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Is urban art smartening up its act?

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The stuff of dreams

Design | Radical and groundbreaking work doesn't deter experienced collectors who like a challenge.

Emma Crichton Miller selects some of the best

Over the past 10 years, PAD London has carved out its distinct niche in London's art fair ecology. Chic, galle and happily enmeshed in Mayfair, it offers a refined combination of antiques and tribal art, museum-quality 20th-century modern furniture, decorative arts, painting and artist-

made, jewellery, and contemporary glass, ceramics, metalwork and design. Presented each year by a slightly different combination of mostly European galleries, the art works serene coexistence in PAD's elegant black and white tent reflects a vision of civilised living.

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Keel (2016) by Nils Webb, at Sarah Myerscough Gallery

The stuff of dreams

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that is passionately endorsed by the fair's director, Patrick Perrin.

A central source of excitement, however, is the presentation of new collectible contemporary design, fresh from the studio. Most of Europe's leading galleries for contemporary limited-edition work are here to show their designers' latest and sometimes radical inventions, combining technological ingenuity with conceptual ambition.

Sarah Myerscough, a London-based gallery specialising in designers working with wood, says: "I like to present a clear vision. So what I show [at PAD] is more experimental than I would show at Design Basel or the Salone in Milan."

Nic Webb, a British designer-maker, is doing a complete installation of striking large asymmetric sculptural vessels, "Group of Five", alluding to the masterminds of China's cultural revolution. He increasingly seeks, he says, to make work that "conveys narratives".

Certainly, David Gates and Helen Carnac — partners in life and based in studios near London's Thames Barrier — do the same. At Myerscough's instigation, these artists have collaborated on a series of powerfully expressive cabinets combining Carnac's poetic vitreous-enamel work with Gates's meticulous, if eccentric, joinery. The cabinets' awkwardness and stained, scratched surfaces express the artists' shared interest in the local industrial landscape.

This kind of work, Myerscough admits, is hard to explain to the uninitiated: she aims it at collectors "looking for new challenges". Also included in her display will be a three-panel room-divider constructed from fragments of differently coloured wood, like a minimalist painting, by architect Wycliffe Stutchbury, as well as graceful new pieces by the master of curling wood, Joseph Walsh, and the father of highly engineered, handcrafted British wooden furniture, John Makepeace.

Sam Pratt of London's FUMI gallery is also planning to display new work. "We work with our designers on specific pieces for months in advance." This year the gallery will show the sleek Fonteyn Chair, by young British duo Brooksbank & Collins, a homage to the ballerina and her dance partner, Rudolf Nureyev, made from a rhomboid block of Verde Guatemala marble intersected by a plane of burr oak veneer. It has also commissioned Italian designer Francesco Perini to produce a simple oak table dressed in remarkable marquetry, with a shimmering coat of cut-out brass.

Loïc Le Gallard, of the Paris-and-London-based Carpenters Workshop Gallery, relishes a platform for taking risks. This year it is presenting a solo show by Korean designer Wonmin Park, known for his poetic "Haze" series of resin furniture. For his CWG debut and first exhibition in London he is presenting a new collection, "Plain Cuts", "essential forms" constructed from cut aluminium sheets. Le Gallard says: "It is hard to get the message across about the qualities of any given artist. By giving Park the space to express himself, people will understand that we are serious about his talent."

Clémentine Krzentowski, co-founder of

Fossil Cabinet by Nacho Carbonell at Galleria Rossana Orlandi; Wonmin Park sitting on his Plain Cuts low table, at Carpenters Workshop gallery



Galerie Kreo, prefers to introduce new work in its solo gallery shows, where "through 10 or 12 pieces, we can tell a story". Krzentowski is aware of the pressure to keep bringing new things to each fair but, she says: "Developing something takes time and energy, and you are never quite sure when it will be ready." What will be ready this October is a new ceiling light by Spanish designer Jaime Hayon, and a beautiful, sleek table in dark wengé wood and black lacquered metal by François Bauchet, a foretaste of an exhibition in January.

Béatrice Saint-Laurent, founder of Paris gallery BSL, meanwhile, is bringing eight new pieces by her established designers. The Chinese-French duo Studio MVW has produced a striking coffee table, a pure circle of Jinshi pink jade on top of three golden balls. BSL is also giving Ayala Serfiaty, known for her magical Soma light pieces, her first London showing. She will be producing a chair and a stool made from metal and a hand-crafted felt fabric, entitled Stella and Maris.

Saint-Laurent says, "She works, like a painter, with layers to create this fabric." Saint-Laurent has also worked with German designer Pia-Maria Raeder on some new lighting, a development of her spiky furniture collection, Anemone, combining lacquered beech rods with bronze and blown glass. Saint-Laurent observes that there is a common interest in organic forms and natural materials among her artists.

Several of the new works brought by the renowned Milanese gallerist Rossana Orlandi, who is coming to PAD for the first time this year, also reflect on nature. The Fossil series of outlandish furniture by maverick Spanish designer Nacho Carbonell includes a bold, characterful cabinet of wobbly grey boxes on top of a forest of pastel-coloured pillars.

Carbonell says: "In the case of the cabinet, it has been shaped with cardboard boxes and imagining that those had been fossilised. This idea brings us into a far future and makes us think that any action we take today will have a reaction in our future."

October 2-8, pad-fairs.com