

Art Fair BRAFA Turns 70— Here’s Why It’s The Darling Of The Art World

From the secrets of its longevity to the highlights of their 70th anniversary edition, Beatrix Bourdon, Managing Director of BRAFA, tells all.

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Find contemporary art, antique furniture, rare textiles and more at BRAFA, which is held at the Brussels Expo every year. COURTESY OF BRAFA

Andy Warhol famously said that “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes”. Nowadays, your time in the sun can be as short as a TikTok post. That’s why it’s even more impressive when one remains relevant for decades, and such is the case with [BRAFA](#).

The Brussels-based art and antiques fair was established in 1956 with one goal: to offer the most qualitative of art fairs in order to satisfy the desires of collectors in search of treasures. The fair started with a handful of Belgian antique dealers, and over the past seven decades has grown to become a well-loved [international art event](#) that's equal parts relaxed and sophisticated.

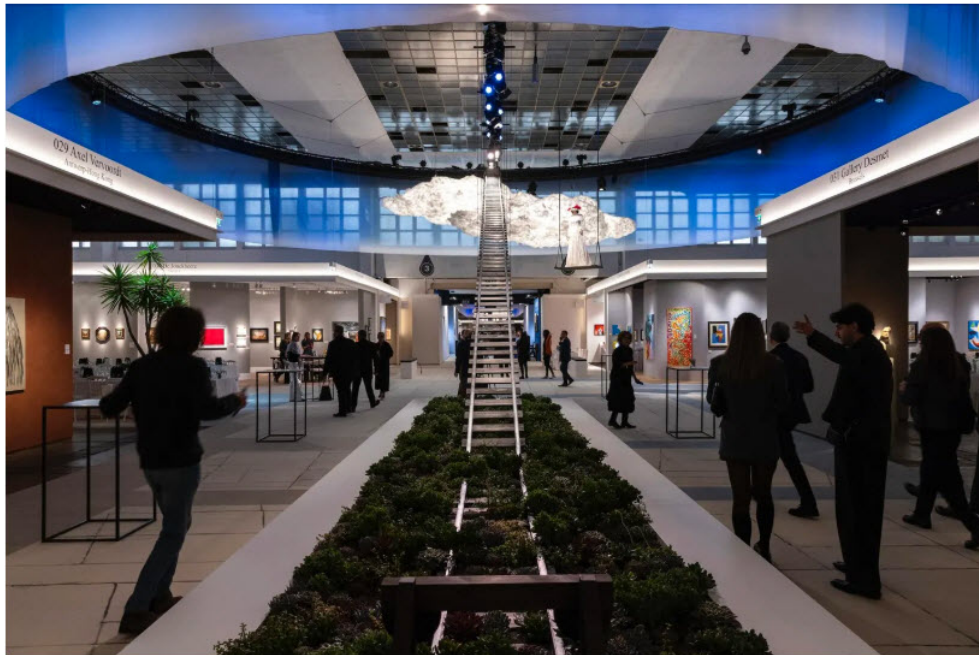
Spanning eight days, the established art fair stands out for its curation of galleries and diversity of artworks. There are 130 galleries from across Europe that come together at Brussels Expo exhibiting rare artworks from antiquity to the twenty-first century including Old Master paintings, classical African art, design future, carpets, fine jewellery and more.



Beatrix Bourdon, Managing Director of BRAFA PHOTOGRAPHY: XAVIER JANSSENS; COURTESY OF BRAFA

On its 70th anniversary, the celebratory edition runs from January 26 to February 2, 2025 and welcomes prolific Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos as the Guest of Honour. This year's fair also features two new countries on the roster, 16 new participants and plenty of notable collaborations.

Curious to know what's in store for this milestone event? We speak to Beatrix Bourdon, Managing Director of BRAFA, who offers us a peek behind the curtain of one of the world's longest-running art and culture events, plus what to expect at this year's fair.



The prestigious BRAFA art fair features 130 galleries and is known for being intimate, relaxed and refined PHOTOGRAPHY: OLIVIER PIRARD; COURTESY OF BRAFA

What would you say are the secrets to BRAFA's staying power? Can you share the biggest changes in its history and how you've personally seen it evolve?

The evolution of BRAFA over the past seven decades is truly remarkable. Its growth and success can be attributed to the vision and ambition of its various chairmen and boards of directors, as well as the continuous dedication of the team, which always strives for excellence. One of the most significant changes has been BRAFA's internationalisation, along with the introduction of new specialties in the 2000s, such as tribal art, contemporary art, and comics.

Despite these changes BRAFA has remained a fair of continuity. Its friendly and welcoming atmosphere has always been a constant. It is a place for meaningful exchange and interaction. The board of directors, entirely composed of art dealers and gallery owners, is driven by a sense of collegiality and a commitment to the satisfaction of all exhibitors.



Kunstconsult 20th century art | object. Charles Schneider (Château-Thierry 1881-1953 Epinay-sur-seine) Five filetés-vases, circa 1925 COURTESY OF BRAFA

BRAFA does not chase trends but remains attuned to developments in the art market. Moreover, as a fair organised by a non-profit organisation, it can approach things with a focus on quality without the pressure of commercial interests. The primary goal is always to provide the highest level of quality, both in the galleries it features and in the visitor experience.

What are key things every visitor to BRAFA should know about this particular celebratory edition?

To celebrate BRAFA's milestone, visitors can look forward to a few special highlights. First, there will be a history wall showcasing key moments from the fair's past, featuring photos of notable personalities who have inaugurated BRAFA over the years. We are also delighted to welcome internationally renowned Portuguese artist [Joana Vasconcelos](#) as our Guest of Honour. Her two large-scale, colourful installations will bring a festive dimension to this anniversary edition.



Joana Vasconcelos, *Retro*, 2013; Galerie Nathalie Obadia at BRAFA 2025 ATELIER JOANA VASCONCELOS; COURTESY OF BRAFA

Another exciting feature this year is our new collaboration with [KIK-IRPA \(Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage\)](#), Belgium's leading institution for the study and conservation of artistic and cultural heritage. KIK-IRPA will have a dedicated space adjacent to that of the King Baudouin Foundation, where they will present their conservation and restoration work. Interactive workshops will take place daily at 2pm and 5pm, offering visitors a behind-the-scenes look at heritage preservation and modern scientific techniques used to uncover the secrets of ancient artworks.



CORTESI GALLERY Lucio Fontana, Concetto Spaziale COURTESY OF BRAFA

For the first time, we are also welcoming 16 new participants. Among them are Valerio Turchi, a gallery specialising in Roman and Greek archaeology, as well as two renowned London galleries — COLNAGHI and DYS44 Lampronti Gallery — known for their Old Master paintings.

Contemporary art will be represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia and TEMPLON, and Swedish gallery Hoffmans Antiques will present Gustavian furniture, a new addition to BRAFA. We're also excited to feature Portuguese silver with J. Baptista, along with crystals, fossils and meteorites from Stone Gallery.

You started working at BRAFA in your twenties. What has kept you engaged and why?

When I first arrived at the fair, I was introduced to an entirely new world. What I enjoyed most was the people I met. With each new chairman, there came a fresh collaboration, a new vision, and a different way of working.



Old Master paintings and antiques abound at BRAFA COURTESY OF BRAFA

Thanks to BRAFA, I've had the privilege of meeting some truly inspiring personalities, including prestigious guests of honour like Christo and Gilbert & George. What excited me from the beginning was the opportunity to learn about all aspects of the fair. Early on, I was involved in every part of the process — communications, press, vetting, catalogue and more. Over time, as the team grew, responsibilities were redistributed, but in those early days, I had to immerse myself in every aspect of the operation.

A fair lasts just days but the impact is enduring. What are the proudest moments of your career thus far?

I would say my greatest pride lies in making each fair a success — for both the exhibitors and the visitors. It brings me joy to see that many exhibitors and collectors return year after year, which is a testament to their satisfaction. I'm always striving to improve, and I aim to instill that same drive for improvement in the team as well. Each fair is a unique experience.



Fine jewellery, gold smithery and more make an appearance at BRAFA COURTESY OF BRAFA

With the talk of “AIvolution” everywhere, how do you think it has (or will) affect the art and design industry?

We can't ignore the presence of AI; it's undeniably part of evolution. However, will it be a true revolution in art? I have my doubts. Artworks created by artificial intelligence will never replace the masterpieces of Bruegel or Picasso.

Speaking of the future, what are you focusing on improving or growing at BRAFA in the coming years?

Our focus for the future is to strengthen key sections, such as archaeology, Asian art, and design, while also introducing new specialties like photography. We aim to maintain a balance between the various areas of interest for collectors.

We don't want to expand too much, as we want to preserve the fair's human-scale atmosphere. Above all, quality is our priority, and we will continue working to bring together the best galleries. Expanding BRAFA's international presence is also a key priority moving forward in order to attract collectors from all over the world.



Maison-Atelier Horta (Horta Museum), 23-25 Rue Americaine, Brussels, Belgium, Designed by Victor Horta in 1898-1901. (Photo by Alan John Ainsworth/Heritage Images/Getty Images) GETTY IMAGES

Lastly, what tips would you give to those going to BRAFA for the first time?

My advice for first-time visitors to BRAFA is to take the opportunity to explore Brussels as well. The city is incredibly charming. Be sure to wander through the Sablon antique district, a lively area with great restaurants, like Vieux Saint-Martin, where you can try Belgian specialties such as the famous prawn croquettes.

From there, head up Avenue Louise to discover the contemporary art galleries. And while exploring, keep an eye out for the hidden gems of Art Nouveau and Art Deco architecture — there is so much to discover just by strolling through the streets.

BRAFA runs from January 26 to February 2, 2025; www.brafa.art

Check out my [website](#).



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