



ON VIEW

The Shifting Identity of Paris's Biennale des Antiquaires

DESIGN BY DAVID NETTO SEPTEMBER 15, 2014 5:15 PM



Jacques Grange's decoration of the Grand Palais for the Biennale des Antiquaires was inspired by Versailles.
Julio Piatti

Nobody turns out to support decorative arts like the French do, and every two years the beau monde of Paris show up en masse for the **Biennale des Antiquaires**. Once, this event was for Wall Street titans seeking to furnish their apartments on Park Avenue. Hubert de Givenchy could be seen squiring the wives of junk-bond kings, advising and conferring with the certainty that pretty much all of them wanted to live in environments like his.

But times and tastes change, and the rules are now less certain. To be sure, you can find “haute” French aesthetics and 18th-century furniture in the booths of dealers like Steinitz and Kraemer, but the relative collapse of the antique furniture market (in favor of Art Deco and Moderne) has given way to a new kind of show. The Biennale that opened Tuesday night offers riches galore, with a presentation that is long on spectacle. But it is less a guidebook on how to live once you’ve made it and more a show to be considered one object at a time.

Some highlights: Dominique Levy from New York has a terrific Robert Motherwell “Elegy” painting (it sold the first night) and a very fine 1960 drawing by Cy Twombly, as full of texture as any work on paper I have ever seen. At the rear of the Geneva dealer Jacques de la Beraudiere’s booth is a superb Matisse drawing of a young woman. If you’re looking for furniture, Galerie du Passage and Vallois are here, but many of the best Paris dealers avoid the expense of exhibiting and have receptions in their own shops. This Biennale is particularly strong in antiquities, one of the few areas of collecting where there is still real value to be had, with Galerie Chenel and Phoenix Ancient Art among the best exhibitors.

Jacques Grange’s scenographic decoration of the **Grand Palais** is **inspired by the gardens of Versailles** (as well as the carpets of Madeleine Castaing and, in the trellises, the crisp geometric style of David Hicks). It provides a chic, cheery, unifying background for the show. In mingling among the crowd, however, one can’t help but be reminded of the old proverb that “kind hearts are more than coronets,” and wonder if the real swans are on the Metro somewhere.

http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/15/biennale-des-antiquaires-paris-highlights/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0