

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY



March 26, 2015

## Discovering Les Lalanne Anew in a Madison Cox-Designed Fun House

by Julie Baumgardner



“I loved Les Lalanne’s work before I met them,” the gallerist Paul Kasmin swoons about the artistic duo Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne, known simply as Les Lalanne. “I loved it even more after I met them.” Kasmin encountered and began representing the duo in 2006, and the last time he showed their work was in 2013, at a Shell Gas station on 10th Avenue: Sheep sculptures were installed on an Astroturf grass pasture, exposed to the elements and the public. This year, he’s tapping into the beloved French sculptors’ more mysterious side by bringing things indoors and recruiting the elusive garden magician Madison Cox to bring to life a maze of an exhibition.

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At 91, after 60 years of traversing the line between artist, designer and creative mischief maker, Claude is still churning out her whimsical mechanical sculptures of flora and fauna – not so much the much-in-demand sheep benches, but her neo-Surrealist bronzes and sculptural jewel designs. From the 1960s until François passed away six years ago, the partners in love and crime swirled and cast through Paris in one of the city’s most iconic creative circles, with Yves Saint Laurent, Pierre Bergé, Loulou de la Falaise and Constantin Brancusi. It so happens that Cox, too, was dear to Bergé, as his close confidant and design adviser. “I saw him create his gardens, especially in Yves’s house,” explains Claude of their shared close friend, Cox. “He arranged the Jardin Majorelle in Morocco. I have never seen anything so beautiful. Really.”

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Now Claude and Cox are taking their friendship to the next level with a collaboration: “A labyrinth in which the visitor wanders and discovers the various pieces by Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne, as one might in a garden maze,” explains Cox, the concept’s mastermind. The installation opens today at the 27th Street outpost of Kasmin’s corner empire in Chelsea, and will be on view through May 2. True, the design draws inspiration from the grand salon in Saint Laurent and Bergé’s Paris abode that contained original works by Les Lalanne. But a copycat act this is not.



With 25 sculptures on display, cast from 1987 onward, the hall-of-mirrors fun house – quite literally, as the red room presents 13 illusion-creating mirrors over which Claude’s foliage-inspired “Lustres” hover, and the entrance is guarded by an owl and a spooky gate –

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“contains that element of surprise and mystery, which I believe is always evident in works of both the Lalannes,” Cox explains. The surprise isn’t just found in the works — the collaboration itself is quite the rarity. “I would have liked to do other projects like this one but the opportunity has not presented itself. It was him who decided to do this!” Claude says in reference to Cox.



Claude, who admits “I always did what I liked, what I felt,” has found difficulties with collaborating in the past, but experienced quite the opposite with Cox. “We have the same vision. For me, I like things simple,” she says, “and he does not like when it’s too farfetched. I appreciate that.” That’s not to say the show lacks for any of the anticipated flash and whimsy. “There is always the sense of fairy tale in Claude’s work, a surrealist view of the

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world as we normally perceive it,” Cox says. “While many of us know some of her works, because they have become iconic for the past decades, here set within the context of a maze, there is the sense that seeing the pieces within a new context makes it interesting.” Claude, on the other hand, was rather surprised. “I don’t think I’ve changed so much,” she confides, but this time around, “We discover things, the character of the works from the point of view of others. It renews my vision of works.” Maybe the more things stay the same, the more they change?

*“Les Lalanne” will be on view through May 2 at Paul Kasmin Gallery, 515 West 27th Street, New York, [paulkasmingallery.com](http://paulkasmingallery.com).*

