

ARTCURIAL

Design

LE CORBUSIER FIRMINY LIGHT SCONCES

Auction on 30th May 2017, Paris



Charles-Edouard Jeanneret dit Le Corbusier, sconce LC III, created in 1949, metal, from the Firminy housing unit, estimation : € 600 - 800/ \$ 660 - 880 each (sold by sets of 2, 5 et 10).

Exposition

From Saturday 27th to Tuesday 30th May 2017

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Paris –Artcurial, an international reference in Design, yet again creates the event during its prestigious sale on May 30th, entirely devoted to the speciality. French and international collectors will encounter the greatest names in French design, including the essential French Masters (Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand and Jean Prouvé), alongside the greatest Italian names and the most symbolic pieces of contemporary creation.

It is, however, one hundred light sconces by Le Corbusier, from the Firminy unit, now listed as a UNESCO Heritage of Humanity site, that have garnered the most attention. This is indeed the first time that such an ensemble will be offered at auction on the art market, an ensemble remarkable not only by its quantity but also by its provenance. The sconces have indeed been put up for auction by the owner of the housing unit. Up to this day, they were kept on site.

« Listed as a historic monument, the Firminy housing unit undertook an ambitious renovation campaign between 2001 and 2005.

It was then that the original wall sconces which lit up the entrance of the apartments were dismantled and replaced by replicas that meet new electrical standards. Artcurial has the privilege of putting up for auction the original sconces today. »

Emmanuel Bérard, director
Design Department, Artcurial

The 30th May Design auction is part of the *Printemps Paris Tout P'tits chez Artcurial*. Several lots from the sale, marked in the catalogue by a small teddy bear, will be sold without fees, benefiting the association. Paris tout P'tits is an association by the law of 1901 that meets the needs of babies under 18 months, born to Parisian families encountering hardships.



Charles-Edouard Jeanneret aka Le Corbusier, Unité d'habitation de Firminy, 1965, owner : Office Public d'Habitation de Firminy © Arnaud Frich / F.L.C / ADAGP

The Firminy site is, after Chandigarh in India, the most important and comprehensive Le Corbusier site. It is in this small city located in the Loire Valley, a few kilometres from Saint Etienne, that his urban theory, his utopian model of society is displayed. In 2016, the ensemble was listed as a UNESCO Heritage of Humanity site, as part of Le Corbusier's legacy.

The apartments of the housing unit are organised on either side of a long, dark, interior street, pierced on either side by skylights. The street is lit only by the metal sconces, arranged above the front door of each apartment. The sconce illuminates the coloured door, reflecting a luminous halo of the same hue.

Classified historic monument, the building which today is home to one thousand inhabitants, is managed by the Firminy housing public office. In the years 2000, the latter initiated a renovation campaign, replacing the 160 original sconces (1 per apartment) by replicas upholding new safety standards.

Today, in a pioneer approach to highlight its heritage, the OPH-Firminy decided to auction a selection of sconces to fund the restoration and conservation of Le Corbusier's work. This assignment, particularly transparent, does not exclude retaining a number of the models for its archives and for the housing unit's exhibition apartment, a cultural and heritage site accessible to visitors. Several pairs of sconces will also be graciously donated to local, national and international museum institutions, such as the Cité du Design of Saint Etienne, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, or the Museum of Modern Art in New York

The 130 sconces are each estimated between € 600 and 800 / \$ 660 – 880 and will be sold by pairs or lots of 5 or 10 units.

Firminy and Le Corbusier

After the Second World War, France is in full reconstruction and the economy finds a new impetus with the beginning of the "thirty glorious years". It is in this context that the idea of the new Firminy neighbourhood takes root in the spirit of Eugène Claudius-Petit, the current mayor. This son of a railroad worker who became Reconstruction Minister is named head of the municipality in 1953. Firminy is then a former mining town, living off the iron and steel industry, and facing a massive increase of its population.

The mayor decides to launch a vast city-wide rehabilitation operation, with the creation of an urban ensemble unique in France, that he entrusts to his friend Le Corbusier. In 1955, the municipal council unanimously votes in favour of the great architect. The latter had big plans, and designs a cultural centre, a church, a stadium and three housing units on the Firminy heights (of the three, only one will be completed, in a model fairly close to that of Cité Radieuse in Marseille). Le Corbusier attends the laying of the first brick of the housing unit on 21st May 1965, only three months before his death. Thanks to the diligence of André Wogenscky, Le Corbusier's faithful assistant, the construction is completed and delivered, two years later.



Charles-Edouard Jeanneret aka Le Corbusier, sconce LC III, created in 1949, metal, from the Firminy Habitation Unit, estimate : €600 - 800/ 660 - \$880 each (sold by sets of 2, 5 et 10).



Charles-Edouard Jeanneret aka Le Corbusier, Interior street, from the Firminy Habitation Unit 1965: Office Public d'Habitation de Firminy © DR / F.L.C / ADAGP

Le Corbusier : « I create with light »

Serge Lemoine, cultural advisor for Artcurial, talks of the special relationship that Le Corbusier entertains with light, in the foreword of the auction catalogue:

(...) « I create with light » Le Corbusier states, but he is referring to daylight and sunlight that he allows to stream into his interiors through vast openings, while he sculpts his architectural volumes with shadows and light.

He is not particularly preoccupied with artificial light. The great salon of the villa Savoye built in 1931 in Poissy is lit at night by a ramp in the form of a suspended gutter throughout the entire length of the room, lighting the ceiling indirectly (...)

The purism expressed by Le Corbusier in the first part of his career, his literal adoption to the Adolf Loos quote "ornamentation is a crime" led him to eliminate any trace of decoration and to delete everything that could recall chandeliers, sconces, lamps and lampshades used in the past.

After this, Le Corbusier provides his buildings with specific interior lighting systems, similar to those he created for the Cité Radieuse of Marseille and will use on many other occasions: the first is a metal lamp on a pivoting central pillar, in the shape of a conch shell, casting indirect light. The device is designed as a sculpture whose forms are directly derived from his plastic arts research. It is intended to illuminate interior spaces such as lobbies, landings, corridors, and can be found in the Nantes-Rezé buildings in 1953, in Briey-en-Forêt in 1959 and Firminy, and more (...)

The second lighting element for the common parts of his collective buildings is a sconce of his own design, intended to be placed above the entrance door of each dwelling, opening onto the corridor. Here called an "inner Street", it is located in the centre of the construction, and is completely obscure. The lighting helps to locate the door, painted a bright colour, as Le Corbusier made wide use of polychrome tones both outside and inside his architectural creations.

The sconces are made out of cut and curved sheet metal to obtain a cylinder which is then cut into a bean shape. The device is fixed to the wall by a frame and equipped with an electric light bulb so as to provide indirect lighting through a slot. Nomenclatured as LC III, the sconces were manufactured by Guilux. In Marseille, these elements are painted the same colour as the door. At Firminy, they are substantially larger and are all painted in the same colour grey, the inside in white. »



Charles-Edouard Jeanneret aka Le Corbusier, rue intérieure, Unité d'habitation de Firminy, 1965, propriétaire : Office Public d'Habitation de Firminy © DR / F.L.C / ADAGP



Charles-Edouard Jeanneret aka Le Corbusier, rue intérieure, Unité d'habitation de Firminy, 1965, propriétaire : Office Public d'Habitation de Firminy © JJ Gelbart / F.L.C / ADAGP

ABOUT ARTCURIAL

Founded in 2002, Artcurial, a multidisciplinary auction house based in Paris, reinforcing its leading position in the market of the international art in 2015. With 3 sale venues in Paris, Monte-Carlo and Hong Kong, the House totals 210.1 million euros in sales volume in 2016, doubling its turnover in 5 years (+10% compared to 2015).

It covers the whole spectrum of major specialties: Beaux-Arts to decorative arts, collector automobiles, jewellery, collector timepieces, fine wines and spirits... Resolutely turned toward the international market, Artcurial asserts its network abroad with representation offices in Brussels, Milan, Monte-Carlo, Munich and Vienna as well as a presence in Beijing and Tel Aviv, and biannual exhibitions in New York. In October 2015, Artcurial organised its first sale in Hong Kong and in Morocco.



HD visuals available upon request

Estimates in dollars provided for information purposes only

Catalogues available online at www.artcurial.com

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