

Combining an exquisitely crafted oiled oak frame with duotone, reversible suede and leather cushions, Janette Laverrière's iconic Fauteuil Cognac (Cognac Chair, 2010) also has aesthetic roots in the designer's earliest beginnings. In the 1930s, she was already an apprentice in the studio of legendary, luxury modernist furniture designer Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann. There the young interior architect and designer - herself the daughter of a distinguished Swiss architect Alphonse Laverrière - was trained in the well-drawn curve and the application of fine craftsmanship using quality materials. Subsequently in the pre-War years collaborative works with her first husband also evidenced her dexterity, foresight and originality – for instance, with her design low-lying seating-and-object-display dias for the circumference of a living room. After going it alone, as a radical designer in early postwar-Paris Laverrière's design language matured and flourished against the odds as one of very few women alongside her near contemporaries such as Charlotte Perriand, or earlier Eileen Gray both of whom have reentered the canon only recently. In the same period Laverrière made her own a name for herself through the creative use of what were then unorthodox poor materials such as plywood and wrought iron, and her allowance of idiosyncratic decorative features implicitly questioning the then pervasive strictures of modernist design. But also because of her egalitarian social-political and feminist convictions which she brought directly to all of her work. Among hundreds of designs, in the 1960s she designed and produced the Whiskey chair, a piece which very late in life she confessed was an intentionally ambiguous homage to the habits of one of her former husbands. Nearly half a Century later, holding court to a loyal group of supporters and fans in her Marais apartment, surrounded by her work and plans (the majority of which are now on permanent loan to the Centre Pompidou), this grande dame of French design never stopped working. Sustenance in the form of delicate macaroons and port wine were on offer to the well-liked. From around 93 years of age Laverrière devoted herself for the last 8 years of her life to a series of 'useless things' – namely mirror objects titled Evocations intentionally on the cusp of art and design which entail a reflection back on the literary and political inspirations of her life.

Shortly after through a new profound friendship with artist Nairy Baghramian she experienced with amazement and gratification a new budding of interest in her life and work in the international contemporary art world. Laverrière dubbed them 'sisters in spirit' and the two undertook a number of major collaborative exhibitions together, notably a presentation for the 5th Berlin Biennale and an exhibition in Kunsthalle Baden-Baden a couple of years later which the designer attended and received visitors and well-wishers in her suite at the Hotel Bremen. In their many discussions Laverrière expressed that one of her fondest wish was that some of her til then unproduced work might be realized. So together in agreement with Laverrière and her family, Baghramian's partner Michel Ziegler of Silberkuppe, Berlin was entrusted to make this wish (or as Baghramian might dub it: a kind of utopian impulse in the everyday) possible for posterity. Thus Silberkuppe was granted

three exclusive production licenses covering with three designs: the lamp Chapeau Chinois II (1952/2012) which hitherto had only existed as a prototype, the rotating cherry-wood Bibliothèque Tournante (1950/2012) originally a commissions one-off for an artist friend Pierrette Bloch's books, and lastly the Fauteuil Cognac. Poignantly the Fauteuil Cognac was in fact to be Laverrière's very last furniture design drawn up especially for production by Silberkuppe and completed before she passed away in her sleep on 1 January 2011 just after her 101st birthday celebrated with champagne, family and friends.

JANETTE LAVERRIÈRE FAUTEUIL COGNAC (2010) solid oak, orange and pale blue leather and suede, 90 x 78 x 66 cm, available in an 'artist's edition' produced by SILBERKUPPE Berlin pursuant to an exclusive license direct from the designer and her estate.

Exhibition design by Katarina Burin

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