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PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHAYNA FONTANA

A SALON TO SWOON FOR

Design team Josyln Taylor and Samantha Sano tapped Lucia Simek to curate the art for The French Room's antechamber.

Imagine yourself relaxing in the living room of young art collectors, possibly European, surrounded by an eclectic collection of contemporary art. This fantasy no longer requires a transatlantic flight. The experience is now as close as the French Room Salon in the newly restored Adolphus Hotel.

The salon is the brainchild of design team Samantha Sano and Josyln Taylor of SWOON, the Studio. "The big, overarching idea we had was that this hotel would feel residential in nature," Taylor explains. The creative duo called upon artist and curator Lucia Simek to fulfill this vision. Several elements served as the basis for their discussions. All three agreed on the residential nature of the area, which serves as a transitional space between the French Room Bar and The French Room. They wanted to honor the hotel's illustrious past and its aspirational nods to France while at the same time rooting it in local culture.

Napoleon Bonaparte provided the unlikely inspiration for Simek's approach. In looking through the hotel's collection, she found a 19th-century portrait of the emperor, dressed in his coronation robes, which had been acquired by the Adolph Busch family. It is one of several versions painted by his court artist François Gerard and one that Napoleon favored over those painted by the better-known Jacques Louis David. "Napoleon's striving for power and honor, and his brilliant innovations which ran alongside his foibles, could be seen as analogous to the way Dallas has positioned itself as a city. In the Salon, I wanted to reference the decadence of his era, as well as his mission to build an empire," says Simek.

Working within a limited budget, Simek amassed a collection of works on paper, paintings, and sculpture that features the work of over 30 artists in a variety of media and styles. Installed salon style, the curation offers a broad cross-section of Texas artists. "The work is breaking stereotypes about Texas, since the majority of visitors won't be from Dallas. They are operating under the suppositions of what art would be like in Texas," Simek says.

The image of Texas that fuels the imaginations of visitors still finds a place among work installed. The folk-art-inspired, backward-looking horse in Bruce Lee Webb's *This Town* could be a metaphor for this metropolis that prides itself on its cowboy roots. *Plaster Studio Photo*, a photograph by Bill Wood, also gives historical context to this area. From 1937 until 1973, the Bill Wood Photo Company was the go-to place for photographers in Fort Worth. Wood's photographs were rediscovered by Diane Keaton who eventually co-organized an exhibition of his work at the International Center of Photography in New York. Simek found this print in a trove of his work that she spotted on eBay.

Geometry and structure also guided many curatorial decisions. Work by artists such as Joan Winter, Travis LaMothe, and the late John Wilcox exemplify this in black-and-white simplicity. The work of Cassandra Emswiler Burd, Leslie Wilkes, and Pamela Nelson

provide colorful geometric counterparts. "I wanted there to be a narrative of building a place that came out of nowhere," Simek says. This train of thought extends from the newly conceived space and its collection to the city of Dallas itself.

"I wanted to include artists from here who have roots here but have moved on and done well," she adds. Myron Stout is a prime example of this. The midcentury Denton-born painter moved to New York where he studied with Hans Hofmann before moving to Provincetown, Massachusetts. The Museum of Modern Art is one of the many institutions that own his work.

Since the French Room Salon is the antechamber to The French Room, it only seems natural to pay homage to France. "We are playing with the idea of luxury and wealth and the aspirational aspects of things French," Simek explains. *Faune et Fleur du Texas*, an Hermès scarf designed by Kermit Oliver, is the ultimate fusion of the two places. Keer Tanchak's small, elegant portrait finds its inspiration in 18th-century French miniature painting. Its title, *Ready to Kick Ass*, could be the motto of Adolphus Busch and the business community of Dallas's early days.

The SWOON team also took into consideration the importance of past generations who built the city. With the legendary Neiman Marcus a block away, they wanted the hotel to stay connected to the early glory of downtown. Taylor says, "Stanley Marcus was definitely one of our muses. It was the spirit of the aesthetic of this dapper cultured man" that inspired them. "It was important to include Allison Smith in the collection to connect to Neiman Marcus," Sano adds. Smith, a renowned photographer in her own right, is the granddaughter of Marcus. "My photograph *Nonesuch* was made in Maine at my parents' home. Their home was called Nonesuch Farm and named after my grandparents' home on Nonesuch Road in Dallas," Smith explains.

Ultimately, Simek says, "I was looking for a dynamic smattering of work to keep it visually interesting." To that end, she also wanted to include the elegant work of Linnea Glatt, Linda Ridgway, and Francisco Moreno.

Taylor and Sano had a simple goal. "For us, The Adolphus is such a special place. The challenge was to honor a history but at the same time make it fresh for a new generation," says Taylor. Sano adds, "So many people were afraid of what we were going to do with it." Skeptics needn't worry. Plans are afoot to make the space a destination event even for locals. It is an ideal venue for intimate gatherings that will allow it to be a salon in the traditional sense, but for a contemporary crowd. Simek hopes that it will bring conversations of art and culture into a more relaxed arena. Surrounded by art while enjoying delicacies from the famed dining room, the French Room Salon should help write the next chapter of the cultural history of Dallas. **P**

