Design for All: from Prisunic to Monoprix, a French Adventure

Press release

2 Dec 2021 — 15 May 2022
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The Musée des Arts Décoratifs will celebrate the history of obtainable design with the exhibition Design for All: from Prisunic to Monoprix, a French Adventure from December 2nd, 2021, until May 15th, 2022. With more than 500 works – furniture, objets and advertising posters – Design for All will retrace the creative and committed history of these two important French department stores who offered high style designs at affordable prices, summed up in the popular French slogan, “beauty at the price of ugly.”

The exhibition will highlight collaborations initiated by Prisunic in the 1960s, and continued by Monoprix, with iconic designers such as Terence Conran, Marc Held, Constance Guisset, Ionna Vautrin and India Mahdavi, while showcasing works by some of the most creative graphic designers, photographers, stylists and illustrators of their day including Roman Cieslewicz and Alexis Mabille. Architect and designer India Mahdavi, who has collaborated twice with Monoprix, has been entrusted with the scenography of Design for All.

1. Prisunic Style Direction and Advertising — Catalogue/4 Design and Comfort at Home
October 1970
Print on Paper
Musée des Arts Décoratifs
Andy Warhol
Marilyn Diptych, 1962
© The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Licensed by Adagp, Paris, 2021

2. Ionna Vautrin — Vase
2021
Ceramic
© Eugénia Sierko / Monoprix

PRISUNIC/4
decor et confort de la maison
Founded in 1931 the Prisunic department store followed an American style of marketing introduced in France in 1946 under the leadership of its new Director, Jacques Gueden, who in the 1950s, endeavoured to provide contemporary, quality furniture and fashion at affordable prices. “Beauty at the price of ugly” became the brand’s official slogan under the leadership of Denise Fayolle, Director of the Style Office from 1957 to 1967. Prisunic initiated many important collaborations with top designers of the day. Terence Conran participated in the design of the first catalog in 1968, a catalog that skillfully staged furniture, lighting and tableware for a new audience of mail-order consumers. Driven by their shared interest in keeping high style design accessible to all, Prisunic and Monoprix merged in 1997, reaffirming their commitment to keeping “the pleasure of living in the French way” alive for their customers.

Design for All: from Prisunic to Monoprix, a French Adventure, is a thematic and chronological exhibition presented in two segments. The first, devoted to Prisunic, will underline the major collaborations that existed with designers and graphic designers who heralded in the age of mail-order catalogues between 1968 and 1976. The second will focus on the creations of the designers invited by Monoprix, showcasing the daily object, tables, seats and clothing, a theme at the heart of the brand. Present in the Modern and Contemporary Galleries of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the exhibition’s route follows a “ready-made” process (furniture and store displays used in the presentation of objects) that evokes the world of mass distribution through a bright and colourful scenography.
On Level Three, the visit begins with emblematic designs by Monoprix stylised in gold finish shown through repurposed refrigerators and signed by Marion Lesage, India Mahdavi or Ionna Vautrin. Advertising films and filmed interviews animate the space. The following spaces are converted into period rooms, both by Prisunic, showcasing a period bedroom and living room with simple, accessible, and functional furniture in coloured metal or polyester. Some pieces, such as the molded polyester bed designed by Marc Held in 1970 and the enameled sheet metal furniture created by visual artist Jacques Tissinier in 1973, are held in the permanent collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and have become 1970s-design icons.

On Level Five of the Pavillon de Marsan, Design for All sheds light on the history of each brand, unveiling rare archival documents and “merchandising” items such as shopping bags, brand pins, advertising key chains, market trolleys on original cash registers used in stores.

Works from the vast collection of posters and advertising art of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs will be on display in the “News Gallery” segment of the exhibition, with important works commissioned by Prisunic and Monoprix from some of France’s most prominent advertising agencies and graphic designers. These include graphic designs by Friedemann Hauss, Roman Cieslewicz for MAFIA (Malmé, Arnodin, Fayolle, International Associés), but also works by advertisers such as T.B.W.A (Tragos, Bonnange, Wiesendanger, Ajroldi), and R.S.C.G (Roux, Seguèla, Cayzac, Goudard), who developed the true visual identity of Prisunic. More recent involvement has come from the FCB Agency (Denis Garcia Garcia & Lily Van der Stokker), which collaborates frequently with Monoprix, and Cléo Charuet from the Havas City Agency, which became Rosapark, reviving the brand’s identity with its capital letters and band of colours. In 2021, and in reaction to the different lockdowns, Monoprix began working with the DDB agency to fulfill its advertising needs.
The second segment of the exhibition on Level Five looks back at the collaborations forged over the last two decades. Through a prism of dream and fantasy, this segment will present elaborate creations, such as a wedding dress by Couturier Alexis Mabille, complimented by a wall covered in decorative plates signed G by Gien and others by Antoinette Poisson, giving life to ancestral techniques of craftsmanship.

The route is punctuated by a period room dedicated to objects designed for daily activities such as dining, going out and dressing. It also showcases monographs by Maison Château Rouge, whose 2018 collection celebrated the works of the Indian women’s social enterprise Creative Handicrafts.

The Marsan Pavilion also hosts monographs by some of Monoprix’s most emblematic designers, including India Mahdavi, Paola Navone, Ionna Vautrin, Constance Guisset and Nadia Gallardo. Artisanal designs from India and Africa also mingle with the permanent collections, evoking the international scene. In this room, visitors are brought back to their childhood, an important field of exploration for designers, illustrated by children’s clothes and toys from the permanent collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

Dialoguing with major achievements of design icons, the Little Black Dresses by Alexis Mabille, Hussein Chalayan, Yiqing Yin, Anne Valérie Hash and Giles Deacon (2013) dress up Jean Prouvé’s bedroom for the Cité Universitaire d’Antony, while Le Corbusier’s kitchen, based on a project by Charlotte Perriand for the Cité Radieuse in Marseille, is filled with everyday objects and utensils.

The exhibition route comes to a close in the Library of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, where every issue of the Prisunic catalogues that marked generations, supplemented by lithographs sold at the behest of Jacques Putman between 1967 and 1973, are here displayed. This final segment questions the notion of colour – a true chromatic manifest of the two brands – in conjunction with the collections of the Library.

With Design for All: from Prisunic to Monoprix, a French Adventure, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs will hold its first-ever exhibition dedicated to the world of mass distribution, which marked the fate of creative adventure in France. This exhibition will bring a new perspective to many of the objects held in the permanent collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, which already presented, since 2018, a selection of Prisunic pieces from the museum’s collections.
Useful information

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#MonoprixPrisunic

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Pierre-Alexis Dumas, President
Sylvie Corréard, General Director
Olivier Gabet, Director of Museums
Yvon Figueras, Director of international development and production
Olivier Hassler, Director of Communication

— Musée des Arts Décoratifs
Olivier Gabet, Director of Museum
107 rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris
+33 (O) 1 44 55 57 50
Métro: Palais-Royal, Pyramides, Tuileries
Open Tuesday to Sunday, 11 am–6 pm (Open late on Thursdays until 9 pm; only temporary exhibitions and the jewelry gallery are open)
→ general entrance fee: €14
→ reduced entrance fee: €10
→ free admission for under 26

— Musée Nissim de Camondo
Olivier Gabet, Director of Museum
63 rue de Monceau, 75008 Paris
+33 (O) 1 53 89 06 40
Open 10 am–5:30 pm
Closed Monday and Tuesday
→ general entrance fee: €12
→ reduced entrance fee: €9

— Library
Stéphanie Rivoire, Director of Library and Resources
107 rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris
+33 (O) 1 44 55 59 36
Open Tuesday to Friday 10 am–6 pm

— Visitor engagement, education and cultural development
The Educational and Cultural Department organizes museum tours for adults, groups and individuals
→ Reservations:
+33 (O) 1 44 55 59 26 thematic workshop-tours and guided tours related to specific exhibitions for 4 to 18 year-olds
→ Reservations:
+33 (O) 1 44 55 59 25 and lectures and panel discussions
→ Reservations:
+33 (O) 1 44 55 59 75

— École Camondo
René-Jacques Mayer, Director
266 Boulevard Raspail, 75014 Paris
+33 (O) 1 43 35 44 28

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Fulvia Di Pietrantonio, Director
107 rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris
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63 rue de Monceau, 75008 Paris
+33 (O) 1 44 55 59 02

— Museum shop
105 rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris
+33 (O) 1 42 60 64 94
Open 11 am–18:30 pm
Open late on Thursday until 9 pm
Closed Monday

— Loulou, restaurant
107 rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris
or access via the Carrousel gardens
Open daily 12 pm–2 am
+33 (O) 1 42 60 41 96

— Le Camondo, restaurant
61 bis rue de Monceau, 75008 Paris
Open Tuesday to Saturday from noon to midnight and Sunday during the day
+33 (O) 1 45 63 40 40

— Internet and social media
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