

Talking with: Elizabeth Garouste

Elizabeth Garouste and Mattia Bonetti came to fame in the 1980s with furniture that was sensual and fantastic. By rediscovering and reconnecting with the roots of French decorative arts and with superb craftsmanship, the two, who worked together from 1978 to 2001, created what might be called nouvelle French design. Garouste, who began her career as a designer of theater sets and costumes, created her first pieces of furniture for an exhibition at the Maison Jansen in 1981, the same year she and Bonetti designed the famed Chaise Barbare. Now, Garouste, whose last show in the U.S. took place in 1993 at the Galerie Néotu in New York and who is represented in Paris by three galleries—Galerie En Attendant les Barbares, Avant-Scène, and Granville Gallery—is back in America with a new series of limited-edition furniture presented by Ralph Pucci. The jewel-like pieces, which look as if they are made of precious metals and precious stones, bring to life her daring, whimsical, and colorful aesthetic sensibility. “Magical,” Ralph Pucci says of Garouste’s work. “There are no rules or boundaries—part Disney, part Jean Arp, part Matisse, but it’s always original.”

The American audience has not seen your work since you parted from Mattia Bonetti. What have you done since?

During these years I have been very active. I had a couple of solo exhibitions in Paris and in Brussels and I have regularly worked on designing furniture for such special commissions as the Christian Louboutin stores in Paris and Moscow. I have designed jewelry for Galerie kreo and for the Parisian art jewelry gallery Naila de Monbrison; and I have also exhibited drawings and sculptures at Polad-Hardouin gallery in Paris and at the Cultural Space André Malraux in Le Kremlin-Bicêtre. Outside of my design-related activities, I act as the chairwoman for the Fondation La Source, which uses visual and performing arts to help kids with social and learning disabilities reintegrate into society.



Your work has always been whimsical and daring. What does it take to be emotional when creating, and to make design that is not ultra-serious?

The most substantial role of an object is to tell a story. I create freely from my own desires and imagination. I love mixing the sophisticated and the raw and playing with the widest range of materials— from wood, resin, iron, and bronze to ceramic, glass, gold, and lacquer. Handcraftsmanship and nature both play key roles in my work.

Your new series of furniture is presented by Ralph Pucci, which is a wonderful platform. How did this relationship begin?

Last year I had two solo exhibitions in Paris, and Mr. Pucci came to see me after seeing them. He immediately offered me the opportunity to create an exhibition in his remarkable space, and I feel fortunate to be working with him.

You started in the 1980s when collectible design was in its infancy. Now the market is more mature, flourishing with galleries that produce contemporary design, design auctions, and fairs. What do you think about the way this market has emerged?

While my own creative development and activity is not affected by the state of the marketplace, I find this development great, and I am constantly surprised by the increasing value of collectible furniture.

—Daniella Ohad

