

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

CHRISTIE'S

Chamberlain-Prouvé: the intersection of contemporary art and design

Two icons — John Chamberlain and Jean Prouvé — meet in the latest collaboration between Galerie Patrick Seguin and Gagosian Gallery, in which rarely seen structures can be viewed alongside large-scale works. Deborah Wilk reports

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Jean Prouvé, Villejuif Demountable House, 1956. Metal. 11.5 x 34.5 x 27.9 feet (3.5 x 10.5 x 8.5 metres). © Galerie Patrick Seguin. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery. Photography by Nicolas Bergerot.

Hot on the heels of mounting the full-scale *Maison Demountable*, a 1945 prefabricated home by design master Jean Prouvé, at Design Miami last December, Galerie Patrick Seguin unveils two more unique examples of Prouvé's legendary innovations at Gagosian New York's Chelsea outlet in a show opening February 27. But rather than merely offering design aficionados a chance to examine rarely seen structures in the flesh, the houses will be paired with large-scale works by John Chamberlain, whose crushed compositions of car parts are icons of mid 20th-century art practice. 'It's not often one finds a gallery that fits two Prouvé houses as well as several behemoth Chamberlains,' laughs Gagosian Gallery director Kara Vander Weg, who is leading the show's charge along with the Paris-based Seguin.

The joint effort won't be the first time the two powerhouse venues have collaborated. When Gagosian opened his Paris gallery, the Cy Twombly inaugural show was accompanied by a separate Seguin-backed Jean Prouvé outing. Since that time, the galleries have examined Prouvé in the context of work by Alexander Calder, a friend and contemporary of the architect. But the pairing with Chamberlain offers a chance to see the expression of one of Modernism's most pervasive materials as it extends from the mid-20th century to the early 21st.

‘It’s pretty exciting to see what happens when you put them together in the space. They really are in conversation,’ says Vander Weg of the output of artist and architect. ‘It’s the work of two men who took metal to its highest potential, but had very different motivations driving their work. Chamberlain created extreme gestures and expressiveness through energy, colour, form, and movement. Prouvé’s work is precise and elegant.’

Prouvé’s innovations of modular design can be seen in the structural core of 1948’s Ferembal Demountable House, in which a row of steel frames that decorate the interior form the spine of the building. Also on view is the Villejuif Demountable House of 1956 (see main image at top), in which striking red-painted steel beams support a cantilevered wood roof. ‘Prouvé gives sincerity to the metal,’ says Seguin of the care the architect used to tease out the material’s capabilities. It’s such precision of measurement that actually connects his practice to Chamberlain’s. ‘The work is so well thought out,’ says Vander Weg of the sculptor. ‘He really knew how to strike the right form and balance.’

The show is also an opportunity for fans of contemporary art and design to cross categories, a phenomenon increasing in the saleroom. Although the auction record of \$5 million for one of Prouvé’s prefabs, *Maison Tropicale*, was set at Christie’s New York in 2007, prices for furniture has been steadily increasing for the last ten years. The designer’s *S.A.M. TS 12*, a table designed in 1947-48, earned €55,500 (\$69,000) at Christie’s Paris last November.

Although Chamberlain’s large-scale work can fetch prices near Prouvé’s high, the proliferation of small-scale objects makes the work highly accessible. *Tonk #7-84*, 1984, a 3 1/2-foot-long tabletop piece, is on offer at the March 6 First Open Sale at Christie’s New York on an estimate of \$100,000 to \$150,000. ‘He’s a tremendous artist, and he’s also pretty undervalued in the marketplace,’ says Vander Weg. With shows like hers, however, change is in the air.