



Victor Hunt's first design show with pieces by Kwangho Lee & English designer Tom Price



Bibliothèque Maison du Mexique by Charlotte Perriand, circa 1955, photo courtesy of Piasa Auction House

THE RISE & RISE OF DESIGN

By Cyril Zammit, Design Days Dubai Fair Director

The market of design has seen a prosperous growth throughout the past years. Auction houses have set records selling contemporary as well as modern design. The hunt for the perfect market to launch your product has set off multiple fairs and design weeks globally. But why is it that the product design field is such a lucrative one? Here Design Days Dubai Fair Director Cyril Zammit explores this evolving market.

Many outsiders looking into the world of limited edition design feel intimidated. Galleries are regarded as elitist while others are engaging. It's a tricky relationship. Galleries will not be in business if it weren't for collectors or simply buyers, just like any other venture around the world. The difference is how do you explain or reason the price tag? When consumers are furnishing their environment, some opt for the obvious and affordable, while others seek luxury brands. What lacks in both is you are paying sums of money for an object that has been mass-produced and could be viewed three houses down.

MOVE AWAY FROM MAINSTREAM

Research is key; where, when, how is the piece produced? You will sometimes find the answers to these questions a bit underwhelming which sparks a search. Looking for products of a smaller design scale means you'll find designs that have been produced by designers or by design studios that fit your budget, though some might be a bit more expensive. The difference now is you're purchasing a unique object that's of limited quantity, engaging with the designer and are aware of the production process.

This investment from buyers into

product design generates a market that keeps craftsmanship alive and is now a field supported globally. Last year Piasa, Europe's leading auction house in design, closed 2014 with a total of €36 million in sales of design products, a sharp rise of €18 million from 2013. Among some of the highest items sold is the Axel Johannes Salto Vase, which went under the hammer for €217,500. Piasa is leading the race in the design auction field under the direction of Frédéric Chambre within just 18 months. These numbers give a clear indication of the rise of design and show that the correct team and vision enabled the sales but the objects remained the stars of the show. >>

Salto Vase by Axel Johannes, circa 1945,
photo courtesy of Piasa Auction House.



BEHIND THE PRICE TAG

Such valuable pieces demand a deep pocket, but surely it wasn't expensive when first created. There are factors that play into the final number that a gallery or an auction house comes up with. A gallery initially needs to have a relationship with the designer and their work, and as Joy Mardini, director of ArtFactum Gallery based in Beirut said, "I can't exhibit something I cannot see in my living room." A gallery will then invest in the choice of materials, location of production and the amount of prototypes. After that, you factor in the designer fee, which can fluctuate based on their career. A few questions involved are: have they been showcased in museums? Where has their work been exhibited? Who has represented them in the past? What sort of clientele does this designer attract? What and how much media exposure has the designer received from his past projects? Collectively you will get the final number you pay for.

Back in May 2007, I acquired a Maarten Baas chair from his clay collection. Maarten was at the start of his rise to stardom. The chair now costs triple the initial amount I paid for; many editions have been produced by several galleries that represented him. Since I bought it from his first edition, the value is even greater. Within 5 years, Maarten has collaborated with luxury houses such as Louis Vuitton for their "Objets Nomades" series. He is now presented by Carpenters Workshop Gallery, a leading design gallery and has work housed in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. A short period of time has made this designer a household name but the core driving force is his talent.

Product design has paved a niche in the world of international fairs. The amount of fairs globally has increased, allowing some fairs to have two editions in one year. Galleries find dealing with design to be a more lucrative one, partially due to its practicality. Alexis Alexis Ryngaert,

“Product design has paved a niche in the world of international fairs.”

director and owner of Victor Hunt DesignArt Dealer; adds, "you can't sell what you don't like and stand behind without being able to still confront the man in the mirror. At the same time, some curatorial choices sell well; others you stand behind just as well don't sell as much but just had to be done for the love of the game. There's a thin wire a gallery owner has to balance on and where the entrepreneurial challenges of a gallery resides. Optimally you have both but then again, that doesn't always turn out as hoped for."

IS DESIGN SUSTAINABLE?

In my opinion it is, but what keeps it moving is understanding your clientele, this could be from where they are based. Certain regions have particular tastes for ceramics while others enjoy innovative play on materials. This coherence helps, and then correctly approaching it will provide growth to the business.

If owning a gallery could be a slippery slope at times, why invest so much in it? Mardini of ArtfactumGallery explains, "I

had a certain passion for art that I felt I had to make use of and turn into an actual career. Also, there was something going on in the Middle East around art, and I thought it was right about time to go ahead with the plan." On the other hand, Ryngaert of Victor Hunt DesignArt Dealer explains why he established his gallery, "there is a need to provide a platform for a recent evolution in contemporary design such as the evolutions on the technological side, works produced with these new basic materials that have grown to mass availability over the past 15 years and evoke creativity with designers."

Galleries and design spaces exist to showcase unique and alternative options to consumers. Owners and directors aren't elitists, they are passionate and wish to engage consumers, start a conversation, challenge you and shed some light on a road less travelled. Fear or lack of understanding are two of mankind's biggest prisons. Once we become curious, we know more, understand more and appreciate the rising culture of design. ■



Alexis Ryngaert, Director of
Victor Hunt DesignArt Dealer, on
his first shoot with a couch by
Korean designer Kwangho Lee

Images Courtesy of Design studios & Design Days Dubai