

Departures
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Culture Watch
A Woman of Substance

"It's all MARIA PERGAY down here." That was the assessment of JAMES ZEMAITIS, Sotheby's head of 20th-century decorative arts, phoning from DESIGN.05, the new show held during Art Basel Miami Beach in November.

And no one has been more instrumental in the current buzz surrounding Pergay than New York dealers SUZANNE DEMISCH and STEPHANE DANANT. Their Design.05 booth featured works spanning three decades of the designer's career, from an undulating 1968 steel daybed to a new steel cabinet covered in spiky marquetry of ebony and bone. Like so much of Pergay's work, both pieces hovered between objet d'art and fine art, between elegantly cool furniture and minimalist sculpture.

Coinciding with the release of Demisch's new book, *Maria Pergay: Between idea and Design*, Demisch Danant and the LEHMANN MAUPIN GALLERY are mounting dual Pergay exhibitions in New York, from March 30 through April 29. They showcase recent and vintage pieces by the septuagenarian French (by way of Russia) designer, whose enduring passion for steel began in 1967, when the company UGINEGUEUGNON approached her to create a line of furniture using the metal.

Prices for Pergay's works, meanwhile continue to rise. Three years ago her iconic 1968 Ring chair - with its concentric ovals of polished steel that seem to float on a pedestal of steel ribbons - could be had for as little as \$15,000. Now it sells for around \$40,000. At Sotheby's in December, a lamp with sculpted fossil forms on the base went for \$16,800, well above its estimate. Pergay has become, notes Chicago auctioneer Richard Wright, "a designer you can count on."