BRAFA Brings Savvy Collectors to Brussels

by Deborah Wilk 24/01/14 2:48 PM EST

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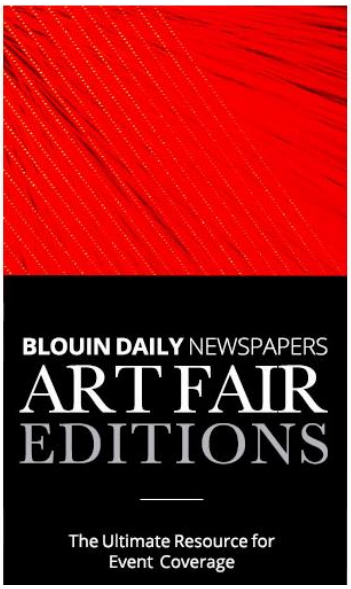
BRAFA Fair entrance
(Photo: Event Attitude – A. de Villenfagne)

A violin-shaped sideboard, by Eugène Printz, at Galerie Willy Huybrechts

The beau monde of Brussels — Antwerp fashion-clad design types mingling with subtly attired, tastefully bejeweled patrons — welcomed the 11th edition of **BRAFA**, the Brussels fair of antiques, fine art, and design, to the Tour et Taxis event venue, a former customs depot built by the Thurn und Taxis family between 1902 and 1907, in private events on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. The fair opens to the public on Saturday and runs through February 2. Originally a forum for primarily Belgian dealers, BRAFA has expanded its international reach, drawing roughly 60 percent of participants from Canada and countries throughout Europe, leaving the 40 percent balance to the home team. Efforts in recent years to bolster the fair's quality, positioning it as a precursor to **TEFAF**, have been solid — though price points offer accessibility to young collectors as well as those merely looking to acquire a pretty object with a notable provenance.

"We've been attending for a while," said **Louis Castor** of Paris's **Galerie Willy Huybrechts**, which is participating in the fair for the first time this year. "The collectors are very interesting." Castor said attendees impress with a deep knowledge of various collecting categories. "They understand what's here." A rock crystal lamp, for example, looking very much like two by **Jean-Michel Frank** that sold at **Christie's** in December for prices around $300,000, was actually by Frank's less well known contemporary **Syrie Maugham**, the designer spouse of playwright **W. Somerset Maugham**. Clever collectors could snag Maugham's version or a pair of andirons capped with chunks of black quartz for a relatively low €30,000 ($41,000).



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Collectors were also on the mind of **Craig Finch** of London's **Finch & Co.**, which mounted a booth of curiosities, including a Central Ivory Coast early 20th-century Baule/Yaure mask for €125,000 ($171,000), an ancient sandstone Celtic head for €33,000 ($45,000), and a late 19th-century piglet in a jar for €4,750 ($6,500). "We love the collectors here. We don't see them in New York or London."

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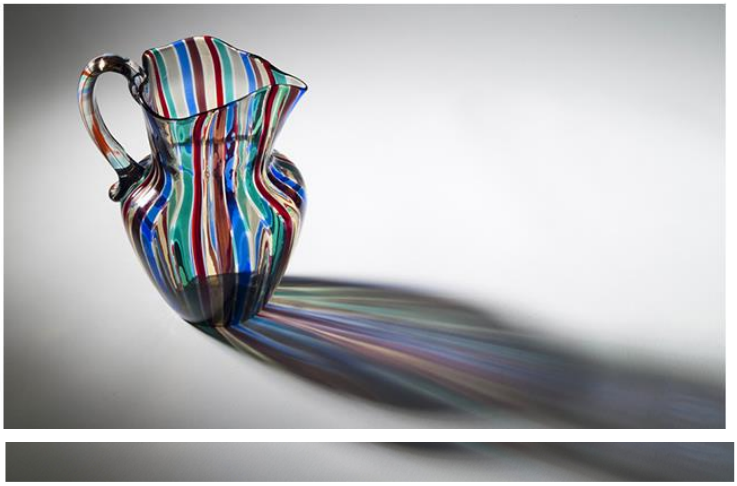

Gio Ponti's "Sette Colori" vase (circa 1948) at Marc Heiremans

Brussels stalwart decorative arts gallery **Marc Heiremans** offers a spectacular examination of 20th-century Italian glass, with prime examples by **Scarpa** and a museum quality collection of **Seguso** factory designs. "It's a risk to show exclusively glass," said Heiremans. But scouts from other fairs, such as TEFAF and **Design Basel**, are around to take note of exceptional presentations. At Heiremans's BRAFA booth, pieces in a broad price range between €1,000 and €50,000 ($1,400-$68,000) were moving briskly, making the risk well worthwhile.

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