

Celebrate Art Nouveau in Brussels

The *BRAFA* fair this year – and several of its exhibitors – has adopted the city's theme for 2023

by Anne Crane

Brussels was one of the earliest cities to take up the Art Nouveau style which flourished across Europe in the late 19th and early years of the 20th century.

Designers such as the Belgian architect Victor Horta were early exponents.

As the Brussels-Capital Region has decided to make this the year of Art Nouveau, *BRAFA* – the city's major art and antiques fair – has adopted the theme for this year's event.

Two of the *BRAFA* art talks (which are staged for every edition) will be devoted this year to Art Nouveau. One, led by Prof Dr Werner Adriaenssens, curator of 20th century collections at the Museum of Art and History, Brussels, covers the Art Nouveau collection of the King Baudouin Foundation.

The other, on Brussels 1893, the birth of Art Nouveau, is by Benjamin Zurstrassen, curator at the Horta Museum.

And, of course, a number of exhibitors will have Art Nouveau pieces for sale on their stands: four examples are shown and discussed here as part of a preview of selected works that will be on offer at the fair.

Traditional time slot

BRAFA opens later this month at Brussels Expo where it was first staged last year in the summer.

Now back in its traditional time slot as one of the first events in the European international fairs calendar, it opens to the public on January 29 and runs until February 5.

It includes around 130 exhibitors, an international roster offering a mix that takes in a wide range in terms of date and categories including fine art spanning Old Masters to Contemporary, Art Deco and decorative arts, furniture and works of art, antique silver, ceramics, tribal art and jewellery. ■

► brafa.art



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Left: The Galerie Mathivet from Paris specialises in decorative arts. It will be taking this elaborate brass firescreen to *BRAFA*. It is a work by Frank Scheidecker (1872-1915), a French artist who was born in England and was much influenced by both Japanese art and the British Arts & Crafts movement. The price is **€28,000**.

The screen measures 2ft 7in (80cm) high x 2ft 2in (68cm) wide, dates from c.1902 and is made from brass with openwork saw-cut Japoniste decoration of a koi carp and marsh iris. It is signed with the monogram FS and was illustrated in the review *The Artist*, volumes 31/32, 1901-02.

In 1898 Scheidecker exhibited a similar firescreen at the Société des Beaux Arts which was created using an electric saw and a hand saw. In both pieces the decorative design is achieved solely through creating sawn openwork spaces without the addition of hammering.



Above: this set of table and two chairs from c.1910 in Cuban mahogany with original upholstery will be shown at *BRAFA* by Thomas Deprez Fine Arts from Brussels. They are linked to two major names in Belgian Art Nouveau: designed by the architect Victor Horta (1861-1947) for the Magasin Wolfers, the shop for Wolfers Frères jewellery and silverware. The price is around **€20,000**.



Left: the Art Nouveau theme to this year's *BRAFA* means a number of exhibitors will be offering works from this period. They include Florian Kohlhammer from Vienna, a gallery that specialises in international art from the turn of the 20th to the mid-century including Art Nouveau and

Jugendstil pieces.

Among the items on show will be this 10in (25.5cm) high Austrian Jugendstil vase in mould blown glass decorated with etched overlay.

It was designed by Josef Hoffmann for the Bohemian glassworks Johann Loetz Witwe and was commissioned by the Imperial Royal Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna (which is now the Museum for Applied Arts Vienna) in 1911. It has a price of **€16,000**.

Capital of Art Nouveau Brussels 2023

Nearly 1000 Art Nouveau buildings can be seen in Brussels, testimony to its importance as one of the founding centres for this well-known pan-European artistic movement.

The city boasted some key figures who were pioneers of the style such as the architect Victor Horta who designed a number of Art Nouveau buildings in Brussels including the Tassel House of 1893 (often called the first Art Nouveau building), the Hôtel Solvay and the Hotel Van Eetvelde as well as his own house and studio.

Brussels also has the Palais Stoclet designed by the Viennese architect Josef Hoffmann and it was the home to talented designers and craftsmen like the jeweller and

silversmith Philippe Wolfers who created elaborate Art Nouveau pieces for the family firm.

To celebrate its Art Nouveau legacy the Brussels-Capital Region is making 2023 the year of Art Nouveau, an initiative involving a series of dedicated exhibitions, guided tours, lectures and special openings in the city's museums and some of its iconic Art Nouveau buildings and other locations.

The project will run throughout the year.

For those interested in making a visit or looking in more detail at what will be on offer see the website below.

► artnouveau2023.brussels



Left: Dr Lennart Booij Fine Art & Rare Items from Amsterdam, which specialises in works from the first half of the 20th century, will be taking this 6¾in (17cm) high fire polished triple layer vase from c.1895 by Emile Gallé decorated with crocuses to BRAFA. The vase is signed Gallé and retains the original retail label. It is priced at **€8500**.



Above: Whitford Fine Art from London is a longstanding BRAFA exhibitor. The artworks they are taking to the fair this year include this mixed media on canvas from 1982 by Bram Bogart (1921-2012) titled *Lentespiegel* (Mirror of Spring). The 4ft 2in x 4ft 6in (1.27 x 1.37m) work, which is signed, dated and titled on the verso, was acquired directly from the artist and comes with a certificate of authenticity by Bram Bogart Jr. It will be priced in the region of **£150,000-180,000**.



Above: *Two Winged Figures II*, a bronze from 1976 by the British artist Lynn Chadwick (1914-2003), will be offered at BRAFA by the Osborne Samuel Gallery from London. It is priced at around **€200,000**.



Left: this 16in (41cm) wide sarcophagus-shaped carved bone, wood and metal casket from Venice, c.1450-75, will be offered by Finch & Co from London at BRAFA with a price of **£48,000**. It is attributed to the Italian Embriachi workshop, known for its production of pieces in carved bone and wood with stained wood marquetry or *certosina*, and to the so-called Master of the Susanna Two, referring to two very similar caskets by this workshop and master housed in the museum in Ravenna.



Above: *Village près de la Rivière*, by Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958) will be shown by Willow Gallery from London which specialises in Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings. The oil on canvas from 1911-12 measures 2ft 5in x 3ft (73 x 92cm) or 3ft x 3ft 8in (93cm x 1.1m) framed, has a certificate of inclusion, ref No 20124 from the Wildenstein Plattner Institute, and will be included in the forthcoming digital catalogue raisonné. It is priced at **€275,000**.



Above: the London Gallery Stern Pissarro specialises in art by Impressionist, Modern and Contemporary masters.

The selection it is taking to BRAFA will include works by Auguste Renoir, Marc Chagall, Henri Lebasque, Eugene Boudin, Christo, Yayoi Kusama and this 21in x 2ft 1¼in (53 x 64cm) oil on canvas by Auguste Herbin (1882-1960). *Maisons au Quai Vert, Bruges*, is signed Herbin lower left.

The painting dates from 1906 when Herbin stayed in Bruges for part of the year. At this point the artist adopted a Post-Impressionist style and vibrant palette similar to contemporary works by Fauvist artists.

The present work compares with three oil paintings executed in the same year and illustrated by Geneviève Claisse in *Herbin: Catalogue Raisonné de L'Oeuvre Peint* (Paris 1993).

Maisons au Quai Vert, Bruges, which is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity from Geneviève Claisse, is priced at **€400,000**.

Right: among the nine new exhibitors at BRAFA is Parisian Galerie Nicholas Bourriaud, which specialises in 19th and 20th century sculpture. It will be showing this version of Auguste Rodin's (1840-1917) famous sculpture *Le Baiser* (The Kiss).

The 11in (26cm) high signed brown-green patinated bronze, reduction No 2, cast by the Barbedienne foundry, is dated to c.1910-15 and has the foundry mark and the letter F to the interior. The work has a provenance to a private collection and is priced at around **€350,000**.

