

## ANTIQUES

# Downsizing Dealers Drum Up Sales

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**DOWNSIZING DEALERS****Drum Up Sales**

Two fixtures of the international fair circuit, which have both recently shuttered shops full of 20th-century antiques, are selling off inventory at auctions next week.

On Tuesday, Christie's is auctioning about 200 pieces from Historical Design, which had occupied a cavernous store at 306 East 61st Street in Manhattan. On Thursday, Heritage Auction Galleries, based in Dallas, is running a Manhattan sale for 303 lots from Michael Playford, a dealer who has closed his London outlet, Two Zero C Applied Art.

The dealers' tastes overlap somewhat. Christie's and Heritage are both offering, at estimates of a few thousand dollars apiece, Marion Dorn's 1930s striped wool rugs, Josef Hoffmann's early 1900s beechwood armchairs and Jean Luce's stoneware vases painted around 1930 with gilded leaves on black backgrounds.

But Historical Design has also brought out 1920s and '30s office accessories, including a black Bakelite telephone (estimated at \$1,500 to \$2,000) as well as 1960s Grateful Dead posters with droopy Art Nouveau-inspired typography (\$400 to \$900). Mr. Playford has sent over Nigerian wooden stools (\$700 to \$2,800 per pair) and 1920s silver collars made for Miao tribeswomen in China (\$1,500 to \$2,000).

Despite the downsizing, both dealers are staying in business. Mr. Playford sells antiques privately from a stone villa he has renovated in rural Tuscany; Heritage put a photo of its mountainside azure swimming pool on the catalog cover. "Dealing is something I can't resist doing," Mr. Playford said, and added that he expected to be running antiques fair booths again within a few years. Historical Design is open by appointment in converted storage space on East 91st Street. The Christie's lots represent "about 10 percent of our inventory, just a tasty sampling," said Daniel Morris, a co-owner of the store. The auction catalog, he added, is meant to sum up the business's playful approach to design history and inspire future sales.

Scattered around the catalog pages are contrarian quotes from designers, like Charles Eames's line "Whoever said that pleasure wasn't functional?" A high-profile auction like this, Mr. Morris said, "can be a forum for dealers to make a public statement about their eye, their point of view, and create a public record of their tastes in a way that has an afterlife, that lives on."

**ART NOUVEAU AND MORE**

Two of the last purist Art Nouveau dealers are bowing to market shifts and adding mid- and late-20th-century material to their Manhattan galleries.

Jason Jacques, at 29 East 73rd Street, after focusing on Art Nouveau ceramics for two decades, has filled half of his gallery with his own collection of contemporary abstract paintings and bronze sculptures and vessels by Martin Kline, an artist in Rhinebeck, N.Y. Mostly priced between \$15,000 and \$55,000, the Kline pieces (on view through early January) have paint drips and mossy textures that echo the glaze streaks and knobby forms on Mr. Jacques's century-old vases and hammered copper boxes (priced between a few thousand dollars and \$90,000). Mr. Jacques said he set up the Kline show because so many Art Nouveau masterworks are now lodged in collections and not budging.



At Christie's: Part of a mosaic sign rescued from the Tiffany Studios building that once stood at Madison Avenue and 45th.  
Christie's

“You can’t buy the great stuff anymore, no matter how much money you have,” he said. “I’m preparing for the inevitable end. The well is running dry.”

Lillian Nassau L.L.C. gallery, at 220 East 57th Street, opens a show on Friday, “Design Revisited: 20th Century Innovations,” with works younger than the gallery itself. (It opened in 1945.) The store’s signature Tiffany glass vases and lamps, many with six-figure prices, are now arrayed on Modernist wooden dressers and tables (priced between \$4,500 and \$45,000) by George and Mira Nakashima, Phillip Lloyd Powell, Tommi Parzinger, Vladimir Kagan, Wendell Castle and Edward Wormley.

“I’ve been quietly building up to this for a year,” said Arlie Sulka, the gallery’s owner. “We need a new generation looking at what we’ve always sold, learning about how you can mix and match.”

She is showing customers 1950s and ’60s shelter magazines, with photo spreads about postwar Tiffany collectors: they displayed their lamps and vases on modernist furniture, sometimes studded with matte or gilded tiles that look like early 1900s precedents. In her store window, along the winding edge of a Nakashima lumber table, she has set a Tiffany lamp with a base shaped like tree roots and some Art Nouveau ceramic frogs clinging to the rim of a lily pad bowl.

## **T IS FOR TIFFANY**

Around 1920, when Louis Comfort Tiffany’s studio on Madison Avenue at 45th Street was razed, some foresighted soul managed to save fragments of the Tiffany mosaic street sign. The rescued T, S and a few digits (the address was 347-355 Madison Avenue), made of marbled glass embedded in four chunks of concrete each weighing about 250 pounds, will be auctioned separately at Christie’s on Tuesday with estimates of \$20,000 to \$30,000 apiece.

The unnamed consignor has owned the little-known slabs since around 1970. Until the Christie’s auction was announced, “I had no clue they existed, and I’m so glad they were salvaged,” said Edith Crouch, author of a new book, “The Mosaics of Louis Comfort Tiffany” (Schiffer Publishing). Arlie Sulka, a dealer who specializes in Tiffany at Lillian Nassau on East 57th Street, said that the quartet “really should go to a museum, even with the ‘iffany’ missing.”

## **A KNIGHT GOES TO YALE**

A widely traveled church window depicting a larger-than-life medieval knight is now headed for the Yale University Art Gallery. The stained-glass designer John La Farge created the 15-foot-tall window in 1899 for a Unitarian church in Detroit, as a memorial to a local newspaper editor. After the church tore out and sold the window, a collector in Virginia hung it in his home for about 15 years, and then last summer he shipped it to William Vareika Fine Arts in Newport, R.I., to sell in a La Farge retrospective. Mr. Vareika’s price tag was \$500,000.

“We were able to negotiate that price to something I can’t say,” said John Stuart Gordon, the assistant curator of American decorative arts at the Yale gallery, which also purchased La Farge’s sketch for the window from Mr. Vareika.

Yale plans to install the window at the entry to its American decorative arts galleries after renovations are completed around 2012. The knight, Mr. Gordon said, “will be a luminous beacon, something that will lure visitors in.”

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