

TO BRUSSELS OR THE BEACH? The season begins with BRAFA and changes to the Florida fairs scene, page 38-41

# ANTIQUES TRADE gazette

THE ART MARKET WEEKLY

**THE BIG ISSUE**  
Halls shakes up its  
auction calendar

Larger seasonal sales of  
higher-value lots

Page 58



## Woolleys stays top of regional league table with seven-figure Benin sale

Report by Roland Arkell

**A SPECTACULAR private treaty sale of an icon of ethnographic art helped Woolley & Wallis retain its status as the UK's leading regional saleroom in 2016.**

The auction of a Benin bronze (right) contributed "a substantial seven-figure sum" to the Salisbury auctioneers' total hammer sales of £22.9m.

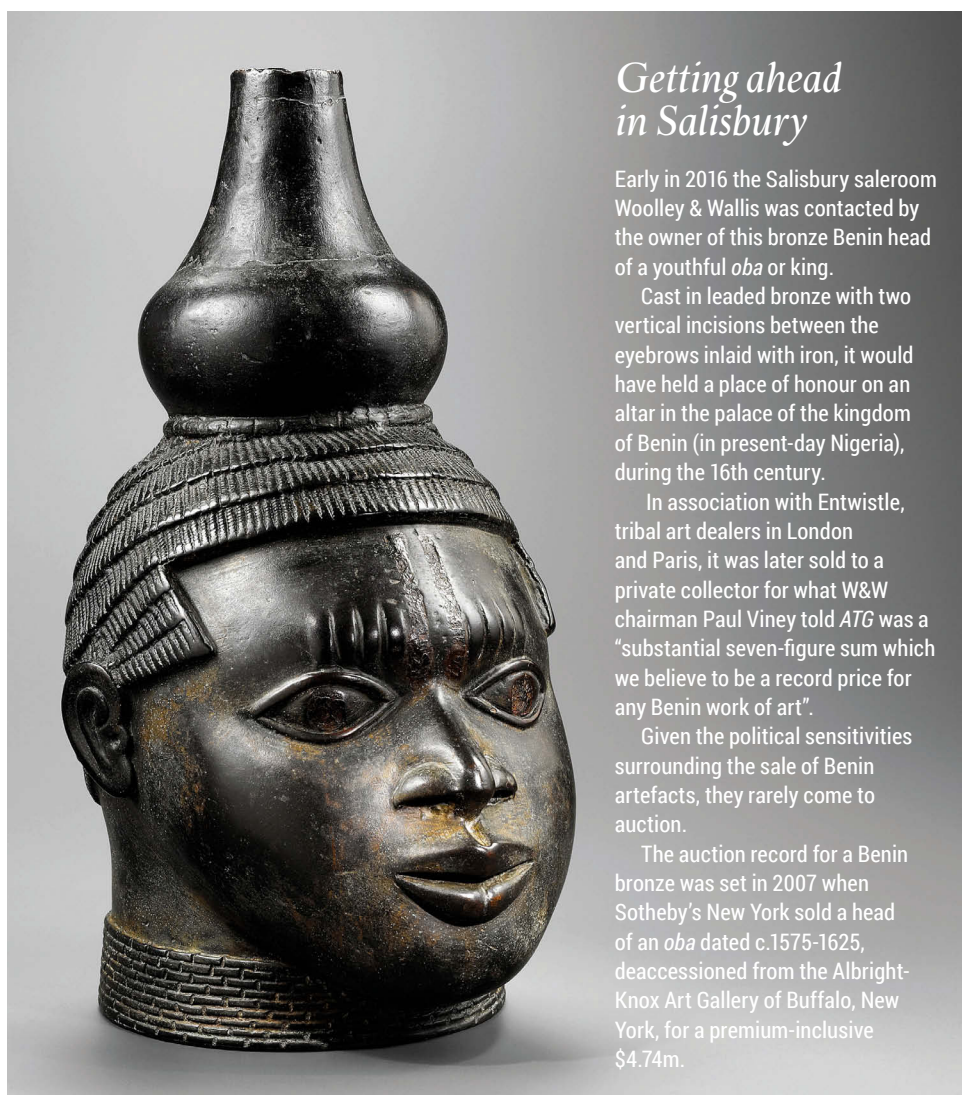
The headline figure (representing a 67% increase on £13.66m in 2015) means W&W has been the number one fine art auctioneer outside London for nearly a decade.

It is also close to a provincial record, second only to the £23.36m the firm posted in 2010 when £9m was provided by just seven Qing jades.

The January to December figures showed particularly strong contributions from Asian art (£4.38m), jewellery (£3.72m) and silver (£1.81m).

Chairman Paul Viney said: "It's been a good year. Our overall selling rate by lot for the year was 79% which is satisfactory.

"Prices seem unaffected by the Brexit vote and we had a remarkable fortnight in the late



### Getting ahead in Salisbury

Early in 2016 the Salisbury saleroom Woolley & Wallis was contacted by the owner of this bronze Benin head of a youthful *oba* or king.

Cast in leaded bronze with two vertical incisions between the eyebrows inlaid with iron, it would have held a place of honour on an altar in the palace of the kingdom of Benin (in present-day Nigeria), during the 16th century.

In association with Entwistle, tribal art dealers in London and Paris, it was later sold to a private collector for what W&W chairman Paul Viney told *ATG* was a "substantial seven-figure sum which we believe to be a record price for any Benin work of art".

Given the political sensitivities surrounding the sale of Benin artefacts, they rarely come to auction.

The auction record for a Benin bronze was set in 2007 when Sotheby's New York sold a head of an *oba* dated c.1575-1625, deaccessioned from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery of Buffalo, New York, for a premium-inclusive \$4.74m.

autumn where our silver, jewellery and Asian art sales had a combined total of £5.7m."

### Fellows up 30%

Six leading salerooms provided ATG with year-on-year data.

In terms of auction sales, the Salisbury firm was pushed close by jewellery and watch specialist Fellows.

The Birmingham saleroom, showing year-on-year growth since the turn of the decade, enjoyed another strong year with sales up across most departments and a hammer total of £17.6m.

Managing director Stephen Whittaker said the increase of 30% on 2015 (the firm's previous record year with sales of £13.5m) came from a greater number of high-value consignments and an improved sell-through rate.

He added that Mayfair viewings (now conducted from a permanent office space) were making a real difference on both counts.

Despite the modest bullion prices – scrap silver and gold remain significantly down from the highs of four years ago

*Continued on page 4*

**Auction Calendar** the original and most authoritative listing of UK sales – page 42-49

## Works on Paper Fair

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www.worksonpaperfair.com

Rosie Sanders, Emerging,  
Watercolour and charcoal (detail)  
Coombe Gallery



# Take a trip to the Tour & Taxis

Capacity at the former industrial venue hosting first major fair of the year on the Continent

Report by Anne Crane

MUCH of the activity in the art world this month is centred across the pond in New York, as discussed last week (ATG No 2274).

Much, but certainly not all. The first major fair of the year in Continental Europe, the *BRAFA Art Fair*, gets under way at the end of this week for a nine-day run from January 21-29, preceded by an 'exclusive viewing' vernissage on January 20.

This Brussels event has a long provenance. Starting out back in 1956 as the major fair for Belgian antiques dealers (*Foire des Antiquaires de Belgique*), it first opened its doors to foreign exhibitors in 1995.

The major change came in 2004 when the event moved from the centre to the much larger Tour & Taxis exhibition space, a renovated former industrial complex, in the north of the city.

This enabled it to expand and take in many more exhibitors and it now runs to 132 dealers. The majority hail from Belgium and France but other European countries are represented, notably the UK with nine exhibitors, half a dozen from Germany and another seven from Switzerland.

Even with the move to the expanse of the Tour & Taxis and a remodelling of the available entrance area last year to take in more stands, *BRAFA* is now at capacity.

As president Harold t'Kint Roodenbeke explains: "While we have a rather long waiting list, it is not currently possible to welcome more galleries without sacrificing a certain level of comfort, or accepting smaller stands, which is not what we want."

The organiser's stated aim is not to do more but to do it better, improving the quality of the event on several levels.

A new visitor to *BRAFA* will find a fair that offers a broad mix of disciplines. These span traditional specialities such as early works of art, furniture, ceramics and silver, through to antiquities, Art Deco and Art Nouveau and other objets d'art.

A large number of dealers bring paintings in a range that covers Old Masters, 19th century, Modern and Contemporary and around half a dozen dealers showcase Asian art.

About a dozen exhibitors also bring tribal art, a Belgian market speciality, and a couple show comic strip art, another understandable favourite in



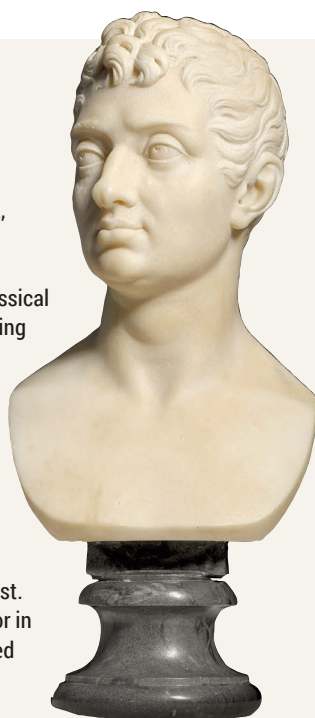
Visitors in the reconfigured entrance section of last year's BRAFA.

## Gallery Desmet

Sculpture and works of art from ancient to the Neoclassical periods are the focus of the Gallery Desmet, a father-and-son team based in the Sablon district of Brussels.

A characteristic piece of Neoclassical sculpture which the gallery is bringing to *BRAFA* is this marble bust by the Italian sculptor Adamo Tadolini (1788-1868), who worked with Antonio Canova in Rome.

The subject is the Russian Count Nikolai Demidov, one of the most successful industrialists of his time as well as a philanthropist. The count probably met the sculptor in Rome in 1823, and Tadolini produced this work a few years later. It is priced in the region of €35,000.



the land of Hergé and Tintin.

Thirteen new exhibitors join the *BRAFA* roll-call this year, eight of them from Belgium. Four of the new names are bringing Contemporary art, which appropriately will help to beef up this sector in a year when the fair's decoration is themed around kinetic art and honours the Argentine Op and Kinetic artist Julio Le Parc, a pioneer in this field.

Le Parc will himself be present and

four of his sculptures will decorate the fair.

Other regulars on the programme at the fair include the *BRAFA* art talks, a daily selection of lectures sponsored by the Roi Baudouin Foundation.

Much more practical information about the fair and about the individual exhibitors can be found on the newly revamped website. ■

[brafa.be](http://brafa.be)

## Didier Claes Gallery

Didier Claes, who has a tribal art gallery specialising in African art in the rue Van Moer in central Brussels, will be showing a selection of works at *BRAFA* focusing on pieces from central Africa. They include this dramatic 2ft 7in (80cm) high Songye statue from the Democratic Republic of Congo (right), made from wood and mixed materials, priced at €600,000.

Photo © Studio Philippe de Formanoir-Paso Doble





## Xavier Eeckhout

Paris dealer Xavier Eeckhout has been showing at BRAFA for seven years. He specialises in animalier sculpture at his right-bank gallery on the rue de la Grange Batelière and admits to a particular fascination with works by sculptors of the Antwerp School.

"It gathered together around 70 sculptors working around Rembrandt Bugatti at Antwerp Zoo and to my mind is still under appreciated," says Eeckhout.

Appropriately for a Belgian fair, he will be highlighting works by these artists on his stand at BRAFA this year where those featured include Albéric Collin, Raymond de Meester and Raoul Eugène Lamourdedieu.

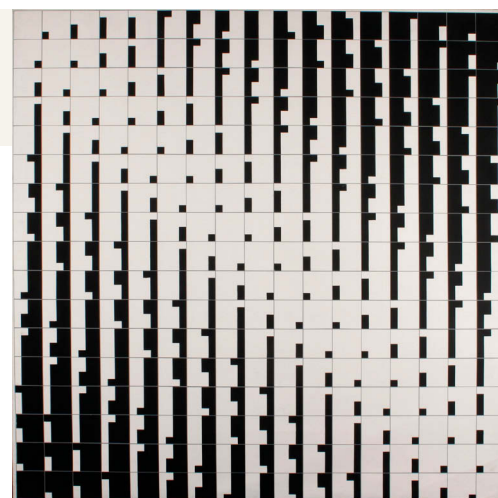
A focus on Collin involves an impressive bronze tiger licking its paw, a work which owes a clear stylistic debt to Collin's master Bugatti, as well as this figure of a monkey with its young (**above right**), a signed bronze bearing a Valsuani foundry stamp. The monkey group is priced in the region of **€50,000-60,000**.



**Above:** an artist's impression of Eeckhout's stand at BRAFA, by designer François Avril.

## La Patinoire Royale

Capitalising on the fact that BRAFA is shining the spotlight on the Op and Kinetic artist Julio le Parc (b.1928) this year, Brussels gallery La Patinoire Royale will be taking one of his works to sell at the fair. *Quantitive Sequences*, **right**, a 6ft 6in (2m) square acrylic on canvas, is priced at **€450,000**.



## Beyond BRAFA: the Winter Bruneaf

WHILE the big art happening in Brussels next week is at Tour & Taxis, other events besides BRAFA are running in town this month. Tribal art enthusiasts will not want to miss the *Winter Bruneaf*, the trail of gallery-based exhibitions back in the town centre set around the Place du Grand Sablon.

Around 30 dealers, a mix of residents and guests from further afield, will be showing a mix of African, American and Oceanic works from January 18-22 in the network of small galleries off the square. A group show of five dealers is also staged in the Sablon's elegant Ancienne Nonciature building.

See [bruneaf.com](http://bruneaf.com) for further information about individual participants.

## Whitford Fine Art

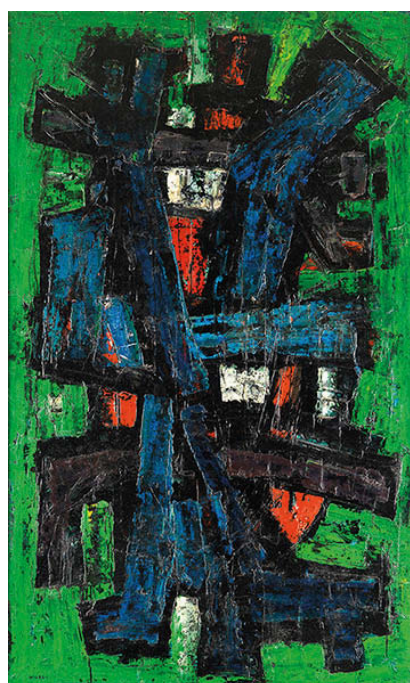
Whitford Fine Art has been standing at BRAFA since 2007. Since Belgian art is one of the London dealership's specialities and something it has championed in the UK since the 1980s, an annual visit to show at BRAFA makes perfect sense.

"We have always marvelled at the amount and the quality of art produced by a relatively small country, matched by the vast cultural knowledge of its art collectors. BRAFA is the oldest and one of the best international art fairs in the world and our exhibits/artists have always received an enthusiastic response from its public," says the gallery.

For this latest staging Whitford is bringing its usual mix of Belgian artists, focusing on three names known for their abstract works: Bram Bogart, Joseph Lacasse and Paul Van Hoeydonck. But the gallery will also be reintroducing the Belgian art-loving public to the work of Frank Avray Wilson, a mid-century British action painter who retired from the art market in 1968 due to the death of his first son from leukaemia.

After a high profile in the '50s and '60s in galleries around the world (including Brussels), Wilson's work was gradually overshadowed by his contemporaries. It is now, feels the gallery, ripe for revival.

As well as showing a selection of his paintings, Whitford is using BRAFA to present the first monograph on the artist, researched by An Jo Fermon, at its stand on January 21.



**Left:** *Synthesis*, a 6ft x 3ft 7in (1.8 x 1.1m) oil on canvas c.1954, one of the works by Frank Avray Wilson to be shown at BRAFA by Whitford Fine Art. It is priced in the region of **£35,000-40,000** (about **€40,000-45,000**).

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