

The Towers of La Rochelle, medieval fortresses built to defend the Atlantic coast, once served as homes for captains and their families.

Inside the formerly inhabited spaces, no traces remain of the furnishings or of how the rooms were once used in daily life.

As it hosts the Mobilier national's "Les Aliénés" [The Alienated] collection, the Tour de la Chaîne tower will again become, temporarily, the urban donjon it once was.

The furniture in the collection has been downgraded from its protected status for having lost its value in terms of France's cultural heritage. Thankfully, the pieces have been brought back to life thanks to reinterpretation by visual artists. The artists have transformed the furnishings to give them a new soul and offer a new way of understanding a forgotten living space, through the lens of contemporary creation.

Each piece has been selected to resonate with the spaces in the Tour de la Chaîne tower and suggest a contemporary understanding of what may have been the captain's study, or perhaps a more private room. Each visitor is invited to tap into their artistic sensibilities and let their imagination run free.

Using their immense talent, inventiveness, and expertise, Céline Bachelot, Céline Camilleri, Sara Favriau, Anne Freisz, Laurent Poumarat, Maurizio Galante, Tal Lancman, Anne-Cécile Lopez, and Aline Putot-Toupry have contributed to the development of a bold and unique collection with an environmentally friendly approach.

Céline Camilleri

Escape Game - Series X 6, 2022

Oriental rug. Wool.

Céline Camilleri used a rug made by the Iranian Bakhtiari tribe, which she chose for its unusualness and figurative imagery, featuring stylised animals and human silhouettes. She made the rug the focal point of a larger mural composition, in which its scenes serve as the key to a rite of passage following multiple paths, all converging on the original piece.

Les Farfelus Farfadets: Anne Freisz and Laurent Poumarat

Nocturne sur jardins zen[A1.1], 2020

Screen. Wood, glass, paper.

Anne Freisz and Laurent Poumarat used a four-panelled screen dating from the Napoleon III era. The lower portion, which was originally covered with textiles, has been decorated with panels of papier-mâché, underscored by waves in relief. The dark tones spangled with gold are reminiscent of the atmosphere of a zen garden.

Anne-Cécile Lopez

Stratigraphy, 2023

Table. Mahogany, wood, stone.

Anne-Cécile Lopez used a sideboard table—used to present, prepare, or set aside tableware, food, and drinks—in the Empire style, made in the 20th century of varnished mahogany. The artist covered the table with a mosaic of lava stone, schist, and marble. These materials take over the surface of the table, transforming it into a relic lost at sea and colonised by shellfish. The table's skin of overlapping stones evokes both a shipwreck and the kind of furniture one might find in a contemporary grotto.

Céline Bachelot

Résilience lagunaire de Venise, 2020[A2.1]

Lantern. Bronze, metal, glass.

Céline Bachelot used a gilt-bronze lantern dating from the late 19th century. She dressed it up with pieces of glass formed into a curved shape and livened up with blocks of colour, echoing certain impressionist paintings. Bachelot took inspiration from Venetian lanterns, whose glass is tinted pink, but sometimes takes on a greenish hue when catching light reflected off the lagoon.

Aline Putot-Toupry

Le Rêve de l'arbre, 2021[A3.1]

Chest of drawers. Walnut, porcelain, ceramic, lacquer, bronze, metal, marble, stone.

Aline Putot-Toupry used a chest of drawers from the Empire period. To honour the old walnut wood from which this piece of furniture was made, she sculpted a beam of purpleheart wood into the shape of a tree. Her artistic process draws inspiration from the contemplation of nature and shows deep respect for the materials used. It fits into the tradition of haikus, Japanese poems that stimulate inspiration and meditation.

Maurizio Galante and Tal Lancman

Nids d'oiseaux, 2021[A4.1]

Light fixture. Bronze, metal, glass.

Maurizio Galante and Tal Lancman used a lantern in the Louis XVI style. As careful observers of birds and their plumage, the artists covered the structure of the light fixture with a network of thin glass strands, creating the appearance of radiant birds' nests. The artists' work takes on even greater meaning in the way it creates an interplay between light and shadow.

Sara Favriau

Display / Terrain de jeu, 2023

Telephone table. Mahogany, terracotta, ceramic, stone.

Sara Favriau used an Empire-style telephone table made of varnished mahogany, produced sometime around 1960. Her art can be situated on the border between image and sculpture. She plays with solids and empty spaces, which orient the gaze in a constant movement between the outside and inside. The hollowed and opened volumes form an artistic language: a space for mental projections and reminiscences of moments past that are at once fleeting and vivid.