

Collecting

DUTKO GALLERY



A python desk that will be exhibited at the PAD fair next week

The witty face of modernism returns

Huon Mallalieu

The term art deco became the shorthand for French-led decoration and design of the Twenties and Thirties more recently than might be thought. Used in passing by Le Corbusier, when writing of the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, the label only stuck when reused by Bevis Hillier of *The Times* in the 1960s.

The painter Charles Dufresne wrote that the art of 1900 belonged to the realm of fantasy, but that of 1925 was the art of the realm of reason, and while the geometry of art deco grew out of art nouveau's sinuosities, it was

Art deco style can be seen in the tube stations of Holden

also a reaction against them in parallel with futurism and cubism. Although the exposition, the style's high tidemark, was intended to demonstrate the cultural predominance of France, for a while art deco was truly international. In America, for example, art deco's most immediately recognisable monuments are the Chrysler and Empire State buildings in New York.

British contributions in 1925 were largely conservative, with the exception of textile designs, but here too in the 1930s there was much art deco architecture, especially Charles Holden's tube stations, while the potter Clarice

Cliff brought the style into thousands of British homes. Given that unlike so much modernism, art deco was not only progressive but often pleasurable and even witty, it might have escaped the usual round; however like other fashions it went from popularity to revival by way of obscurity, even derision.

Since the 1960s it has been embraced by art dealers, particularly in France, and the movement's most important designers, led by the ébeniste Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, who made lavish use of exotic materials in his furniture, make very big money. The most sought-after examples include furniture by Süe et Mare and Clement Rousseau, textiles by Raoul Dufy and Paul Poiret, jewellery by Georges Fouquet, bookbindings by Pierre Legrain, lacquer by Jean Dunand, metalwork by Edgar Brandt, glasswork by René Lalique, and costumes by Jeanne Lanvin.

Jean Jacques Dutko, a Parisian champion of art deco, is now opening in Davies Street, Mayfair. At the same time, he will exhibit at the PAD fair in Berkeley Square (October 14-18), with highlights including an ebony and bronze desk covered in python skin by Marcel Coard (c 1925-30) at £850,000, an oak, brass and travertine low table with cubic feet by Paul Dupré-Lafon (1930), a wool rug in intersecting planes of colour by Ivan da Silva-Bruhns (c 1925), and furniture by Eugène Printz.

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