

WIDEWALLS

Belgian Art at its Finest - Francis Maere Fine Arts at BRAFA 2020



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If you are looking for a gallery excelling at **Belgian art** spanning some of the most important decades of its production, then **Francis Maere Fine Arts** is the right place for you. Founded in 1995, the gallery is focused on artworks and artists from 1880 until 1950 (but is including some contemporary tendencies as well), including movements such as Impressionism, Luminism, Symbolism, Expressionism and Surrealism. Since 2011, you can find [Francis Maere Fine Arts](#) in a new space in Ghent, on the first floor of Hotel Falligan, a simply thriving environment for the art of such quality.

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But **Francis Maere** isn't "just" a gallerist. He is also an active member of ROCAD, the Royal Chamber of Art Dealers Belgium, valued for his experience, as well as the Vice-Chairman of **BRAFA**, one of the most important in the country, and in Europe. It is because of **BRAFA** that we sat down with Mr. Maere, to discuss his gallery's participation in the 2020 edition of the prestigious fair, but we also picked his brains on Belgian art at large, and its market.



Left: Léon De Smet – Contemplation, 1914. Oil on canvas, 141,5 x 160,5 cm. Signed and dated lower right Leon De Smet 1914 / **Right:** Francis Maere

The Becoming of Francis Maere Fine Arts

Widewalls: Where does your passion for art originate?

Francis Maere: I guess my passion for art originated in the cultural environment in which I grew up. My parents weren't great art collectors but they frequented a circle of people around the Emile Veranneman Foundation in Kruishoutem.

I still remember the great exhibitions of Botero, Eugène Dodeigne and Roger Raveel, among others. This foundation was such a wonderful place, situated in the heart of the Flemish countryside, a wonderful source of inspiration for a young guy like me. I started the studies of art history and ended up specializing in Belgian art 1880–1940.

Widewalls: That is quite a period to cover! Do you have favorite artists/artworks that you're particularly proud to have had touch with through the work of the gallery?

FM: What is so great about that period is to understand and experience the influence of the historical context on art.

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Impressionism reflects the pre-WWI atmosphere of the Belle Epoque and the seemingly careless society. Sunlit landscapes glorifying the beautiful countryside as in the paintings by Emile Claus or Léon De Smet.

Some individuals expressed deeper feelings of anxiety and doubt. The symbolists like Léon Spilliaert, James Ensor or Gustave Vande Woestyne represent the *malaise du fin de siècle*.

The interbellum period in Belgium shows the same tendencies as for the rest of Europe. A new world was there to explore. Cubism (Gustave De Smet/Fritz Vanden Berghe) Constructivism (René Guiette) and Surrealism (Fritz Vanden Berghe) flourished in the Belgian art scene in the 20s and 30s.

Widewalls: The gallery also tackles the contemporary notions in Belgian art; could you tell me a little bit more about this?

FM: An art gallery is a living entity that has to follow the whims and moods of its time. In order to reach the younger customers, one has to come out of his comfort zone from time to time. This is very interesting and can only work when there is a story, a continuity and above all a high quality label.

This year, we are also showing interesting work by Pol Bury (Kinetic Art) or Roger Raveel and his New Vision of the late 60s.



Left: Eugène Dodeigne Drawing. Charcoal on paper, 107 x 74 cm / **Right:** Léon Spilliaert – Female predator. Watercolor on paper, 50 x 35 cm. Signed and dated lower right L. Spilliaert 1903

The State of (Belgian) Art

Widewalls: How would you describe the position of Belgian art on the international scene?

FM: Belgian art is very well represented on the international art scene, but as it is the case for many other countries the attention goes only to a limited area.

René Magritte, Paul Delvaux, James Ensor and to a certain extent Léon Spilliaert and Fernand Khnopff (the big 6) are the artists known abroad, represented in international museums and international art galleries. There is so much more to discover and to study but Belgium is a very small country, with relatively important private collectors who unfortunately tend to neglect the local market and prefer to play on an international level.

Here, again in this age of globalisation, I feel it's important to support and promote the national art scene and to show the quality and high standards of it in an international context.

Widewalls: What are your impressions of BRAFA? What's your history with the fair?

FM: Brafa allows us and the customers the opportunity to discover, compare and evaluate each year again new artworks, interesting artists or different tendencies. Brussels as the heart of Europe and Brafa as a product of it, is and should always be a melting pot of cultures and styles.

Together with the other members of the board we will keep on trying to improve, internationalise and diversify the Brafa Art Fair. The international art market tends to centralise around the big houses, big money and global marketing.

It is my goal to continue to promote Belgian art in all its diversity through the ages and to give it the place it deserves.

Widewalls: What will you show at Tour & Taxis in 2020?

FM: As mentioned above, we will show works by Pol Bury (Kinetic Art) or Roger Raveel and his New Vision of the late 60s.

We will also pay tribute to Eugène Dodeigne (1923–2015) with a selection of sculptures and drawings. In his work, the touch of the sculptor is always very present, drill holes, cuts and chisel marks become more and more apparent from the mid-1960s onwards. At any confrontation with his work, it seems as if the artist just finished sculpting and one feels the sheer power and determination. His drawings express the same feelings of energy and creativity.

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The State of (Belgian) Art

Widewalls: What's next for Francis Maere Fine Arts?

FM: First of all continuing to enjoy this wonderful profession. Organizing interesting exhibitions and expanding the field of interest as much as possible. Doing great discoveries and sharing them with others (by the way I am looking for Cimabue's).

As president of the Royal Chamber of Art Dealers in Belgium, I am very keen on defending our profession against EEC regulations and others. Restrictions that make it more and more difficult for our profession, such as the Ivory Ban, the AML directives and the import and export regulations.

There is still a lot of work ahead.



Frits Van den Berghe – The pigeon gate of the castle Ooidonk, 1923.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 58 cm. Collection Herbert, Kortrijk.
Francis Maere Fine Arts

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BRAFA Art Fair
Tour & Taxis, Brussels
26.01. - 02.02.2020
www.brafa.art

Featured image: BRAFA 2019, Stand Francis Maere Fine Arts. © Benjamin Brolet; Roger Raveel – Bezoekers op de Vernissage, 1971. Sculptures in painted wood with mirror (two pieces), 185 x 90 cm. All images courtesy Francis Maere Fine Arts and BRAFA 2020.

Image gallery, top of the page

