THE MULLIN COLLECTION AUCTIONED BY BONHAMS: PAYING TRIBUTE TO BUGATTI, A FAMILY OF ARTISTS



Bugatti is a brand built on beauty and craftsmanship, inspired by the creative vision of Ettore Bugatti — who himself was heavily influenced by the artistic flair of his closest family. His father, Carlo, was a prominent furniture designer while his brother, Rembrandt, was a renowned sculptor. Both father and sibling created timeless works of

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art that continue to resonate today — just as Ettore's cars do — and some of the finest of these creations, the Mullin Collection, are due to be auctioned by Bonhams on July 24th.

The late, prominent American businessman and philanthropist, Peter Mullin (1941-2023), held a deep fascination with the world of Bugatti. Affectionately referred to by some as 'Mr BUGATTI in America', his passion and deep understanding drew the attention of international media — and led him to assemble one of the largest Bugatti collections in the world.
From the extraordinarily rare Type 57SC Atlantic, to the 1925 Type 22 Brescia, such was his affection for these vehicles that he felt compelled to share them with other enthusiasts. Peter went on to found the Mullin Automotive Museum in 2010, with French marques such as Bugatti at the center of this celebration of exquisite automobiles.

But his vision didn't stop there. He wished to commemorate the creative lineage of these cars with one of the most extensive portfolios of precious works by the celebrated Bugatti family. It is these exquisite items that are now going up for auction; the largest-ever sale of furniture crafted by Carlo Bugatti, featuring select sculptures from Rembrandt Bugatti, and showcasing select Art Nouveau and Art Deco pieces. It is an exceptional portfolio — paying a fitting tribute to the rich heritage and unparalleled craftsmanship of the Bugatti marque.

Renowned for his innovative designs — seamlessly blending organic shapes with Orientalist and Gothic motifs — the masterpieces of Carlo Bugatti (1856-1940) fueled not only Peter's passion, but a broad canvas of exceptional designers. Even today, well over a century after their creation, Carlo's furniture pieces continue to influence modern interior designers, including Martyn Lawrence Bullard.

The Bonhams auction celebrates the greatest hallmarks of Carlo's inimitable style; intricately crafted chairs, desks, tables, and display cabinets — all integrating Carlo's trademark materials such as wood, silk, vellum, and copper. Each item exemplifies Carlo Bugatti's masterful artistry, celebrated in prestigious museums worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

Carlo Bugatti's Mirrored Hall Tree, circa 1888, is a prime example of his encapsulating work. Estimated to sell for between $20,000 and $30,000, this remarkable hall tree is crafted from walnut, ebonized wood, cork, bone, hammered copper, inlaid pewter, and mirrored glass. Just as modern Bugatti cars pioneer a blend of distinctive materials and intricate design, so too does this elegant furniture piece.

Complementing the series of furniture pieces are several magnificent sculptures by Rembrandt Bugatti (1884-1916), one of the most significant sculptors of the early 20th century, and brother of Ettore Bugatti. Profound animal-lover, Rembrandt mostly drew his inspiration from wildlife. As a result, he became famous for his dynamic bronze sculptures depicting exotic animals, like the 'Dancing Elephant'. One of his first creations, this motif became a radiator cap for the Bugatti Type 41, called the 'Royale' — a homage from Ettore to his beloved brother who took

his own life during World War One. Imbued with rich provenance and exceptional quality, his sculptures are highly coveted by collectors.

One of the auction's standout pieces is the 'Petite Panthère Assise', a bronze sculpture with a dark brown patina, measuring 8 5/8 x 4 5/8 x 14 1/4 inches. Conceived around 1912 and cast by the A.A. Hébrard foundry, this exquisite work is signed, numbered, and marked with the foundry's stamp — estimated to sell for between $150,000 and $250,000.

Of course, Ettore Bugatti himself represents a core component of the auction, including in one of its standout lots: a Type 52 Bugatti 'Baby' car from 1927. Originally designed by Ettore Bugatti for his son as a replica of the Bugatti Type 35 Grand Prix car, this meticulously restored example includes a 12-volt electric motor, finished in quintessential Bugatti blue livery with a rich red leather interior.

Bugatti enthusiasts also have the opportunity to bid for a motoring trunk, once owned by Ettore Bugatti — constructed from leather with impregnated canvas over a wicker frame, and reinforced leather corners. It is stamped with the iconic 'EB' initials, and the Bugatti logo can be seen in the leather lid trim.

Such is the attention to detail and personal touches woven into the showcase, that it extends beyond the immediate Bugatti family — also honoring their peers. Celebrated French designer, René Lalique (1860-1945), held a personal and professional connection with both Ettore and Rembrandt. Very close friends, René and Ettore immediately shared a passion for aesthetics, beauty and refinement. Together, they even developed a prestigious venue, the Clos Saint Odile, to host the great and the good of the time. As a testament to their deep connection, the modern Lalique and Bugatti brands partnered to reimagine Rembrandt Bugatti's iconic 'Dancing Elephant' and cast his exceptional oeuvre in a new light, using crystal glass as a medium and the lost-wax technique to preserve and render Rembrandt's creative work intact.

The Bonhams sale pays tribute to the depth of partnership between René Lalique and the Bugatti family, with over 30 pieces of beautiful glass sculptures molded at René's hand. These pieces, proudly displayed in the Mullin Automotive Museum exemplify the elegance and artistry of the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements, both of which also heavily influenced the iconic designs of Jean Bugatti, son of founder Ettore Bugatti, including the Type 57SC Atlantic.

Peter Mullin's collection is a fitting tribute to his deep understanding of the Bugatti brand, even beyond the automotive world. It reflects the richness of the family's story, and the irresistible flair that infused the entire brand from 1909 through to the present day. Bonhams' unique auction is an equally pertinent homage to Bugatti's timeless legacy — a testament to the talent of a treasured family of artists, and their unmistakable influence on Ettore and Jean Bugatti's automobiles, which still echo through the brand today.

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