

Focus on...

BRAFA's diamond jubilee, or 60 years of the union of Art and Brussels!



Rare and exceptional pair of 'girandole' earrings of gold, silver and diamonds.
In their original jewel case
Second half of the 18th century

A pair of unusual and spectacular 'girandole' earrings of gold and silver, set with rose-cut diamonds. In the original case. Second half of 18th century.

The 'girandole' model may be considered one the most successful type of earrings in history. Its French name, 'girandole', comes from the Italian 'girandola' and refers to a decorative wall sconce with several candleholders. Girandole earrings are made up of three or five pear-shaped elements suspended from a central motif. The first girandoles appeared on the market around 1660, but enjoyed their greatest popularity throughout the 18th century.

Their success can be attributed principally to the fact that during that period, women put their hair up and wore somewhat lower-cut evening dresses, thus leaving sufficient room for large earrings that filled the entire space between the ears and the shoulders. The discovery of diamond mines in Brazil in 1723 was a second reason for the popularity of girandole earrings.

These jewels were the ideal model for displaying a large number of diamonds. Moreover, around 1700 the technique of diamond cutting was perfected, so that the girandoles with their moving parts could display their sparkle to maximum effect in the 18th century candlelight.

Diamond girandoles were the preferred accessory for formal occasions. For daytime use, girandoles set with plainer gemstones such as garnet, cornelian, pearl, topaz and, above all, plain glass, came on to the market in the mid 18th century. This was the first time in history that a distinction was made between jewellery for daytime use and for formal use, a distinction that has been maintained to this day.

Few such jewels have withstood the teeth of time. Since girandoles were very large and filled to the brim with valuable diamonds, they were often dismantled to make smaller earrings and pendants. The majority of the 18th-century girandoles that do survive are ones set with less valuable gemstones. Diamond girandole earrings from the 18th century are therefore extremely rare.

Exhibited by **Epoque Fine Jewels** (Belgium), stand no. 80.