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Collecting

FTWeekend



Rock 'n' roll hall of fame The designers taking stone stratospheric – PAGE 7

All the fun of the future

Galleries | A new generation of gallerists grew up in a playground of experimental design; now they are inviting their peers in. By *Malaika Byng*.

It was a little girl's dream," says Clara Krzentowski of the cabana-like sofa that dominated the living room of her childhood home in Paris. This colourful cocoon – a house within a house, with an inbuilt lamp, shelf and asymmetrical layered upholstery – was a 2008 work by two titans of the rough-ties design-art movement, Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, and produced by Galerie kreò, the design-art gallery founded by her parents. This daily climbing frame, of a sort, was part of an ever-changing design playground of experimental pieces in her home that also included a 1988 hot pink sci-fi Embryo chair by Marc Newson, beside the desk in her bedroom.

In 2021 at the age of 25, Krzentowski – now 31 and based in London – joined the gallery as a director to channel this playful, subversive spirit to attract the next generation of collectors. She has an

eye for the unusual, and work "that makes you question how it was made," she says, pointing to a luscious table by London-based Marco Campardo. It's crafted from high-gloss polyester resin – typically used for boat hulls – cast inside a cardboard mould, which creates strange striations across its surface. The monolithic table is surprisingly light thanks to its hollow core.

The gallerist spotted a small version glinting in the corner of Campardo's studio in 2022 and decided to arm him with the equipment and time to upscale. The result is a full furniture collection in the vivid tones that she hoped would appeal to young buyers: plum purple and lilac. Her hunch was right: two pieces from the limited edition Jello collection were recently snapped up by collectors in their thirties, including a mirror (sold for €24,000) and a coffee table (for €27,000). Gallery kreò will



Galerie kreò's director Clara Krzentowski – Photographed for FT by Nelson Bermi

bring one of these tables to the PAD London fair in Berkeley Square this month (October 13-18).

Krzentowski is one of several dynamic newcomers to the design gallery world in the last few years; new recruits who grew up with collectible designs as their playthings and are helping burnish their appeal to a growing cohort of younger collectors. Luna Laffanour, 30, joined Laffanour | Galerie Downtown in 2022, the Paris-based venture started by her father François Laffanour in the early 1980s. 28-year-old Mia Lacoste has also joined the family-run Galerie Jacques Lacoste, which has been dealing in 20th-century decorative arts since 1997.

Lacoste recalls sitting beneath the metal branches of a vine-like "Liane" wall light by French designer Jean Royère in her parents' sitting room as a child. "I always joked it would be mine one day – until my father sold it," she says. "It gave me a love for the hunt – the search for rare pieces that leave a lasting impression."

Their assumption and consolidation of roles comes amid a shaky period for the art market, although optimism is returning and the collectible design show circuit is gathering pace. Milan's Salone del Mobile furniture fair launched an exhibition devoted to unique and limited edition designs in April, while the roving Nomad fair made its US debut in the Hamptons in June and PAD had its inaugural seaside edition at Saint-Tropez in July. A steady decline in global art sales (including decorative arts and antiques) of 15.5 per cent over 2023 and 2024 has finally been followed by a rise of 4 per cent year-on-year in 2025, according to an Art Basel and UBS report. Meanwhile,

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sales of design, furniture and the decorative arts grew by 20 per cent in the first half of 2025, according to reports by ArtTactic, outstripping several traditional fine art categories.

In a recent boost to the collectible design market, a set of 15 mirrors framed with gilt bronze and galvanised copper branches, leaves and candelabra by Claude Lalanne, originally commissioned by Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, surpassed the artist's auction records in April, selling for \$53.5m at Sotheby's New York.

Dorian Dumonteil is hoping to find the next Lalanne. Since becoming artistic director of Galerie Dumonteil, founded by his parents in Paris in 1982, he has focused on what he calls "artist-led design", spotlighting functional pieces. "Collectors are increasingly seeking works they can interact with every day," he says. At PAD London the gallery will be exhibiting pieces by Jean-Marie Fiori, including a pair of bronze deer chairs with antlers as backrests (€18,000 each) and a bench that can transform into a table shaped as a turtle (€140,000), alongside a cabinet made by sculptor Aurélien Veyrat from discarded bricks (€14,000). Veyrat's poetic patchworks sold out at PAD Paris earlier this year; one chest scooped the Contemporary Design Prize.

Younger collectors "are drawn to craftsmanship and strong narratives", says Dumonteil, and rarely limit themselves to one discipline. The Art Basel and UBS collecting survey 2025 showed how buyers in their twenties, thirties and early forties are "omnivores", drawn to a smorgasbord of art, design, fashion, cars and jewellery; of these, millennials spend the most on the decorative arts. Laffanour is taking note. She launched *downtown+* in 2023, a series of exhibitions featuring 20th-century pieces, some from the Laffanour | Galerie Downtown collection, alongside works by contemporary designers. "I wanted to continue what my father created but offer something new, finding fresh ways of showing art," she says. "People are looking for an experience."

During the Design Miami.Paris fair last year, she commandeered a town-

'Young collectors are more informed... and they are looking for the unexpected'

Laura Tsoukala



house in the seventh arrondissement with the exhibition *Trônes* (thrones), where 20th-century sculptural seating by Superstudio and Andrea Branzi sat alongside contemporary designs by Wendy Andreu and Leo Orta and paintings by Miranda Webster.

Among the works was Orta's Electric Wave Chair, an assemblage of steel, concrete, electric cables and lacquer, priced at €15,000. "There is a rich dialogue between the decades," Laffanour says, pointing to Orta's references to 1970s

Italian design and its mix of high and low materials. "The collecting world is always in motion, so it's important to show the progression from one design movement to another."

Laffanour sees work by emerging artists and designers as a more accessible entry point for new collectors. She will exhibit the work of Kazakhstani-born figurative painter Ais at the same townhouse on rue Las Cases this autumn (October 16-24), alongside chairs by the established craft designer Wendy Andreu, set against a soundtrack from electronic music producer Sam Tiba.

Art was the starting point for 31-year-old collector Marc-Alain Spruch; it proved the gateway to buying design pieces from Laffanour. "I kept buying from young artists who didn't take off or more established people whose work I didn't really connect with," says the president of French tableware specialist Guy Degrenne. "I just couldn't get it right. Design is part of everyday life, so it felt easier to understand."

Spruch bucks the trend in his generation. "My friends collect art, watches and jewellery, but my interests have become increasingly specific," he says. He started to focus on the 1980s, which he sees as a "huge moment for French design". A prized piece purchased from Laffanour

is a punctured metal table designed by Philippe Starck, one of a limited run for his first hotel commission, New York's The Royalton Hotel in the 1980s.

This focus on rarity and niche moments in history is more characteristic of today's young buyers than any specific periods or designers, adds Lacoste. "What matters most to them is understanding why a piece is important." She points to a pair of "Hirondelle" three-light wall sconces in green lacquered metal (circa 1950) by Jean Royère, bought by a collector in his thirties at PAD Saint-Tropez for his Paris home — pieces "that we have only encountered twice in the history of the gallery," she says. "It says a lot about how some young collectors are approaching the market. He was not simply looking for a recognisable Royère piece but something rare, with provenance and quality."

Online access to information has changed the game, adds Laura Tsoukala,



director of Stefanidou Tsoukala Gallery, which she co-founded with her mother, interior designer Veta Stefanidou Tsoukala, in Athens in 2018. "Young collectors are starting out with a more informed perspective," she says. "And they are looking for the unexpected."

Tsoukala represents Greek artists and designers alongside international designers inspired by ancient Greece. She encourages this varied approach. "If you are collecting pieces by well-known artists, it's important to add something with a twist," she says. The gallery collaborates with artist Konstantin Kakanias, who lent his whimsical brushstrokes depicting the Greek god Poseidon surrounded by jellyfish to a cabinet. It sold to a young collector at PAD Saint Tropez.

Krzentowski suggests that it is also straitened times that are driving some of this new eclecticism. "Rising production and material costs mean our contemporary pieces tend to be more expensive than our vintage pieces," she says. "In the early days, someone might see a collection and buy the lot, but that's rare now. People have to be more selective and aware of market value."

Krzentowski sees the gallery's most crucial roles as carving out "space and time" for designers to experiment and helping collectors to understand the value of such work. It has begun working with London-based design collective JAM, which has developed a collection at glass research centre Cirva in Marseille, one of the largest projects realised there. The results — giant lampposts to be shown at Gallery kero's Paris base in late October — will exist "somewhere between object and architecture" and stretch the limits of blown glass to the max.

Like the new crowd of young collectors she works with, Krzentowski is "drawn to work that defies expectations," she says.

PAD London, October 13-18
padesignart.com



Luna Laffanour is spotlighting classics at PAD London: a 'Grand Confort' chair by Charlotte Perriand, Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier — Laffanour | Galerie Downtown



Clockwise from main: Laura Tsoukala of Stefanidou Tsoukala Gallery; cabinet by Aurélien Veyrat at Galerie Dumonteil; Dorian Dumonteil; the Jello collection by Marco Campardo at Gallery kreo; Mia Lacoste; art deco alpaca-wool chair at Stefanidou Tsoukala Gallery — Nikolas Fotinakis; Studio B Heller; Francis Armand; Alexandra de Cossette; Stefanidou Tsoukala Gallery