

# BRAFA ART FAIR



Didier Claes, Vice-Chairman of BRAFA ©Michel Figuet

**Didier Claes is an African art expert, specialising in the arts of Central Africa. Emphasising excellence and passionate about all art forms, he likes to set himself challenges, such as motivating young collectors or bringing previously unknown objects to light. He has been the Vice-Chairman of BRAFA since 2012, and his gallery “Claes Gallery” is located a stone’s throw from Avenue Louise in Brussels.**

**The next BRAFA will be held from Sunday, January 28<sup>th</sup> to Sunday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024. How do you envision this 69<sup>th</sup> edition?**

This will be the third edition of BRAFA at Brussels Expo, so we have found our feet and are even beginning to be well-practiced. The venue we have chosen is proving to be popular with our exhibitors and visitors alike. For this edition, we wanted to ensure an even greater diversity of specialities, whilst remaining close to the DNA of the Fair, which is first and foremost an antiques fair. As a result, in January 2024, we'll have an appropriate balance between the different fields on display. With this dynamic, we're seeking to attract a multi-generational audience.

**BRAFA is now firmly established at Brussels Expo. What do you think are the advantages of this venue for exhibitors and visitors?**

To begin with, it's a venue that was created for exhibitions, which by definition makes life easier for our exhibitors. Brussels Expo is easily accessible for visitors from all over Belgium and neighbouring countries. The accessibility and mobility plan at Tour & Taxis have been modified and no longer corresponds to BRAFA's needs. Moreover, should we decide to scale up the Fair in the future, there is room for expansion at the Brussels Expo site, which is a significant advantage.

**Are you satisfied with the current size of the Fair?**

That's the eternal question. My philosophy is: "If you're not going forwards, you're going backwards." That said, some similar fairs are finding it difficult to maintain their number of exhibitors. Beyond the desire to expand, the most important thing is to offer a high-quality fair. We could open up the Fair a little more to other specialities such as drawing and photography, or offer a section with new galleries, and increase the number of exhibitors from 130 to 150, but no more.

**Modern and contemporary art are very much in vogue. What is the Fair doing to preserve its eclecticism?**

We can't avoid taking the changing tastes of collectors and the market into account. If we'd stuck to what we were doing at the beginning, we would currently have an old-fashioned fair. We have to keep up with the market whilst maintaining a balance, and that's no easy task. If you look at the Fair, you'll see that it presents what you would expect to find in a collector's home: a skilful blend of ancient art, modern art, contemporary art and design.

**The Paul Delvaux Foundation is the guest of honour at BRAFA 2024. This isn't the first time you have showcased an institution. What is the purpose of this approach?**

BRAFA has traditionally given a place to institutions. The Fair, which has an international resonance thanks to the press and social networks, will provide an opportunity for the Paul Delvaux Foundation to raise its profile internationally. It's a sort of win-win situation for the art market and public institutions, which will enhance our reputation in Belgium and elsewhere.

**Can you give us three good reasons to visit the Fair in January 2024?**

It's a living museum that encompasses all eras and specialities. It's an event where you can share your passions; you can easily ask the exhibitors questions and discuss things with them. The atmosphere is also a very good reason to visit the Fair.

**What is BRAFA's position on the art market?**

BRAFA is a kind of bubble that attracts more than 65,000 visitors over 10 days in January in Brussels, the capital of Europe. It's a good barometer of the art market and it must be said that the Fair is in good health. It gives access to objects of very high quality with more or less accessible price categories, and our exhibitors are delighted with their participation at BRAFA.

**How do you see BRAFA developing?**

I see the organisation of an event a bit like a government. You have to be able to offer something new, you need change. A turnover of people and ideas. There has always been innovation at BRAFA, different venues, etc., and to keep the momentum going, we absolutely have to keep evolving.

**What are your hopes for BRAFA over the next 10 years?**

I would like to see it open up to other fields that are perhaps currently less emphasised, such as street art and photography, whilst remaining faithful to its DNA.

**Do fairs still have the same appeal for galleries?**

There has been a certain fashion for fairs, but nowadays that model is being somewhat called into question, especially since COVID. There is a sense that the marathon of fairs is over: galleries are doing less of them because they are being more selective. I think that each exhibitor makes a choice based on their geographical location, their field, their clientele and so on. BRAFA 2024 has been fully booked since August, which means that exhibitors are choosing us, and with last year's success in terms of visitors, it's fair to say that BRAFA is a key event for everyone involved in the art market.

**How do market trends emerge, and by what means?**

Every generation has its own movement. With each movement, there is creation and therefore public interest. One mistake we must not make is to denigrate each generational movement. That's often what people do. We live in a world of constant change, so we have to accept that there will always be new trends and not succumb to conservatism or even protectionism. In the 1980s, Basquiat was considered a street artist. Nowadays, he is one of the most important post-war artists in the world. That's why you always have to reevaluate yourself, especially as a member of the Board of a fair.

**Can art still be considered a safe investment these days?**

I wouldn't use the term safe investment, but rather diversification, because when you talk about safe investments, you get into a kind of speculation. I have always struggled to see art as speculation. My personal experience tells me that it is a mistake to see art in this way. It is above all a matter of passion and emotion. That said, when the purchase of art is well supported and intelligently constructed, like at BRAFA, art can perhaps indeed become a form of safe investment.

**You are the Vice-Chairman of BRAFA. Could you tell us more about your role within BRAFA and what that means for you?**

In a Board, my role, like that of the other directors, is to decide how relevant it would be to include certain galleries in the Fair, and to assess the quality of the various galleries. Our role also extends to external relations, communicating about the Fair and upholding its reputation.