



September 12, 2012

# Sumptuous Paris Fair Defies Bearish Times

By MAÏA de la BAUME

PARIS — With a space designed by Karl Lagerfeld and more exhibitors than in the past two decades, the 26th edition of the [Biennale des Antiquaires](#), opening Friday, will be a test of the prestige art market in a stagnant economy.

The Biennale, now one of the world's most prominent antiques fairs, started in 1962 with 78 exhibitors. This edition, to be held at the Grand Palais from Sept. 14 to 23, will have 122 exhibitors and a collection of about 8,000 items, from Vietnamese bronzes and Roman coins to 146-carat diamond necklaces.

The Biennale will keep with its tradition to showcase some of the rarest and first-class collections of furniture, paintings, decorative art, sculptures, and jewelry from well-known dealers including L&M Arts and Marlborough from New York, Aaron and Kraemer from Paris, and Jan Krugier from Geneva. As one of the most expensive fairs in the world, dealers pay outrageous amounts of money to rent their stands at the Grand Palais, where a single square meter, or just over 10 square feet, is worth about €1,300, or \$1,630.

Often described as an elitist gathering of handpicked dealers and collectors, the Biennale will play host to 54 newcomers from France and abroad this year, in more than 5,000 square meters of customized stands.

New participants include Christophe Hioco, an antique dealer in Asian art, and the Budapest-based Kalman Maklary Fine Arts Gallery, which specializes in Post-War and Surrealist artists. Wallace Chan, a jeweler from Hong Kong, will be the first Chinese jeweler invited to exhibit his haute joaillerie designs alongside traditional Place Vendôme names, like Chaumet and Van Cleef & Arpels.

“We have 122 exhibitors this year, against 87 two years ago, that’s the change,” said Christian Deydier, the head of the Syndicat National des Antiquaires, the national union of antiques dealers that organizes the Biennale.

Among the items selected for their quality and historic value, Mr. Deydier cited some unusual

gems like a Koran dating from the 18th century, given by Louis XV to his daughter Victoire, known as Madame Victoire, and a painting by Paul Cézanne, “Tasse, verre et fruits, II,” presented by Jan Krugier.

One of the most expensive artworks, Mr. Deydier said, will be a 1963 portrait of Liz Taylor by Andy Warhol, worth about \$40 million and shown at the L&M Arts stand.

The Biennale, which used to showcase more vintage jewels than expensive diamonds, will honor “Haute Joaillerie,” or high jewelry, this year with more fanfare than before. Ten of the most prestigious jewelry houses, including Cartier, Boucheron, Dior, Harry Winston, Piaget and Van Cleef & Arpels, will uncover their finest collections or have jewels exclusively made for the Biennale. Piaget, for example, says it has created its biggest high jewelry collection ever for the Biennale, which includes an 18-carat necklace in white gold encrusted with 2,011 diamonds cut as a brilliant.

Harry Winston will display a necklace with 146 carats of jewels — 13 sapphires and 225 diamonds. Bulgari will show a €2.6 million diamond necklace; Cartier, a choker encrusted with platinum, diamonds, and turquoises.

All of which seems far from the mood of austerity in Europe. “The art market is doing well,” Mr. Deydier said. “Especially for exceptional art works, and likewise for luxury jewelry. The high jewelry houses bank on ultraluxury collections because they know that they will sell them.”

Many houses, like Chanel and Cartier, have doubled the size of their stands this year, the organizer said. Cartier will present an 18-carat diamond watch in gray-gold in a 250-square-meter room, compared with about 100 square meters in 2010.

The interior design of the Biennale is a hugely important part of the event, and exhibitors often put much work into the layout of their stands. Galerie Steinitz, for example, known as the prince of antique dealers, which specializes in furniture and objets d’art from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, has long been considered as having one of the most outstanding stands, showing its treasures in rooms covered with rare wood paneling.

This year, the Biennale will benefit from an extended exhibition hall, designed by Mr. Lagerfeld. Previous years’ curators at the Biennale have included renowned architects and designers like Pier-Luigi Pizzi, Jean-Michel Wilmotte and, most recently, Christian Lacroix.

Mr. Lagerfeld has designed more than 15,000 square meters of space, including parts of the newly restored Salon d’Honneur, a 1,200-square-meter extension of the nave of the Grand Palais, topped by a giant glass window, which reopened in 2011 after being shut for more than 70 years. The Salon d’Honneur served as military hospital during World War II.

Mr. Lagerfeld, who designed the stand of the Gmurzynska gallery at Paris's main contemporary art fair, the FIAC, last year, will use the Grand Palais to recreate a 19th-century Paris. Visitors will be able to wander the erstwhile streets of Paris and shopping arcades and see sites including the Champs-Élysées and a 7-meter-high Arc de Triomphe.

“We are very happy that Mr. Lagerfeld accepted to handle the interior design of the Biennale,” Mr. Deydier wrote. When asked if he had chosen Mr. Lagerfeld in an attempt to revive and make more cutting-edge an event seen by many as archaic and reserved to a small elite of wealthy collectors, he said that this was not the case.

Mr. Deydier said it was thanks to the extension of the Salon d'Honneur that the Biennale was able to grow this year.

“We've been able to welcome more exhibitors,” he said. “We will have more African art and high jewelry.”

Mr. Deydier himself, a specialist in Asian Art, said he would show an “exceptional collection” of seventh-century fabrics and silk clothing from Central Asia. His collection also includes “Dame de Cour Assise,” a delicate terra-cotta statue of a court lady from the Chinese Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–907) covered with a rare blue pigment imported from Iran.

The Biennale will feature many important paintings including Lucas Cranach's “Portrait of King Christian of Denmark” and Picasso's “Vase, Pipe, Paquet de Tabac.” Also on display will be a wealth of fine furniture and objets d'art from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries from dealers like Kraemer, whose stand at the 2010 Biennale was a recreation of President Barack Obama's Oval Office in the White House.

Kraemer will show at the Biennale a much-anticipated cabinet in mahogany adorned with carved and gilded bronzes by Jacques-Henri Riesener, Marie-Antoinette's favorite cabinet-maker. Chadelaud, another dealer from Paris, will showcase a €2.2 million marble sculpture by Wilhelm Haverkamp, representing twins seated on a Corinthian capital.

Some dealers specialized in archaeology, like David Ghezlbash in Paris, will have on display antiquities, including a stunning second-century Venus head, her wavy hair delicately sculpted in white marble, while Phoenix Ancient Art, one of the leading dealers in rare antiquities, will present an amusing fourth-century bronze of a Gorgon sticking out her tongue.

Works by some of the most famous contemporary sculptors include Niki de Saint Phalle's 1993 “Nana,” one of her signature, cartoon-like maternal figures, and François-Xavier Lalanne's 1998 “Âne de Natalie,” a 1.82-meter-tall donkey made of bronze, leather and wood.