

# Q&A

## Benoist Drut

Benoist Drut is managing partner of Maison Gerard, a leading source for French Art Deco furniture, lighting and objects, and — more recently — postwar and contemporary design. Founded in 1974 by Gerardus Widdershoven, Maison Gerard maintains premises on East 10th Street in Manhattan and is an elegant presence at both the Winter Antiques Show and the International Fine Art and Antiques Show. In celebration of its 40th anniversary, Maison Gerard unveiled a cache of 1950s and 1960s designs by Jules Leleu and his children for Villa Médy Roc, the Cap d'Antibes residence of the South American financier Robert Greif, and the Paris apartment of Pierre Frilet. With “Leleu 1960s,” Maison Gerard pushes forward into the rich design legacy of a century it long ago claimed as its own.



**“Jardin à la Française,”** unique monumental Aubusson tapestry designed by Camille Hilaire (1916–2004), woven by Pinton Frères. Villa Médy Roc, Leleu 278, 1957. Marked with the Pinton Frères monogram and EDITION LELEU. Handwoven wool; height 159 by width 206 inches. Dining table, LELEU 272, 1957, Villa Médy Roc. Gunmetal patinated metal by Granec, verre églomisé top, gilt-metal feet by Monin; height 29 by width 197½ by depth 49½ inches.



**Q** Is “Leleu 1960s” your most important exhibition to date?

**A** We have presented work by Jules Bouy, Jean-Michel Frank and E.J. Ruhlmann but, in terms of monetary investment and the amount of pieces presented, this is the most significant show we’ve had. The Frilet and Médy Roc commissions are two of the most important of their time. We’ll never be able to gather this much material again — 60 pieces of 1950s and 1960s-era furniture, lighting and carpets, plus original watercolors documenting the Médy Roc project.

**Q** What prompted the show?

**A** About ten years ago, we purchased the contents of the Frilet apartment, which hadn’t been touched for 15 years. Pierre Frilet had authorized Jules Leleu’s son André to acquire earlier Maison Leleu pieces, so the commission represented an interesting continuum of work. It had never been the right moment to exhibit the material before now.

**Q** Who is the Françoise to whom you dedicate the catalog accompanying your exhibition?

**A** Françoise Siriex, a Leleu associate who wrote the definitive book, *The House of Leleu: Classic French Style for a Modern World, 1920–1973*. We have done three Leleu exhibitions and contributed the forward to Françoise’s book. In the past we have focused more on Jules Leleu (1883–1961), an acknowledged master of French Art Deco style.

**Q** How does this build on past shows at Maison Gerard?

**A** We knew Leleu of the 1920s and 1930s and associated characteristic features with his work. But this is the 1960s. Jules Leleu died in 1961, so his sons Jean and André and daughter Paule had really taken over the business by then.

**Q** What characterizes this later Leleu work?

**A** Patinated and gilt metals and beautiful lacquer, which Leleu used to perfection, in every single color you can think of. I really believe that new technologies led to greater artistic freedom.

**Q** How did the Médy Roc project come about?

**A** Leleu knew nothing of Mr Greif, who happened to see a smaller version of the monumental Aubusson tapestry “Jardin à la Française” in the Leleu shop window and was prompted to go in. Médy Roc has train station proportions. Paule Leleu’s genius was to design monumental pieces and carpets for a great hall, grand salon and a living room that opened onto a loggia.

**Q** How is the show going?

**A** We’ve sold quite a few pieces already. About half of them are unique and priced accordingly. They range in price from about \$18,000 to \$300,000.

**Q** How did you acquire Médy Roc’s contents?

**A** The villa sold to a Russian billionaire in 2007. Someone was wise enough to pile the villa’s contents into containers, where it sat for years until it was offered at auction in Paris. Meanwhile, we had been offered the original watercolors documenting the project. They may end up with the person who buys the furnishings or perhaps with a museum.

**Q** Tell me about the Frilet commission.

**A** Pierre Frilet asked André Leleu to bring together objects of the highest quality. Maison Leleu had the full freedom to design whatever they wanted and they were able to buy back and incorporate other Leleu pieces.

**Q** What are the best pieces?

**A** That’s hard. You have to see them to form an opinion. I suppose what impresses me most is the dining table. It is so huge — 16 feet long! Yet it is very light and practical, but still of the richest materials. It has an églomisé top with gold and silver leaf. The pair of red lacquer cabinets, also for Médy Roc, are very nice, too. Both date to 1957.

**Q** I understand that the Médy Roc interior is immortalized in film.

**A** Yes, it was pictured in *Les seins de glace* starring Alain Delon and Mireille Darc.