

Wrapper performs at BRAFA

Guest of honour Christo fronts up the Brussels event with largest work ever lent for exhibition

by Anne Crane

Brussels gears up for its major art and antiques fair this month with the latest edition of BRAFA.

One of the first international fairs of the year, this will be staged at the Tour & Taxis exhibition centre from January 27-February 4. It is always a spacious and elegant event which, while having grown in size, remains very accessible.

From its origins as the national *Belgian Antiques Dealers Fair*, which started back in 1956, BRAFA has successfully reinvented itself over the years.

Non-Belgian exhibitors were first admitted in 1995 and, as the number and range of exhibitors grew, the event moved from the central Palais des Beaux Arts to the spacious Tour & Taxis centre in the north of the city in 2009.

It changed its name from the *Foire des Antiquaires de Belgique* to BRAFA (*Brussels Antiques and Fine Arts Fair*) and in 2014 to the *BRAFA Art Fair*.

It now features over 130 exhibitors, more than half from outside Belgium. France continues to be a major source of exhibitors, with around 50 participants, but there are now a dozen from the UK. Other well-represented European countries include Switzerland (seven)



Installation view at Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, 2001 of Christo's *Three Store Fronts*, 1965-66, galvanised metal, aluminum, wood, fabric, masonite, paint, plexiglas and electric light. The work will be on display at BRAFA. Property of the artist.

Photo: Wolfgang Volz

and Germany (five). The roll-call this year includes 14 new exhibitors, 10 of them from outside Belgium.

The attendance has grown as well, rising to 61,000 in 2017. The cosmopolitan local population are keen visitors but the location means BRAFA is well placed to attract customers from further afield: particularly the other Benelux countries, Germany, France, the UK and Italy.

BRAFA's long history means it has traditional strengths such as early

works of art, antiquities and tribal art, all of which have high profiles, as our preview here demonstrates.

While these continue to flourish in terms of exhibitor strength and visitor interest, the organiser, the Belgian Antiques Fair Association, continually aims to promote other areas. As with many fairs, modern and contemporary art is on the agenda.

This focus will be helped this year by the presence of a high-profile guest of honour: Christo.

The artist is famous the world over

for his wrapped historic monuments, created with his late wife Jeanne-Claude, including the Pont Neuf in Paris and Reichstag in Berlin, and he will be lending the largest work that has ever been shown at BRAFA for exhibition this year.

Three Store Fronts is part of the series of works on this theme that he created in varying sizes between 1963-68 and will be hard to miss – it measures over 46ft (14m) in length and 8ft (2.5m) in height. ■

brafa.art



Above and right: a Greek cuirass and a silver tetradrachm, one of 17 'pairings' of ancient coins and objects from the *Connections* exhibition on ArtAncient's stand at BRAFA.

Antiquities

Antiquities is one of BRAFA's strong suits in terms of exhibitor volume. Around 10 specialists in this field are standing, plus a number of others that mix antiquities with, for example, Asian art.

New this year is the UK dealer ArtAncient, which is putting together an intriguing display for its inaugural visit to the Brussels fair.

Connections features 17 items which are paired with 17 coins to illustrate their historic and symbolic links.

They include a 17kg iron meteorite formed 4.6bn years ago displayed with a silver denarius from the Antioch mint of 218AD under the Roman Emperor Elagabalus, depicting a four-horse chariot towing the stone of Emesa. The black metallic stone, almost certainly a meteorite, was the object of veneration at the Temple of Emesa in the Near East. It became famous when Elagabalus had it brought to Rome in

an elaborate chariot procession, emphasising that man's fascination with these otherworldly objects dates back centuries. The two items are on sale priced at £60,000.

Also on display is the finely modelled piece of ancient Greek armour pictured left, a cuirass from the 4th century BC.

It is displayed alongside a Greek silver tetradrachm, minted in Paeonia, c.330BC, featuring a scene in which Ariston, Alexander's cavalry general, wearing similar armour, spears the Persian commander Satropates in a skirmish before the Battle of Gaugamela of 331BC. Cuirass and coin are priced at £400,000.

artancient.com



Impressionist, modern and contemporary art

The picture dealer element of *BRAFA* is substantial, but increasingly these days the emphasis is on works from the 19th century onwards, be they Impressionist and modern or post-war and contemporary art.



Osborne Samuel is making its inaugural appearance at the fair this year.

The gallery will be bringing a mix of modern British paintings and sculpture by artists such as Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore and Lynn Chadwick, whose 1983 bronze maquette *Jubilée II* edition is pictured **left**. The two figures, the man standing 2ft 11in (89cm) high and the woman slightly taller at 3ft (91cm), are from an edition of nine and are priced at **£500,000**.

osbornesamuel.com



Whitford Fine Art from London is a *BRAFA* regular and this year, while the gallery is taking a mix of modern and contemporary artists' work to Brussels, there is a particular focus on one name: British pop artist Clive Barker.

Whitford has a special affiliation with the artist. Its director An Jo Fermon wrote the catalogue raisonné for Barker and earlier this year collaborated with the Wolverhampton Art Gallery, which put on a major retrospective, something which has given a boost to sales.

"Every year Whitford Fine Art shows some of his finest works at *BRAFA* and has created a large following of Belgian collectors, some of whom lent their pieces to that museum show," says the gallery.

Whitford will be taking around seven examples by Barker to *BRAFA*, all 3-D pieces spanning the early 1960s to more recent works, creating a special display on the stand. The highlight will be a Barker classic – *Coke Bottle with Two Straws*, pictured **left**, from c.1968 – which it has been saving up for the show. The prices will range from **£20,000 up to around £80,000**.

Also on sale will be works by artists such as the Belgians Bram Bogart, Walter Leblanc and Joseph Lacasse and the British abstract expressionist Frank Avray Wilson, who was the subject of another mini exhibition on the Whitford *BRAFA* stand last year.

whitfordfineart.com

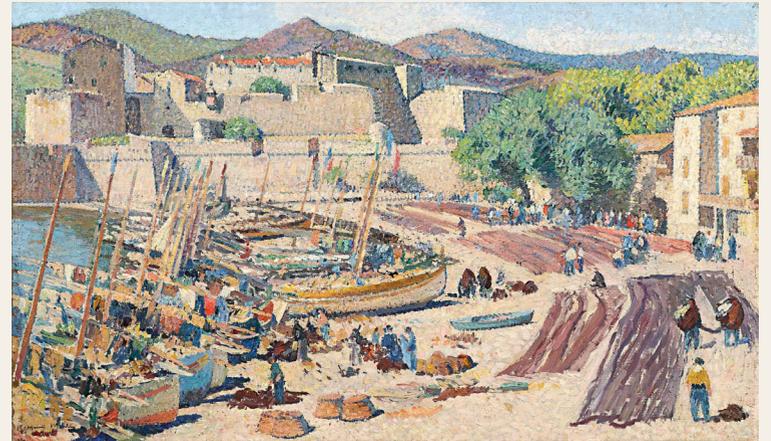
This will be the fourth appearance at *BRAFA* for Galerie Alexis Pentcheff from Marseille, which specialises in work from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, especially by painters who frequented the Mediterranean coast.

This year it will have a two-part display. One section is given over to "an intimate room in which visitors and collectors will be invited to discover an original selection of artworks dedicated to the representation of the female figure". This will include an oil on canvas by Kees van Dongen titled *Les Parisiennes ou Le Sentier de la Vertu* and a selection of works on paper by the fashion illustrator René Gruau.

The remainder of the space features a display of the Post-Impressionist works for which the gallery is well known. They include examples by Henri Martin, such as this signed 2ft 5in x 4ft 1in (75cm x 1.25m) oil on canvas of the Port of Collioure, **right**, and Armand Guillaumin, and a group of works depicting Mediterranean subjects by Henri Person.

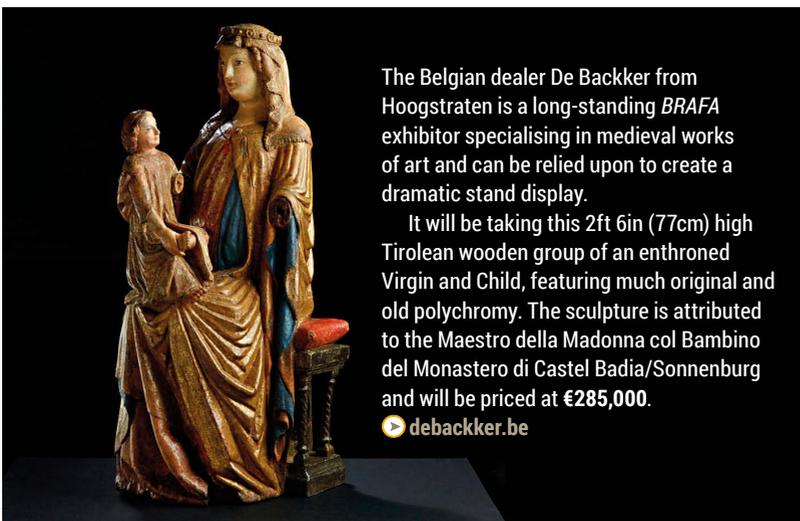
The price range reflects the broad selection of artists and media, from around **€3000 up to several million euros**.

galeriepentcheff.fr



Early works of art

BRAFA has long been a fair with a speciality in early (medieval and Renaissance) works of art, which is something that dates back to the years when it was a Belgian National fair in the city centre. It thus serves a venerable collecting tradition drawing in buyers from the local area and further afield.



The Belgian dealer De Backker from Hoogstraten is a long-standing *BRAFA* exhibitor specialising in medieval works of art and can be relied upon to create a dramatic stand display.

It will be taking this 2ft 6in (77cm) high Tirolean wooden group of an enthroned Virgin and Child, featuring much original and old polychromy. The sculpture is attributed to the Maestro della Madonna col Bambino del Monastero di Castel Badia/Sonnenburg and will be priced at **€285,000**.

debackker.be

Specialising in Haute Epoque (sculpture, works of art and paintings spanning 1200-1700), Mullany Fine Art from London has been a *BRAFA* regular for seven years.

Nicholas Mullany's display always includes a tempting mix of early wood and stone statuary. Among them this year will be a 15th century Nottingham alabaster relief of the Adoration of the Magi (**right**). Measuring 15 x 10in (39 x 25cm), with original polychrome and gilding, it is priced **in the region of €100,000**.

mullanyfineart.com



Tribal Art

Tribal art has long been a Belgian speciality due to the country's colonial history in Africa. So it is not surprising to see this area well represented at *BRAFA*, with around a dozen participants in this field hailing from Paris, Brussels and as far away as Montreal.



Didier Claes, whose eponymous gallery is situated in the Avenue Louise district of Brussels, specialises in tribal art from Africa.

Among the works he is showing at *BRAFA* this month will be this late 19th early-20th century Yaka mask from the Democratic Republic of Congo that has a provenance to a Belgian private collection.

It measures 2ft 1in x 16in (66 x 40cm), is made of polychrome painted wood and raffia fibres and is priced at **€30,000**.

didierclaes.art

Bernard de Grunne returned to *BRAFA* in 2017 after a gap of over a decade. His Brussels gallery specialises in works from Africa, Oceania and Indonesia.

Highlights on his stand will be a rare Kota brass *Janus* figure from Gabon, a carved Gouro/Bete mask from the Ivory Coast of c.1850 and three wooden ancestor figures created c.1890-1900 by the Makonde tribe from Mozambique (shown **left**). These are carved to epitomise ideals of Makonde feminine beauty and were kept in the ancestor shrines in the houses of village leaders.

bernarddegrunne.com

Left: three Makonde figures to be offered at *BRAFA* by Bernard de Grunne. Each of these particular 'Three Graces' has a provenance to a different contemporary artist: the 2ft 3in (69cm) high figure on the left to Daniel Hourdé c.1980; the 2ft 1in (65cm) figure centre to David Henrion and the 2ft 4in (72cm) figure right to Willy Mestach pre-1966. Each is priced in the region of **€60,000-120,000**.

Curiosities

Some of the works on offer at *BRAFA* are simply too quirky to fit into any time-honoured collecting category, but they are often responsible for creating an eye-catching draw to a particular stand.

A case in point this year will be new exhibitor *Theatrum Mundi* from Arezzo in Italy, which will show this Russian spacesuit, **right**.

It was worn by the cosmonaut Strelakov during the Soyuz TM 10 mission from August-December 1990.

The suit is part of the gallery's theme of a cabinet of curiosities composed of antique and contemporary objects.

It is priced at **€130,000**.

tmundi.com



Frank views on non-European art

While *BRAFA* understandably dominates much of the cultural headlines during this period, it is not the only show in town.

Among the other events taking place in Brussels is the *Winter Bruneaf* (Brussels Non-European Art Fair). This is the first of two annual celebrations in the city of this particular market sector and runs from January 24-28.

It is a gallery-based event centred around the Place du Grand Sablon and features selling shows and displays by resident and guest dealers in ethnographic art.

Winter Bruneaf also includes a larger mixed selling show involving five dealers from France, Belgium and the US. They put on a cross-cultural display of works from round the world in the elegant surroundings of this large building on rue du Sablon.

One of them is Bruce Frank from New York.

"This will be my third consecutive year participating in *Winter Bruneaf*," he says. "My motivation to exhibit at this event came about from the opportunity to collaborate with a group of friends, Joaquim Pecci, Renaud Vanuxem, Olivier Castellano and Adrian Schlag, whose taste and professionalism I respect greatly. Also, the space at the Ancienne

Noniciature, where we are mounting our collaborative exhibition, is really magnificent."

Frank's show is devoted to Indo-Pacific art and will feature 22 objects from Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

Many of the works have historic and early provenances, such as this splendid 19th century head rest from the latmul tribe of the middle Sepik River region, PNG, pictured **below**. It formerly belonged to the renowned British and French collectors, Harry Beasley and Walter Bondy.

The 10in (25cm) wide x 5½in (13cm) high carved wood and pigment decorated rest is priced at **\$25,000**.

bruneaf.com

