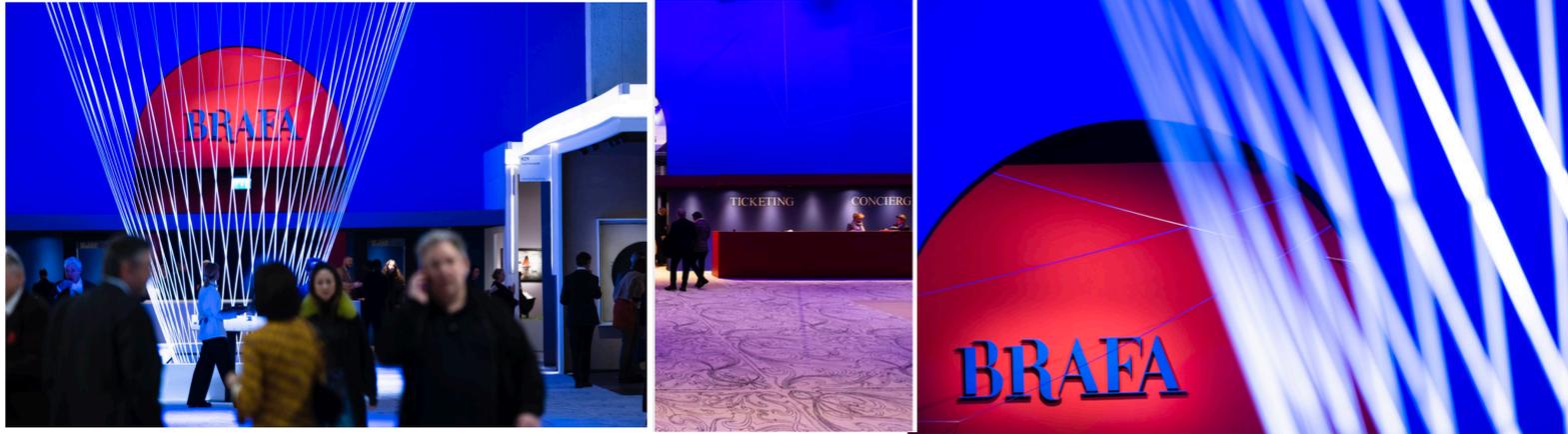


# WIDEWALLS

## BRAFA 2023 – An Infinite Universe of Discovery

### Art Fairs



January 29, 2023

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[Elena Martinique](#)

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Brussels is renowned for its artistic offer and inhabitants who are great consumers of art. It is also home to [BRAFA](#), one of the world's oldest and most prestigious art fairs. This year, BRAFA returned to its original January dates, bringing yet another spectacular edition despite the short period of time in which it was prepared.

Visiting BRAFA is always a singular experience. It is also an overwhelming one due to the high quality and eclecticism of art presented, but also its impeccable organization. Unlike many other art fairs, BRAFA is appreciated for its openness and pleasant atmosphere. It draws you in with its warm, inviting and homey feel and imaginative display, making your experience somewhat intimate despite its impressive size.

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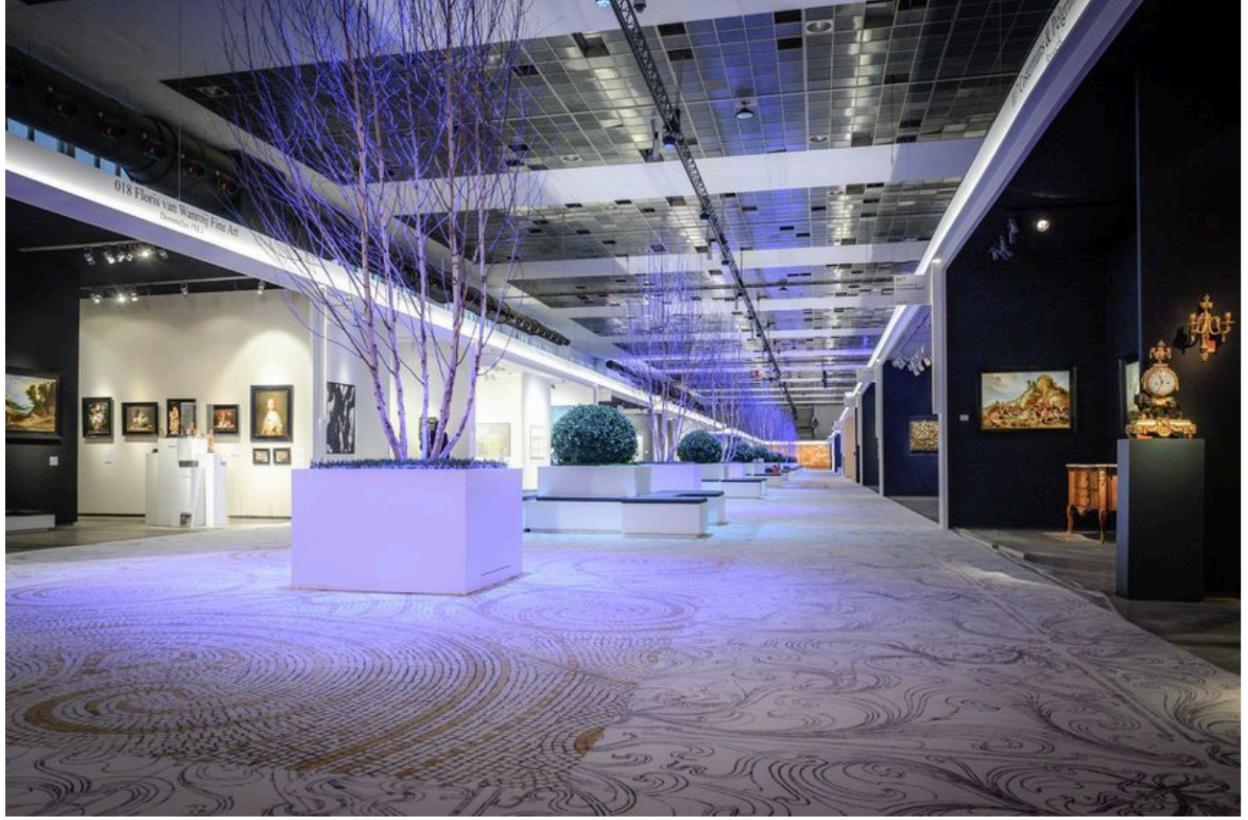
Renowned for the range of specialties it presents to collectors and art lovers from all over Europe and beyond, BRAFA has always been balancing between stability and novelty. Dedicated to maintaining the quality and the luxury of the artworks on view, BRAFA has always been celebrated for its eclecticism and mix of styles. While walking across the aisles of the Brussels Expo, one feels as if in an ephemeral museum, taking a wonderful journey through the history of art, and its different periods and styles, on different continents. This visionary and engaging display allows collectors and art enthusiasts to broaden their tastes, leaving them enriched.

The line-up of galleries at BRAFA 2023 is truly rich and wide-ranging. This year, the fair brought together **130 exhibitors**, including 13 newcomer ones, displayed in a circuit that promotes discovery and a mix of styles. Visitors have an opportunity to see more than 10,000 artworks dating from Antiquity to the present day. Each of the 130 participating galleries presented their finest objects, skilfully laid out on stands that compete for originality and elegance.

The decor is filled with the signs of Art Nouveau, the theme chosen for this 68th edition, in a staging by Volume Architecture, which celebrates 20 years of collaboration with BRAFA this year. The creation of the BRAFA 2023 carpet was based on original drawings by Victor Horta and art lovers will be able to attend two BRAFA Art Talks devoted to Art nouveau; one will be led by Professor Werner Adriaenssens, Curator of the Twentieth-Century Collections at the

Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, and the other by Benjamin Zurstrassen, Curator at the Horta Museum. Also, the King Baudouin Foundation and some galleries specialized in this field presented exceptional Art Nouveau pieces.

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BRAFA 2023 - General view © Jean-Michel Clajot

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## Modern and Contemporary Art at BRAFA 2023

As you step inside the venue, you take on a real journey of discovery. You are immediately confronted with **the eclectic nature** of this unique fair – right across the entrance, you stumble into early Meissen and German 18th-century porcelain at **Röbbig München**, then pieces by the most important Art Deco designers at **Galerie Mathivet**, then fine examples of Ancient Classical sculpture, European sculpture and works of art at **Cavagnis Lacerenza Fine Art**, or Haute Epoque African Art and Hindu-Buddhist Ancient Art over at **Dalton Somaré Gallery**.

As I was focusing on modern and contemporary art, I was immediately drawn to **La Patinoire Royale | Galerie Valérie Bach** (stand 48) on the right side of the aisle. As you approach the stand, you are greeted with works by Thomas Devaux, an artist who has been widely noticed for his ground-breaking imagination of the photographic medium, and a work by Marthe Wery, a seminal Belgian artist known for her minimal, monochromatic canvases. Inside this minimal booth adorned with black walls, one can also find geometric works by Carlos Cruz Diez, textile pieces by Olga de Amaral, a sculpture by Alice Anderson, an artist working with copper wire, and a piece by Casper Brindle, a representative of the Light and Space Movement, among others. A little bit further, **Francis Maere Fine Arts** (stand 40) invites you in with their exclusive presentation of early canvases and sculptures by Pierre Clerk, an American artist known for geometric and mod abstractions. As **Francis Maere** explains, these works have been recently discovered in the artist's studio; the majority had to be cleaned, stretched and framed properly before going on view for the first time in 70 years. The presentation is rich, showcasing works ranging from lyrical abstraction with reminders of Paul Klee and Kandinsky towards his geometrical abstraction of the 70s, inspired by Mondrian, as a reaction against

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the emotional abstract Expressionist movement in New York. Other highlights in the booth include works from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which the gallery is known for, including an astonishing "interior with mirror" by [Léon Spilliaert](#) and paintings by other Belgian artists such as [Frits Vanden Berghe](#), Floris Jaspers and [Victor Servranckx](#). Presented in a sophisticated way against a combination of classical and modern interiors, most of them have a private provenance, meaning not having been on the market in the last 50 years.

As you approach the booth of [rodolphe janssen](#) from Brussels (stand 36), you are immediately captivated by an impressive wall dedicated to photography, a medium not so represented at BRAFA. Here you can find seminal works by masters such as [Robert Mapplethorpe](#), [Betty Tompkins](#), [Edward Weston](#), [Larry Clark](#), [Lee Friedlander](#), [Helmut Newton](#), and [Eadweard Muybridge](#), among others. As you step inside the booth, you are up for more discovery, as the gallery always tends to combine works by contemporary artists from their program and more historical pieces. One particular wall that resonated with me mixes generations of artists, such as [Pierre Alechinsky](#), [Eddie Martinez](#), [Sean Landers](#), [Raymond Pettibon](#), [Rirkrit Tiravanija](#) and Tomas Vu, [Brooklin A. Soumahoro](#) and [Imi Knoebel](#), among others. As gallerist **Julie Senden** explains, the innovative display invites the viewers to discover the surprising links between different influences and styles. Another booth with quite a thought-through display that combines contemporary art with more historical pieces is [Meessen de Clercq](#) from Brussels (stand 22), inviting the viewers to find connections and create their story, as **Olivier Meessen** says. There you can discover works by Chinese artist [Xie Lei](#), who is concerned with the theme of absence, juxtaposed with works by [Claudio Parmiggiani](#), a canvas by young Dutch artist Chaim van Luit, and a drawing by Mexican artist [Jorge Méndez Blake](#) inspired by the book by William Morris. There is also a wonderful selection of works by [José Maria Sicilia](#), including an earlier work that translates physical experiments with light and works from a more recent

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series that translates bird songs. Other highlights include works by Nicolás Lamas, Thu Van Tran, and Benoit Maire, among others.

The stand of [MDZ Art Gallery](#) (stand 16) from Knokke is truly diverse, ranging from modern to urban art. Here you can find works by an eclectic selection of artists such as [Gilbert and George](#), [Tom Wesselmann](#), [Gérard Schlosser](#), [Jan Kalab](#), [Christo](#), [Yves Klein](#), [Karel Appel](#), [Francis Picabia](#) and [Paul Delvaux](#). What also caught my eye are two abstract canvases by young artist Stefan De Jaeger - taken fresh off the easel, these works are still semi-wet, and a wall dedicated to drawings by [Frédéric Bruly Bouabré](#), an Ivorian artist whose work seeks to record and transmit information about the known universe. As **Michael de Zutter** highlights, the selection in the booth reflects his diverse tastes in art and openness to beauty. Three hours into the fair, the gallery had already sold two works by [Jean Dubuffet](#) and one work by Christo. The newcomer gallery [Samuelis Baumgarte](#) (stand 67) decided to dedicate their booth almost entirely to [Alexander Calder](#) and [Joan Miró](#), referencing an exhibition held in their home gallery. Prepare to be amazed by the impressive selection of delicate Calder mobiles ranging in size, especially the one from 1963 titled *Little Yellow Post*, which the gallerist **Petra Schreiner** describes as "a piece for the heart." The Calder and Miro focus is enriched with a selection of works by [Niki de Saint Phalle](#), [Sam Francis](#), [Fernando Botero](#), and [Gerhard Richter](#).

If you are up for some more Niki de Saint Phalle, pay a visit to [Opera Gallery](#) (stand 104), where you will immediately come across a stunning large-scale bird sculpture right at the entrance. Smaller works by the artist further await in the booth, complemented by works by Yves Klein, [A.R. Penck](#), [Pierre Soulages](#) and [Serge Poliakoff](#). Over at the [Baronian](#) (stand 89), one of the oldest Belgian galleries, you will find a truly eclectic mix of different styles and periods. Here you can see two amazing pieces by [Frank Stella](#) from the 1980s; a colorful textile piece by Belgian artist [Claude Viallat](#), the co-founder of the Supports/Surfaces

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movement in the 1970s; an acrylic on jute piece by Italian painter [Giorgio Griffa](#); an expressive piece by Belgian artist Michel Frere, with whom the gallery has been working for the past 20 years; several photographs by American artist [Matthew Porter](#), known for creating multiple and complex worlds within the same frame; the latest edition by Gilbert and George, created at the end of 2022; a canvas by French artists Jean Francois Lacalmontie, the artist known as a painter of vibration whom the gallery is currently exhibiting at their home venue; several pieces by celebrated American cartoonist Robert Crumb; and a portrait of Mao Zedong by [Yan Pei-Ming](#), Chinese painter best known for these epic-sized portraits of the communist revolutionary; to name a few. A remarkable selection of large-scale works by American artist Summer Wheat immediately caught my eye at Luxembourg-based [Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery](#) (stand 122), both at the very entrance and inside the booth. Wheat is best known for painting vibrant, narrative scenes that explore femininity and draw from a range of traditions, including Native American artmaking, Egyptian relief sculpture and Greco-Roman vase painting.

If you are interested in Kinetic and [Op Art](#), be sure to check out the booth by [Galleries AB & BA](#) (stand 73), presenting a work by Op artist [Victor Vasarely](#), recent works by [Vera Molnár](#), a generative art pioneer who continues to work at the age of 99, [Pol Bury](#), a Belgian artist celebrated for his kinetic works, and a stunning kinetic stone piece by François Weil, among others. A veteran at BRAFA, gallery co-founder **Odile Aittouarès** describes Belgian collectors as quite curious and open to artists of different nationalities and styles. Another piece that caught my eye here was a relief canvas by [Bram Bogart](#), a Belgian artist who focused on paint as physical matter and the medium's material possibilities. His canvases are featured prominently throughout the fair, including the stands of two London galleries, [Whitford Fine Art](#) (stand 73) and [Repetto Gallery](#) (stand 83).

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As **Adrian Mibus**, the founder of **Whitford Fine Art**, explains, Bogart is one of the gallery's favorites, and he has been collecting and exhibiting the artist for over 40 years. Here you can also see works by two other Belgian artists, Joseph Lacasse and [Paul Van Hoeydonck](#), and works by Polish artist Caziell, whose Estates the gallery represents. There is an exquisite and diverse selection of works by Reinhold Koehler, a German artist mainly known as the inventor of decollage and contre-collage whose Estate gallery has just started to represent. Mibus describes Koehler as "quite adventurous" for his time, developing an immense body of artistic work until his sudden death in 1970. The artist's inventiveness and progressive approach are evident in the diverse selection of his works exhibited, for which he employed unusual methods such as experimenting with fire and hot iron or composing works formed of broken objects, such as plates and bottles. One of Koehler's works was sold in the first three hours of the preview.

Specialized in post-war Italian art, **Repetto Gallery** presented several pieces from their main roster, creating a dialogue between [Michelangelo Pistoletto](#), [Lucio Fontana](#) and [Fausto Melotti](#) and [Salvo](#) and [Alighiero Boetti](#), but also works by [Arman](#), Christo, [Hans Hartung](#) and [Mark Tobey](#), among others. At the entrance of the booth, you are greeted with a spectacular large-scale canvas by [Hermann Nitsch](#), a key figure in Viennese Action Painting of the 1960s. Nitsch is known for radical painting methods using his whole body, and this particular work, where the paint was spread by hands in performative movements, demonstrates his energetic, spiritual, sensual and passionate persona.

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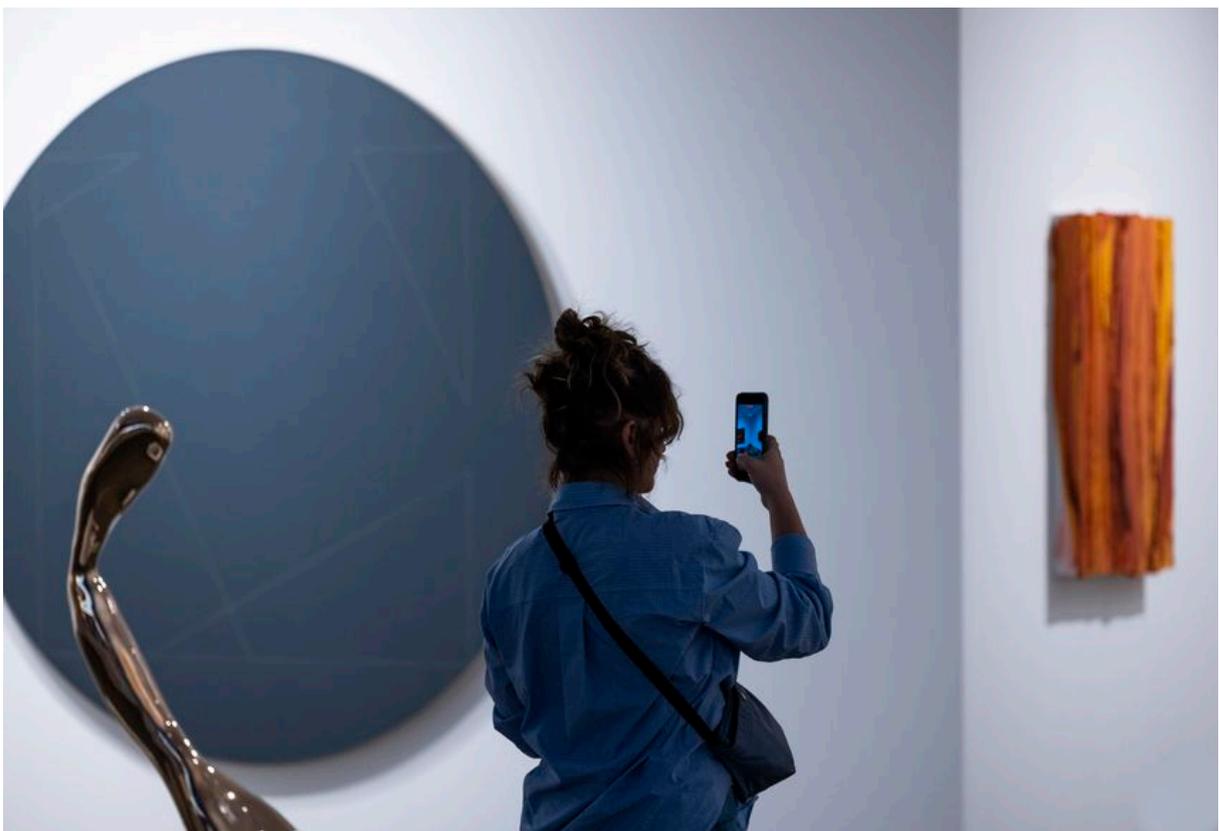
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An equally spectacular piece by Nitsch can also be seen in the booth of [Maruani Mercier](#) (stand 80), a large-scale canvas in which the artist also used his hands to distribute the paint. The entrance of the booth features a large-scale canvas by [Paul Mogensen](#), an American artist who explores painting through mathematical progressions and classical ratios, and a recent work by [Arne Quinze](#), who was BRAFA's first Belgian guest of honor in 2021. Inside the booth, you will also find three paintings by [Takis](#); a work by [Ross Bleckner](#); the youngest artist to have a retrospective at the Guggenheim at the age of 45 and who is also known as the painter of light; a captivating work by Peter Haily, which [Laurent Mercier](#) describes as the highlight of the booth; a rare painting by [Ron Gorchov](#); and works by Ghanian artists Kwesi Botchway, Cornelius Annor and Emmanuel Taku, among other pieces.

Over at [Nosbaum Reding Gallery](#) from Brussels (stand 16), you can see a monumental work by Damien Roubaix inspired by [Pablo Picasso's](#) masterpiece [Guernica](#), which denounces the atrocities of war and fascism using the example of the bombing of the village of Guernica. In 1955, a first re-interpretation of the work was created: a tapestry woven by Jacqueline de la Baume-Dürnbach, which was acquired by the Rockefellers and is currently on display at the United Nations headquarters in New York. Two other versions followed: the 1976 version, acquired by the Musée Unterlinden in Colmar, and the 1985 version, acquired by the Musée d'Art Moderne in Gunma. Deroubaix discovered the tapestry preserved in Colmar as a teenager. This piece would remain one of his sources of artistic inspiration and go on to mark a large part of his work

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One of the interesting discoveries was a booth by [Galerie Van den Bruinhorst](#) from Kampen (stand 123), themed Dutch Modernism and featuring works by the important members of [De Stijl](#). The majority of the booth is dedicated to [Bart van der Leck](#), a Dutch painter, designer, and ceramicist who was a founding member of the movement. Although the least known of the De Stijl artists, van der Leck produced a seminal oeuvre that significantly influenced Dutch modern art. The gallery brought a diverse selection of the artist's work, including works on paper, tapestries and ceramics. Apart from van der Leck, here you can also discover works by architect Gerrit Th. Rietveld and functionalists W.H. Gispen and Sybold van Ravesteyn. Among the highlights is the zigzag chair, one of Rietveld's most iconic and well-known furniture designs. As the gallery co-founder, Aagje Voordouw, explains, the chair had a special function in the villa he designed in Hague, intended as the seat of performing musicians when giving house concerts on a stage in the living room.



## Pierre Alechinsky in Spotlight

The work of [CoBrA artists](#) dominates the fair, but the artist who is evidently in the spotlight is [Pierre Alechinsky](#). An early member of the group, Alechinsky is famous for wonderfully abstract compositions, combining monochrome ink drawings and bright acrylics, which are archetypal of the Cobra style that revolutionized modern art in Europe.

[Samuel Vanhoegaerden Gallery](#) (stand 110) is entirely devoted to the artist, showcasing approximately 30 works dating from the 1960s to the present day - against the pastel walls of the spacious booth under impeccable lighting. The centerpiece of the stand, and one of the artist's most important works, is *L'or du rien*, which was first presented at the 36th Venice Biennale in 1972. It is the first time in 25 years that a panorama of this size and importance has been presented in a gallery. As Samuel Vanhoegaerden explains, the 95-year-old artist is at the age that he deserves a retrospective. Vanhoegaerden has been collecting his work for several years and decided to first present this valuable collection at BRAFA.

Other galleries present at BRAFA that offer artworks by Pierre Alechinsky are [Harold t'Kint de Roodenbeke](#) from Brussels (stand 32), with ten works dating from 1950 to 1970, but also [DIE GALERIE](#) from Frankfurt (stand 78), the [Maurice Verbaet Gallery](#) from Knokke (stand 13), [Galerie Boulakia](#) from London (stand 47), [Galerie Jamar](#) (BE), stand 91, [Galerie Seghers](#) from Antwerp (stand 121), [Rodolphe Janssen](#) from Brussels (stand 36) and [Galleries AB-BA](#) from Paris (stand 73). In [Harold t'Kint de Roodenbeke's](#) booth, you can also see a fantastic selection of works by Mig Quinet, a Belgian painter who experimented with abstraction mixing influences of analytic cubism and fauvism.

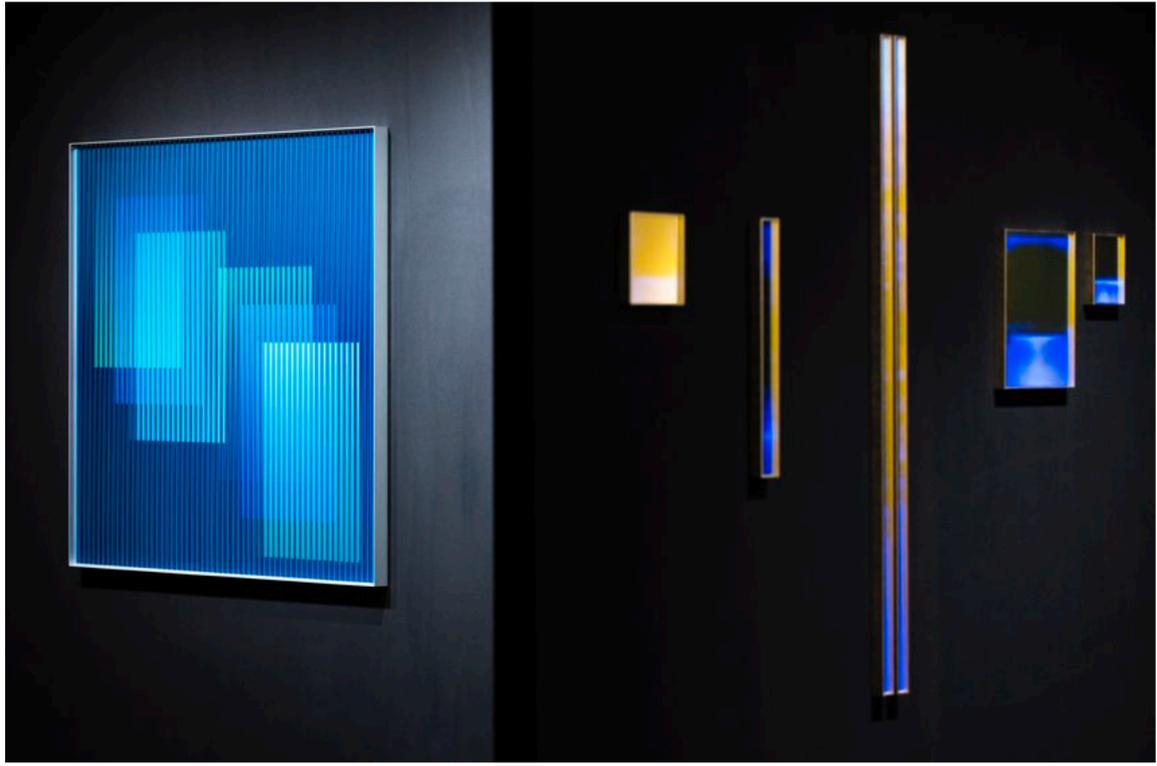
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As Harold t'Kint de Roodenbeke explains, the works span her entire career, from early works in the 1930s when she made collages under the influence of Max Ernst and other avant-garde artists to works created just after World War II, featuring new optimistic color palettes. Apart from stunning works by Alechinsky, **DIE GALERIE** draws you in with an impressive 1987 large-scale canvas by Karel Appel titled *Witnessing the Dawn*. Inside, you will see the works of seminal CoBrA artists such as Reinoud D'Haese, Christian Dotremont and Lucebert, complemented by modern masterpieces by Marino Marini, André Masson, Max Ernst and Paul Delvaux.

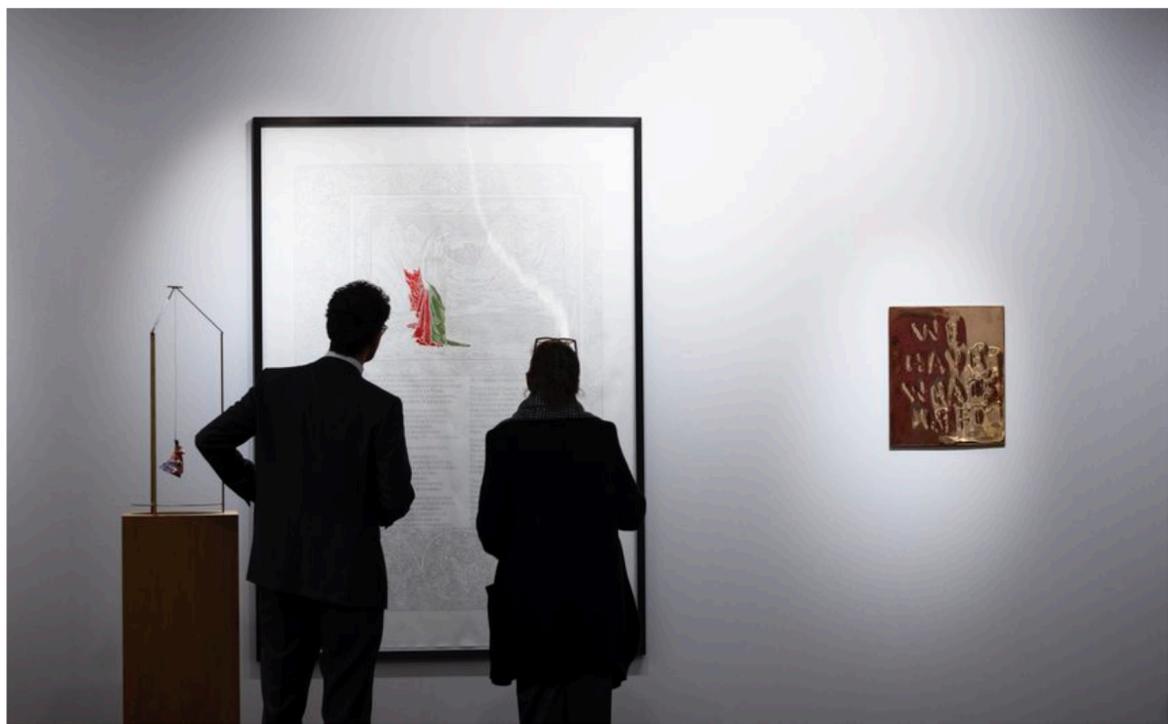
Almost every gallerist I have had a chat with had great expectations from this year's BRAFA, describing the fair as one of the finest and most important in Europe. They describe Belgian collectors as knowledgeable and curious and, most importantly, as many. At the same time, many of them noted that the interest in art is strong and that the art market is stable, running on its course, despite all the challenges the world is currently facing.

BRAFA 2023 opens its doors to the public on **January 29th** at **Brussels Expo** at the Heysel in Halls 3 and 4 and will be on view until **February 5th, 2023**.

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BRAFA 2023 - La Patinoire Royale | Galerie Valérie Bach © Olivier Pirard

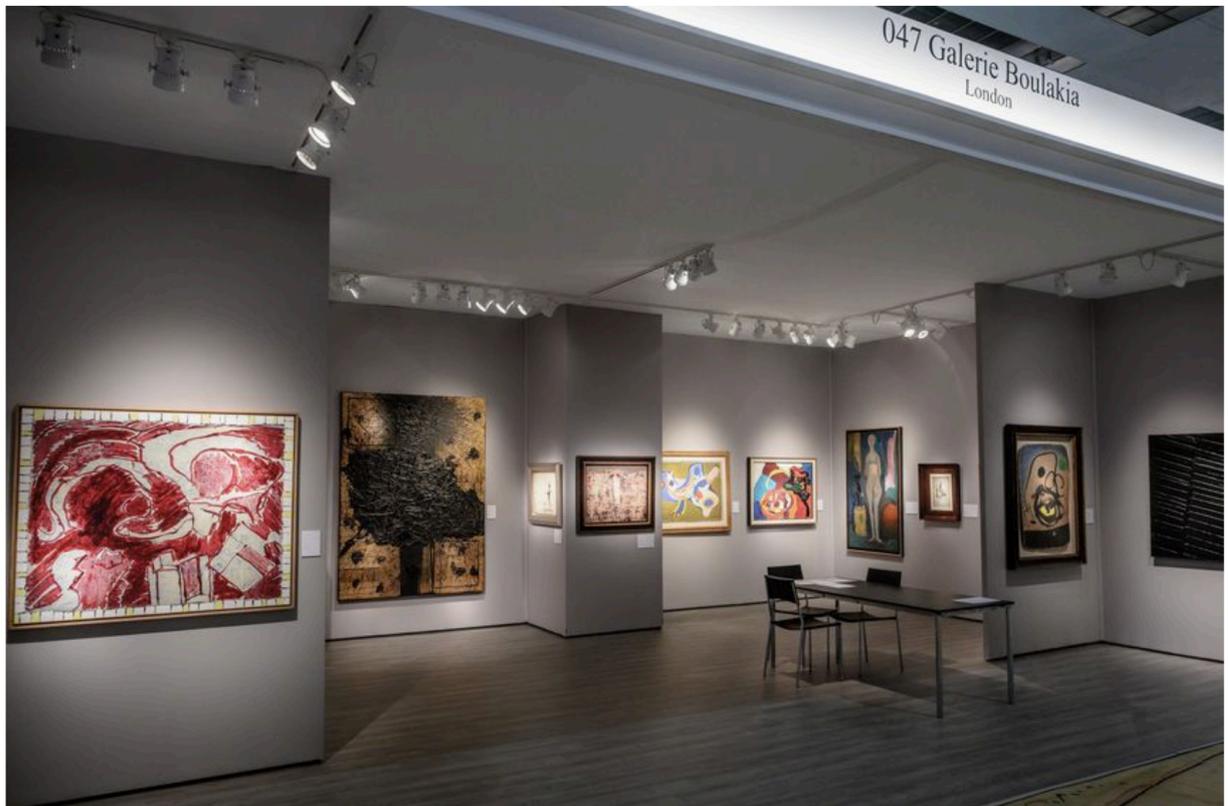


BRAFA 2023 - Meessen De Clercq © Olivier Pirard

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BRAFA 2023 - Repetto Gallery © Olivier Pirard



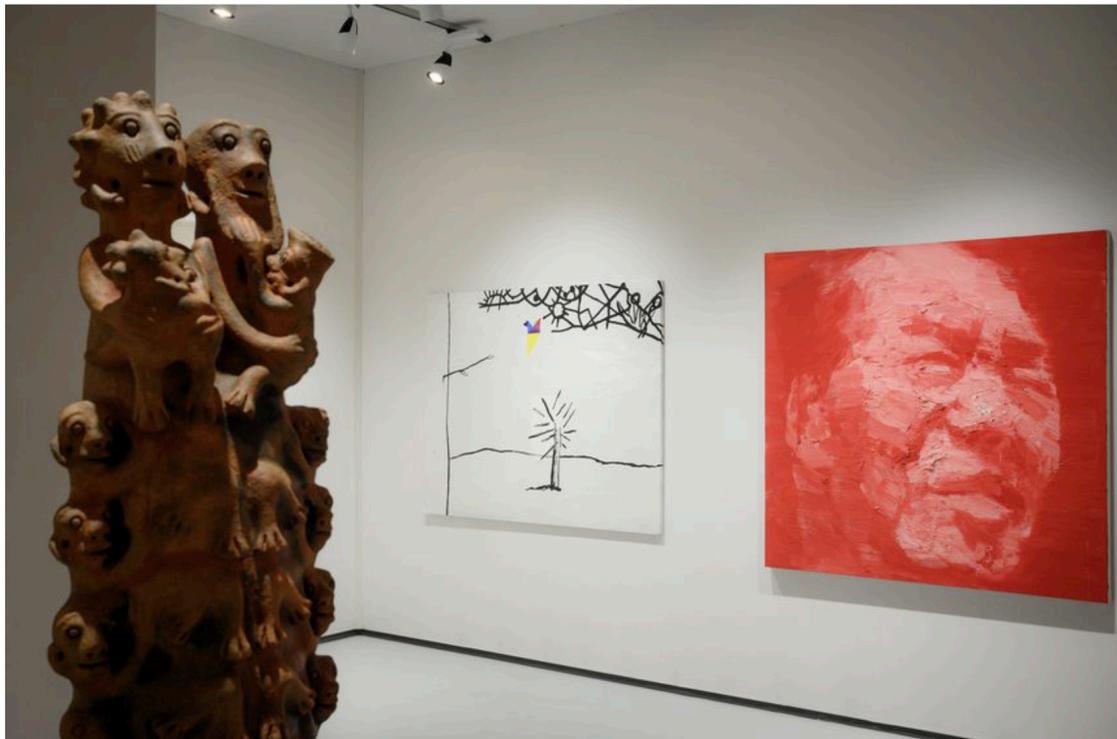
BRAFA 2023 - Galerie Boulakia ©Jean-Michel Clajot

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089 Baronian  
Brussels-Knokke



BRAFA 2023 - Baronian © Jean-Michel Clajot



BRAFA 2023 - Baronian © Jean-Michel Clajot

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BRAFA 2023 - Galeries AB & BA © Olivier Pirard



BRAFA 2023 - DIE GALERIE © Jean-Michel Clajot

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BRAFA 2023 - Opera Gallery © Emmanuel Croÿ



BRAFA 2023 - Opera Gallery © Olivier Pirard

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BRAFA 2023 - Samuel Vanhoegaerden Gallery © Olivier Pirard



BRAFA 2023 - Harold t'Kint de Roodenbeke © Jean-Michel Clajot

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