

The paths of Modernism

Dealers at London's Pavilion of Art and Design opt for blue-chip works in uncertain times. By Caroline Roux

For the 11th year, the Pavilion of Art and Design (PAD) has filled its monster marquee in London's Berkeley Square with highly designed furniture, pricy jewels, 20th-century art and tribal masks. Its message to visitors: see how lovely all these disparate things look together.

There is innovation in this world of luxury. On the stand of Carpenters Workshop Gallery, in the same prime spot at the fair's entrance for several years, sits a series of pieces – from coffee tables to lights – striking in their chilly austerity. Designed by the thirty-something Korean Wonmin Park, they are exercises in new ways with aluminium. The Carpenters Gallery crew has spent 20 years working out how to patinate the metal and here is the result, a deep dappled grey matter and – unlike bronze, which displays the life it has lived – immutable.

But these are cautious times, and that's reflected here this year. Unknown contemporary designers and new approaches have taken a back seat to the safer realms of the 20th century; thus, PAD offers a delightful wander down the many paths of Modernism. There's a gorgeous 1970 rosewood and black glass triangular dining table by Joaquim Tenreiro at Galerie Le Beau (£48,000), a perfect example of the sensuous Brazilian variant of the movement. At Portuondo London is Ico Parisi's 1958 suite of low-slung sofa and armchairs, whose proximity to the floor and frame of black-painted metal rods was modern madness in its day, and is still 1950s Italy at its most alluring.

At Robin Katz, next to a charcoal drawing by David Bomberg, a sculpture made by Reg Butler in 1948 of a reclining woman is redolent of a recovering postwar Britain: a linear abstraction of the female form, where iron looks as light as air. Weaver Peter Collingwood's taut, geometric "Macrogauze" wall hangings from 1960s-90s (£10,000-£22,000) hang on Rose Uniacke's stand nearby. Even Wonmin Park's architectural furniture follows the Modernist rules – a kind of nu-metal Modern.

Since its beginnings, PAD has encouraged galleries to mix art and design. In the pale and comforting space of Alexandre Biaggi's blue-chip stand, a fabulous four-panelled painting by Christian Bérard (known for set designs for Les Ballets Russes and fashion illustrations for Chanel) – originally a screen commissioned by

the designer and decorator Jean-Michel Frank in 1930s – shares space with an Alberto Giacometti lamp ("Very rare, £180,000," says Biaggi) and a glittering gold wall work by the contemporary ceramic artist Johan Creten. At Repetto Gallery, expressive ceramic figures and abstract forms by Fausto Melotti (£4,500-£66,000) are best shown alone.

Once elaborate room sets were *de rigueur* at PAD, now it seems dealers prefer to set out their stalls in a simpler way. A few mentioned that the market is not being as kind to them as in previous years.

Other changes include the absence of some familiar faces. David Gill, London's first design gallerist, who set up shop in 1986, is showing only in his gallery space in St James's this year. And a couple of galleries specialising in Modern painting have not returned. "Some galleries are better off at Frieze or Frieze Masters," conceded the fair's founder Patrick Perrin, who is based in Paris. When asked if Brexit had had any impact, he replied: "I live in euros, and here I'm earning pounds. So, yes, around 25 per cent impact."

Nonetheless, sales at PAD so far this year include a Doshi Levien cabinet influenced by Le Corbusier sold for more than €50,000 at Sèvres, and at De Jonckheere a rare Magritte and Fontana's "Concetto Spaziale, Attesa" (1964-65) each went for a six figure sum.

I hope someone will snap up the unnerving cabinets by Marlène Huissoud on Sarah Myerscough's stand, whose bobbly black exteriors are silkworm cocoons covered in resin: Huissoud is 28 and comes from a family of beekeepers in the French Alps. Not modern, not cheap (£11,000 and £28,000), but a breath of fresh air.

To October 8, pad-fairs.com/london



Porcelain cabinet by Doshi Levien (2017) – Sèvres gallery