

November 1st - December 22nd, 2023

Opening Reception: November 1st, 2023, 6-8pm

Les Artisans de Marolles

The Resurgence of Craftsmanship in the 1950s

We are pleased to announce our upcoming exhibition, "Les Artisans de Marolles: The Resurgence of Craftsmanship in the 1950s", showcasing about 20 pieces by Les Artisans de Marolles, a cooperative of craftsmen founded by Jean Touret in 1950. The exhibition will open Wednesday, November 1st, 2023 with a reception from 6-8pm.

The group Les Artisans de Marolles is first and foremost the encounter of a man, Jean Touret, with a small village in Loir et Cher, France, where he moved after the war in 1947. While the climate of numbness brought on by life during modernization was blooming in distant major cities, this village provided those living there a separation that allowed the importance of ancestral work and working with one's hands to remain. The knowledge and ability of local weavers, blacksmiths, and carpenters captured the interest of the impassioned artist and designer Jean Touret.

A painter and sculptor himself, Touret quickly made his studio a meeting place where the men of the village would discuss and exchange on a daily basis. In the early mid-century, amid the continuation of rapid industrialization, Touret's disdain for the rise of standardized furniture manufactured in industrialized material was shared with the local artisans, defenders of traditional savoir-faire.

In response to this general loss of tradition in mid century french design, Touret founded with metalworker, Henri Vion, woodworker, Maurice Leroy, weaver, Edmond Le Flohic, ceramicist, Manuel Gold, and his own son, Emile, a cooperative under the name Les Artisans de Marolles. Together they shared a vision in creating furniture that provided an essential purpose to everyday life, both in utility and in honesty.

From the hammered textures seen in the wood and iron furniture, referring to techniques used by the artists of Magdalenian (which Touret also used in his own sculptures) to the simplistic figures of animals and humans sometimes presented in the pieces, which were directly inspired by the Lascaux cave drawings, this simple, pure, yet contemporary aesthetic almost comes across as spiritual. Touret believed that "beauty, in its pure essence, joins poverty" and as a creative director, applied this religious concept to the pieces he drew for Les Artisans de Marolles. From the high back chairs or the bench with back presented in the exhibition, to the exceptional large table commissioned for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Loir-et-Cher, the pieces are perfect examples of the authentic, strong but non ostentatious designs offered by the cooperative.

These poetic and honest productions quickly became successful enough that the group needed to expand. Indeed, after their first and successful exhibition at the Chateau de Blois, the cooperative became in 1959 Les Artisans de Marolles et du Loir et Cher, and included craftsmen from the region. Still creative director of the cooperative, Touret nonetheless left in 1964 to fully commit to his sculpture practice, leaving a path for the group, rebaptized Artisanat de Marolles, to evolve through their last decade of existence and ultimately diverging significantly from the design established by Jean Touret.

The pieces in this exhibition, made between the first two eras of the Marolles productions, highlight the collective's shared artistic earnestness and remain to tell the story of their success.