

# WWD

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## Bridget Foley's Diary: Salon Style

At-home chic is about more than the perfect pajamas. The Salon: Art + Design, in New York this weekend, highlights modern and contemporary design.

By Bridget Foley



The Wendell Castle dining set at Wexler Gallery  
Courtesy Photo

It seems there's barely a topic in American life that can't wend in short order toward Donald Trump. But the presence of glass exhibitors at The Salon: Art + Design, which opened Thursday night at the Park Avenue Armory? Yes, even that.

Jill Bokor is the executive director of the show, which typically opens on the Thursday after Election Day. (Thursday's opening benefited the Dia Art Foundation.) Over a recent coffee at the Americano, Bokor recounted what she calls "the misery of two years ago," when the shock of Trump's presidential win was still very new and, for many, very raw.

On that opening evening, attendees found their focus diverted from shopping. "They wanted to look, they wanted to see each other and they wanted to sob," Bokor recalled, though she added a quick inclusivity caveat: "I mean, there were probably people there who'd voted for Trump."

The following Saturday, typically the event's biggest day, traffic woes generated by anti-Trump demonstrations caused a dip in show traffic, which caused a dip in sales, and crappy sales led some vendors to drop out. That left Bokor challenged "to make lemonade out of lemons." Or at least to procure highfalutin vessels for lemonade, because at that point, the show was lacking in impressive glassware, and she sought out that category to fill the vacancies. So in a way, anyone smitten by the midcentury Italian glass at Glass Past or contemporary pieces at Heller Gallery has Trump to thank.

Achieving a compelling exhibitor mix is essential to a successful show. While proud that 21 vendors have stayed with the event since its inception, Bokor noted that healthy movement around that core makes for an interesting, ever-evolving event. Once all gallerists are confirmed, she arranges the floor plan to afford each maximum impact, a task she considers one of the most difficult aspects of staging a show of this scale. To illustrate, she ran through the order of a few stations: Enter and turn right to come upon antiquities next to Seventies-and-Eighties French next to contemporary German, and across from French ceramics. "There is such great stuff. It can only be freshly seen if what's next to it makes them look differently," she said. In addition to the basic gallery set-ups, this year's event features numerous special installations, and they swing diverse, including one by interior designer Ryan Korban in collaboration with Lalique crystal and another by Eileen Fisher, taking her message of sustainability to the Salon with a collection of wall hangings made from recycled textiles.



The Eileen Fisher DesignWork Installation features wall hangings made from recycled textiles by artist Sigi Ahi. Courtesy Photo

The show's 57 gallerists (in 55 booths) hail from 11 countries and specialize mostly in work from 1900 on. Among the few golden oldies: antiquities galleries Ariadne Galleries and Phoenix Ancient Art, the inclusion of which Bokor deems essential. "I have such strong feelings that everything that has come since begins with ancient art, that we have two ancient art galleries in the fair. And they do very well there," she said.

Still, the primary thrust is modern and contemporary, which makes for a very different scenario than in the late Eighties, when Bokor was publisher and editorial director of Art + Auction magazine, a time when major antiques were all the rage. "We saw people amassing the most extraordinary collections of Louis Quinze, of 18th-century French paintings, of Old Master paintings, of silver. They collected deeply. It was not unusual to walk into a house that was entirely Arts & Crafts. And these people who collected really and rightfully had enormous pride in what they were doing."

Given the long-running obsession with 20th and 21st-century everything, it's clear that focus changes, as tastes do. Yet Bokor attributes the shift to more than a zeitgeist-y evolution of aesthetic preferences. True, the sophisticated collector's eye shifted its communal gaze, from fusty-musty toward newer and often, more avant-garde. But it got encouragement from that omni-powerful overseer of discretionary spending: money.

"I tie all of this to the world of economics," Bokor said, noting that the "financial mini-crisis" of the late Eighties, though not as disastrous as 2008, resonated significantly. If it didn't formally sound the death knell for Nouvelle Society (a term coined by WWD's late editorial director John B. Fairchild), it certainly symbolized that era's waning. Enough for suddenly downgraded 1-percenters to reevaluate all of their assets. "People who thought they wouldn't part with things found that they could," Bokor noted.



Neolithic European Idol in marble, fifth to fourth millennium B.C., at Phoenix Ancient Art. Courtesy Photo

Yet once they'd unloaded the Old Masters, they weren't ready to live like monks, and began turning their "extraordinary taste and eyes" toward new periods and ways of collecting. For example, an item such as Shiro Kuramata's now-iconic acrylic chair embedded with red roses might have replaced a Louis-whatever treasure. Another Kuramata chair, sans flowers, is featured in the Salon's Callidus Guild installation.

Along the way, the psychology of collecting evolved as well, and with it, the ways in which people integrate design into their lives. Today's collectors tend to be more open to suggestion and eclectic in their tastes; they acquire "more horizontally and less deeply," allowing them to integrate collecting into their lives in a more relaxed, comfortable way.

Then there's the impact of technology. Given the show's contemporary current, one might expect to find overt instances of tech-driven design. Bokor name-checked some younger designers, including Misha Kahn and Jonathan Trayte, whose work has "what would be fun to call a new industrial feel," though she's unsure if gallerists would agree with that characterization. As for pieces created using 3-D printing, she said there's still relatively little at this level of the design world, though she expects swift changes will come.



The Shiro Kuramata chair, in the Callidus guild Installation. Courtesy Photo

But she identified the impact of technology elsewhere. One significant piece that was supposed to be at the show sold early, via Instagram. Bigger picture, the Salon addresses how people live at home, which is changing. Just like in the Fifties (but not like the Fifties at all) television plays a major part. "Entertainment is so accessible at home now. That's probably the major factor," Bokor said. As television's current golden age has muscled in on movie-going, people spend more time at home. At the same time, there's been an uptick in at-home entertaining. And the more time people spend at home, the more important home design becomes.

The Salon is decidedly high-end, featuring the work of major design- and art-world names such as Calder and Fontana. While the Wendell Castle dining table and chairs at Wexler Gallery "would have been extraordinary in any circumstance," his death in January has likely heightened the interest, and Bokor predicts an early sale.



A Riccardo Licata Doppio Incalmo Venini Vase, circa 1955, at Glass Past.

Given such attractions, the show draws a mostly tony, serious crowd, including designers shopping for and with increasingly hands-on clients who peruse pieces that in a rare case might top seven figures. Yet Bokor stressed that it is not a rich-people-only affair, and she is focused on attracting a younger audience. “One of the myths about [design] fairs that we need to deconstruct is that there is nothing affordable,” she said. Aspiring collectors who may be priced out of furniture might find a decorative piece of glass or ceramic, and that first purchase can trigger lifelong curiosity and desire. “They start to think about things, and maybe the next year, they come back and they say, ‘My goal is to have a piece of the Haas Brothers. I love Brazilian rosewood, that’s what I want.’ So the idea, the seed of a collection, is formed,” Bokor said.

She mused, too, that as Millennials buy first homes, they start to think about design differently, often taking an approach that we in fashion talk about all the time — high-low, perhaps putting a piece of midcentury glass on a table from Ikea.

At the same time, even the most traditional shoppers (read: the highly knowledgeable, really rich ones) want to be charmed. As Bokor put it, “The best collectors — even if their collections look a little serious — know how to do something that makes your eyes twinkle.”