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Sit up and take notice

By Gareth Harris

Miami online; Riyadh on the radar; a bespoke speedboat for 'everyday oligarchs'



Wendell Castle's 'The Secret of a Few' (2012), three-seater sofa made from oiled ash

In a significant move, and to little fanfare, the online art database Art.sy, which includes Wendi Deng Murdoch and gallerist Larry Gagosian among its backers and advisers, has teamed up with the premier modern and contemporary fair DesignMiami/ (December 5-9). Art.sy will give a substantial overview of the work at the fair, featuring a selection of pieces from each gallery, says director Marianne Goebel. Art.sy president Sebastian Cwilich explains that “dealers will have the option on a per-work basis to decide what users can do, ranging from making inquiries with Art.sy or the gallery, to making offers, to buying works outright.”

Whether this translates into sales for the 35 participating dealers, from big-hitters such as Galerie Patrick Seguin of Paris and R20th Century of New York to emerging dealers such as Tel Aviv's Design Space, remains to be seen. The move means, though, that DesignMiami taps into a global, virtual collector base. Surprisingly, Art.sy says it will forgo its usual sale commissions. So how will it make money? “We are only waiving our

commissions around these initial art fairs [the online facility has also teamed up with the Armory Show in New York]; we will eventually charge commissions just as we do for non art-fair sales on the site,” adds Cwilich.

At DesignMiami it will be worth checking out the “America Table and Jefferson Chair”, 2012, by the veteran Italian designer Gaetano Pesce, available with Erastudio Apartment-Gallery from Milan. In the light of the recent US presidential election, Pesce presents his “own tribute to the USA”, says the gallery’s Valentina Lucio. In London, David Gill Gallery has made quite a splash with a show of Pesce’s “Six Tables on Water” (until December 22). These waterscape works represent H2O sources from oceans to ponds and rivers, and are all priced at £75,000 (apart from the “Puddle Table”).

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Phillips de Pury looks to the past in its Design Masters auction in New York (December 11). “One of the top lots is a spectacular and rare sideboard, around 1875, by the progressive English architect EW Godwin,” says Alexander Payne, the auction house’s worldwide director of design. “This will be the earliest dated work in the sale. In our ongoing Design Masters series, we’re intent on pushing our offerings back into the early 20th century, and



Sideboard by EW Godwin (c1870)

farther back into the late 19th century when appropriate.” A London-based source in the art trade says, however, he feels the estimate of \$500,000-\$600,000 is “optimistic”, adding that the piece is not characteristic of Godwin as generally “[his] furniture has legs; he had a thing about being able to have the floor underneath cleaned”. The sideboard has been consigned by a British collector. “This is an early example of this iconic design, and this may account for the type of design for the base,” adds Payne, who also singles out a prototype hot-rolled “Table for Two” (c1978) by artist Scott Burton (estimate \$100,000-\$150,000). The combined presale total estimate for Phillips de Pury’s two December Design sales, made up of around 225 lots, is \$5m.

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Slowly but surely, the Middle East is waking up to the commercial and critical merits of modern and contemporary design. A new fair, Design Days Dubai, launched in the Gulf earlier this year offering collectable and limited-edition furniture and objects (a second edition is planned for next March). Now, even the notoriously restrictive state of Saudi Arabia is getting in on the act with news that a new contemporary art and design gallery in Riyadh, Alaan Artspace, will launch an exhibition in January featuring 100 miniature

chairs produced by Vitra, the renowned Swiss furniture manufacturer. “By hosting Vitra’s retrospective, we are able to open avenues of conversation around design, functionality and aesthetics, that would otherwise not be present in Riyadh,” says Neema Alsudairy, the gallery’s founding director. Replicas of the most famous design miniatures, in styles such as Bauhaus and art nouveau, will be available for sale in the Alaan Artspace shop (prices unavailable).

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Wendell Castle is considered a trailblazing figure in handcrafted modern designer furniture, so a catalogue raisonné of work by the influential Kansas-born octogenarian, five years in the compiling and due out next spring from the Artist Book Foundation, is eagerly awaited by scholars and market specialists. “Scholarship on design is thin on the ground,” says Marc Benda of Friedman Benda, a New York gallery representing Castle. Its sister Manhattan space, Barry Friedman Ltd, is currently showing a series of limited edition furniture by the designer including a three-seater sofa (until January 26); prices range from \$32,000 to \$125,000. Castle gets his place in the sun with R20th Century gallery set to show a selection of his works at DesignMiami next month.

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The Zaha Hadid-designed Z.Boat

The London-based dealer Kenny Schachter says that his limited-edition luxury speedboat, designed by architect Zaha Hadid, is moving (excuse the pun) full speed ahead. The Z.Boat is a slick eight-metre vessel built by Shoreteam in France in an edition of 12, plus four prototypes. At less than €400,000, the bespoke boat, which is almost sculptural in appearance, is a snip, says Schachter. “You don’t have to be in the Rich List’s top 10 to jump onboard; you can be an everyday oligarch,” he quipped. To date, two editions are sold and in

production.

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