

A Bit of Miami Comes to a Grand Townhouse in Paris

In its first Paris edition, Design Miami has drawn nearly 30 exhibitors. “We plan to push the boundaries in Paris a little,” an official said.

By Nazanin Lankarani

Reporting from Miami

Oct. 17, 2023

Is Paris ready for a dose of Miami’s vibe?

Ready or not, Design Miami kicks off its first-ever Paris edition with a public opening on Wednesday in a venue quite unlike the sun-kissed shores of South Beach, its home turf: a stately 18th-century hôtel particulier, or grand townhouse, with ornate walls with gold moldings, nestled in the Seventh Arrondissement, neighboring government ministries and ambassadors’ residences.

“We bring a different energy and a lot of freedom in the American sense,” Jennifer Roberts, chief executive of Design Miami, said in an interview in Miami’s Design District in September.

“The ‘Miami’ in Design Miami suggests something over the top, or a license to transgress,” Ms. Roberts said. “Every fair takes on the character of its location, but we plan to push the boundaries in Paris a little.”

The fair’s first edition was originally scheduled to open last year, coinciding with the arrival of Paris+ by Art Basel, its sister fair devoted to contemporary art that replaced the longstanding Foire Internationale d’Art Contemporain, which is known as FIAC.

“We like to activate with Art Basel because we give mutual access to our respective V.I.P.s, as an added value,” Ms. Roberts said.

Outside the Miami edition of Design Miami in 2022. via World Red Eye for Design Miami

Paris+ went ahead without a glitch last year. But security concerns relating to the tent that Design Miami was planning to erect on the Place de la Concorde in the midst of social unrest in France prompted the local authorities to order the design fair canceled less than three months before its planned opening.

This year, the design fair, which holds annual editions in Basel, Switzerland, in June and in Miami Beach in December, has the enthusiastic “thumbs up” of the French authorities.

“This edition is organized under the patronage of the French Ministry of Culture, who is promoting us through the Tourism Office,” Ms. Roberts said. “Many political figures are expected to attend, and we have partnered with great institutions like the Mobilier National and the Manufacture de Sèvres.” (The former is in charge of the country’s official furniture collections; the latter is a porcelain factory.)

The fair, which runs through Sunday, caters to art and design lovers, experts and the general public, showcasing collectible design pieces ranging from historic to contemporary. This edition has 27 exhibitors packed into 2,095 square meters of

space — 16 Parisian galleries and 11 international galleries — a modest showing compared with Miami’s 60 or Basel’s 70 participants.

“This edition feels very French but with a touch of American entrepreneurialism,” Ms. Roberts said.

Galerie Mitterrand will show “Âne Attelé” (1989) by François-Xavier Lalanne. Didier Saulnier

Past the mansion’s grand archway, in a large cobblestone courtyard, the Paris-based Galerie Mitterrand is showing a life-size bronze donkey titled “Âne Attelé” (1989) by François-Xavier Lalanne, exhibited in the 2021 Lalanne retrospective show at Versailles.

“Design Miami is one of the few strong worldwide platforms for vintage and contemporary design,” Edward Mitterrand, president of the Galerie Mitterrand in Paris, wrote in an email. “It is the epitome of French taste that Design Miami is offering here to international collectors.”

Still, the international galleries are using the platform to present artists who have had little exposure in Europe.

“Roots” (2022) by Andrea Branzi, an Italian architect whose work Friedman Benda is showing at Design Miami in Paris. via Friedman Benda and Andrea Branzi

Mr. Branzi’s “noble memories of ancient storms” are captured in sticks and driftwood suspended in metal cages. via Friedman Benda and Andrea Branzi. Photo by Timothy Doyon

Salon 94 Design of New York is showing handmade soft sofa sculptures by the British designer Max Lamb that reinterpret the gilded details of the venue, the Hôtel de Maisons. Moderne Gallery of Philadelphia has brought vintage furniture and lighting by George Nakashima. Sarah Myerscough of London is showing innovative pieces made from wood, like a carved dresser by John Makepeace, anthropomorphic, spindle-legged cabinets by Christopher Kurtz’s, and Marc Fish’s sinuous furniture.

The Miami Design District, a partner of the fair, is showcasing an award-winning bench by the multidisciplinary British designer Samuel Ross, also represented by Friedman Benda of New York.

“France has a strong collector base and a great appreciation of design,” Jennifer Olshin, a founding partner of Friedman Benda, said in an interview. The gallery plans to open its first international outpost in Paris early next year.

“We have a global audience, but much of what we do has never been shown in Europe, and in Paris in particular,” Ms. Olshin said.

“Plot II” (2022), hand-carved in oak by Faye Toogood. via Friedman Benda and Faye Toogood

Among others, Friedman Benda is showing the British designer Faye Toogood’s sense of craftsmanship in a series of hand-carved, whimsical oak furniture pieces, and the late Italian architect Andrea Branzi’s “noble memories of ancient storms” captured in sticks and driftwood suspended in metal cages.

“A lot of American interior designers are coming with their clients to shop and take advantage of a vast program of artist studio visits, private home tours, and maybe even a hop over to the Marché aux Puces over the weekend,” Ms. Roberts said, referring to a local flea market. “Paris is always a good idea.”

A version of this article appears in print on , Section S, Page 6 in The New York Times International Edition