbein, responsible for the new Kunstmuseum Basel extension, will display its first pieces of furniture at the fair with Maniera, a company based in Brussels that develops furniture designed by architects. Also on Maniera’s booth are a series of minimal box stools by the Swiss architects Trix & Robert Hausmann.

Interspersed within these gallery booths are 10 “cabinets of curiosity” put together by invited designers, curators and gallerists under the Design Curio platform, which is now in its third year. Following the wider art fair trend for thematic booths, sometimes overseen by an independent curator — a way for galleries to stand out from the crowd in this competitive environment — each Curio here is conceived as a “total environment of objects, textures, artefacts and ideas”.

Highlights this year include Oscar Humphries' "Teatro Mollino", an immersive installation that blurs the boundaries between architecture, cinema, photography and performance. Humphries brings together the original chairs by the Italian architect, designer and photographer Carlo Mollino (1905-73) for the RAI Auditorium in Turin in 1952, evoking the space for which they were conceived (the auditorium has since been renovated and most of the chairs lost).

Another element here is the Design at Large installation. It returns for its fourth edition this year under the creative direction of the American fashion designer Thom Browne. He will exhibit a vast grid of desk designs from the last century, including those by Jean Prouvé and Ron Arad; they will be displayed next to the set installation from Browne's Fall/Winter men's runway show from 2014.

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