

CHRISTIE'S

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THE STEVEN A. GREENBERG COLLECTION MASTERPIECES OF FRENCH ART DECO



New York - Christie's is honored to announce *The Steven A. Greenberg Collection, Masterpieces of French Art Deco* to be auctioned in New York on December 12 and 13, 2012, in an evening and day sale. This museum-quality collection chronicles a unique chapter in the history of 20th Century design, focusing in depth on some of the most distinguished artists associated with the historic Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in 1925 – Jean Dunand, Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, and Jean Dupas. Two important lacquer screens by Eileen Gray, perfect complements in their rarity and stature to the works of these artists, constitute another key facet of Steven Greenberg's collection. With approximately 210 lots, the sale is expected to realize in excess of \$15 million.

Steven A. Greenberg was a genuine connoisseur whose passion for the subject was sparked in the 1970s when he bought his first pieces on a trip to Paris. He applied himself with energy, focus and determination to create a superb collection that celebrated both the sophisticated style and the meticulous craftsmanship of great French Art Deco. And he did so from an American perspective, appreciating the influence of the great French artists on American design. His office was situated for many years in the Art Deco styled Rockefeller Center. Here, on the 67th floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza, space that is now the building's observation deck, he installed his magnificent homage to Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. Steven A. Greenberg was a multi-faceted entrepreneur whose business interests ranged from financial public relations, investment management and owning and operating nightlife venues.

Philippe Garner, International Director of 20th Century Decorative Art & Photographs, comments: "Steven Greenberg was a pioneer. He appreciated the quality, refinement and historic importance of French Art Deco at a time when the style was just starting to attract wider attention after decades of neglect. He collected with flair and with confidence, trusting his own eye and instinct. The pieces he assembled constitute a rare tactile and visual treat, for he was sensitive to fine materials and exceptional craftsmanship as well as to elegance of line and of form. The Steven A. Greenberg Collection of Art Deco is one of the most distinguished ever assembled. The auction is the most spectacular offering that

we have seen in America in recent times. It is an honor to present these remarkable works – largely unseen for so many years.”

Carina Villinger, Head of Department, 20th Century Decorative Art & Design, New York, says, “The collection is a testament to one of the great eras of French decorative arts, selected with Steven’s very particular vision. He focused with great passion on the sumptuous, luxurious and highly decorative aspect of French artistic sensibilities in the 1920s and 30s, and concentrated on the work of three emblematic creators. Between the superb craftsmanship of Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, the refined lacquers of Jean Dunand and the elegant neo-classical drawings and paintings of Dupas, the picture emerges of a period that gloriously celebrated the arts.”

Leading the selection of works by the French ébéniste **Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann** (1879-1933) is a **modernist desk** which is a unique version of a model first shown by Ruhlmann in the Paris Salon des Artistes Décorateurs of 1929 (estimate: \$2,000,000-3,000,000). The desk embodies the prevailing shift in sensibility as modernism suggested a new set of priorities to designers: lines became simpler, cleaner; decorative effects were reduced to the most minimal geometric elements, or shunned in favor of sleek surfaces; and there was a new focus on materials that spoke of a culture of industrialized, mechanized production, albeit here within a high luxury context. The centerpiece of the 1929 display was a fan-shaped desk of essentially the same design as the present example, was set in a lofty space before high curtains, a grandiose look that Steven Greenberg replicated in the décor of his New York office.



Ruhlmann’s display at the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs presented a suite of furniture conceived for an Indian Prince, who ordered a version of the desk in Macassar ebony. Ruhlmann made another in Macassar ebony for his own use in his rue de Lisbonne offices. The model exhibited in 1929 was bought by Président du Conseil des Ministres André Tardieu, and surviving records confirm the execution of a small number of further variant examples. The present example corresponds to one recorded as executed in 1932 for the French industrialist M. Sulzer, and represents the final phase of an illustrious career, as Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann died the following year. Such was his status within the French arts that he was honored with a major retrospective the following year at the Musée du Louvre in Paris.

Additional highlights by Ruhlmann in the collection include a macassar ebony **‘Meuble à Fards’ cabinet**, circa 1926-27 (estimate: \$500,000-700,000), an extending amboyna **dining room table with eight chairs**, circa 1925 (estimate: \$300,000-500,000) with a matching sideboard (\$100,000-150,000), and a magnificent **pair of beaded glass and silvered-bronze table lamps**, circa 1925 (estimate: \$600,000-800,000) – *pictured left*, which were included in the Metropolitan Museum’s exhibition ‘Ruhlmann: Genius of Art Deco’ in 2004.

Steven Greenberg was particularly passionate about the work of the French lacquer artist **Jean Dunand** (1877-1942) and his collection encompasses an unprecedented overview of the different techniques used by this artist, showcased in a wide variety of tables, panels, vases and accessories. One of the highlights in the collection is a **radio cabinet**, circa 1930, with carefully stylized motifs representing the modern and energetic spirit of jazz on the meticulously rendered surface of the doors (estimate: \$250,000-350,000) – *pictured right*. Compact, and designed to enclose the increasingly affordable table-top radios that, were by 1930, beginning to appear in many European homes, the cabinet depicts an attentive listener, most likely inspired by Josephine Baker, draped in African batik prints, poised atop a landscape that is part the lush canopies of a jungle, and part the rigid architectural massing of the modern city. From France’s colonies in the Congo, via



Harlem, and back to Paris, jazz become the riotous soundtrack to liberty, and Josephine Baker—former Broadway chorus girl now transformed into glamorous Parisian siren—the emblem of that spirit.

A remarkable **low table with ‘Suprematist’ decoration** is the perfect expression of the vision of **Jean Dunand**, both in terms of its concept and its execution (estimate: \$600,000-800,000) – *pictured right*. An exquisitely crafted piece, deploying the lacquer techniques in which Dunand had proved himself an unrivalled master, the table also illustrates Dunand’s great skill in devising forms and motifs that draw inspiration from multiple sources and constitute an impressive lexicon of avant-garde imagery through the Art Deco years. The table was first exhibited at the Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, in 1923. The early 20s date of execution confirms that Dunand was ahead of his time in developing such crisp geometric motifs to decorate his creations, for it was not until the latter years of the decade that such styles became widely fashionable. The decorative motif that Dunand has conceived for this table calls to mind the work of the rigorous yet expressive abstraction of the Russian Suprematists, and particularly of certain paintings by Kazimir Malevich.



Other fine examples by Dunand in the collection include a **piano** of lacquered wood with a fish motif, *circa* 1925 (estimate: \$250,000-350,000), and two **four-panel screens** by Jean Dunand and Jean Lambert-Rucki (1888-1967) (each estimate: \$400,000-600,000). One of the outstanding examples of the many vases by Dunand in the collection is a 20 ¼ in. tall lacquered vase with an abstract geometric motif of eggshell and lacquer (\$150,000-200,000) – *pictured on page 1, left*.

The career of **Jean Dupas** (1882-1964) is well represented in Steven Greenberg’s collection with a wide array of posters, gouaches, preliminary drawings for large-scale works as well as paintings. These provide a perfect complement to the three-dimensional works in the collection. Dupas was a painter, decorator and graphic artist originally from Bordeaux. He studied art at the turn of the century and developed a very distinct neo-classical style which has become one of the defining looks of the Art Deco period. He is probably most well-known for his murals in the SS Normandie and for his painting ‘Les Perruches’, which was part of Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann’s pavilion at the 1925 Paris exhibition.



A two-panel **verre eglomisé mural**, the ‘**Chariot of Poseidon**’, is a smaller scene from large mural ‘*The History of Navigation*’, which was originally designed by Dupas for a suite of four murals conceived in 1934 for the Grand Salon of the SS Normandie (estimate: \$100,000-150,000) – *pictured left*. The Normandie was the greatest luxury liner of its day, and perhaps of all time. Launched in 1935, this magnificent vessel was in effect a floating museum travelling between Paris and New York. It was the last great testament to the glories of French Art Deco, incorporating designs commissioned from leading artists of the day, notably such figures as Jean Dunand and Jean Dupas, who had earned such acclaim at the Paris Exhibition of 1925. The allegorical subject of the mural incorporates a bearded figure, a Pegasus, the bulging eyes of a sea monster, and a siren against stylised waves, and is an exceptionally rare version from what

might be described as the artist’s most visible and most important commission. The mural ‘*The History of Navigation*’ is now in the collection of the Museum of Metropolitan Art, New York.

Other important works by Dupas include a **frieze painting**, *circa* 1925 (estimate: \$150,000-250,000), and a gouache entitled **Two Women**, 1924, which was included in the “Ruhlmann: Genius of Art Deco” exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2004 (estimate: \$80,000-120,000) – *pictured on page one, right*.

Also from the legendary SS Normandie, are three ‘*chauffeuses*’ side chairs designed for the Grand Salon by **Jean Rothschild** (1902-1998), *circa* 1934 (estimate: \$30,000-50,000). The grandest of the ship’s salons were decorated with an attention to materials that consciously recalled the sumptuousness of the aristocratic interiors of the Sun King, Louis

XIV. The Grand Salon, paneled with verre églomisé murals by Jean Dupas, ornamented with a symbolic gilded blazing mid-day sun stationary over calm waters, provided the showcase for the elegant furnishings designed by Jean Rothschild. With gently carved gilt-wood frames, the low, wide seats upholstered in hand-woven Aubusson tapestry designed by Emile Gaudissart, these were lounge chairs in the noble 18th century tradition, designed to complement an interior that celebrated the long tradition of the greatness of France.

A magnificent **eight-panel screen** by the Paris based Irish artist **Eileen Gray** (1878-1976) *circa* 1921-23, is one of three variations on a theme, with incised linear decoration in a deep brown lacquer ground (estimate: \$1,500,000-2,500,000) – *pictured right*. Of the three screens created, the screen being offered is the most impressive example, the other two being smaller and their decoration less elaborated.

Eileen Gray is hailed for her independence of spirit and of vision and the singularity of her talent is evidenced in a relatively small but nonetheless impressive legacy of furniture. Unlike her contemporaries Jean Dunand and Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, designers who became veritable entrepreneurs running very substantial workshops, Gray never courted publicity, preferring to work for a very small circle of clients.



Gray enjoyed the appreciation and custom of two key clients in the twenties, two fashionable ladies with a well-developed eye for quality and integrity. They were Mme Mathieu Lévy and Mme Jean Henri-Labourdette. The former commissioned Gray to fully refurbish her apartment and commissioned or bought from her appropriate furniture. A central feature of the refurbishment, executed between 1919 and 1922, was a series of lacquer wall panels with a decoration of fine sweeping and intersecting lines. These developed an idea first pursued in the decoration of one side of the screen 'Le Destin', created in 1914 for the couturier collector Jacques Doucet, on the other side of which was a symbolist figurative subject. Within Gray's *oeuvre*, the present screen defines a moment where the artist has evolved from the figurative to the abstract, with linear graphics as a constant.

The screen, one of a tiny number of paneled screens by Gray recorded, let alone surviving, was among the fine group of works bought by Mme Labourdette from the artist. It remained in her family's possession until acquired in the 70s by Paris dealer-collector Jean-Claude Brugnot, by whom it was eventually sold at auction in New York, where it was bought by Steven Greenberg.

Steven Greenberg equally treasured the small, exquisite accessories that became a vehicle of artistic expression by the lacquer artists of the period. His collection showcases approximately 23 matchbook and lipstick holders, compacts and cigarette cases by Jean Dunand, Paul Brandt and other artists.

A **modernist cigarette case** created by **Paul Brandt** (1887-1952) in the late 1920s is made of silver with eggshell lacquer decoration, and was in the collection of Andy Warhol (estimate: \$15,000-20,000). Warhol, who, like Steven Greenberg, saw in French Art Deco an expression of sophistication and high style that resonated profoundly in their own search for the very essence of glamour from the perspective of 1970s New York. Paul Brandt was among a small group of distinguished Paris jewelers to revolutionize design within their field, introducing chic and dramatic geometric forms and motifs. He used cigarette cases and compacts, such as the present example, as perfect blank canvases on which to present a dynamic, asymmetrical series of graphic designs that perfectly captured the fashionable new look.

Tour Dates of Collection Highlights:

10-22 September – Paris

8-14 October – London

17-20 October – Los Angeles

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