

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

Resources

Spotlight on the Mobilier National

The innovative furnishings created under France’s centuries-old state-supported design program are celebrated in a pair of shows, including a small survey of pieces from the 1960s to the early ’80s at the New York gallery Demisch Danant

Text by Mitchell Owens



An installation view of the “Mobilier National” show at Demisch Danant gallery in New York. Photo: Oliver Christie, courtesy Demisch Danant

Few countries have the devotion to design that has gripped France since the days of the Sun King. Fewer still have state-supported organizations like the centuries-old [Mobilier National](#) and its subsidiary, the Atelier de Recherche et de Création (ARC), founded in 1964 by minister of culture André Malraux and charged with promoting contemporary design as a statement of national pride. The prototype furnishings created with ARC support were often intended for wider production. Many found homes in official settings such as the presidential quarters at the Élysée Palace, where a ground-floor suite furnished with mod chairs and splashy 20th-century art gave President and Mrs. Georges Pompidou—ardent Mobilier National boosters—a chic futuristic background for entertaining. As the president huffed, “There is no reason to allow the Italians a monopoly on innovation.”

The ARC still commissions handmade furnishings from top designers such as the Bouroullec brothers, Martin Szekely, and Elizabeth de Portzamparc, most for embassies and other government buildings. But it’s the organization’s early years that are the focus of a noteworthy show at the New York gallery [Demisch Danant](#). Featured are more than 20 domestic objects—lighting, chairs, desks, and more—that exemplify French postwar chic. A 1969 example of Henri Lesêtre’s SAD desk (Pompidou had one) features a curved slab of polished Macassar ebony grasped by C-shaped aluminum supports. Pierre Paulin, the subject of a forthcoming solo show at Demisch Danant, is represented by a

fragile angular writing table from 1981 that has a vaguely Wiener Werkstätte mien, while the husband-and-wife team of François-Xavier and Claude Lallanne fashioned the charmingly buttoned metal-and-leather 1971 Coffee Beans side chair.

Another aspect of the Mobilier National's activities is organizing exhibitions from its own heralded collections, including "Décor et Installations," currently on view at the Galerie des Gobelins in Paris and the Galerie Nationale de la Tapisserie in Beauvais. The show presents a diverse array of contemporary tapestries alongside traditional and recent-vintage furniture in settings created by designer Frédéric Ruyant.

"Mobilier National" is on view through February 11, 2012, at Demisch Danant in Manhattan (demischdanant.com). "Décor et Installations" is at the Galerie des Gobelins in Paris and the Galerie Nationale de la Tapisserie in Beauvais through April 15 (mobiliernational.culture.gouv.fr).

[Click here to see a selection of pieces on display.](#)