A brief history of the **Brussels Antiques and Fine Arts Fair** ...

The **Brussels Antiques and Fine Arts Fair** (formerly known as **The Belgium Antiques and Fine Arts Fair**) is the oldest annual event of its type in the world.

Organized for the first time in 1955, it moved in 2004 to that jewel of international architecture, the Tour & Taxis site. Located in the heart of Brussels, the fair is easy to reach from the principal railroad stations and from Brussels International Airport. With some 133,472.5 square feet for its 130 national and international exhibitors, the fair is among the most important of its sort worldwide and is ready to meet new challenges.

In 1919, Belgian antique dealers established a national syndicate known as the “Chambre syndicale des Beaux-Arts et de la Curiosité de Belgique”. This name was retained until 1961, when it became the “Belgian Association of Antique Dealers”. The name changed again in 1989 into the Royal Belgian Association of Antique Dealers. The Association is also a member of UBEMA\(^1\) and CINOA\(^2\).

In 1956, the association decided to organize the first top-level Antiques Fair. The idea was to allow its members to meet each year at a specific location in Brussels and to display the finest items available on the art market. Belgian valor at the end of the Second World War, gave Belgian antique dealers considerable prestige in the eyes of their colleagues and international collectors.

The first show was held in a ballroom, the Salle Arlequin, on the Avenue Louise in Brussels. Twenty exhibitors came together in for the first time in stands with surfaces from 6 to 16 square meters. The fair is therefore born after that of London (Grosvener House) and Delft, but before those of Paris, Florence and Munich. As early as 1957, the exhibition had spread to the upper gallery, with a further 10 exhibitors. At the time it was a fashionable place to see and be seen, and the elite of the country would hurry to our exhibition. However, the premises became less and less adequate and the board of directors decided that the 1968 Fair should be organized in the complete circuit of exhibition rooms of the Brussels Palais des Beaux Arts. The Antiques and Fine Arts Fair of Belgium could at last be held in an appropriate setting. The first catalogue was printed in 1960. It was a slim volume. In 1971 it became a full-grown catalogue with today’s presentation.

In 2004, the fair moved from the Palais des Beaux-Arts to its current location, the splendid Tour & Taxis architectural complex, a jewel of Belgium's industrial heritage, which lent a sense of magic to the event. The wide-ranging options offered by these new premises allowed the fair to stay on course; and, as was the case with the previous event, to increase visitor numbers. These increases leveraged the quality of the show. This was achieved by including Belgium's best Belgian antiques dealers, and, by developing the fair’s international dimension in inviting dealers from Germany, the UK, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland. The number of Belgian and foreign exhibitors is now held at around 130 in almost perfect equilibrium with a 49% Belgian and a 51% international membership. The number of dealers contributes to the improvement of the fair’s high level of excellence and brings it closer in size to competing events.

Today the fair is a ‘must-see event’ in the antiques world. Every year, it provides an opportunity for professionals and antique lovers to view and learn, to assess the market and to network.

\(^1\) The joint association for the Belgian and Luxembourg art market

\(^2\) CINOA is a non-profit international federation of art market associations, established more than 70 years ago.
Nine presidents

J.P. Van Goidsenhoven was the first president. He was succeeded by Louis Van Capellen then by José Bueso and Raymond Marynen. Then came Charles van Hove, the uncle of François van Hove, followed by Georges Baptiste. The Association owes the very real privilege of its place of residence in the heart of the Sablon area in Brussels, at the intersection of Allard, van Moer and Watteeuw streets to Monsieur Belley, a major benefactor, who bequeathed this building with its vast windows to the association. It was Baptiste, however, who instigated the project of an annual meeting for around twenty selected dealers, and who decided to move to spacious Palais des Beaux-Arts in 1967.

Christian de Bruyn (1971-2002) then held the presidency of the Association for more than thirty years and he added his considerable dynamism and a noble altruism to the position for those many years.

In 2004, under Jan De Maere’s presidency, the fair moved from the Palais des Beaux-Arts to its current location, the splendid Tour & Taxis architectural complex.

In 2005, current president, Grethe Zeberg, became the first woman to run the national organization of the fair, and the first director who was not from Brussels. The multilingual Mrs. Zeberg and her sister Jelva, inherited a firm established in the center of Antwerp for more than a century, and specializing in furniture, tapestries, sculpture, silver and rare objects dating from the XVth to XVIIth centuries. Grethe Zeberg is targeting international recognition and prestige for the fair, which is certainly merited by its quality.

Famous personalities

The opening of the fair is always a moment characterized by its prestige and elegance. In recent years, the fair has had the honor of being officially opened by a range of distinguished personalities, including: HRH the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, Baron Philippe Roberts-Jones, the actress Catherine Deneuve, the actor Alain Delon, fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld, Princesses Elisabeth and Marie Teresa von Thurn und Taxis, HRH the Archduchess Rodolphe of Austria, HRH Prince Philippe of Belgium and Princess Gesine Doria Pamphilj.