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Jackson, Mississippi

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'Paris Moderne'

- Swanky digs reflect lavish lifestyles

By Sherry Lucas

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Furniture in Paris Moderne is so seductive, the Mississippi Museum of Art might consider new signage: "Please do not sit."

It's bold, it's fresh. In one case, the upholstery is yellow python. Ssssssweet.

Paris Moderne: Art Deco Works from the Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris opens Saturday. The new blockbuster exhibition — seventh in the Annie Laurie Swaim Hearin Memorial Exhibition Series — suggests the swanky digs of high style 1920s and '30s Paris, when it reigned as the world's "It" city of art.

Paintings, sculpture and finely-crafted furniture combine in sumptuous settings of office and home interiors in five galleries.

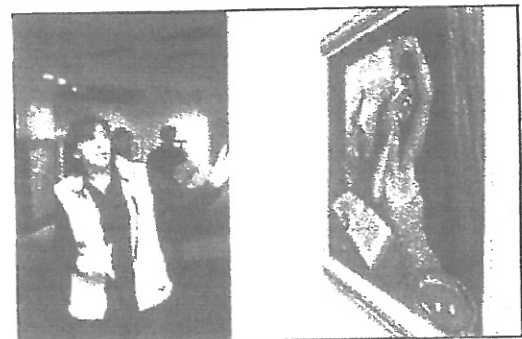
Many know the artists' names: Matisse, Modigliani, Picasso, Bonnard, Dufy. Paris Moderne shows how they're hanging.

"The interior, where this wealthy



Special to The Clarion-Ledger

The Pierre Bonnard masterpiece *Le Dejeuner* (Lunch) is among the highlights in Paris Moderne: Art Deco Works from the Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, opening Saturday at the Mississippi Museum of Art. It's the seventh exhibition in the Annie Laurie Swaim Hearin Memorial Exhibition Series.



Barbara Gauntt/The Clarion-Ledger

Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris curator Dominique Gagneux discusses pieces in the exhibit including *La Incertitude* by Pierre Dubreuil done in 1936.

customer could live, there were Modiglianis, Dufys," said Dominique Gagneux, curator at the Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris).

Stylish arrangements evoke the influences and attitudes of the era. African art and other exotic inspirations showcase cubism and Art Deco designs. Python skin, palm and ash are reflected in the striking desk set and armchairs by Michel Dufet. An equally startling secretary by Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann uses Ambon wood, Nile crocodile, ivory, ebony and Moroccan leather.

Some of the furniture was commissioned for international exhibitions in Paris in 1921, 1925 and 1937, to display innovations in style, technique and design. "Part of its purpose was to show the world the latest in modern art and accomplishments in craftsmanship," museum director Betsy Bradley said, "so they were showing off. It's meant to be the most exotic and exciting."

An exhibit knockout is the gold and lacquer wall panel Les Sports by Jean Dunand, which originally decorated the smoking lounge of the ocean liner Normandie. Measuring about 18 feet by 18 feet, it's comprised of 45 stucco panels averaging 70 pounds apiece; a special metal frame was constructed to hold it. Stylized figures line up javelins and outstretched arms in a dramatic diagonal that sweeps the eye up. In the Lower Atrium, it greets viewers right off the bat, smacking of luxury. Its shades of gold change with the day's light.

That'll be a highlight for Coleman Lowery of Jackson. A museum volunteer, he's hunting hard now for the photo of his grandmother, who sailed to Europe on the ocean liner in 1938, standing by the ship's rail and a lifesaver. "I have this wonderful picture, with the hat and the fox fur — in 1938, that's how people dressed."

Paintings by Picasso and Braque pull visitors into the show. "You really sense the idea of the new and modern immediately," René Paul Barilleaux, museum deputy director for programs, said of the streamlined tableau in the opening gallery.

Another gallery emphasizes the feminine. The furniture by André Arbus, on loan for the first time, was originally displayed in the International Exhibition of 1937 in Paris as a music room, "as if it was in a house in the countryside,"

Details

- **What:** Paris Moderne
- **When:** Saturday through July 11
- **Where:** Mississippi Museum of Art, 201 E. Pascagoula St., Jackson
- **Hours:** 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Saturday, noon-6 p.m. Sunday, extended hours until 8 p.m. Tuesday
- **Tickets:** \$10 (adults), \$9 (seniors), \$5 (students 6 through college), free for children 5 and under and museum members.
- **Contact:** (601) 960-1515, 1-866-VIEWART or www.msmuseumart.org

Gagneux said. A dream in cream, it seems perfect for a 1930s screen siren.

A trio of large paintings by Kees Van Dongen dominates a corner. One, *La Vasque Fleurie* (The Flower Bowl), is an allegory of vanity. A heavily made-up woman in heels and a flimsy robe stares into a mirror; a skull sits on a side table. "In ancient painting, the pearl is synonymous with luxury," Gagneux pointed out another symbol. Another painting portrays French stage actress Maria Ricotti.

Themes of domestic life and color define other galleries. A bright masterpiece by Pierre Bonnard, *Le Déjeuner* (Lunch), a small charmer by Matisse and a 13-foot sofa are among the eyecatchers.

Additional intrigues include a Raoul Dufy replica of his own monumental mural, *La Fée Electricité* (The Electricity Fairy), for the International Exhibition of 1937 in Paris. "When Dufy made the composition for the pavilion, all were not kept," Gagneux said of the temporary exhibition. "I think he wanted to keep a testimony to the story."

Read from right to left, the pictorial follows history from ancient Greece to modern day. Aristotle, Roger Bacon, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison, Marie Curie and Alexander Graham Bell are among those pictured, along with the Olympian gods. At the culmination, "All the capitals of the world are linked by Electra," Gagneux said.

Museum officials hope attendance tops 50,000, which would make it the biggest Hearin show to date; an ambitious round of auxiliary programs can generate more traffic and repeat visits.

"I expect it to be one of those shows that generates excitement by word of mouth," Bradley said. "I think people don't expect to be as excited by decorative arts as they will be by art. ... But each piece is so elegant and beautiful. People are going to come back, and be encouraging others to."

Lowery, who has visited Paris a dozen times and is a self-described "F. Scott Fitzgerald nut," loves the period. "I'm thrilled to death with it. ... I just can't wait to see it."

Amid uncrating and installation of the show earlier this week, museum officials had to contend with leaks in a gallery. "We've been in contact with the roofing company. We're doing our best to correct that," said Melvin Anderson, director of human and cultural services for the city.