

ART AND DESIGN

Collecting

FTWeekend



Far horizons
The genre all set to move into London
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Extreme collecting
What are design museums actually for?
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'Alinetob' (2012-13)
by Aldo Bakker

Bare essentials
Without negatives, photographs are unique
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A single October week has become one of the international art world's foremost shop windows. At one end of London, the white marquees of Frieze and Frieze Masters draw collectors to autumnal Regent's Park - while the chic black tent of PAD London provides a different welcome amid the trees in Mayfair's Berkeley Square.

Since its founder Patrick Perrin first ventured, in 2007, to bring his Gallic-inflected design and modern art fair to London, his Pavillion of Art+ Design has provided a space where fine art and the decorative arts cohabit with continental ease. As Perrin says, it is a very personal formula: "I don't want my fair to look like the other fairs. When it's too much of one thing. My personal taste is to be able to mix many things together."

This year, among other new galleries, PAD introduces that most venerable of all French institutions, Sévres - Cité de la Céramique. This is an entity created in 2010 from the amalgamation of the eponymous porcelain manufactory with the national museum of porcelain at Sévres, and it is charged with guarding the legacy of the world's most famous ceramic business. But set aside thoughts of boat-

Ceramics | The venerable firm of Sévres has surprising links with contemporary creators.
Emma Crichton-Miller reports

Fired with a new sense of purpose

shaped pot-pourri vases in Madame de Pompadour's favourite pink, or intricate gilded ceramic candelabra adorned with elephants. What will be on view at PAD are not 18th-century antiques but the wildly various products of Sévres's most ambitious artist collaborations of the last 100 years - including Louise Bourgeois's headless, multi-breasted, canine-footed sculpture "Nature Study" (1996) and a grey-and-gold fragmented ceramic dress, illuminated from within, created last year by Brazilian fashion designer Gustavo Lins. There are the amusing, allusive creations of Canadian artist Kristin McKirdy and Pucci di Rossi's architectural "nuts and bolts" white vases.

The most exquisite are perhaps the four limited-edition pouring pieces by Dutch design genius Aldo Bakker. As Romane Sarfati, Sévres's new director-general, puts it: "Many people think that because our craftsmen have the same skills as their 18th-century predecessors, that nothing

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Fired with a fresh sense of purpose

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has changed. In fact, we have never ceased to work with contemporary artists." Indeed, at every stage of its history, it has only been through its fertile interactions with the most talented artists and designers of the age that the manufactory has survived at all.

It was reportedly Madame de Pompadour who first saw the potential in this struggling porcelain factory in

Vincennes, founded in 1740, encouraging her lover Louis XV to invest in it. With the royal imprimatur (Louis XV's royal cipher of two crossed 'L's became its official mark), and, more importantly, royal cash, in the 1750s the manufactory drew together designer Jean-Claude Chambellan Duplessis, the painter François Boucher and sculptor Etienne-Maurice Falconet.

By the time the business moved to Sévres in 1756, it had gained the creative edge on its older German rival,

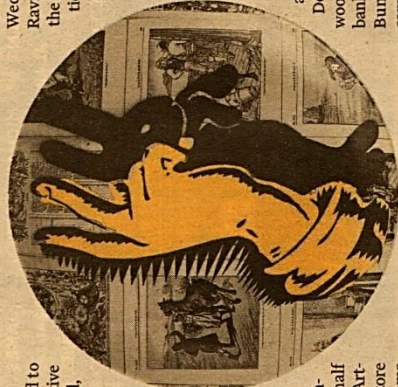
Meissen. Later, Auguste Rodin and Jean Arp, and, in the 1950s and 1960s, Alexander Calder and Serge Poliakoff helped provide new impetus to what is to this day a state-supported national institution. Since the 1960s, Sarfati says, this focus on contemporary collaboration has intensified, "and really increased in the last 10".

Half of the business is now contemporary production, with the other half re-editions of the Sévres patrimony. Artists and designers of the stature of Etторе Sottsass, Pierre Soulages, Yayoi Kusama

and Jaime Plensa have created limited edition or unique works as part of a programme of artist collaborations that extends to jewellers, photographers, choreographers and composers.

For Sarfati, these initiatives are an essential part of Sévres's remit to preserve costly, hard-won skills: "It is very important for the craftsmen, who are pushed to try new colours and new forms," she says. As for the artists, they "discover a new world".

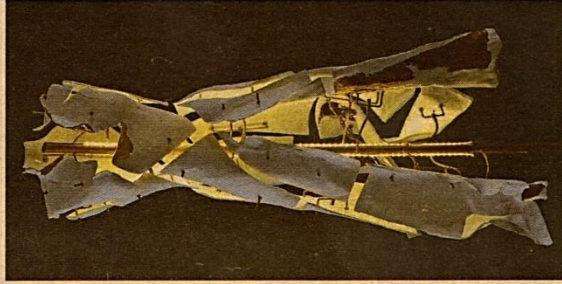
But if this is partly about creative inspiration, it is also about the market. In the words of David Caméo, who led the company from 2003: "These professions must be centred on creation; that's where they find their salvation."



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And Sévres, of course, is not the world's only ceramic business to turn to contemporary artists for inspiration. As dining habits and tastes in home decoration have changed, so Britain's own historic bone china and porcelain companies have been pressed into reinvention. As long ago as the 1930s, Wedgwood sought designs from Eric Ravilious, while between 1989 and 1990 the Art Fund commissioned two collections of contemporary Wedgwood Art Plates from the likes of Patrick Caulfield, Bruce McLean, Sir Eduardo Paolozzi, John Piper and Peter Blake.

Since 2000, Royal Crown Derby has worked with ceramic artists Ken Eastman and Peter Ting and fashion designer Bruce Oldfield to lend contemporary flair to Royal Crown Derby's heritage. This year, by contrast, Royal Doulton, part of the troubled Wedgwood Waterford group, which filed for bankruptcy in 2009 and is known for its Bunnykins figurines and babyware, came up with its Street Art graffiti series,



From far left: 'Messaline' (1994) by Etторе Sottsass for Sévres; Bunny Fingers Plate by Pure Evil for Royal Doulton Street Art; ceramic 'Robe' (2013) by Gustavo Lins

created with street artists Pure Evil and Nick Walker and mass-manufactured. In contrast to this rather rushed response to market pressures, Sévres has had freedom to develop handcrafted projects more slowly. As Aldo Bakker remarks of his first exploratory meeting: "I was totally impressed by Sévres as a company . . . It's like a dream village, surrounded by gardens, with so many workshops."

Another virtue, for a master of precision, driven to ponder and analyse, is that "in Sévres there is no hurry. You have all the time." Making his poetic, sculptural, highly idiosyncratic pieces, Bakker has drawn on all the expertise and resources of the company, nodding both to Sévres' 18th-century pre-eminence in unglazed biscuit-ware and its famous glaze, Bleu de Sévres.

"The pleasure with porcelain, for someone like me who's fascinated by form, is that you can do anything. With the help of a great producer . . . And [then there are] the endless possibilities of glazes and pigments in paint."

Ultimately, whether his pieces pour or balance, or simply express these actions in their form, they are intended as the heirlooms of the future. They are the means by which Sévres can hope, in the words of Romane Sarfati, "to reach out beyond Europe and America to Asia, China and Japan."

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PAD London runs from October 15-19
pad-fairs.com