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Jean Dunand et Jean Goulден
A black and polychrome
lacquered cabinet,
with bird's-eye maple
interior, 1921.

A UNIQUE DECORATIVE ARTS

Antiques columnist Andrea Kon highlights the auction of the Félix Marcilhac collection

By Andrea Kon

Downsizing is never easy, especially if that means parting with personal treasures collected with an expert eye and a passionate heart. However, for Félix Marcilhac and his wife Noelle, the decision to move from their splendid mansion in the Bois du Boulogne, Paris has meant placing their private treasure-trove of personal belongings up for auction.

That means collectors of Art Nouveau and Art Deco masterpieces are in for an uncommon treat, as the entire contents of the Marcilhacs' private collection will soon be put up for sale. The furnishings, sculptures and decorative arts, never before seen by anybody outside the Marcilhacs' close circle of family and friends, will be shown for auction at Sotheby's in Paris, France on 11 and 12 March 2014.

Greatest authority

Renowned as the world's greatest authority on 20th century decorative arts, Félix Marcilhac's passion for collecting Art Nouveau and Art Deco creations started back in 1967, when he bought the black-patinated bronze sculpture *Femme* by Gustave Miklos. It was formerly owned by Mrs. Jeanne Lanvin, wife of the famed French fashion designer who founded the couture House of Lanvin in the 1920s.

That very same sculpture, with its certified provenance, is just one of 300 lots which will be available in this rare auction, and has

an estimated value of 200,000 to 250,000 Euros (\$270,000 to \$338,000).

After obtaining that very first figure, Mr Marcilhac went on to amass a vast and eclectic collection of museum-quality pieces. Many of the works were put on display in the Galerie Marcilhac he opened in 1969, just a stone's throw from The Louvre Museum, but many of his favorites became cherished possessions in the home he shared with his wife and four children. Rooms were exquisitely furnished with the finest glass, ceramics, carpets, furniture, sculptures, and paintings from that stylish period.

"It is not easy to part with one's home, where one's family grew up," Mr Marcilhac says. "The pieces going into this auction are part of our family history. Other people may consider it strange that my four children had no idea, as they were growing up, that they were surrounded by valuable artifacts. They walked on the carpets. They put their books on tables. They sat in the chairs. Just as any other family lives behind closed doors in their own home."

Awarded the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur, the highest French order of merit, in recognition of his expertise, Mr Marcilhac's renown as a leading figure in the world of decorative arts extends far beyond his native France. He helped launch the Rene Lalique Museum in Suwa, Japan in 2011, and has officiated at a number of significant



Pierre Legrain

A nickel-plated brass and glass console table, circa 1924
Provenance : Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Noailles



Marcel Coard

A unique rosewood, vellum inlaid and mother-of-pearl cubic armchair, circa 1920. Stamped twice and marked Provenance: Jacques Doucet

art auctions around the world – facilitating the sales of many famed private collections, including those of Karl Lagerfeld in 1975, and Nouran Manoukian in 1993.

Time for a change

As a first step towards a total change of direction in his life, Felix Marcilhac, now 72, handed over the reins of his beloved Galerie Marcilhac to his eldest son, Félix Félix, two years ago. The gallery counts a plethora of significant French establishment figures among its regular clientele, and has also hosted international celebrities over the years, such as Catherine Deneuve, Andy Warhol, and Alain Delon.

The move from the home in Paris marks Mr Marcilhac's return to his first love, academia. Boasting a portfolio of authoritative reference works on interwar painters, sculptors, architects and decorators, his latest 'catalogue raisonné' of celebrated glass-maker Maurice Marinot was released in December.

"I always knew I would sell my collection when I turned a new page in my life, and stopped working as a specialist," he says. "I put this collection together secretly over more than 40 years and now it will serve as a testimony to my love of collecting that others can share and enjoy. I am planning to devote myself to writing now, and my next projects include books on the Sculptor Gustav Miklos, and another on the French furniture maker, Raymond Subes."

A special collection

Cecile Verdier, European Head of 20th Century Decorative Arts and Design at Sotheby's, considers Mr Marcilhac's properties "A fabulous collection, composed of the finest quality, totally unique pieces. These have not been seen by anyone but Monsieur and Madame Marcilhac's close family and friends for more than four decades."

So special is the auction, in fact, that it's brought together Sotheby's and renowned Parisian auction house Artcurial for the first time. "Generally, the top European auction houses consider themselves rivals at such sales," explains spokesperson Sophie Dufresne.

"However, on this occasion, Sotheby's will be working in tandem with Artcurial, and the auctions will be conducted jointly by Sotheby's auctioneers and Artcurial's co-Chairman, Francois Tajan – a personal acquaintance of Mr Marcilhac."

From the collector's perspective, the auction will offer several fascinating lots. In particular, there are three lots gaining a vast amount of attention.

Auction Highlights

The first is a beautiful nickel-plated brass and glass console table, made in 1924 and previously owned by the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Noailles. It has a pre-sale estimate of 100,000 to 120,000 Euros (\$135,000 to \$165,000).

The second is a unique rosewood, vellum inlaid and mother-of-pearl cubic armchair, circa 1920 and stamped by the furniture maker Marcel Coard, which is expected to fetch 200,000 to 250,000 Euros (\$270,000 to \$338,000).

And the third is an exquisite black and polychrome lacquered cabinet, with bird's-eye maple interior, made in 1921 by Jean Dunand, widely considered the greatest lacquer artist of the Art Deco period. As the 'star' of the collection, it is expected to fetch 300,000 to 400,000 Euros (\$405,000-\$540,000).

Even the catalog for this exceptional sale will be special, as it is accompanied by a new art book by Jean Louis Gaillemain that charts Felix Marcilhac's long career and changing tastes. Not only does it contain interviews with Mr Marcilhac, but also conversations with an array of key figures from the worlds of fashion and decoration of the 21st century, whom Mr Marcilhac counts among his friends.

All in all, it makes for a rare opportunity to invest in some of the world's greatest decorative arts.

To request a catalog for the auction, and to bid online, please email susan.pierce@sothebys.com