

ART FAIR

# BRAFA opens the fair season

In his seven years as BRAFA's president, Harold t'Kint de Roodenbeke has constantly had to respond to the eternal matter of introducing something new with the next edition. Because the basic character and ambition of the Brussels fair is always the same: opening out to the world, and preserving a balance between the different specialities: archaeology, contemporary art, the decorative arts, carpets and antique books. And yet he smiles, proud to see BRAFA so well established on the European scene, considered "one of the world's top three fairs" by gallery owner Bertrand de Lavergne, and a must for Alexis Bordes from Paris. He sums up the situation succinctly: "BRAFA has a genuine identity as a Benelux fair that attracts not only French and Belgian collectors but also those from Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Germany, the UK and Switzerland. Thanks to its remarkable organisation and excellent communication, it received over 61,000 visitors in 2017. Social interaction is the undeniable trademark of this fair, which has a warm, laid-back atmosphere highly conducive to business." And it opens the season at the very start of the year, a month before the ritual gathering of the TEFAF

Maastricht. An advantage that is not always enough to "convince American collectors to cross the Atlantic just after Christmas," to quote Jacques Germain, a Montreal gallery owner specialising in classical African art. But institutions don't have such cold feet: "More and more American museums are attending BRAFA because it is such a serious and reliable fair," he continues. For example, in 2017, curators from the Atlanta High Museum of Art, the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Saint Louis Art Museum turned up, and the Art Institute of Chicago has already announced its appearance in 2018. This reputation has certainly helped persuade Christo to exhibit *Three Store Fronts* in the aisles of Tour & Taxis (where the event is being staged). Over 14 m long and 2.5 m high, this sculpture of 1965/66 will be the largest work ever hosted at BRAFA, alongside 134 participating galleries. There will be fourteen newcomers, including ArtAncient, Repetto

Democratic Republic of Congo, late 19th/early 20th century, Yaka mask, wood, raffia fibres, polychromy. Didier Claes gallery, Brussels.



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(London), Chastel-Maréchal, Maeght, Ratton (Paris), Gladstone (Brussels) and Theatrum Mundi (Arezzo), while Christian Deydier, Tanakaya (Paris) and Chamarande (Brussels) are making a come-back. Demand is very high (with around a hundred new applications), and the rotation is barely 10%.

**Warm and eclectic**

BRAFA's chief asset is thus its cross-over character and eclecticism, with a few anchor points like archaeology, the ethnic arts, the 19th century and modern art.

Many exhibitors will be hoping to surprise visitors, like Philippe Heim (Paris), who had fun creating a stand entirely dedicated to travel and exoticism, from the 19th century to the present day, where pictures illustrating an expedition in Amazonia by Raphaël Lagye (1862-1952) rub shoulders with portraits by Titouan Lamazou and a *Psyché* (spotted in Japan!) by Surrealist Belgian artist Marcel Delmotte (1901-1984). Didier Claes (Brussels) invites visitors to rediscover the Yaka people's masks (Democratic Republic of Congo), not generally popular with collectors because they contain straw (between €12,000 and €30,000: see

photo). It took five years to assemble fourteen pieces collection. Daniel Lebeurrer of the Parisian gallery Gilgamesh explores the theme of archaism, proposing a new look at Saharan axes, French flints and Cypriot idols. Diversity is also the watchword for Vincent

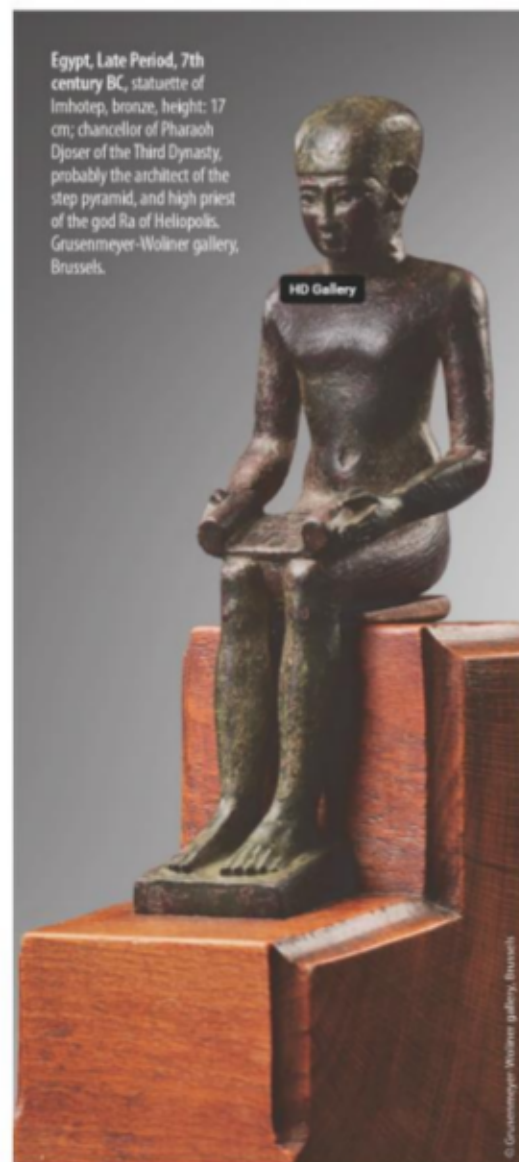
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Amiot of the Galerie des Modernes, who is creating a dialogue between gouaches by Warhol, a Renoir landscape and a study for Bourdelle's sculpture *Héraklès archer*: a rare appearance on the market. So there are many treasures to discover in the aisles, like this bronze Imhotep from the 7th century BC (€60,000, see right), which comes from the collection of Dutch public buildings industrialist Adriaan Eliza Herman Goekoop (1859-1914), or "this masterpiece by Frits Van den Berghe, *Les Compagnons*": one of the best Belgian works of the 1930s," as we are told by Edwin van Trijp of the Belgian gallery Oscar De Vos. Ten days to look and return and look again, as numerous collectors do, and thus explore time and continents, starting at a few thousand euros. **Stéphanie Pioda**

BRAFA - Brussels Art Fair, from 27 January to 4 February 2018, Brussels. [www.brafa.art](http://www.brafa.art)

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Egypt, Late Period, 7th century BC, statuette of Imhotep, bronze, height: 17 cm; chancellor of Pharaoh Djoser of the Third Dynasty, probably the architect of the step pyramid, and high priest of the god Ra of Heliopolis. Grusenmeyer-Woliner gallery, Brussels.



Clive Barker (b. 1940), "Two Heads", 2012, polished bronze, 28.3 x 44 x 33 cm. Unique work engraved with the artist's name, title and date (€ 39,500). Whitford Fine Art, London.

