

Exhibitors explain fair's long-lasting appeal

BRAFA Art Fair, Brussels' major international art and antiques show, is one of the earliest events in the European fairs calendar, writes *Anne Crane*.

It traditionally opens at the end of January when much of the other activity is centred across the Atlantic.

This year BRAFA celebrates its 65th anniversary.

The fair runs from Sunday, January 26, to Sunday February 2, which is one day shorter than previously.

"We have given this matter some thought over the last two years," said BRAFA chairman Harold t'Kint de Roodenbeke. "Some people argued in favour of a shorter duration, a common trend among art fairs lately, while others would have preferred no change. I hope this compromise will satisfy everyone while making things easier during the set-up of the fair which can be quite tiring."

These days over 20 different specialities are covered at this fair - fields as diverse as tribal art, classic European ceramics, Art Nouveau, early sculpture and works of art, 19th century paintings, antiquities and Contemporary art.

Last year it was attended by over 66,000 visitors.

European unions

What started out very much as a showcase for the Belgian art and antiques trade shifted up a gear 12 years ago when the fair moved to the Tour & Taxis exhibition centre. This increased the participation of dealers from other countries, particularly the Parisian trade.

For this latest 2020 edition, 83 of the 133 galleries (63%) hail from outside Belgium.

French dealers still make up with lion's share of the international exhibitors (43 this year) but these days the numbers from other European countries is increasing. This year there will be a dozen exhibitors from the UK and eight from Switzerland while Italy will be fielding 10 and half a dozen come from the Netherlands.

That said, BRAFA traditionally has a relatively low turnover rate, testimony to its exhibitor loyalty.

ATG contacted some of those long-standing international exhibitors prior to BRAFA 2020 to find out what makes them keep coming back to Brussels - and also asked one newcomer what it will be taking to BRAFA for its first appearance.

► brafa.art

Skilful mixture of specialities

Xavier Eeckhout is a Paris sculpture dealer with a particular speciality in animalier works.

"This is our 10th participation at BRAFA which has always been a very positive fair for the gallery," he said. "This fair has improved from year to year to become essential on the international scene.

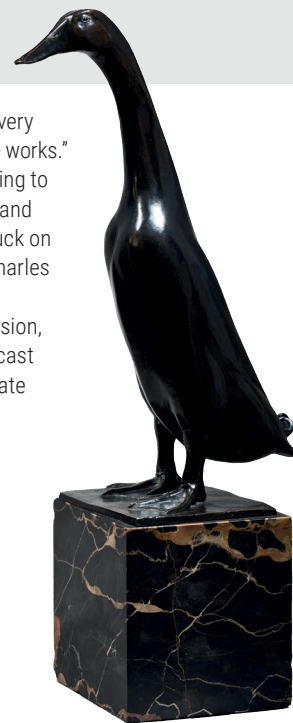
"Its eclecticism, the organisers' skilful mixture of specialities, make it very popular, with a clientele that, while certainly very European, is more and more international. The fair takes place in a very fraternal atmosphere, with flawless organisation.

"It is one of the rare fairs with 130 exhibitors, which

can be called 'tout public', the price range being very open, and the clientele can enjoy very affordable works."

Among the pieces that Eeckhout will be taking to BRAFA this year is this 21in (55cm) high black and brown patinated bronze of an Indian Runner duck on a portor marble base by the French sculptor Charles Artus (1897-1978).

The model was created in 1926 and this version, which bears the Valsuani foundry stamp, was cast between 1927-29. It comes from a French private collection and will be priced **in the region of €100,000-120,000**.



Magical location

The Old Master paintings and drawings dealer **Alexis Bordes** has a gallery on the rue de la Paix in Paris and was one of the first French dealers to join the BRAFA exhibitor list. "I have participated in this fair since 2004 and I really appreciate the convivial atmosphere with my fellow collectors and exhibitors," he said.

"The location of this former brownfield site is magical. The Belgians have managed to remarkably restore this building at Tour & Taxis which was a former postal sorting office.

"We especially appreciate the organisation of the fair and the excellent set-up and staging of the stands. Over the years we have managed to secure the loyalty of a fine French-speaking and Flemish clientele who eagerly await this event in January. The Belgian is a collector at heart and appreciates the eclecticism of BRAFA, which has turned itself into an essential fair in Europe."

Serene scene

This year the gallery will be showing a selection of Symbolist works, paintings priced in the region of €3000-60,000.

They include a portrait, shown **above**, titled *Sérénité* by the French artist Edgard Maxence (1871-1954). Born in Nantes, Maxence trained under the Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau in Paris. This bust-length portrait is of a young woman whose pose and mediaevalist costume typify the artist's enigmatic style, mixing elements of the Middle Ages and Celtic legend. The 22 x 20in (56 x 51cm) watercolour, pastel and gouache portrait on paper is signed and dated 1902 and priced at **€55,000**.

First brush with frame

Among the eight galleries making their BRAFA debut this year will be the **Galleria Paolo Antonacci** from Rome. For this first appearance the firm will be showing a selection of paintings from the late 18th to the first half of the 20th century with a particular emphasis on *Vedutismo* (views of Italian towns and cities).

The gallery is also taking this work shown **below**, a frame designed by the Italian artist Carlo Bugatti (1856-1940) made from wood partly covered in bleached deerskin applied with embossed copper, brass inlay and pewter.

It is fitted with an Orientalist painting of a barber's shop. The price is **€38,000**.





Loyal client base

London dealership Finch & Co is a BRAFA regular. "We have exhibited at the BRAFA event for 13 years," says the firm's **Jan Finch**. "It is very well organised and has a very loyal client base who are interesting collectors. Our 'cabinet of curiosities' is understood and appreciated."

Finch & Co will have a new stand this year not far from the location of the previous space but of bigger size.

Different faces

Among the many varied pieces that will make up the eclectic mix this year will be a carved, gilded and polychrome painted poplar wood Florentine Italian Renaissance bust of Mary Magdalen, dated to c.1500-

20 and priced at **€52,500** (shown right).

Finch & Co will also show an equestrian deified ancestor figure from what was formerly known as the Hindu Kush (north-eastern Afghanistan), made from carved cedar wood, **above left**.

It is priced at **€20,000**.



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