

WELCOME

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs: It's wonderful to welcome you to The Monocle Café on Rue Bachaumont, where we have gathered to talk about collecting. It feels apt to host you in Paris, a city with a strong historical connection to art and antiques, as well as a dynamic contemporary scene. Art Basel Paris is coming up and will return to the Grand Palais in October. To begin with, though, I would like to take a step back and reflect on the human instinct to collect things.

WHY WE COLLECT

Florence Bonnefous: We are inclined to collect because objects can fulfil our desire for adventure and help us to envision a better life. They are imbued with stories and are benevolent witnesses to the past.

Aline Matsika: I like what you just said about the desire for adventure. For me, to collect is to be surrounded by things that transport you. You enter into a

conversation with special objects; they can invite you to ask questions.

Dorith Galuz: I collect conceptual artworks and what matters to me is my search for meaning. As well as the aesthetic aspect, the emotion that a work evokes and the questions that it raises are essential to me. The artworks that I purchase are connected to each other. I might want a work if it completes an existing set by an artist or if it is by an artist who has a different vision and poses a new question in the dialogue between the works.

Marie Wittmann: I find that collectors often want to live with a work for a while, understand it and allow it to resonate in their life. I believe that this is a true art of living: surrounding oneself with beauty, recognising that learning is a lifelong journey and accepting that our perception of beauty evolves along with us.

Cécile Verdier: Yes, in France especially, collecting is very much aligned with the

DRINKING & DINING — CONVERSATION — Paris

FINDERS

In Paris, we sit down for lunch with a panel of experts to discuss the relationship between artists and gallerists and the innate power of objects to appeal to our emotions. Is it possible to define what makes someone a collector?

Photographer — Stephanie Füssenich
Writer — Sophie Monaghan-Coombs

KEEPERS



art de vivre. One thing that we haven't mentioned is that these objects can be a way for someone to express their personality.

Laurence Seguin: And that creates an environment in which you feel comfortable.

WHAT MAKES A COLLECTOR

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs: Most people accumulate things – be they decorative or functional – throughout their lives but what differentiates a “collector”?

Cécile Verdier: There are lots of different kinds of collectors. Some are investing and following the evolution of the market, while others love objects and are on a journey of discovery. And then there are those who have found an artist they really love and that leads them to find others. In that case, it's more about someone's personal experience than decorating a home. And, of course, some people buy on instinct with no overarching plan.

Marie Wittmann: I agree that collectors are on a journey in art and often have a strong desire to learn. When you tell the story of a piece and what makes it special, you can tap into someone's curiosity. Whether they choose to buy something also depends on their budget and if it's the right moment or if they have the right apartment. But really it rests on their curiosity.

Aline Matsika: All of us here have something in common – we have an eye. For me, collectors can combine colour or texture from different places and stage a space in a beautiful way. You need to have books, objects and art on the walls, as well as furniture. Art advisors are important because we can help to mix works by both emerging and well-known artists.

Florence Bonnefous: There is a difference between collecting and possessing and I have come to the realisation that I am more of a collector than a gallerist. I have always viewed my job as a gallery owner and exhibitions as a temporary collection of artworks. I don't own them, I try to sell

them, but they surround me for the duration of an exhibition or when we're storing them. I prefer to be crossed by works of art rather than to own them. A painting might be bought by someone, but I'll keep something of its essence. What I collect are the ideas, the narrative and the memories.

THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT COLLECTING CREATES

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs: That personal relationship, that journey of discovery, often ends up connecting not just ideas or works but people too. Collectors might spend years speaking to their gallery or specialist of choice and sometimes that leads them to the artists themselves. A collection such as Peggy Guggenheim's is inextricably linked with her personal relationships with artists. And it goes both ways; some artists say that they enjoy creating work on commission, having a human exchange and getting to know the people who appreciate, understand and support their work.

Dorith Galuz: When possible, I always like to meet the artist when I buy a work. I often ask the gallery that I'm buying from to set up a meeting or to see if I can do a studio visit. A work of art is not just an object. There is a human being who produced it.

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs: Can that meeting ever change how you view an artist's work?

Dorith Galuz: Sometimes. At times, discussions can feel inauthentic or a bit too constructed to mention trends or to reel me in. But at the same time, there are artists who don't know how to talk about their art – they're speaking through their works! I am always sympathetic to that.

Marie Wittmann: I see my work as all about creating a relationship between the client, the art and me.

Florence Bonnefous: And a strong relationship between gallerists and artists can be commercially beneficial for them.

1.

Dorith Galuz

I'm a psychoanalyst but have also been a collector for the past 35 years, mostly focusing on emerging artists. I'm on the acquisitions committee for the Pompidou Museum and Centre National des Arts Plastiques (CNAP) and the selection committee for the Prix Marcel Duchamp.

2.

Aline Matsika

I was born in Congo but raised in Paris. When I had the chance to go back and visit the continent, I discovered and started collecting African art. I opened my first concept shop in 1996. Now I split my time between New York and Paris and work as an interior designer. I also run the TIMUNTU concept shop here on Rue Bachaumont with my two sisters.

3.

Cécile Verdier

I have been the president of Christie's in France for the past six years but am also a specialist in 20th-century design. I work with specialists to develop business opportunities – the objects and collections for sale. I'm also an ambassador for the auction house and we act as a laboratory for new ideas as the Paris office is smaller and more boutique than London or New York.

4.

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs

I edit Monocle's culture pages and am a contributor to *Konfekt*. I write and commission stories on everything from pop stars to print media and have a particular interest in visual art. I enjoy crossing paths with collectors and gallerists at fairs and events and reporting on the contemporary art market.

5.

Florence Bonnefous

I founded Air de Paris gallery in 1990 with Edouard Merino. In the years since we have championed young contemporary artists and followed many of them on their journey from obscurity to becoming a big name. I was part of the selection committee for the FIAC art fair for a decade and am now on the selection committee of Art Basel Paris.

6.

Laurence Seguin

Alongside my husband, I am the co-founder of Galerie Patrick Seguin, a design gallery for 20th-century French architects' furniture. We run our space in Bastille like a showroom; people come here specifically for what they want to see, rather than walking by and popping in.

7.

Marie Wittmann

I run Wittmann Antiquités alongside my brother, Charles, and my father, Patrick. It's a new project but I'm the third generation of antique dealers in my family. We have art objects, sculpture and furniture, from antiquity to the early 20th century. We have no speciality but try to curate a selection of rare pieces.

The venue

Rue Bachaumont is an elegant passage where traditional brasseries meet modern hotels – and where The Monocle Café opened its doors earlier this year. Its soft lighting and warm wooden interiors by Paris-based firm Kann Design create a cosy environment that's perfect for perusing the titles available on the shelves (including, of course, Monocle and *Konfekt*). On the walls are photographic prints from Monocle's archives. You'll also find a range of unisex fashion, home décor and accessories from French brands, with a private lounge for meetings or events. The menu offers coffee from Ten Belles Paris, Japanese sandos – and Ruinart champagne for special occasions such as this.



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The Menu

Blinis with tarama
Gildas

Roasted cabbage with green tabasco, pecorino and pine-nut cream
Fish carpaccio with seared calamari, labneh, mixed greens, lemon and olive oil



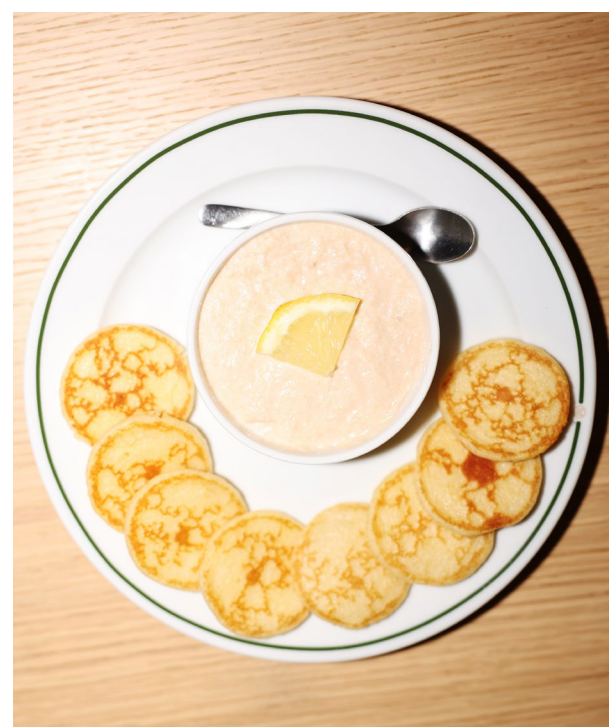
2 Chicken schnitzel with potato salad and poached egg

La Fromagerie du Louvre cheeseboard
Japanese cheesecake from Pâtisserie Tomo

To drink
Domaine du Peizon Crozes-Hermitage
Vietti, Perbacco, Langhe Nebbiolo
Studio Miraval rosé



- 1. The stage is set for the conversation
- 2. Marie Wittmann listens in
- 3. Blinis with tarama kick off the meal
- 4. A range of the international titles on offer at the café
- 5. Cécile Verdier makes her point
- 6. Sophie Monaghan-Coombs chairs the discussion
- 7. Aline Mitsaka enjoys a coffee after the meal



I sometimes help our artists' ideas take form and turn into projects that are marketable.

Aline Matsika: Our role as advisors is so important for creating bridges between a maker or artist and the person who might buy their work. If I'm in a village in Africa and see something beautiful, I can advise the maker about what might be needed to bring that piece to the Western market. I will suggest a different fabric, for example, and show how African art can be mixed with something more classical. For me, that mixing of styles is very important.

Marie Wittmann: It's important for me too. At Wittman Antiquités, we put our historic furniture in the middle of a contemporary space. That mix of styles allows people to imagine themselves there. Each piece deserves to be seen clearly, which is why we're fortunate to have a gallery that is filled with light and has high ceilings.

EVERY OBJECT TELLS A STORY

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs: As Florence mentioned at the start of our conversation, each object has its own story. Earlier this year, I wrote about the v&A East Storehouse in London. It's a cross between a museum and an open storage facility and gives the public better access to what's in the v&A collection. That includes entire rooms, a 500-year-old ceiling and part of a façade from a brutalist London tower block. It has been a huge hit since it opened in May – it feels as though lots of people have a renewed interest in learning where something came from.

Laurence Seguin: I've seen that desire in many of my collectors too – a hankering to understand what they're buying. When we started out in the 1980s, art deco was the trend and Jean Prouvé's furniture was little known – his furniture was austere, with no noble materials or ornamentation, and attracted very few buyers. We gradually realised the importance of his work and switched focus to raise awareness of it among collectors. Now, that educational part of antiques dealing goes hand in hand with the job.



Aline Matsika: It's the story you are selling.

Marie Wittmann: And that's because these are specific items. It's not just an ornament but, for example, a rare 17th-century Kakiemon porcelain dog from the Arita region in Japan. You need to explain where it comes from and how it was made. For each of our pieces, we carry out rigorous research, which we share with our potential clients. Beyond providing guarantees of authenticity, it's important for us to place an object in context and explain what makes it unique. This knowledge informs a collector's choice and gives pieces a coherent place in history.

Cécile Verdier: Yes, at auction our purpose is to tell that story. At Christie's, we have found that even when you have a long catalogue text, people prefer to hear it from you directly – they don't really want to read it. Collectors now want to have the history behind an object but not delivered in the same way as before. It's more about the experience. In a way, the more the world becomes digital, the more we crave the physical.

Aline Matsika: And that makes me think of how, in Africa, there is a rich tradition of oral storytelling and how we tell stories to our children, who pass them on to our grandchildren. When you are always repeating the story, you remember it.

“It's important for us to place each object in context and explain what makes it unique. Sharing this knowledge informs a collector's choice”

WHEN DESIGN BECOMES ART

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs: I find it interesting how an approach that was perhaps once reserved for buying art has extended to so many other disciplines. People are now purchasing pieces of furniture as though they are works of art – in terms of understanding their provenance, their craft and their attributes. Laurence, your background is pertinent in this respect because you started as a contemporary art collector but your gallery sells furniture. Do you feel that the two disciplines are merging?

Laurence Seguin: The design market has evolved so much since we started the gallery. In the beginning, we were selling chairs and tables for everyday use and now we sell unique or rare pieces. Our collectors tend to be looking for specific things. The current market values mean that they don't treat pieces as ordinary furniture but really look after them. As a result, the items must be of a higher pedigree or they must have a truly exceptional appearance.

Cécile Verdier: One of the things that Laurence's gallery has done is to bring together this design market and the contemporary art market. You have fought very hard for the gallery to exhibit in parallel with or at art fairs – and to have Jean Prouvé, for example, shown with visual artists from the 1950s to demonstrate the similarities. It's not just furniture – there's a concept there too.

Laurence Seguin: In 2003, we staged a Prouvé exhibition at the gallery of one of our early collectors, Ileana Sonnabend, in New York. Suddenly there was a mixing of the contemporary art and design scenes. Some big art collections don't pay attention to furniture; they don't feel that it's at the same level as art. That's why we have tried to get into this world and elevate furniture. There's a real synergy between Prouvé's furniture and contemporary art. Our collectors are mostly major art collectors.

PARIS AS A CENTRE FOR ART

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs: One of those design events that happens in parallel with an art fair is Design Miami, which will take place alongside Art Basel Paris this autumn. Does it feel that the city is increasingly becoming a hub for collectors – and if so, who do you think gravitates here?

Cécile Verdier: Though the Christie's Paris office is smaller than the New York and London ones – and France accounts for 10 per cent of the company's global results – it's significant because France is so important culturally. And, we have a French owner – François Pinault. I took a year off when I moved to my job at Christie's: my plan was to go to all of the exhibitions in the city but there were just too many. The number of museums and the strength of artistic study in Paris are still specific to the city. Art Basel Paris, especially after Brexit, has contributed to a boom in the Parisian art market.

Marie Wittmann: Definitely. While sales, fairs and art-related events are flourishing across the globe, Paris remains an anchor. The city continues to hold a central place in the art market, thanks to the density of its cultural calendar, the diversity of its institutions and the vitality of its key players.

Dorith Galuz: Yes, the scene in the city and its suburbs is so rich. As you say, we have a thriving and demanding cultural offering with fantastic museums, art centres, large and small foundations, all kinds of galleries, spaces constantly being created by artists... There is always something new.

Florence Bonnefous: Air de Paris started in Nice but we moved to Paris after five years, as we badly needed more people to see our shows – there was no social media in the 1990s. Now, Paris is so international and oriented toward the global art market. You mentioned the suburbs, Dorith: I remain fond of what happens on the peripheries.

Aline Matsika: Recently I brought a German client to the Parisian flea markets. They

hadn't been before and they were just blown away. There are flea markets elsewhere, of course, but Paris is still by far the best in terms of having lots of choice between beautiful and unique pieces.

COLLECTING IN THE FUTURE

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs: Just before dessert arrives, I'd love to know how you think the art of collecting might change.

Marie Wittmann: Well, I think that it's important to bring a fresh perspective to antiques. It's part of what we do as a gallery. We also like to think of ourselves as a small museum: free to enter and welcoming, whether or not you're looking to buy anything.

Cécile Verdier: Similarly, when we don't have auctions happening, we try to open our space to young artists and designers to bring them into this cultural ecosystem.

Aline Matsika: In terms of the market for African art and objects, many pieces will become more valuable as they move between collectors. This will also be informed by the movement to repatriate African art from Western museums. That will likely make objects rarer.

Laurence Seguin: In a similar vein, over time, while our gallery has become highly specialised in the work of Jean Prouvé, globalisation has opened a vast world to us. Meanwhile – and paradoxically – supplies are becoming scarcer. While collectors in bygone eras lived with and used their 20th-century furniture, I think these pieces will increasingly become collectors' items.

Cécile Verdier: I think that we'll see more and more interest in design, as it's the perfect starting point for new collectors.

Dorith Galuz: Since the pandemic everything has accelerated, with an even greater need for real encounters, sharing, exchange and humour. The white-cube model, in which the viewer is passive, has evolved into an experience to be lived.

I favour moments of conviviality and intellectual exchange.

Florence Bonnefous: We should mention how digital is taking over but I don't think it's all doom and gloom. Digitalisation has changed the world of literature but books have persevered. The same will probably be true for art. Rather than as a sign of luxurious but reified living, let us hope that art collecting will survive as an adventure, a dream and a collective endeavour.

Sophie Monaghan-Coombs: Well, thank you all for joining me today. There's plenty more we could talk about. But, for now, let's tuck into this cheesecake. ——— κ

For your calendar

For budding and established collectors alike, there's a wealth of art and design events to explore this autumn in Paris.

Le Parcours de la Céramique et des Arts du Feu, 16 to 20 September
Ceramics take centre stage at this fair, with participation from both French and international galleries.

FAB Paris, 20 to 24 September
The Grand Palais will host France's major classical art fair, which presents work from antiquity to the present day.

Collection Daniel Abadie auction, Christie's France, 30 September
The late art historian Daniel Abadie's extraordinary collection of postwar and contemporary French works goes under the hammer.

Art Basel Paris, 24 to 26 October
The fair will return to the beautiful Grand Palais this year with more than 200 exhibitors.

Paris Photo, 13 to 16 November
The world's largest and most prestigious dedicated international photography fair.