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The Design Market: Buyers follow the flock

By Gareth Harris

Lalanne sales flow, Louis XV excites, and airport art takes off

A Sotheby's sale in Paris last week of 20th-century decorative arts and contemporary design demonstrated that the market for works by François-Xavier Lalanne is robust. Fifteen pieces by the late French designer all sold, with Lalanne's flock of 12 patinated aluminium sheep (1966-69), consigned by a Belgian private collector, fetching the sale's top price of €1.7m (with buyer's premium; est €1.5m-€2m).



François-Xavier Lalanne's marble bird egg table

“The sale price was slightly disappointing, as a single sheep piece by Lalanne (“Mouton de Laine”, 1968) went for €360,750,” said Rozen Le Nagard, a Paris-based adviser in art and design. “It’ll be intriguing to see what happens this week when another important flock comes up at auction in Paris [at Christie’s, December 3].”

Lalanne’s marble bird egg table (1974), fresh to market, jumped above its high estimate of €20,000 to reach €29,550. Other highlights included Demetre Chiparus’s bronze and ivory sculpture “Les Girls” (1928), acquired by a European collector for €552,750 (est €500,000-€700,000). “A work this exceptional, in a five-figure version, rarely comes to market,” said Le Nagard.

Prices for the art deco bellwether Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann were steady rather than exceptional (a burr-veneered 1920s bookcase, selling at €39,150, just nudged the low estimate). A key contemporary work, an oak and metal armchair (1990) by US sculptor Richard Artschwager, sold within estimate for €19,950.

Seventy-nine lots sold out of 107, achieving a sales total of €6m, a respectable sum in relation to the pre-sale estimate of €4.5m-€6.5m.