

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS

CLAUDE & FRANÇOIS-XAVIER LALANNE

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In recent years the work of Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne has achieved iconic status, garnering a cult-like following among private collectors and luminaries such as Yves Saint Laurent, Peter Marino, Marc Jacobs, Valentino and Tom Ford. This summer Ben Brown Fine Arts will mount a major retrospective of the duo's fantastical output, exhibiting their famous bronze sculptures together with specially commissioned new works by Claude.

Drawing inspiration from flora and fauna, the Lalannes' sculptures embody an eclectic style that references classical antiquity, surrealism and the Baroque. Among the most famous on show are François-Xavier's playful animal sculptures, which all feature hidden compartments: a life-size rhinoceros doubles as a writing desk, and the bared chest of a gorilla guards a concealed safe (*Rhinocrétaire*, 2002, and *Gorille de Sécurité II*, 1984). Equally inventive is Claude's *Choupatte, très grand* (2008), an oversized cabbage perched on surrealistic chicken's legs and textured by verdigris.

Claude Lalanne's love of the natural world is further exemplified by her bronze chairs and chandeliers, which seem to grow out of a tangle of sinuous branches (*Chaise feuilles bambou*, 1995 and *Lustre 15 Bougies*, 2011). Works that have been newly created for the show include elegant mirrors that reflect the floral motifs of Art Nouveau, and a surrealist hybrid creature titled *La Femme du Crocodile* (2012), combining a reptilian body, a spiny dorsal fin and a horned nose.

Claude's process involves moulding organic forms directly from life, using contemporary electroplating methods in combination with traditional casting techniques. Her richly detailed artworks highlight the intricacy of natural forms, while François-Xavier's use of sheet metal emphasises the bulk and majesty of his animal sculptures. By doubling as storage spaces or writing surfaces, these works play on the idea of capaciousness, while their arresting, almost abstract features are rooted in his early interest in ancient Egyptian statues.

As practical as they are imaginative, the Lalannes' sculptures represent a unique marriage of fine and decorative art traditions. *Claude & François-Xavier Lalanne* at Ben Brown Fine Arts is the first significant retrospective to be dedicated to the work of these renowned artists in London.

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

Claude Lalanne (b. 1924 in Paris, France) and **François-Xavier Lalanne** (b. 1927 in Agen, France; d. 2008 in Ury, France) have been known individually—and collectively as 'Les Lalanne'—since the 1960s.

François-Xavier Lalanne moved to Paris at age 18 to study sculpture, drawing and painting at the Académie Julian. After renting a studio in Montparnasse, he met artists Constantin Brancusi, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Jean Tinguely, who would all prove influential on his work.

It wasn't until 1952, when he met Claude (née Dupeux) at his first gallery show, that he abandoned painting for sculpture. Claude studied architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts and the École des Arts Décoratifs. She became friends with American artists Larry Rivers and Jimmy Metcalf, who helped her develop the art of electroplating.

The Lalannes' works are represented in many prominent collections around the world including the National Design Museum (New York), Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne/Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), the Cooper Hewitt Museum (New York) and the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle (Paris). This exhibition comes following a major retrospective held in 2010 at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.

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