

FARAH MASSART

Farah Massart's enthusiasm for Asian art started more than twenty-five years ago when she began travelling intensively to Asia. After 15 years of business management experience and her studies of Asian art at SOAS University London, she took some major steps in reorienting her life. She decided to devote her professional life to Southeast Asian and Indian art by starting the gallery Famarte in Knokke in 2012. Famarte is now located in Meise (nearby Bruxelles) where collectors are welcome by appointment. During the holiday season in the summer she manages a pop-up gallery in Knokke.

Famarte specializes in high quality sculpture and ritual objects from India, Southeast Asia, Japan and Nepal. The gallery represents also several emerging and mid-career Asian contemporary artists.

She organizes regular exhibitions at the gallery and participates at several national and international antique fairs (Cultures Bruxelles, Antica Namur, Art Breda, Cologne Fine art, Parcours des Mondes Paris). Farah Massart is happy to collaborate with distinguished international collectors and to build their collection with passion and expertise.

Contact:

+32 495 289 100
art@famarte.be
www.famarte.com



YOUR PARENTS ARE ALSO ART COLLECTORS OF ASIAN ANTIQUES ? WHAT IS YOUR EARLIEST MEMORY INVOLVING ART?

My parents still travel a lot and they still are art collectors, not only of Asian antiques, but also in other fields that fascinate them. I feel of course privileged that I have always been surrounded by beautiful objects at home, it expanded my perspective on the world at young age. I have a vivid memory of artists stopping by at our house or the frequent visits to befriended antique dealers. On the way back home from Italy it happened more than once that my brother and I had to share the back seat with a fragment of a fountain or a huge vessel in terracotta from Tuscany... It was all quite usual for me, but my friends were always astonished. One of the things that inspired me most and made me really happy (till today) were the regular visits to the Middelheimpark, a fabulous and permanent "art in the park" location in Antwerp, with an international overview of modern and contemporary art. I inherited without any doubt the sense of beauty and hunger for art from my mother. From my father I learnt the entrepreneurial skills.

In 2010 two coinciding encounters inspired me to reorient my life after 15 years of business management experience, and to devote my passion to Southeast Asian and Indian art. An art dealer in the south of France pointed out that my life was predestined to work in the art business with my name "MassART". A few months later the owner of a successful antique gallery in Knokke announced her wish to retire. At that very moment I decided to start my antique business in the same gallery in Knokke.

Two exhibitions in 2010 have also changed my life. The first one was in Paris, about the art of Gandhara in Guimet Museum. The next exhibition "Passage to Asia" took place in Brussel, about 25 centuries of exchange between Asia and Europe.

YOU HAVE RECENTLY OBTAINED YOUR DEGREE OF SOUTH EAST ASIAN AND INDIAN ART AT SOAS, THE SCHOOL OF ASIAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES IN LONDON. IS IT IMPORTANT TO KEEP DEEPENING YOUR KNOWLEDGE ON AN ACADEMIC GROUND?

I obtained my degree of Southeast Asian and Indian art at SOAS in 2010. Originally I didn't graduate in art history, but in Roman languages, so it was essential for me to start my art career with an in-depth study in Asian antiques. The course included lectures and conferences with contributions from a wide range of scholars, curators and art market professionals. Particularly the study on objects from the collections of the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum was a real eye-opener for me. It was also a proven pathway to further postgraduate studies in Asian Antiques. I'm still in touch with alumni and tutors who assist me with some research, and the library from SOAS is a great place to consult art books and old auction catalogues. The profession of antique dealer requires a constant deepening of knowledge, with each new piece you buy.

THE MOTTO OF YOUR GALLERY IS « A WAY TO ENLIGHTENMENT ». CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY?

The main theme in the major religions (or philosophies of life) in Asia is the spiritual awakening, that can be attained by building spiritual or religious merit. The commission to build a statue or temple was a contribution to this merit, auspicious for the karma of a person. It was also a support for meditation and a motivation in the pursuit of enlightenment.

In my opinion, this is still very relevant today. Asian artworks can be a help for yoga or meditation. They can help us to connect with others, to be more compassionate, or to accept reality with more serenity. They have a universal appeal because of their authenticity and purity.

Seated Buddha on his throne
Thailand
Chiang Saen period
circa 15th Century
Gilt bronze with natural green patina
H 25.5 cm



Hindu tantric vessel
India
18th Century
Bronze
H10xL14cm
From the Collection of Colette and
Jean-Pierre Ghysels Belgium



Ming Tong (China)
A l'écoute (2019)
Ceramic with gold leave
44x29x25cm,
Signed by the artist in front



WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF A GALLERY LOCATED IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF BELGIUM?

As I told you before I started my first gallery in Knokke, where I developed a loyal customer base. In 2018 I decided to open a gallery in our private house nearby Brussels, where I welcome the collectors in a personal and quiet setting. Their visit is not restricted to opening hours, and they can always find inspiration how to integrate an artwork at home. Of course, I still participate on a regular base in specialized antique fairs or events to meet new customers. In 2021 we organised an exhibition called "Serenity" with several like-minded dealers.

IN WHAT WAYS DOES DIGITALIZATION FACILITATE YOUR BUSINESS?

My clients come from all over the world, their time is precious, and they cannot always visit the gallery or art fairs. Digital is vital, surely since the pandemic situation, and I adapt my business model to facilitate developments in e-commerce platforms, such as the Asian Art Society. I regularly update the Famarte website www.famarte.com and I'm now developing a brand new version of it. I stay in contact with my customers via digital newsletters and catalogues to share insights about new artworks. A few years ago I couldn't imagine that a customer would buy an expensive artwork, only based on images, without having seen or touched the piece. Nowadays it's reality, but the quality of the picture, the storytelling behind a piece and sharing the emotion that emanates from a piece becomes more and more important to attract people online. To attract young people, who are the new buyers, it is also important to have a frequent visibility on social media. It is demanding to have the discipline to stay visible online as much as possible! Nevertheless, people still love to receive a catalogue on paper and turn the pages by hand to discover a piece of art. Nothing can replace direct contact with the work.

WHAT ADVANTAGES ARE THERE FOR BEING A WOMAN IN THE ART WORLD?

Unfortunately, even in the art world,

businesswomen are still under represented. We need yin as well as yang energy, both are complementary. I hope I can inspire other women to find their place in the art world. Luckily my clients are pleasantly surprised to meet a woman, they like the soft power and my personal touch in doing business. When I buy a new piece of art, I first connect with my instinct and intuition, judging authenticity, historical relevance or quality comes next. I buy with my heart, if I don't like something, I just don't buy it, even if it's likely to generate a good profit. My sensitivity and eye for detail are powerful tools for my customers to search a unique piece of art that fits with their environment and way of life. Although my management style can be helpful and compassionate, I also need determination and perseverance to survive in this art business! Emotional intelligence and a problem-solving attitude can help to create a healthful and strong relationship with the art collector.

WHAT'S THE BEST PIECE OF PROFESSIONAL ADVICE YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN?

When I started in this business, they gave me two important professional advices. First, to be taken seriously in this business, it is important to have the necessary connoisseurship, a great sense of responsibility and an open communication. Second, one need to be open to learn and to stay critical to yourself without losing your passion and drive.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE COLLECTING TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY ART?

The combination of the two gives me the opportunity to appeal to a wider audience. In general collectors nowadays have a much broader taste. They are not only interested anymore in buying antiques, they have a deep interest in other fields too. Traditional or contemporary art, both can be the perfect testimony of the cultural, historical and religious identity of Asia. An antique work can enhance the identity of a contemporary work and vice versa, to become a rich combination. A meaningful blend of past and present gives context and depth to a home. There are also remarkable similarities in use of symbols, colour, design, ... Contemporary artists often find inspiration in the past, as well in terms of pictorial techniques, traditions and vision on life. For contemporary art I work both with artists from Asia



as with Western artists who are inspired by Asia. It is rather an unexplored field, scouting good artists who appeal to a Western audience is a very interesting challenge for me. I try to build a strong personal contact with the artist, to better understand their political, cultural and human issues. I once invited two Burmese artists-brothers in my gallery in Knokke. They never had left their country before, they barely spoke English. But it was a wonderful life experience for all of us.

DO YOU FIND SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY ART COLLECTORS AND COLLECTORS OF ANTIQUES?

Sometimes people are more easily drawn to a contemporary artwork, because as a collector you need less background information nor an historical context. The provenance or the authenticity factor is not an issue here. Contemporary art is more accessible and approachable.

IF YOU HAD TO BE ONE WORK OF ART, WHAT WOULD YOU BE – AND WHY?

A bronze sculpture from Folon, the Belgian artist, famous for drawings and sculptures, represents my personality quite good. It represents a man with an open suitcase. (see picture).

I love to travel, I need the freedom to explore and to discover. My suitcase is an essential part of my life. I'm always on the pursuit for inspiring pieces of art. I consider myself as a medium between the (anonymous) artist and the present-day art lover, I try to make a long-lasting connection that could widen the horizon of the collector and also of myself.

Folon, Voyage (1995), bronze