

# LA GAZETTE DROUOT

INTERNATIONAL

NUMBER 69

MAY 2017



# Outdoor auctions

Did Rouillac secretly fancy themselves as Le Vau or Le Nôtre, when in 2013 – the year they sold their famous Mazarin chest – they had 17 tons of sculptures by Alfred Janniot (1889-1969) delivered? Their staging in the middle of the gardens at the Château de Cheverny (Loire region, France) paid off, despite logistic difficulties, with 35 of the 37 lots sold. Six sculptures went for over €100,000 and a large bronze sculpture of the “Three Graces” (see photo) even achieved €370,000. Is the market so filled with aspiring Medici?

## Garden deco

The first ornamental gardens date back to the Renaissance. In those days, the Boboli Gardens in Florence, Niccolò Pericoli’s landscape masterpiece at the Palazzo Pitti commissioned by the Medici, were a talking point in every European court. British auction houses started the fashion for outdoor sculpture in the late 1980s, and they are now firmly part of the landscape. Sotheby’s, a pioneer in this regard, holds

sales every year consisting entirely of garden ornaments, with sculptures, fountains and monumental railings. Palladio’s aura during the 18th century took Italian-style parks across the Channel, where they ravished the English aristocracy. It’s no surprise, then, that this very British passion was strongly revived by arty decorators and new age landscape artists. The first auction entirely dedicated to garden statuary (in the broadest sense) was held in London in 1986, and by the second auction had become a key biennial event. Thirty years later, design and decorative art lovers have remained highly active, in line with changing tastes and trends. Nor has garden statuary left auctioneers cold on the other side of the Channel. Artcurial led the way in October 2003 by selling off

**€352,800**

Niki de Saint Phalle (1930-2002), “La Sirène”, 1983, Polyester resin single piece used as a model for the composition in the Fontaine Stravinsky in Paris, 90 x 240 x 90 cm (detail). Paris, 6 December 2012, Pierre Bergé & Associés auction house.

HD







the "architectural antiques" of the Houdan estate, amassing a little over €2 million over two days – and again, in 2007 with a sale of 1,200 lots including a jumble of 60 fountains and tubs, 40 pillars and entrance gates, and as many 18th and 19th century

**It is undeniable that contemporary art is booming in the field of garden statuary, with new enthusiasts battling for pieces up to several hundreds of thousands or even millions of euros.**

sculptures and statues. It produced few spectacular sales, but there were numerous, consistent bids ranging from a few hundred euros for a glazed ceramic fruit basket to nearly €40,000 for a white marble sculpture by André César Vermare. Other auction houses soon stepped into the breach, with varying degrees of success. Some, like Christophe Joron-Derem in Naintré (Vienne region), focus on "decorative garden items" (posts, pools and basins, columns, imposing stone chimney pieces and so on), attracting mostly restorers of old buildings undaunted by monumental ensembles. Others, with a more decorative approach, choose sculptures that are more easily carried and installed, which afficio-

Opposite

**€15,500**

Mathurin Moreau (1822-1912), "Nymph", 19th century, white-lacquered casting by Val d'Osne, h. 200 cm. Paris, Drouot, 25 May 2011, Coutau-Bégarie auction house.

Next page

**€370,000**

Alfred Auguste Janniot (1889-1969), "Les Trois Grâces" (at the centre of the photo), patinated bronze, signed, 252 x 144 x 78 cm. Château de Cheverny, 9 June 2013, Rouillac auction house.

nados buy for their own gardens, courtyards and terraces. And in France, historically the land of founders and bronze casters, there's more than enough to go around! In fact, it's interesting to note that mass-produced creations are more popular than original stone statues these days. Large-scale pieces by the founder Val d'Osne can only rarely be obtained for under €5,000, though they can easily top €15,000 if they have a white imitation marble lacquer coat, like a "Nymph" sold at Coutau-Bégarie in 2011 (see photo). For collectors, this is a rare chance to think big, making sure the piece they're after is in good condition. They should be careful, as restored outdoor sculptures are worth considerably less. The Brits, on the other hand, have never hesitated to use – and abuse – lead, as visionary pioneers of the famous "English style" gardens.

### Contemporary art's green fingers

In the era of steel and resin sculptures, traditional ornaments, be they garish or refined, are still holding their own, and are being incorporated into architecture, bathing in the middle of pools or displayed on scythed lawns. But the death-knell of noble, all-powerful marble has most certainly sounded. Enter the more weather-resistant stone and its reconstituted substitutes, often using metal frames – although these pieces fetch half the price at auction. It is undeniable, however, that contemporary art is booming in the field of garden statuary, with new enthusiasts battling for pieces up to several hundreds of thousands or even millions of euros. Works by Bernar Venet, Jean-Claude Farhi, Xavier Veilhan, Jean-Pierre Raynaud, Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely are now found in public spaces and private gardens alike. In the Var region, the extraordinary sculpture park opened by Enrico Navarra for a privileged few last summer, not far from the Jean-Gabriel Mitterrand park, Patrick Seguin's 40 hectares of land and the Fondation Bernar Venet, shows that, far from disappearing, this discipline is being tenderly cultivated, and blossoming more than ever as spring arrives!

Dimitri Joannidès







