

PIERRE PAULIN - ÉLYSÉE PALACE

Opening on Thursday 12 May 2016

Exhibition from 13 May to Saturday 11 June 2016

Echoing the Pierre Paulin retrospective organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou, the exhibition Pierre Paulin, Elysée Palace at the Galerie Jousse Entreprise is showing some of the pieces devised by the designer for reception rooms at the Elysée from 1969 on. They are extremely valuable, and of great historical value in particular, inasmuch as they incarnate the way French society was developing in the direction of modernism.

In 1964, an initiative that was the brainchild of the Minister of Cultural Affairs, André Malraux, with the backing of the then prime minister Georges Pompidou, was intended to mark a milestone in the history of official décor in France: the foundation of the Atelier de Recherche et de Création du Mobilier National [National Workshop of Furniture Research and Creation], with Jean Coural appointed as its director. In no time at all, Pierre Paulin was busily at work with this institution. As soon as Georges Pompidou, who was keen to relaunch the contemporary furniture industry, was elected France's president, he decided to set an example. His wife, Claude Pompidou, accordingly declared during an interview with Frédéric Mitterrand, which was broadcast on France Culture in 2007: *"We want to bring the new furniture into the Elysée. It was a pity, nevertheless, that people should not be received in a house whose furniture was not the product of contemporary art."*

Advised by Jean Coural, the president and his spouse decided to refurbish the Palace's private apartments, as well as its semi-official reception rooms (salons). Having seen Paulin's prototypes at the Mobilier National, Claude and Georges Pompidou were in no doubt about whom to turn to. Pierre Paulin was involved with three adjoining ground-floor rooms: the Picture Salon, the Dining-room, and the Smoke-room. Between this latter and the corridor, the whole project was rounded off by a library, made up of 19 units (caissons) (made of brown altutor) mounted in a quincunx arrangement. First of all, Paulin had to adapt to the Pompidous' wish that the operation could be reversed. He could not touch the walls, so he used moveable and free-standing scenographic systems, seeing those reception and other rooms like tents, with their walls and ceilings covered with untreated wool. As he himself put it: *"I made rooms within rooms."* Through that use of techniques peculiar to exhibition installation, something with which he had had plenty of experience since the 1950s, Pierre Paulin introduced an innovative atmosphere within the Elysée. We might say that he turned those rooms into a "Superstand".

Furniture is a symbolic vehicle of power. "The Elysée style" was a personal dialogue between Paulin and politics. That commission was thus one of the pivotal moments of his career, in both a theoretical and visual sense. For the Elysée, Paulin created a closed world, at once protected and soothing, which tallied with his declaration: *"I am dealing with the power of that particular period. On each occasion the context is of primary importance."* His supple and inventive furniture elegantly embraced rigour, the avant-garde, and excellence, in a day and age which celebrated the freedom of the body.

The exhibition at the Galerie Jousse Entreprise is showing the furniture designed by Pierre Paulin for the Elysée, including wall lights and the large standard lamp produced by Verre Lumière, and the set of "Coussins" armchairs and sofa, produced by Alpha International and Mangau, again under the wing of the Mobilier National.

These products anticipated an expressive design, somewhere between sculptures and functional pieces. This distinctive feature, undoubtedly due to Paulin's training, makes the "Elysée" pieces nothing less than works of arts, as much for the quality of their execution as for their originality.

Pierre Paulin (1927-2009) joined Michel Gascoïn's research department, after studying at the Ecole Camondo in Paris. From that experience he would retain the Scandinavian influences, as well as an attachment to the works and theories of the Bauhaus. In the 1950s, he embarked on his career as a designer with a keen eye on the work of Henry Bertoin, Charles Eames and Charlotte Perriand. In 1953, he became associated with the Thonet publishing house, and then worked with Artifort in 1958. After freeing himself from these varied influences, Paulin was recognized in Japan and the United States, especially with the appearance of the F560 (Mushroom in 1960) and the F582 (Ribbon Chair, created in 1966, which was acquired by the MoMA collection), before coming to notice in France. Pierre Paulin is indeed rooted in his period, but he managed to create a timeless style that was warm and decidedly modern. He incarnated a spirit of rigour, integrity and research, without ever sacrificing either balance or comfort. His vision remains a quintessential factor in the history of design in France.

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“Élysée” armchairs



“Élysée” low table



“Élysée” sofa (3 seats) and floor lamps



“Élysée” Pair of wall lamps, “Sheep wool”
François-Xavier Lalanne

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