

# BRAFA ART FAIR

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## BRAFA 2024: In search of hidden gems

Liesbeth M. Helmus, a curator at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, Charu Gandhi, an interior designer, and the sculptor Johan Creten have selected three must-see works that will be on display at the 69th edition of BRAFA, which will be held from Sunday, January 28<sup>th</sup> to Sunday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at Brussels Expo. These three figures from the art world explain the reasons behind their choices.

### Liesbeth M. Helmus

With a doctorate in art history, Liesbeth M. Helmus has worked for almost 30 years at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, the Netherlands, where she is the senior curator of Old Master paintings and drawings. She has also published several books, including one on Caravaggio and another on Theodoor Rombouts. The works she has chosen to present reflect the eclecticism that constitutes BRAFA's DNA.



**Galerie Hioco:** Yukiya Izumita (Japan, 1966), *Série Sekisoh (layers)*, 2022, in Iwate clay, H 32 x L 51 x D 18 cm

*“This sculpture, which is part of the Sekisoh series, appealed to me because of its material, texture and colour. There is movement in this sculpture and, subconsciously, you realise that it is the infinite undulation of water, harmoniously captured in the clay,”* explained Liesbeth M. Helmus.

For her: *“What makes this Dogon statue so special is not only the proud strength it exudes, but also the twins on whose heads the hands rest. It’s an exceptionally rare piece, of very ancient origin.”*



**Dalton Somaré:** androgynous Figure Dogon with twins, Mali, 1406-1512 AD, wood, H 48 cm



**Nicolás Cortés Gallery:** Francisco de Zurbarán (Spain 1598-1664), *Still Life of Lent*, 17<sup>th</sup> century

*"I'm always amazed that paintings by Old Masters such as Francisco de Zurbarán, one of the most important Spanish Baroque painters, are still on sale. I don't know enough about the types of food that can be eaten during Lent, but it would appear that they are represented in this painting. It's an intriguing image. As far as I'm concerned, it's an exceptional piece,"* said Liesbeth M. Helmus.

## Charu Gandhi

Born in Delhi, India, Charu Gandhi is the founder and director of Elicyon, an architecture and design studio based in London (Kensington). When she was nine, her parents had their house designed and built by an architect. Charu Gandhi explained: *"She brought beautiful models and drawings to the design meetings. Watching her work, I realised what my future career would be."* Charu Gandhi now creates bespoke interiors worldwide for private clients, property developers and hotels. Here are the three works she has selected.



**New Hope Gallery:** George Nakashima (USA, 1905-1990), *Conoid dining table*, American black walnut, New Hope, USA, 1971

According to Charu Gandhi: *"This dining table designed by George Nakashima is a true classic, representing the golden age of innovative furniture design. Its clean lines and understated elegance make it the ideal match for pairing with playful contemporary upholstered chairs."*

*“Juxtaposing the gleamy polished brass materiality, the cuts in these Fontana pieces give the sculptures a raw look and add an almost industrial quality.” She continued: “I was particularly drawn to their mismatched nature – the intention seems to be to give character to each piece individually whilst maintaining a beautiful cohesion as a pair. I can just visualise them sitting together beautifully on a plinth.”*



**Robertaebasta:** Lucio Fontana (Argentina, 1899-1969 Italy), *Concetto Spaziale Natura*, 1967, polished brass, H 26 x L 20 x D 21 cm



**Axel Vervoordt:** Pierre Culot (Belgium, 1938-2011), *Vase*, circa 1990, partially enameled earthenware, H 84 x L 64 x D 25 cm

*“The unique texture and tone of this stunning vase immediately caught my eye, as did its natural, handmade form. This piece would be perfectly at home on a console or a table in the context of one of our projects,”* explained Charu Gandhi.

## Johan Creten

Johan Creten is a Belgian-born sculptor based in Paris, who began drawing and sculpting at an early age. He soon discovered the potential of clay and decided to include ceramic elements in his paintings. Deeply influenced by the environment, Johan Creten’s work is highly varied, ranging from delicate clay sculptures to large-scale bronzes. His work reveals his personal commitments and raises existential questions such as the unpredictable power of nature.

Like Liesbeth M. Helmus, Johan Creten has selected the work of Francisco de Zurbarán presented at BRAFA by the Nicolás Cortés Gallery. He explained: *“Coming face to face with an image or painting by this great Master is always an event. How to forget his poignant sheep (see Agnus Dei at the Prado Museum in Madrid) or his still lifes of fruit? The painting presented here is deliciously disturbing. Each fragment of the image is like a lesson in painting and a lesson in the unspoken. Transcendent austerity. I would love to wake up in a bare bedroom with this painting as the only window onto eternity.”*

*“My father kept a version of ‘The Man with the Broken Nose’ opposite his armchair, on the windowsill. The sculpture seemed to speak to him. He said that the sculpture changed mood from day to day, that the light and the reflections of the trees and the sky made it express different emotions all the time. It remains formidably intriguing. This sculpture is a friend, a person and a presence, a rock. What fascinates me is the story behind the creation of this work. How, in a poorly heated studio, where frost had almost destroyed the clay and caused the neck of the colossus to burst, something new, radical and revolutionary emerged in a natural way. Rodin, or how to transform a catastrophe into a victory, or how to accept randomness, the unknown, the unforeseen and the improbable in one’s work? All very important lessons,”* added Johan Creten.



**Galerie Nicolas Bourriaud:** Auguste Rodin (France, 1840-1917), *The Man with the Broken Nose*, mask - type II 2nd model (1903), in bronze with a black-green patina, H 25.5 x L 20 x D 21.5 cm



**Belgian Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association (CLAM):** Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Brussels, 1525-1569), *Invidia, Envy, one of the seven vices*, circa 1558. Engraving by Pieter van der Heyden (1530-1572). Published by Hiëronymus Cock (Antwerp, 1518-1570)

*“In my exhibition ‘I Peccati or THE SINS’ in 2020-2021 at Villa Medici in Rome, I included a series of engravings by Baldung, van Leyden, Callot and Beham, in dialogue with my own sculptures. This engraving appeals to me not only because of its subject matter, but also because of its totally surreal and delirious imagination, and because of its extremely contemporary themes. The monstrosity of envy seems very topical to me. I obviously love this work.”*

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