

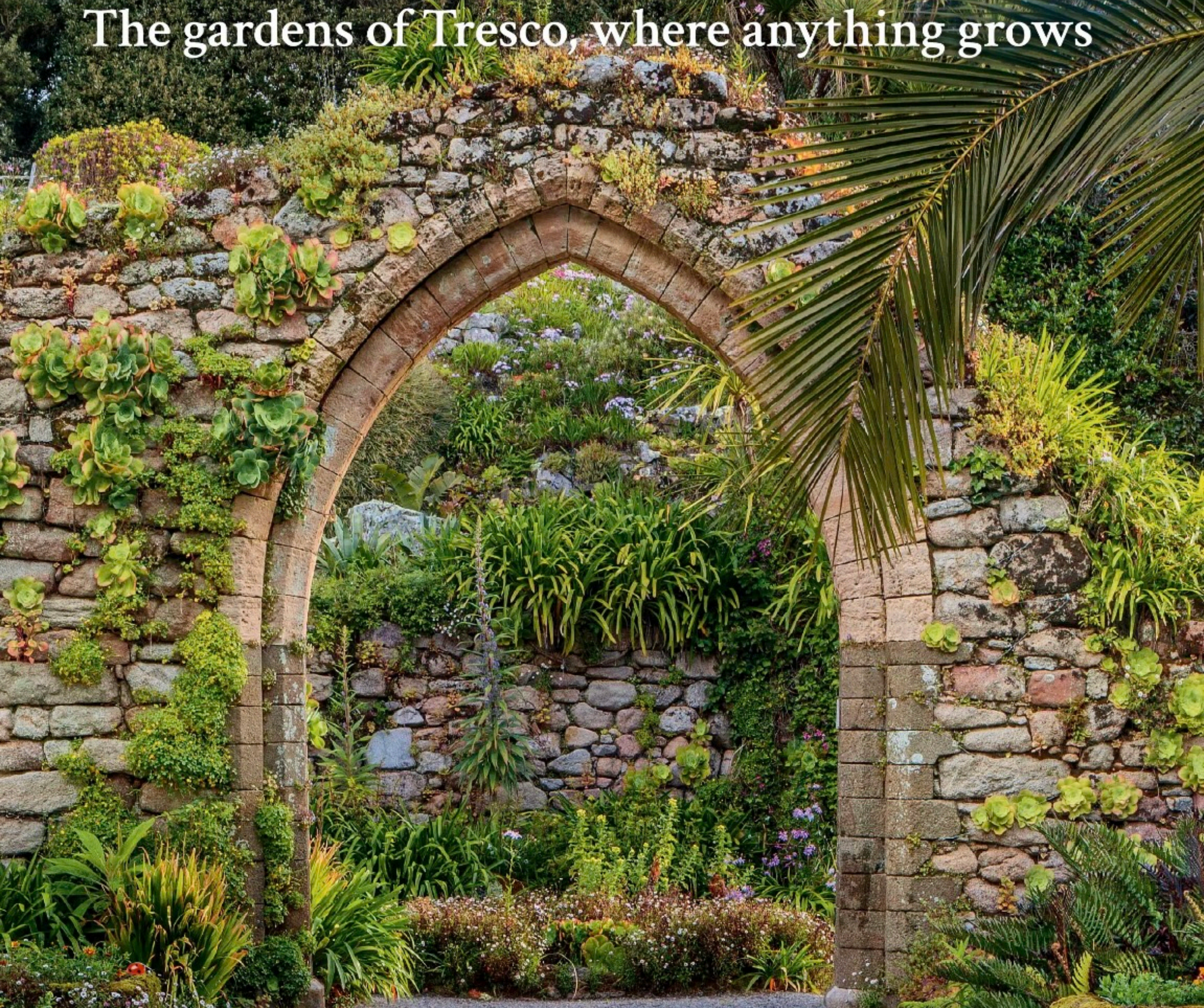
COUNTRY LIFE

EVERY WEEK

JANUARY 15, 2025

Totally tropical

The gardens of Tresco, where anything grows



How to save your box hedge

Constitution of an ox: the cows with pulling power

Royal wave: meet the glove-maker to royalty



Fig 1: Late-15th-century limestone St Jérôme, from Burgundy. With Dei Bardi

LAST month, I led a tour of Flanders, on which we saw some of the greatest triumphs of European art, notably the Van Eyck Ghent Altarpiece and the comparatively tiny St Barbara by the same artist in the Antwerp Museum of Fine Arts. The latter is especially fascinating because it is unfinished, so one can see the artist's hand and mind at work. To vary things, we toured a brewery, ate a good deal and called on two commercial galleries, the owners of which have become friends over my many years of attendance at the BRAFA fairs in Brussels. Although Christian Vrouyr is handing control of his Antwerp carpet gallery to his daughter Naïry—the fourth generation—and has retired as BRAFA's general secretary, he was there with her and they could not have been more welcoming. It was the same in Ghent, where Francis Maere had an exhibition of paintings and sculpture by Karel Dierickx (1940–2014) in his particularly beautiful gallery. It is a privilege to listen to people who really know and love their subjects.

A grand tour

The Low Countries offer much to please the traveller, from Van Eyck masterpieces in Flanders to jewelled dragonflies and greedy dogs at the Brussels Expo



In 10 days' time, I shall be heading to the Brussels Expo for the preview of this year's fair, which will run from January 26 to February 2 (www.brafa.art). Here is a small selection of diverse works I am looking forward to seeing. Galleries are Brussels based, unless otherwise indicated.

Last year (*January 17, 2024*), I illustrated a 15th-century northern French Flamboyant Gothic canopy that was shown by Dei Bardi, a gallery that specialises in medieval sculpture and works of art. This year, it has something even more to my taste, a 23¾in-high limestone figure of St Jérôme (*Fig 1*) dating from the last quarter of the same century. It is Burgundian, in the style favoured at the court of Duke Philip the Good. Particularly appealing is the diminutive lion reaching up, dog-like, to lick the saint's hand. The same gallery also has a comparatively unfaded Flemish tapestry, which was probably made in Bruges in about 1535, showing the martyrdom of St Barbara, with grotesque creatures and many fascinating details.

I rarely mention jewellery in this column unless it has a good provenance or history, but here are two that I show simply because they are beautiful. First, with VKD Jewels



Fig 2 left: Fritillaria earrings by Luz Camino. With VKD Jewels. Fig 3 above: Laliq dragonfly necklace. With Galerie BG Arts

of London and Milan, is a pair of fritillaria earrings (*Fig 2*) made in 2023 by the Spanish designer Luz Camino. Set in silver, gold and platinum, they are embellished with sapphires and diamonds. The second, with Galerie BG Arts of Paris, is a necklace featuring a pair of dragonflies (*Fig 3*) in gold, tourmaline, enamel and *plique-à-jour* by René Lalique.

Frans Snijders (1579–1657) was a masterly dog painter and a splendid 44½in by 72in example, showing a stand-off between kitchen-raiding curs (*Fig 7*), is with Klaas Muller of Lokeren near Ghent. Mr Muller is now chairman of the fair, too.

This will be BRAFA's 70th outing; in recent years, it has become more international and, inevitably, there is more modern, particularly 20th-century, art on sale than in the past. As ever, however, Belgian staples, including textiles, cartoons and tribal arts, are well represented. The comic-book specialist Huberty & Breyne has what might be termed an Old Master of the genre, the only original plate from Hergé's 1932 *Tintin en Amérique* available to the market (*Fig 6*). It is inscribed by the artist to his publisher Etablissements Casterman to celebrate its bicentenary.

Georg Karl Pfahler (1926–2002) was the first German 'hard-edge' abstract painter, sculptor and printmaker and his architectural work for public spaces is well known in his home country. Here, his 63in by 55½in acrylic *Dreilex II* (*Fig 5*), 1964, is with the QG Gallery. Also mid century is the 'President' →

Pick of the week

What do you know about Maurice Yves Sandoz? Until now, the name only struck the tiniest of bells with me, but, as he once owned a Fabergé imperial egg, it seemed that Geoffrey Munn, formerly of Wartski, would be the person to consult. He pointed me towards a massive three-volume catalogue of the Sandoz collection of watches and automata, most of which was passed to a Swiss museum in Le Locle, Neuchâtel, by a foundation dedicated to Sandoz and his brother, the animalier sculptor Édouard Marcel Sandoz (1881–1971). The brothers inherited a pharmaceutical fortune and it was the sculptor who had tinkled the bell for me.

However, Maurice (1892–1958) was certainly interesting. Having trained as a chemist, he took to writing fantasy fiction and several of his books were illustrated by Dalí. Two were filmed, *Spring-Heeled Jack*, 1950, inspired by a London myth, and *The Maze*, 1953, based on the Beast of Glamis. Their author mostly lived in Rome, but also owned a villa that took up most of Gaiola, a pair of rocky islets joined by a bridge just south of the Bay of Naples. Locally, the place is believed to be cursed.

Certainly, its 20th-century owners were unfortunate. A Swiss was murdered in the 1920s, his wife drowned shortly after, their German successor died of a heart attack there and Sandoz himself eventually committed suicide in a mental hospital. Post-war, two Agnelli heirs died young and soon after Paul Getty bought it his grandson was kidnapped. The last owner's insurance company folded and he was jailed. Since then, the villa has been abandoned.

It is perhaps as well that the automaton 'Magician Book' (pictured) offered at BRAFA by Artimo Fine Arts served as a visitors' book for another of Sandoz's villas, in Burier, Switzerland, where he kept the collection. Bound in tortoise-shell, gold and enamel, it was made for Meussel & Fils of Geneva in 1823 and still has the instructions for its question-and-answer functions.

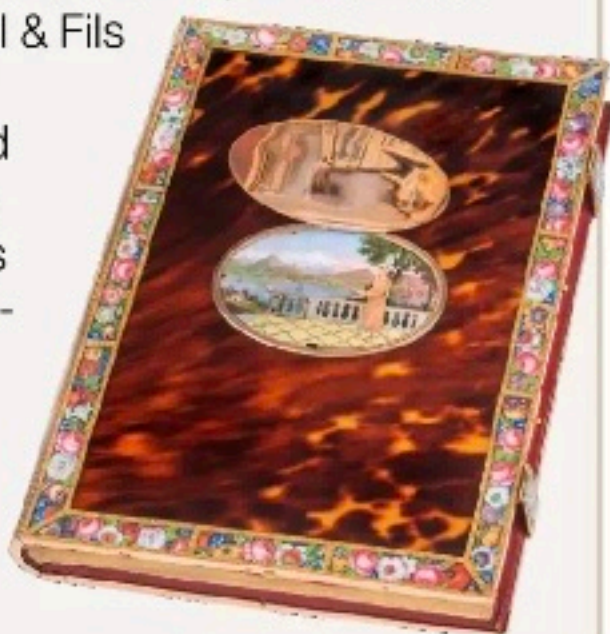
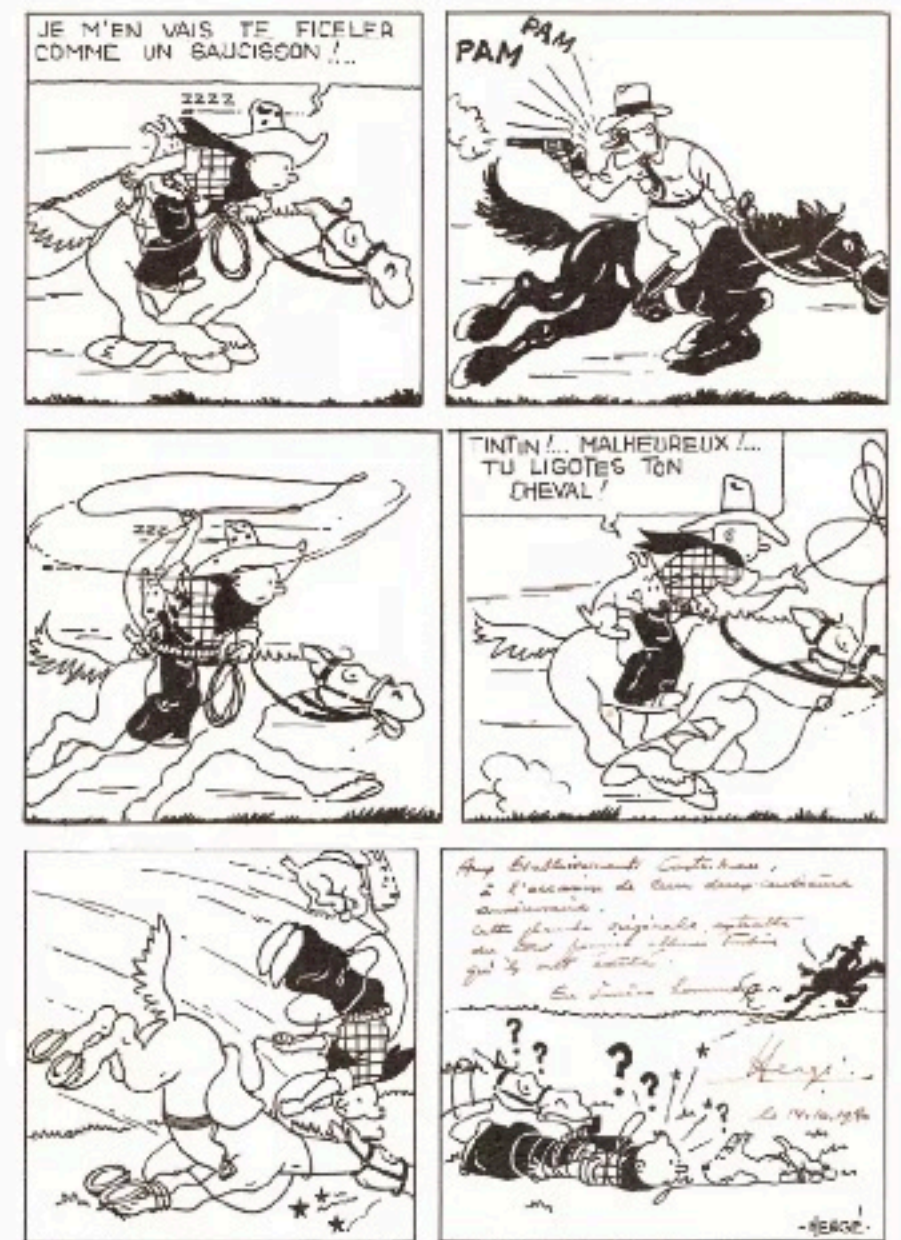


Fig 4 above: Bodil Kjaer's 'President' desk. With Gokelaere & Robinson. Fig 5 left: *Dreitex II* by Georg Karl Pfahler. With the QG Gallery. Fig 6 below: Plate from Hergé's *Tintin en Amérique*. With Huberty & Breyne



desk (Fig 4) that was designed in 1959 by the Danish architect and town planner Bodil Kjaer (b. 1932). It is offered by Gokelaere & Robinson of Knokke, Belgium. Her pieces came about between 1959 and 1965 because 'I often had problems finding furniture that could express the same ideas as those we used in the buildings we designed and which could, at the same time, express the ideas of Modern management'.

I am sad to miss the January 26 talk by Leonore van Sloten, senior curator at the



Rembrandthuis, Amsterdam, on Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–78), a Rembrandt pupil and fine writer on art. He believed critics should practise what they preached: 'Sketch and re-sketch... theoretical knowledge will hardly serve, if you do not fix it fast with practice.'

Next week A diversity of paintings

Fig 7: *Kitchen Interior*, about 1620, by Frans Snijders. With Klaas Muller

