



ANTIQUES  
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## Antique Garden Furniture Fair

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Aileen Minor, Centreville, Md.

Review and Photos by W.A. Demers



More & More Antiques, New York City, showed a bronze figure of a young Native American, signed Ferd Miller Jr, 1873, from the Jack Warner estate.

BRONX, N.Y. – “It was the best-attended opening night we’ve had in years! It was great to see so many designers and collectors there,” said garden antiques specialist and honorary chairman Barbara Israel following the Antique Garden Furniture Fair, which was presented May 5-7 inside a 10,000-square-foot tent at the New York Botanical Garden.

The Katonah, N.Y., dealer, of course, was referring to the May 4 gala preview party and collectors’ plant sale, which preceded the show’s three-day run, but attendance was reported to be good throughout the weekend – even on Friday when a steady rain would have normally kept all but the serious folks away. “Buyers were enthusiastic,” said Judy Milne of Milne’s At Home Antiques, Kingston, N.Y. “We sold very well and had a very good show.”

In the middle of the flurry of activity on preview night, Leatherwood Antiques’ owner Mo Wajselfish was writing up slips left and right, and partner Johnny Young was using one of the booth’s centerpieces – a handcrafted and designed Adirondack twig table surrounded by four chairs, circa 1930s – as a surface to wrap up some of the smaller purchases for show patrons. Anyone who has seen the Sandwich, Mass., dealer’s display at other shows can appreciate the scarcity of space, for it is chockablock with a wild profusion of unusual objects – garden, folk art

and paintings, Black Forest carvings, sailor's "woolies," theatrical décor and cold painted Vienna bronzes. On the tabletop coiled a carved wooden black snake, lurking beneath a topiary in a decorative tree-form stoneware jardiniere and next to another jardiniere in the shape of a stump with partial limbs and vine holding a hosta. In front of the snake was a carved and painted round game board with a clock face and hourly indentations to hold large, round stone marbles.

"It was my first time exhibiting at this show and I did not know what to expect," said Wajselfish afterward. "I was surprised at the level of artistry, the quality of the dealers who were so inventive and sophisticated. I sold to both old and new customers. One woman came up and said that she'd looked at my sign and recognized the name. 'I'm a big fan of yours,' she told me."

Wajselfish ended up selling the twig table and chairs on Saturday, along with a high-style rattan or bamboo settee from the 1950s. At preview, he sold numerous Black Forest figures, and on Sunday shoppers' appetites seemed to gravitate to Vienna bronzes.

Fellow dealer Bruce Emond of the Village Braider had "recruited" Wajselfish to this show, telling him that the event's patrons were "your kind of crowd." As for himself, the Plymouth, Mass., dealer, as usual, brought many large pieces, mostly statuary and garden antiques, but also a bronze Raven sculpture by Peter Woytek, signed and marked "2 of eight," and a Nineteenth Century Austrian bronze parrot. Garnering much interest here was a pair of Italian limestone maidens, circa 1900-20, that came from the Joan Rivers estate.

Cast stone figures of animals formed a compelling menagerie on two ascending sets of steps in the corners of the booth of James and Judith Milne, At Home Antiques, Kingston, N.Y. Owls, hedgehogs, dogs, rabbits, ducks, turtles, otters and geese were on parade here, as were thousands of pounds worth of urns, fountains and planters, figural sculptures and weathervanes. A pair of carved stone lions from an estate in England exhibited excellent patina, while a set of four stone planters, circa 1940s, from Surrey, England, were a quick sale on preview night. "This show and New Hampshire are the two that I save material for during the year, much of it is from England," said Judy Milne. "Preview is always a great start, and every day we sold to enthusiastic buyers."



Francis J. Purcell, Philadelphia

From Pennington, N.J., Jeffrey Henkel created a designerly display anchored by a set of three pillow-form steel sculptures and a pair of faux bois chairs and demilune console by artist Susy Ventura. Ventura casts and sculpts containers, chairs, tables and more out of concrete and stains them to mimic bark. The one-of-a-kind pieces show well indoors or out. Atop the console was perched a pensive cast stone seated monkey, circa 1960s.

White cast iron furniture dominated the booth of Francis J. Purcell Inc, Philadelphia, who, true to the firm's tradition, featured a massive working fountain burbling away in the booth, and in each corner placed a high Aesthetic Movement Fiske urn with handles.

“The show went really well for me,” Bob Withington of York, Maine, said. “I sold every day of the show and ended up writing up 80 sales, including a three-tier fountain, two large stone troughs, an 8-foot wrought iron console, several concrete planters, a monumental pair of bronze lanterns, a huge millstone, as well as numerous flower frogs and other smalls.”

Aileen Minor Antiques, Centreville, Md., is a charter member of this show, having participated every year in its 26-year history. Minor said that in spite of the heavy rain on Friday the show turned out well for her. “It is a unique show with the total garden theme and is always exciting with the wonderful booth displays.” While it seemed as if nearly every booth featured a pair of recumbent or rampant lions, Minor may have had the best ones – a pair of opposing large males with their paws on top of spheres. From a Baltimore estate, the circa 1900 beasts were made of cast stone with quartz aggregate and featured extraordinary detail.



Jeffrey Henkel, Pennington, N.J., with his display of pillow-form sculptures and faux bois garden furniture by Susy Ventura, a vignette that sold completely during the show.

To see another pair like it, one would have to travel to Florence, Italy, where in the Piazza Della Signoria, the “Medici Lions,” 1589, from which these are modeled, can be seen today.

“I sold several large cast iron urns, a large antique marble bench and smaller planter pots, along with many small items,” said Minor. The marble bench, circa 1910, had paw feet on classically decorated supports and came from New Hampshire.

Barbara Israel Garden Furniture, Katonah, N.Y., was at its regular spot at the show, a large corner space just off the entrance to the plant sale and silent auction. A key sale for the dealer on opening night was a pair of Japanese tall bronze cranes, the feathers meticulously rendered and the heads turned in opposite directions. One of the late Meiji period, circa 1900, cranes stood 82 inches high and the other was 76-½ inches high.

Patiently waiting for a porter to put them on a truck to their new home was a pair of cast stone cows from the 1950s seen briefly at Brennan & Moulleseaux Antiques, Northfield, Conn. The dealers happily reported having a very good show. “Unusual cast stone pieces seemed to be the hit of the show,” said Dave Moulleseaux. “We also sold some rare decorative cast iron pieces, not furniture, and our three wonderful urns, a single and a pair, went begging. Our midcentury artist-made copper fountain was a hit at the preview and sold early. We sold very well on Friday despite the torrential rain.”

“It’s a very fun and different show,” summed up Karen DiSaia said in her fourth year of managing the event, “and it’s also very focused, which makes it engaging for the dealers. We feel that we’re really the only show of its kind left for the serious gardener and beginning enthusiast to find the things they’re looking for.”

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