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Art that Moves Movements of Art

BRAFA 2026 - General view © Olivier Pirard

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This issue invites readers to reconsider the art market in all its complexity. Too often reduced to auction results, headline-grabbing sales, or the spectacle of major fairs, the art market is in fact a far broader cultural, economic, legal, and social ecosystem. It is a space where objects circulate, but also where meanings are negotiated, hierarchies are produced, expertise is tested, and values are constantly redefined.

One of the aims of this issue is to show how deeply the art market is being reshaped by contemporary transformations. Digital tools and algorithmic logics are increasingly influencing visibility, selection, and access, raising new questions about authority and mediation. At the same time, museums and public institutions are facing mounting pressure to reconcile financial imperatives with their social and cultural missions. These changes compel us to think more carefully about who creates value today, under what conditions, and for whose benefit.

Yet the market is not only a site of innovation. It is also a place where the past remains active and where objects acquire new relevance over time. Antiquities, decorative arts, and other often neglected categories remind us that value is never exhausted by price alone. Beauty, authenticity, historical depth, memory, reuse, and intergenerational transmission all shape the meanings attached to objects. In this respect, the art market is also a laboratory of cultural continuity and reinvention, where old things find new audiences and new functions.

This issue also foregrounds the importance of law, regulation, and responsibility. Expertise remains central to the market's functioning, but it is increasingly scrutinized through legal, ethical, and institutional frameworks. Provenance research, questions of authenticity, and the responsibilities of museums and market actors alike now occupy a crucial place in public and professional debate. The circulation of cultural goods cannot be separated from broader concerns about transparency, due diligence, ownership, and historical accountability.

What emerges from these pages is thus a conviction that the art market should not be understood simply as a commercial mechanism, but as a privileged observatory of contemporary culture. It reveals how societies assign worth, preserve heritage, build trust, negotiate expertise, and project cultural aspirations into the future. It also reminds us that markets are never neutral; they include and exclude, elevate and marginalize, conserve and transform. We hope it will encourage readers to move beyond familiar clichés and to engage instead with the art market as a particularly dynamic and revealing arena.

Anne-Sophie V. Radermecker
Université libre de Bruxelles

March 2026

BRAFA 2026 - General view © Olivier Pirard

BRAFA 2026 : A VIBRANT 71ST EDITION CONFIRMS THE FAIR'S INTERNATIONAL STANDING

GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens
ENCATC General Secretary

The 71st edition of BRAFA Art Fair closed on a strong note, confirming the commercial dynamism and enthusiasm that had been evident since the opening days. Held at Brussels Expo from 25 January to 1 February 2026, the fair once again asserted its position as one of the key events at the beginning of the international art calendar. True to its identity built over more than seven decades, BRAFA combined eclecticism, quality and a distinctly Belgian sense of conviviality.

BRAFA ART FAIR

From the opening night, the atmosphere proved lively and welcoming. Negotiations unfolded throughout the aisles, significant works found buyers, and collectors mingled with gallerists in a setting where prestige never overshadowed accessibility.

“BRAFA once again demonstrated that prestige and accessibility can coexist in a fair that encourages dialogue and discovery.”

BRAFA 2026 - DIE GALERIE © Emmanuel Crooÿ

Modern and Contemporary Art Lead the Momentum

The modern art sector proved particularly successful from the first days of the fair. Van Herck-Eykelberg reported sales of works by Pierre Alechinsky, René Magritte and Dan Van Severen, as well as pieces by James Ensor and Léon Spilliaert.

Martos Gallery from New York celebrated its first participation with the sale of ten works by Keith Haring, including one priced at $500,000. The gallery also reported meeting numerous new collectors and expressed its intention to return next year.

BRAFA 2026 - De Wit Fine Tapistries © Emmanuel Crooÿ

The contemporary sector was not left behind. Several works presented by **Almine Rech** found buyers, with prices ranging from a few thousand euros to over €250,000, demonstrating the Fair's ability to combine artistic excellence and accessibility: a ceramic piece by **Miquel Barceló** (€80,000–100,000), a sculpture by **Hans Op de Beeck** (€70,000–90,000), a painting by **Javier Calleja** (€250,000–€275,000), a sculpture by **Johan Creten** (€70,000–€80,000), a work by **Minjung Kim** (€70,000–€90,000), a piece by **Taryn Simon** (€35,000 – 40,000), a painting by **Vivian Springford** (€150,000 – 200,000), a painting by **Thu-Van Tran** (€45,000 – 50,000) and a painting by **Paul de Flers** (€25,000 – 30,000). "This first participation at BRAFA was a very positive experience for the gallery... Brussels holds an essential place in the history of Almine Rech, and it seems natural to us to actively contribute to the vitality of the local scene", says Gwenvael Launay, partner and director of the Brussels gallery.

BRAFA 2026 - Galerie La Patinoire Royale Bach © Luk Vander Plaetse

BRAFA 2026 - Meessen © Emmanuel Crooÿ

"Collectors showed renewed confidence this year, with sales ranging from €10,000 to €500,000." — *David Stern, Stern Pissarro Gallery*

A Dialogue Between Cultures: Non-European Art

BRAFA's longstanding commitment to eclecticism was particularly visible in the strong interest in non-European art. Objects from Oceania, Asia and the Americas attracted collectors and curators alike.

At Galerie Flak, buyers acquired a Hopi Kachina doll from Arizona for €35,000, a Maori ear ornament from New Zealand for €4,000 and a Malangan ritual decoration from Papua New Guinea for €10,000.

Claes Gallery recorded notable sales of African sculptures, including a Yaouré mask from Côte d'Ivoire and a Dan Mano mask priced close to €150,000.

BRAFA 2026 - Grusenmeyer-Woliner © Luk Vander Plaetse

BRAFA 2026 - Vagabond Antiques © Emmanuel Crooÿ

BRAFA 2026 - Maison Rapin © Luk Vander Plaetse

BRAFA 2026 - Maurice Verbaet Gallery © Luk Vander Plaetse

Old Masters: A Core Pillar of the Fair

The Old Masters sector once again demonstrated its vitality. The Geneva-based dealer De Jonckheere reported strong results, selling works to Belgian and French collectors, including a pair of paintings by Van Kessel II and a work linked to the Bruegel dynasty.

Klaas Muller, chairman of BRAFA, sold thirteen paintings during the fair, including a work depicting hunting trophies by Frans Snyders and the painting 'Portrait of Lady Bagster with her Son', executed in 1649 by Cornelis van Ceulen.

Jan Muller Antiques also sold Jacob Jordaens' 'The Triumph of the Eucharist' for approximately €200,000 during the first weekend of the fair.

Craftsmanship and Decorative Arts

Collectors also showed strong interest in goldsmithery and decorative arts. d'Arschot & Cie offered an Augsburg cup listed at €40,000, while Francis Janssens van der Maelen sold around thirty art objects, mainly Art Deco silver.

Galerie Haesaerts-le Grelle, participating for the first time, sold its highlight piece—a copper and brass chandelier by Belgian designer Gustave Serrurier-Bovy—to a Brussels collector.

Meanwhile, Hoffmans Antiques reported strong sales of neoclassical Scandinavian furniture, and Vagabond Antiques sold numerous works, including a carved marble from Siena priced at €18,000.

BRAFA 2026 - Pron © Luk Vander Plaetse

BRAFA 2026 - Objects With Narratives © Emmanuel Crooÿ

BRAFA 2026 - Patrick Derom Gallery © Luk Vander Plaetse

Design Regains Momentum

The design sector also attracted renewed attention. Galeria Bessa Pereira welcomed collectors from Portugal and Belgium, while robertaebasta sold a rare cocoon chair by Louis Vuitton for between €50,000 and €60,000.

Museums and Institutional Interest

Museums were actively present throughout the fair. The painting 'Portrait of Lady Bagster with her Son' was acquired by the Musée du Luxembourg.

Other works also caught the attention of institutions: Galerie de la Présidence is currently in discussions with a museum regarding a work by Eugène Boudin, while the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam selected a painting by Kees van Dongen from Galerie Jean-François Cazeau for its upcoming exhibition 'Van Gogh and the Fauves'.

An International Fair with a Human Scale

Although BRAFA attracts collectors and art professionals from across Europe, the Americas and Asia, it has preserved a welcoming atmosphere. Conversations flow easily, discoveries unfold naturally and collectors can engage with artworks without pressure.

With approximately 72,000 visitors, BRAFA 2026 matched last year's record attendance. The fair will return to Brussels Expo from 24 to 31 January 2027.

BRAFA 2026 - Galerie Jean-François Cazeau © Emmanuel Crooÿ

GIANNALIA **COGLIANDRO BEYENS**

Since 2004, GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens is the Secretary General of the European network on cultural management and policy, ENCATC. She is also the administrator of the Thomassen mobility programme and serves on several boards. GiannaLia is an expert in EU affairs and international relations, with more than 30 years' experience in advocacy, cultural policy, and strategic management, in the context of international cultural NGO. Since 1998, GiannaLia has also successfully designed, drafted, and managed a large number of EU cross-sectorial projects in the field of culture, education, and research.

Former Policy Officer of the Cultural Forum of EUROCITIES, GiannaLia was also Secretary General of the Association of the European Cities of Culture , AECC. Journalist since 1993, she started her career as Press & PR Officer for the N.A.T.O organisation in Rome. For the European Commission, she wrote 10 Reports on social European policy and a major study on the European Cities of Culture of the year 2000. Educated at the University "La Sapienza" in Rome, GiannaLia holds a Degree in Political Sciences - International Relations and two additional masters in European & International Career Studies, and a in European Constitution. Since 1993, GiannaLia is member of the Association of the Former trainees of the European Union.

BRAFA 2026 - Galerie de la Béraudière © Olivier Pirard

BRAFA AND THE STRENGTH OF ECLECTICISM

Interview by
GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens with Beatrix Bourdon

In this interview, Beatrix Bourdon, Managing Director of BRAFA, reflects on the factors that have shaped the fair's strong position in the international art market. The conversation explores how BRAFA's distinctive eclecticism, broad collector base, and collaboration with museums contribute to its identity and resilience. At a time when the art market is evolving, the fair offers a compelling example of how quality, diversity, and openness to new audiences can sustain both cultural relevance and market confidence.

BRAFA has just concluded its 71st edition with high visitor numbers and strong sales. What best sums up the atmosphere at the fair this year?

This year's fair stood out thanks to an excellent range of works, with the number of exhibitors expanded to 150, and a friendly, dynamic atmosphere. The fair's aisles were constantly busy throughout the event, with a strong turnout of 72,000 visitors. Gallery owners reported numerous sales, confirming the vitality of the art market at the start of the year. The event also took place in a relaxed atmosphere, which certainly facilitated exchanges between gallery owners and collectors.

At a time when the global art market is sending mixed signals, BRAFA seems to be thriving. What makes this fair particularly resilient at the moment?

It is a fact that BRAFA appears to be highly resilient. It has a very clear identity and a distinct positioning, characterised by a self-assured eclecticism. This diversity attracts collectors from all walks of life. Furthermore, BRAFA emphasises that it seeks to develop in its own right and avoids copying other international events, which reinforces its unique identity. Furthermore, the fair prioritises a high-quality selection of galleries, which builds buyers' confidence. It also has a loyal base of passionate collectors, particularly in Belgium and across Europe. BRAFA also seeks to appeal to younger generations through talks and guided tours, thereby broadening its audience.

BRAFA 2026 - Galerie Jean-François Cazeau © Emmanuel Crooÿ

BRAFA is renowned for its unique diversity, ranging from Old Masters to contemporary art and tribal artefacts. Do you think this eclecticism is the key to the fair's longevity?

Yes, most likely. Eclecticism is certainly one of BRAFA's key strengths, and undoubtedly contributes to its longevity, as well as its excellent international reputation. This diversity attracts a wide audience and appeals to collectors with varied interests. It encourages new discoveries and enables the Fair to adapt to changes in the art market. A lover of old master paintings can thus engage with a collector of contemporary art or an archaeology enthusiast, leading to unexpected discoveries and the building of bridges. The art market is constantly evolving, but by offering a range spanning from the classical to the contemporary, Brafa can adapt easily without merely following art market trends. BRAFA strives to conscientiously build a distinct and sustainable identity.

BRAFA 2026 - Van Herck-Eykelberg © Emmanuel Crooÿ

Many galleries have reported making sales across a wide price range, from a few thousand euros to works reaching several hundred thousand euros. Does this suggest a broader collector base than in previous years?

Yes, your question does indeed suggest that there is a larger collector base than before, with a wide range of profiles and budgets. There has always been a wide range of prices at BRAFA, ranging from a few thousand to several hundred thousand euros. This price diversity makes the event accessible to both new collectors and experienced buyers. This price variation certainly contributes to the longevity and growth of our event. A fair where the prices of artworks vary widely means it is less focused solely on very large purchases and helps attract a more diverse audience, including younger collectors or new art enthusiasts.

BRAFA 2026 - Galerie Jean-François Cazeau © Emmanuel Crooÿ

Museums also collaborated actively with the galleries during the fair. How important is this institutional presence for BRAFA's cultural credibility?

The active presence of museums and cultural institutions at BRAFA helps to position the fair as a serious, rigorous and recognised event. Several sales were made thanks to the active involvement of the museum sector. Furthermore, the presence of museums as guests of honour, for example, demonstrates that the Fair is not merely a venue for commercial transactions. The presence of museums lends legitimacy to the works on display and reassures collectors and visitors as to the quality of the pieces exhibited. It demonstrates that the event is recognised by curators and experts. This presence also creates a link between the art market and cultural heritage, enhancing the value of the works on display. Thus, collaboration with museums helps to make BRAFA a prestigious and culturally recognised event.

BRAFA 2026 - Galerie Bernard De Leye © Emmanuel Crooÿ

With around 72,000 visitors this year, the fair has confirmed its prominent place on the international calendar. What are your ambitions for BRAFA in the coming years?

In the coming years, we wish to continue attracting an even more international audience, enhance the diversity of the works and galleries on display, and offer enriching experiences for all visitors. We also want to combine tradition with innovation, by incorporating new initiatives, particularly those focused on sustainability. All this whilst staying true to our own DNA. In short, we want BRAFA to remain an unmissable event for everyone interested in art in all its forms.

Looking ahead to the 2027 edition, what new developments or ideas would you like to introduce to ensure that BRAFA continues to evolve?

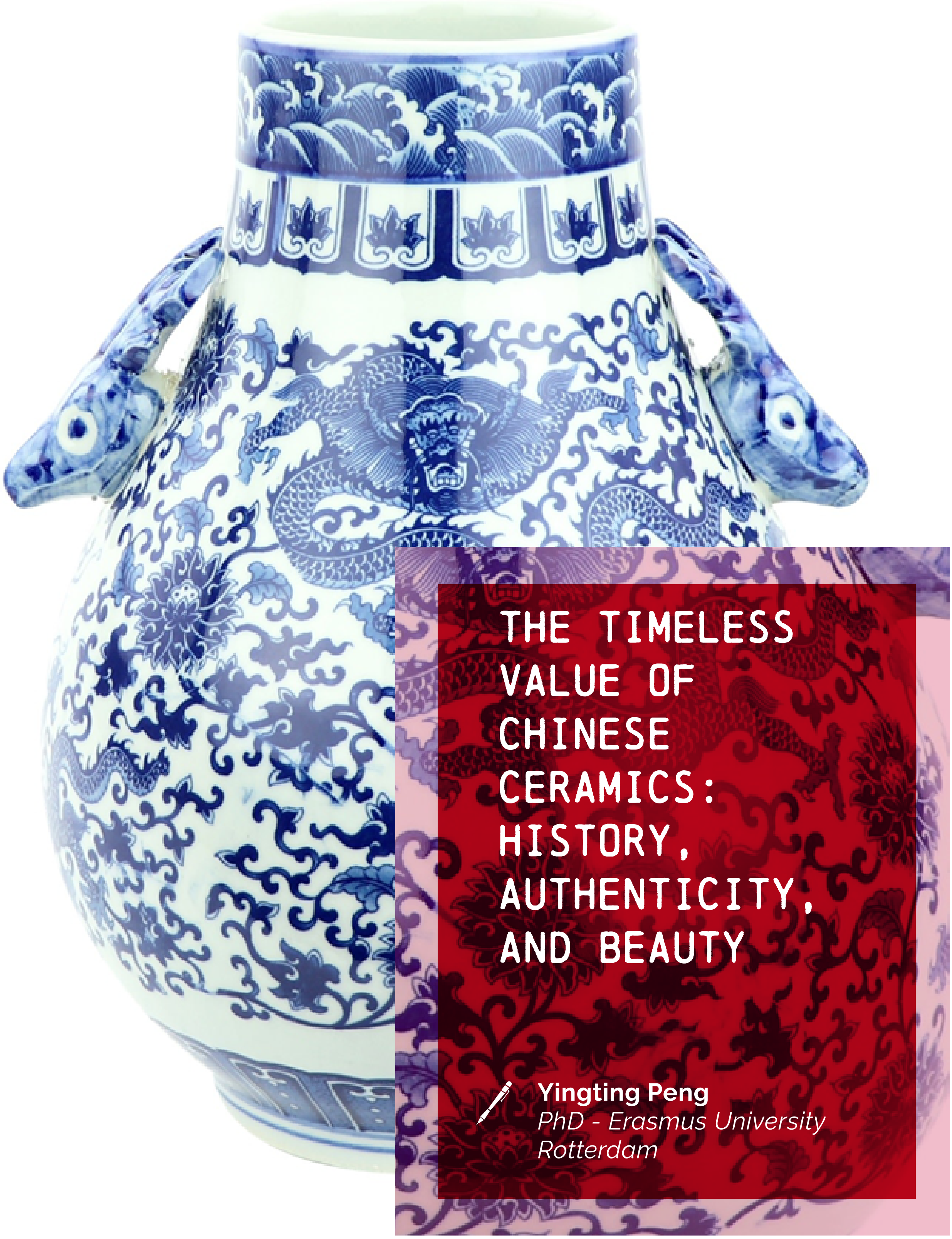
For the 2027 edition of BRAFA, several ideas are currently being explored to develop the fair whilst strengthening its international reach. In particular, we wish to attract younger generations, who will be the collectors of tomorrow. With this in mind, we are considering developing interactive guided tours or mobile apps offering content on the works on display. We also wish to offer more lectures, panel discussions and workshops to the general public. Finally, we would also like to implement initiatives to reduce the fair's carbon footprint and promote the use of recycled materials, something we are already doing today.

BEATRIX **BOURDON**

Interview by
GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens

Beatrix Bourdon holds a degree in history from KU Leuven, a diploma in American Studies from the same university and a Master of Arts in East European Studies (KU Leuven, VUB, UGent). She was initially interested in being a journalist, but her passion for art proved decisive. She began working in auction houses before joining the ASBL Foire des Antiquaires de Belgique, the organisation behind BRAFA, in 1992. BRAFA is now one of the oldest art fairs in Europe. Presenting ancient, modern and contemporary art, it is considered to be one of the most prestigious and eclectic art fairs in the world. Beatrix Bourdon, who was appointed Managing Director in 1999, is responsible for all aspects of organisation for the international event it has become: finding new exhibitors, setting up stands, printed matter, advertising, sponsorship, expertise, catering, etc. Born in Knokke on the Belgian coast, she is a woman brimming with iodine, who loves long walks and bike rides in the open air, wild landscapes, happy gatherings with family and friends, and reading to dream. She is also a keen golfer. In the city, she spends her free time at museum exhibitions and concerts. A born traveller, she loves to explore the world through the aisles of BRAFA and discover artworks from a wide variety of eras, styles and civilisations, or from elsewhere: Italy, Sweden, etc. Beatrix has been married for 28 years and has 25 year old twins.

BRAFA 2026 - Nosbaum Reding © Olivier Pirard



THE TIMELESS VALUE OF CHINESE CERAMICS: HISTORY, AUTHENTICITY, AND BEAUTY

Yingting Peng
PhD - Erasmus University Rotterdam

In November 2024, Sotheby's London auctioned a very extraordinary pair of Ming Dynasty Wucai (five colours) fish jars with lids from the Jiajing period. Only one other complete pair of these jars is preserved in the Musée Guimet in Paris, and just three single pieces reside in private collections. Preserved for over a century in the collection of a German family, the jars fetched around £9.6 million ($12.5 million), nine times the estimated price. This sale set a record for Chinese ceramics and illustrates the enduring fascination with these ancient treasures. Stories like this capture the timeless appeal of Chinese ceramics: objects that combine artistic brilliance, technological mastery, and a profound cultural significance.

Chinese ceramics: objects that combine artistic brilliance, technological mastery, and a profound cultural significance.

Ever since the late 2000s, China became and remained one of the top three art markets in the world. Whereas international art market reports (e.g., Art Basel & UBS, Artnet, and Artron) show that Chinese art remains one of the largest global collecting categories, ceramics are nonetheless often overshadowed by fine arts in commentary and analysis. Yet, they have started to outperform other traditional art categories (like Chinese painting and calligraphy, oil painting and contemporary art) in both market share and sales volume. Since 2012, ceramics remain the best-performing category of Chinese antiquities and artworks on the overseas auction market.

China's long history of ceramic production has made its porcelain prized worldwide for centuries. Tang Sancai, Song official kilns, Yuan blue-and-white porcelain, and Ming Doucai all reflect innovations in aesthetics and technique. European collectors have coveted Chinese porcelain for over 300 years, with Delftware producers in the Netherlands and German manufacturers like Meissen attempting to replicate its secrets. Today, auctions reflect this enduring admiration. Unclear until today is what makes certain pieces so valuable, while others remain modestly priced, and how cultural and historical factors translate into economic value. That's precisely what my PhD research investigates.

Ever since the late 2000s, China became and remained one of the top three art markets in the world.

This article draws on insights from my PhD research, using a dataset of 225,039 auctioned Chinese ancient ceramics from 1994 to 2023. But before diving into market patterns, it helps to understand why certain artworks hold value at all.

Historical Value: What Time Adds to Artworks

Historical value reflects the age of an object and the era in which it was created. Earlier works often command higher prices, partly due to their scarcity. They also carry cultural and technological stories about how people lived, what they valued, and what techniques they applied. Chinese ceramics span more than a millennium, and traditions such as Tang Sancai (three colours), Song monochrome glaze, and Yuan blue-and-white. Each dynasty left its own aesthetic and technological signature. In my analysis, ceramics from the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) fetched the highest premiums. Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasty ceramics also performed strongly, while Qing (1644-1912) pieces showed a slight discount on auction prices.

Why does history matter so much? Yuan blue-and-white porcelain exemplifies the first global trade in ceramics, with masterpieces exported to Europe and the Middle East (Figure 1). The cobalt blue pigment came from Persia, and Chinese potters combined it with Chinese porcelain technology at Jingdezhen. The result was a completely new artistic style that blended Middle Eastern materials with Chinese craftsmanship. With its major export across continents, it can be considered as one of the world's earliest "globalized" luxury products. Song ceramics, in contrast, often undecorated and renowned for their subtle glazes and elegant forms, reflect the pinnacle of aesthetic refinement. Meanwhile, Ming and Qing ceramics benefited from industrial-scale production, which increased their availability, and currently slightly reduces rarity-driven price premiums. In short, collectors often pay for a tangible connection to history, where quality and scarcity converge.

Figure 1: Blue and White plum vase designed with peony scrolls (Yuan Dynasty) exhibited in Jingdezhen China Ceramics Museum, Jingdezhen 2025. Picture by the author

Rarity, Authenticity, and Condition: The Golden Code of Collecting

Collectors care deeply about rarity, authenticity, and condition, the golden rules of the art market. The Chinese ceramic market follows these rules closely. Rarity drives value. However beautiful they may be, works that were widely produced usually fetch lower prices. Unique or truly rare pieces, by contrast, can command extraordinary sums. For example, we find that paired ceramics - a rarity in the market - tend to sell for higher prices than single items, reflecting both their scarcity and the improbability of the pair remaining intact over time. At auctions, only two bidders competing for one lot are needed to drive up the prices of rare goods. Authenticity implies that the object is real, original and unique. For antique ceramics, authenticity is demonstrated through various indicators: inscriptions, seal marks, documented provenance, references in the literature, or certificates (Figure 2). Pieces with a well-documented lineage, especially those previously owned by famous collectors, can see their value multiply. Our data shows that authenticity indicators can increase from 73% to over 200% in price premiums. Condition also feeds into perceived authenticity and quality, as well as further amplifies value: well-preserved ceramics enjoy a 30% premium, while damaged pieces (e.g. cracks, repairs, and chips, etc.) receive a discount of roughly the same magnitude.

Collectors care deeply about rarity, authenticity, and condition, the golden rules of the art market.

Figure 2: Qianlong reign marks exhibited in Jingdezhen China Ceramics Museum, Jingdezhen 2025. Picture by the author

Aesthetic Value: Beauty, Craft, and Technique

Aesthetic value originates in aesthetic characteristics of the work like its beauty, harmony, and form. Whereas in paintings, color and composition matter most, in ceramics, shape and glaze are the important aesthetic attributes. Among forms, vases and cylinders achieve the highest premiums, while dishes often fetch lower prices. Glaze types, too, make a difference. Doucai (joined-color) combines underglaze blue outlines with colored enamels after firing added on top of the glaze. Extremely difficult to master, the technique results in attractive multi-colored patterns (Figure 3). Also challenging are underglaze red pieces, with designs painted in red iron-based pigment under the glaze. It may not be surprising that Doucai and underglaze red command the highest premiums (83% and 37% respectively), reflecting the technical skill and artistry involved in their production. Famille rose, characterized by opaque overglaze enamels, dominated by pink tones, by contrast, tends to generate lower prices, likely due to its easier technique, more widespread production, and shorter history.

Why are shape and color so influential? Across cultures, form often takes precedence over decoration in ceramics. A vase's silhouette, proportion, and curvature draw the eye first, while color and glaze serve to enhance its visual impact. When it comes to color and glaze, intense hues and complex techniques, such as those seen in Doucai or underglaze red, tend to impress collectors more than softer, more subdued palettes.

Figure 3: Doucai Jar with Auspicious Beasts in Waves Pattern and tian Character from Chenghua Reign, Ming Dynasty (1465-1487) exhibited in Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum, Jingdezhen 2025. Picture by the author

Investment or Appreciation?

Ceramics blur the boundary between art and craft. They are functional objects elevated to artistic treasures through technique, symbolism, and historical resonance. Investing in Chinese ceramics carries both allure and risk. Prices can skyrocket, as with the Jiajing fish jars, but market fluctuations are real. Even sought-after pieces can be discounted if damaged or poorly preserved. Here, understanding the interplay between historical importance, rarity, and aesthetic value is crucial for collectors and investors.

Ceramics blur the boundary between art and craft.

Ancient Chinese ceramics sit at the crossroads of history, aesthetics, and economics.

An intriguing question: do collectors buy with their eyes or their wallets? While economic value can be measured through prices, the emotional and cultural resonance of Chinese ceramics is harder to quantify. Each dynasty developed distinctive techniques and aesthetics, yet collectors often value these works as much for their beauty and craftsmanship as for their potential financial return. In many cases, art and craft intertwine, with mastery of material and form just as important as market trends.

Collectors often straddle two identities: the aesthete and the investor. Some buyers seek beauty; others hope for future price growth. Most, however, appreciate ceramics for both.

Conclusion

Ancient Chinese ceramics sit at the crossroads of history, aesthetics, and economics. Our research demonstrates that rarity and authenticity are decisive in determining value, alongside historical and aesthetic considerations. Understanding these multiple value dimensions helps reveal why a simple-looking jar might sell for millions, while another slips quietly through auction. While markets fluctuate, the deep cultural and historical heritage embedded in these works ensures their enduring appeal. For European collectors and global enthusiasts, understanding both the artistry and the economics of Chinese ceramics offers richer insight into one of the world's most fascinating art markets!

This article draws on part of my PhD-research at Erasmus University Rotterdam, supported by a team specialized in art markets from historical and non-western perspectives (Filip Vermeylen), cultural economics and entrepreneurship (Ellen Loots), and risk management (Yijing Wang). Together, we hope to shed light on the enduring allure of Chinese ceramics and perhaps inspire readers to look at these artworks with new eyes - not just as investments, but as living, breathing artifacts of history and creativity.

YINGTING
PENG

Yingting Peng is a PhD candidate at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her research focuses on cultural production and economics, with particular interests in the Chinese ceramic art market, art finance and investment, and valuation. Through an interdisciplinary lens, she examines how the economic, cultural, and social values of cultural assets are reflected in, and contribute to the dynamics of the cultural and creative industries. She has presented her research on *The Price Determinants for Chinese Ceramic Artworks in a Global Auction Market* at the 23rd International Conference on Cultural Economics and as a guest lecture (*Economics of Arts and Culture*) in 2025, and has participated in the Brussels Art Market Workshop (Université libre de Bruxelles) and the Symposium Porcelain Fever (Princessehof National Museum of Ceramics) in 2024.

Photo By Loraine Bodewes

TEFAF MAASTRICHT 2026: THE MARKET AS MUSEUM, THE MUSEUM AS MARKET

Interview by
GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens
*with **Will Korner***

In an art world increasingly defined by volatility—economic, geopolitical, and cultural—TEFAF Maastricht continues to perform an almost paradoxical role: both stabilizer and spectacle. The 39th edition of the fair, which closed on March 20, reaffirmed its reputation not merely as a marketplace, but as a cultural ecosystem where scholarship, connoisseurship, and commerce intersect with rare clarity. With more than 50,000 visitors over eight days and representation from over 450 museums, TEFAF once again demonstrated that, even amid uncertainty, the appetite for exceptional objects remains robust.

A Fair That Thinks Like a Museum

If most art fairs aspire to institutional relevance, TEFAF has long reversed the equation: museums come to it. Representatives from leading institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rijksmuseum, and the Louvre walked the aisles not as observers but as active participants in acquisition and dialogue. This convergence blurs the boundaries between private and public spheres. A 14th-century marble figure acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Delft objects sold to American institutions underscore TEFAF's dual function: it is both a commercial arena and a pipeline for public collections. The fair's curatorial ambitions extend beyond transactions. Its Curator Course, run in partnership with Maastricht University, hosted emerging museum professionals, reinforcing TEFAF's long-term investment in intellectual infrastructure.

FlowerWall, photo Jitske Nap

Confidence in a Fragmented World

Set against a backdrop of global instability, TEFAF's success reads as a barometer of confidence. Dealers reported strong sales throughout the week, with some describing the edition as among their most successful. Notably, a quarter of exhibitors have remained loyal for over two decades—a statistic that speaks less to inertia than to trust in the fair's enduring model. Yet this confidence is not monolithic. It is nuanced, shifting toward discernment rather than spectacle. Collectors are increasingly drawn to smaller-scale works, cross-category acquisitions, and objects with impeccable provenance.

A Cultural Touchstone

TEFAF distinguishes itself not simply through the quality of its objects, but through the coherence of its ecosystem. Here, a Renaissance sculpture, a modernist canvas, and a contemporary design object coexist as part of a broader cultural conversation.

It is within this context—where market dynamics, scholarship, and institutional dialogue intersect—that we sat down with **Will Korner**, Head of Fairs, to explore how TEFAF continues to navigate this balance. In the following conversation, he reflects on the fair's evolving role, its response to global uncertainty, and the ways in which it both shapes and responds to shifts within the art market.

David Gill Gallery stand at TEFAF

TEFAF continues to position itself as both a marketplace and a cultural platform. How do you balance commercial success with the fair's growing emphasis on scholarship, institutional dialogue, and long-term cultural impact?

For us, these elements are complementary. TEFAF is a foundation that runs two fairs, and our exhibitors are dealers who are absolute experts and specialists in their fields and care deeply about arts and culture - not only through what they present, but also through their ongoing relationships with museums, scholarship, and institutional support. The commercial and cultural aspects of the fair reinforce one another. The quality of the works, the depth of research, and the trust created through vetting all contribute directly to the strength of the market.That is also why we have developed initiatives such as the TEFAF Summit. It allows us to explore wider cultural questions - but crucially, it is anchored within the fair itself, bringing together the public and private sectors in the same space. That connection between market, scholarship, and policy is very much at the core of TEFAF's identity.

This year's edition showed strong attendance and sustained market confidence despite global uncertainty. What do you think TEFAF offers collectors and institutions that creates this sense of stability in an otherwise volatile art market?

It really comes down to our values and clarity of identity. TEFAF has always stood for quality, scholarship, and trust, and those become even more important in uncertain times. Collectors and institutions know what to expect: rigorously vetted, museum-quality works presented by dealers who are specialists in their fields. Most importantly, it is the depth and breadth of the fair. With more than 15,000 objects across all periods and disciplines, TEFAF reflects a much richer and more resilient ecosystem than any single segment of the market. That allows collectors to move with confidence - not just within one category, but across many - and to place works within a longer context of value and significance.

Richard Green, photo Loraine Bodewes

We're seeing a shift toward smaller-scale works, cross-category collecting, and increased attention to overlooked artists. To what extent do you see TEFAF shaping these trends, rather than simply reflecting them?

I think TEFAF does both - it reflects and shapes the market. From the beginning, TEFAF was built on the idea that collectors cross-collect. They don't think in rigid categories, and often discover new areas precisely because objects are placed in dialogue across time and disciplines. So in that sense, what might now be described as a "trend" has long been part of the fair's structure.You see that very clearly in the increasing attention given to artists who sit outside the traditional canon — whether that is overlooked Old Master women artists, or artists from regions that have historically been underrepresented in the market. For example, the inclusion of galleries such as D'Lan Contemporary, bringing leading Aboriginal artists into the fair, or Proyectos Monclova presenting 20th- and 21st-century Latin American artists, reflects that broader expansion of art history. Sections like Focus and Showcase reinforce this as well, encouraging more concentrated, research-led presentations and giving space to new perspectives. That included a dedicated booth to Ladi Kwali the most important Nigerian Modernist ceramicist, or Demisch Danant one of the most important Design galleries choosing to dedicate their stand to Antoine Vollon, an underappreciated 19th Century French artist. So while these shifts may be visible as "trends," they are also a result of a longer-term evolution in how art history is understood — and TEFAF provides a platform where that evolution can be seen, tested, and supported.

Cora Sheibani, photo Maison Rowena

The Emerging Collector Program suggests a strategic effort to broaden access to the fair. How important is it for TEFAF to cultivate the next generation of collectors, and how do you ensure they remain engaged long-term?

It's essential - but again, we think in terms of collecting journeys rather than age. It is important of course also to remember that this is something the dealers themselves think about all year around, and so we should provide a platform and amplify what they are doing. In terms of our intiatives, not everyone arrives at TEFAF with the same level of experience, and it's important that the fair offers meaningful entry points without compromising on quality. That is where the Emerging Collectors Programme plays an important role. By highlighting works under €20,000 on a dedicated digital floorplan, we help newer collectors engage with confidence and with the dealers as experts. And because of the breadth of the fair, that first engagement can naturally expand into a much wider collecting path over time.

The TEFAF Summit this year emphasized culture's role in public policy and economic impact. Do you see the role of art fairs evolving beyond the market—toward influencing how culture is valued at a societal or governmental level?

Yes - but always in connection with the market, not separate from it. The TEFAF Summit is a good example, which we have developed as a platform to explore these themes in depth. In recent editions, we have focused on topics such as Safeguarding Cultural Heritage and Reimagining Philanthropy. It was created to explore wider questions around the role of culture with this year's important insight and debate on Beyond Economic Impact including its economic, social, and even health impact. That means it brings together museum leaders, policymakers, collectors, and the trade in one place, encouraging dialogue between public and private sectors. We see that as a natural extension of what TEFAF has always been: not only a marketplace, but a meeting point for the wider cultural ecosystem. It is also important that these conversations are supported by data. If we want to advocate effectively for culture, we need to be able to measure and demonstrate its impact. That was one of the main reasons for the Economic Impact Report on Maastricht that we undertook with Deloitte this year, which quantified €38 million brought directly to the Maastricht economy and €87 million to the Netherlands overall. Together, these initiatives reflect our ambition not only to support the market, but also to contribute to how culture is understood, valued, and sustained in the long term.

Aronson Antiques, photo Maison Rowena

Education initiatives like the Curator Course signal TEFAF's investment in future leadership. How do you see the role of education—particularly in cultural management and cultural policy—shaping not only the development of TEFAF itself, but also the evolution of the art fair model and the wider market?

Education is increasingly central, because the art world itself is becoming more interconnected. Through initiatives like the Curator Course, the Museum Restoration Fund, and the Summit, TEFAF is investing in future leadership across those areas - as well as Showcase for the next generation of dealers. It allows emerging curators and professionals to engage directly with objects, dealers, and institutions in a very practical way. More broadly, this helps evolve the role of the fair itself. It is not only a place of transactions, but a place of learning, exchange, and continuity. And in a landscape where every fair has to be very clear about what it stands for, that depth of engagement becomes a defining strength.

Photo by Maison Rowena. Courtesy of TEFAF

WILL **KORNER**

Will Korner is Head of Fairs at TEFAF, where he oversees operations at TEFAF's world-leading fairs in Maastricht and New York. He works directly with more than 300 international galleries and dealerships, as well as museums, collectors and many other stakeholders within TEFAF's community and unique role as an arts foundation. Will was previously Manager of International Art Fairs at the Art Loss Register, and as a trained archaeologist worked with the trade, police, governments, museums, and collectors to identify and return stolen art and antiquities. He separately runs the Cultural Heritage At Risk Database (CHARD), a charity and foundation that assists galleries, museums, sites and archives in conflict and crisis zones.

ART EXPERTISE FROM A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

Alexandre Pintiaux
Lawyer - Specialist - right of arts and culture - right of artists - right of author

In the art market, the figure of the expert occupies a curious and sometimes uncomfortable position. Traditionally perceived as an art historian, a connoisseur, or increasingly a scientist armed with infrared cameras and spectrometers, the expert is primarily associated with knowledge, authority, and judgment. Yet, in practice, experts frequently find themselves crossing paths with lawyers specialised in art law, often at moments when certainty is precisely what is lacking.

This encounter is not accidental. The art market is built on opinions rather than absolute truths. Attribution, authenticity, provenance, condition, and value are all matters that depend on assessment rather than measurement. Even scientific expertise, often perceived as more objective, rarely provides definitive answers on its own and must be interpreted alongside historical and stylistic analysis. From a legal perspective, expertise is therefore less about discovering an immutable truth than about producing a reasoned and credible opinion capable of supporting decisions, transactions, or, occasionally, disputes.

Unsplash - Photo by Raúl Mermans García

Art lawyers do not usually challenge the legitimacy of expertise as such. On the contrary, they rely on it. But they also know that expertise operates within a legal framework that imposes limits, responsibilities, and sometimes uncomfortable consequences. Understanding expertise from a legal point of view therefore requires looking not only at what experts do, but also at when they intervene, how they are appointed, who appointed them, how they are paid, and what is expected of them.

The art market is built on opinions rather than absolute truths.

The many faces of art expertise

Expertise in the art market takes multiple forms, each corresponding to different moments in the life of an artwork and different expectations from its stakeholders.

One of the most common forms of expertise arises at the time of acquisition. Whether the buyer is a seasoned collector or a first-time amateur, expertise plays a central role in assessing authenticity, attribution, provenance, and, increasingly, compliance with ethical and regulatory standards. This is where the concept of due diligence comes into play. The expert's role is not limited to confirming that an artwork "looks right", but extends to evaluating its history, its documentation, and its coherence within the artist's oeuvre. From a legal perspective, this pre-acquisition expertise often determines whether a professional buyer has acted prudently or not, should a dispute arise later.

Another type of expertise is linked to collection building and advisory services. Here, the expert acts as a guide rather than a gatekeeper. The objective is not merely to avoid mistakes, but to shape a coherent collection, advise on artistic relevance, market positioning, or long-term value. While these advisory roles are less likely to lead directly to litigation, they nonetheless involve legal considerations, particularly when advice proves inaccurate or misleading.

Unsplash - Photo by Palina Kharlanovich

Valuation expertise constitutes yet another category. Auction houses, insurance companies, and financial institutions regularly rely on experts to assess the monetary value of artworks. These valuations may serve different purposes, such as sale estimates, insurance coverage, estate planning, or collateralisation. Although valuation is often presented as a neutral exercise, it is inherently subjective and can have significant financial consequences. The law does not require experts to predict market outcomes, but it does expect valuations to be reasonable, justified, and free from conflicts of interest.

Expertise takes on a very different dimension once a conflict emerges. Disputes relating to authenticity, financial loss, misrepresentation, or provenance frequently bring experts and lawyers into direct collaboration… or confrontation depending of the client. At this stage, expertise becomes a strategic element. An expert opinion may support a claim, weaken an opposing argument, or simply help a party assess whether its position is legally sustainable. It is often at this point that the limits of expertise become most visible.

There are, however, situations in which expertise adds little or no value. When an artwork has been stolen, for example, the dispute usually revolves around ownership and acquisition conditions rather than intrinsic qualities of the object. In such cases, legal analysis may prevail over expert opinion. The same applies to certain contractual disputes where the characteristics of the artwork are not in question.

A particularly illustrative scenario is that of a buyer seeking to annul a sale. When doubts arise as to authenticity or attribution, expert intervention is almost inevitable. An expert may be appointed jointly by the parties, by one party seeking to strengthen its position, or, if litigation is already underway, by the court itself. Judicial expertise represents a distinct category, governed by procedural rules and subject to judicial oversight, but it ultimately raises similar questions about authority, independence, and reliability.

Appointing the expert and paying the price

The designation of an expert is rarely a neutral act. Whether chosen by agreement between parties, unilaterally appointed, or designated by a court, the expert's role, mandate, and legitimacy depend heavily on the context of appointment.

Parallel to this issue lies the question of remuneration, which is far from anecdotal. In practice, experts are remunerated according to different models. Some charge a flat fee or an hourly rate for issuing an opinion. Others, particularly in valuation contexts, link their fees to the estimated value of the artwork. While this practice is widespread, it raises obvious concerns regarding conflicts of interest. An expert whose remuneration increases with the value of the object may, consciously or not, be influenced in their assessment.

The designation of an expert is rarely a neutral act.

From a legal standpoint, such remuneration schemes are not automatically prohibited, but they may affect the credibility of the expert opinion and will not be acceptable in contentious situations. Courts and lawyers alike tend to scrutinise the independence of experts more closely when financial incentives appear misaligned.

Transparency regarding fees and methodology is therefore essential, not only for ethical reasons, but also to preserve the evidentiary value of the expertise.

The legal framework and the expert's responsibility

One of the striking features of the art market, particularly in Belgium but also in many other jurisdictions, is the absence of a specific legal status for art experts. There is generally no formal accreditation required to present oneself as an expert. Anyone may, in principle, offer expertise services, regardless of training, experience, or recognition by peers.

This freedom has advantages. It allows expertise to develop organically and avoids excessive institutionalisation. However, it also places a significant burden on responsibility. From a legal perspective, experts are typically subject to an obligation of means rather than an obligation of result. In simple terms, they are not required to be infallible, but they are expected to act diligently, competently, and in accordance with the standards of their field.

This distinction is crucial. The law acknowledges that art expertise involves uncertainty and interpretation. An expert does not guarantee authenticity, but rather provides a reasoned opinion based on available information and accepted methodologies. Liability may arise if the expert fails to conduct appropriate research, ignores relevant data, or issues an opinion without sufficient justification.

This framework reflects a delicate balance. On the one hand, it protects experts from unrealistic expectations. On the other, it offers recourse when expertise is clearly deficient. For lawyers advising clients, understanding this balance is essential when assessing the weight and reliability of expert opinions.

Expertise in practice: when opinions decide outcomes

In certain disputes, expertise becomes the central axis around which the entire case revolves. This is particularly true when parties hold diametrically opposed views on authenticity. In such scenarios, the judge, who is not an art specialist, will rely heavily on expert conclusions.

The expert does not decide the case, but their opinion significantly shapes the legal reasoning.

If a court-appointed expert concludes that an artwork is authentic, it is unlikely that a judge will annul the sale on that basis alone, absent other exceptional circumstances base on specific facts. Conversely, if the expert determines that the work is not authentic, maintaining the sale becomes difficult, unless specific conduct by the buyer or seller justifies a different outcome, or based on a procedural argument.

Legal arguments in these cases often revolve around concepts such as mistake, misrepresentation, or consent, but they tend to remain secondary to the expert's findings. The expert does not decide the case, but their opinion significantly shapes the legal reasoning.

There are, however, limits to this influence. In some cases, courts may consider that a professional buyer who failed to conduct adequate due diligence cannot rely on expert findings to escape contractual obligations. Such considerations highlight that expertise does not operate in a vacuum, but interacts with broader legal principles.

When expertise fails to help

Despite its central role, expertise is not always useful. Certain categories of goods traded on the art market are fungible by nature. Fine wine provides a good example. Bottles may be authentic at the time of sale and delivery but easily substituted afterwards. Labels can be reproduced, and physical identification becomes nearly impossible.

In such cases, even the most sophisticated expertise may fail to establish whether the object presented is the same as the one sold. From a legal perspective, the probative value of expertise diminishes dramatically. Courts may then focus on contractual arrangements, storage conditions, and evidentiary issues rather than on expert opinions.

This illustrates a broader point. Expertise is a powerful tool, but not a universal solution. Its relevance depends on the nature of the object, the timing of the dispute, and the questions at stake.

Conclusion: a powerful tool, not a magic wand

It would be absolute unfair to paint a bleak picture of the art market, filled with forged masterpieces, misguided experts, and endless disputes. In reality, such cases remain marginal compared to the vast number of artworks exchanged daily across the globe, including in Belgium. Most transactions proceed smoothly, guided by competent professionals and fair participants.

Expertise offers opinions, not certainties.

Expertise remains an indispensable pillar of the art market. It structures trust, supports transactions, and helps resolve disputes when they arise. But from a legal perspective, it must be approached with realism. Expertise offers opinions, not certainties. It illuminates, but does not replace, legal analysis. And while it can be decisive, it is sometimes illusory in its promise of absolute truth.

In other words, expertise is best seen as a compass rather than a map. Extremely useful, occasionally misleading, and always dependent on who is holding it.

ALEXANDRE **PINTIAUX**

Alexandre Pintiaux is a Belgian attorney whose practice focuses on the law of art and the cultural and creative industries. He advises artist, museums, auction houses, and cultural institutions.

His work is characterized by a transversal approach to art law, covering areas such as copyright, tax and customs issues (including ATA procedures), trademark law, the legal status of artists, heritage management, authenticity issues, criminal law related to culture (including street art and trafficking), as well as the international export and sale of artworks and antiquities.

Since 2017, he has been teaching at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, where he lectures in the Master's programme in Cultural Management on law applied to the cultural sector. Since 2023, he has also taught the course Economic Circuits and Legal Issues of the Performing Arts. He is actively engaged in academic work and publishes annually the Code essentiel – Marché de l'art et secteur culturel, a compilation of the main legal texts applicable in Belgium.

Pexels - Photo by Miguel González

THE ART MARKET IS NO LONGER A LEGAL GREY ZONE

Interview by
GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens
with ***Marie-Sophie de Clippele***

Legal scholar Marie-Sophie de Clippele on restitution debates, anti-money-laundering rules and why the art world can no longer ignore the law.

For decades, the art market cultivated the image of a discreet ecosystem governed by reputation, trust and unwritten rules. Today that world is under increasing scrutiny. Provenance disputes, restitution claims, anti-money-laundering regulations and the rise of digital art have pushed legal questions to the centre of the cultural economy.

"People often imagine the art market as a kind of informal universe," says Marie-Sophie de Clippele, professor of law at UCLouvain Saint-Louis Brussels. "But in reality it has become one of the most legally complex sectors of cultural life." We spoke with her about why law is becoming unavoidable for artists, collectors and institutions alike.

The art market has long projected an aura of secrecy and flexibility. Is that era ending?

To some extent, yes. The art market was traditionally built on personal networks and trust. Deals were often informal, and discretion was part of the culture.

But the scale of the market has changed. When artworks are selling for tens of millions and circulating globally, the stakes are simply too high for everything to rely on informal arrangements. Legal questions inevitably enter the picture.

What kinds of legal questions are most pressing today?

Provenance is probably the most visible one. Museums and collectors are increasingly expected to investigate the history of artworks—sometimes going back decades or even centuries.

But that's only part of the story. We also see growing attention to anti-money-laundering regulations, tax rules, copyright issues linked to digital works, and contractual disputes within the market. The art world is discovering that almost every stage of an artwork's life raises legal questions.

The restitution debate has intensified in recent years. Why now?

There has been a broader societal shift. Institutions are being asked to confront historical injustices—whether related to colonial collections, wartime looting or illicit excavations.

Law becomes the framework through which these debates are negotiated. It doesn't resolve every ethical question, but it structures the discussion: who has a claim, what evidence matters, and what remedies are possible.

Some people worry that increasing legal scrutiny could suffocate the art market. Is that a real risk?

It depends on how regulation is implemented. But law does not necessarily stifle creativity or exchange. In many cases it provides stability.

Clear rules about provenance, contracts or due diligence can reduce uncertainty and protect both buyers and sellers. The art market has historically tolerated a lot of ambiguity—sometimes too much.

The EU has introduced anti-money-laundering rules that now affect parts of the art market. Has that been a shock?

It has definitely changed the landscape. Dealers and other market actors in certain situations now have obligations similar to those of financial institutions: verifying clients, documenting transactions, reporting suspicious activity.

For a sector that has traditionally valued confidentiality, that is a major cultural shift. But it reflects the growing recognition that artworks can function as financial assets.

Digital art and NFTs briefly created a sense of legal chaos. What did that moment reveal?

It revealed how quickly technology can outpace regulation. When NFTs emerged, there were immediate questions: What exactly is being sold? What rights are transferred? How do copyright and ownership interact?

These questions show that the art market is no longer just about physical objects. The legal frameworks we use need to adapt to new forms of artistic production and circulation.

Artists themselves are often not at the centre of these legal debates. Should they be?

Absolutely. Artists are directly affected by copyright law, resale rights, taxation and contractual arrangements with galleries or institutions.

Many artists focus understandably on their practice, but understanding the legal framework can be empowering. It can help them protect their work and negotiate fairer conditions.

You often speak about 'legal literacy' in the art world. What do you mean by that?

Legal literacy simply means that professionals in the art world—artists, curators, collectors, dealers—have a basic understanding of the legal environment in which they operate.

The goal is not to turn everyone into a lawyer. But when people understand the rules, they can anticipate problems rather than react to them after a dispute arises.

This is precisely the ambition of the Certificat en Droit, Art et Marché organised by UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles in partnership with Université libre de Bruxelles: to provide better understanding to the legal context for the art world, and for lawyers who would like to gain more expertise in that area.

More information about the Cerificate - click here

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SAINT-LOUIS BRUXELLES
ULB

Looking ahead, will the art market become even more regulated?

Probably. But the reason is that the expectations around the art world are changing.

People care about transparency, about the ethical circulation of cultural objects, about the protection of heritage. Regulation is one way societies respond to those concerns.

The real challenge is maintaining the balance: protecting artworks and cultural heritage while preserving the vitality and creativity that make the art world unique.

MARIE-SOPHIE **DE CLIPPELE**

Marie-Sophie de Clippele is Assistant Professor of Law at the UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles. She holds a UNESCO Chair on Heritage, Art & Nature in the Digital world (HAND) together with professor Olivier Servais. Her research focuses on cultural heritage and environmental law, with a strong interest in legal theory. She participates in various interdisciplinary research projects relating to the restitution of colonial collections, the status of human remains, the digitization of natural history collections, or the rights of nature. Her first monograph addressed the burden of heritage ('Protéger le patrimoine culturel: à qui incombe la charge?', PUSL, 2020) while her second book deals with human remains ('Restes humains et patrimoine culturel, de quels droits?', Anthemis, 2023).

Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi

CULTURAL CAPITAL FINANCING: HOW MUSEUMS CAN COMBINE PROFIT AND SOCIAL PURPOSE

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Museums are evolving from static repositories of artefacts into innovation ecosystems that connect culture, technology and sustainable development. Tokyo's teamLab Borderless and teamLab Planets, for example, are host to 3D digital artworks, which visitors can become immersed in and interact with. Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Cultural District, home to cultural institutions such as Louvre Abu Dhabi, Zayed National Museum, Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi and the Abrahamic Family House, offers digital and historical experiences that connect technological innovation with cultural heritage.

These augmented institutions create significant opportunities for creative industries and their satellites: Saadiyat Island, where the Saadiyat Cultural District is located, has seen a 14% visitor increase across its cultural landmarks and hotels.

Given these developments, financing models that are as innovative as the exhibits are important to ensure long-term sustainability for museums and cultural institutions. By integrating investments, partnerships and creative economy initiatives, museums can generate different forms of value in many sectors, such as tourism, education, research, community development, environmental resilience and others.

A new framework – Cultural Capital Financing – could be conceived to help combine public funding with private investment, digital innovation and social entrepreneurship. The goal is to align cultural institutions with inclusive growth, environmental resilience and future-ready governance together with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Blended and impact-driven financing

Museums can be platforms that transform ideas into different forms of value. New financial frameworks illustrate how cultural institutions can operate as impact enterprises, especially when they embrace hybrid financial models that blend cultural agendas and economic strategies that guarantee these institutions' financial survival.

Natural History Museum, Abu Dhabi

Endowments, usually awarded by trusts, private foundations, or public charities, are a common financing instrument employed by most US museums. But recently, they have been coupled with additional strategies. Guggenheim New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago implemented joint acquisitions to co-own artworks, reducing the financial burden of individual acquisitions and optimizing overall costs. Additionally, the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio has started providing guarantees for artworks that it wants to acquire at auction; even if it doesn't win the bidding, the museum receives a percentage of the hammer price in return for guaranteeing a minimum sale price.

In the context of Cultural Capital Financing's search for new strategies, Public-Private-Philanthropic Partnerships(4P) represent a next-generation governance and financing model, designed to integrate institutional legitimacy, market innovation and civic trust. Within this framework, endowment and impact investment funds can ensure ethical, sustainable investment of cultural assets while generating long-term returns. Complementing these efforts, Percent-for-Art schemes allocate a fixed share of infrastructure or business development budgets to cultural initiatives, embedding culture into broader economic planning.

Public-Private-Philanthropic Partnerships represent a next-generation governance and financing model, designed to integrate institutional legitimacy, market innovation and civic trust.

Finally, collaboration with SMEs positions museums as anchors for creative entrepreneurship and sustainable local supply chains, reinforcing their role not only as custodians of heritage but also as active contributors to economic development. The Louvre Abu Dhabi and the upcoming Zayed National Museum both also function as economic multipliers supporting SMEs, artisans and creative practitioners, demonstrating how cultural infrastructure fuels innovation ecosystems. In 2025, the inaugural edition of the Made with Louvre Abu Dhabi initiative invited UAE-based businesses to draw inspiration from the museum's distinctive design and rich cultural tapestry to create a range of innovative, high-quality products that resonate with both local and international audiences.

Digital transformation takes museums beyond borders

Digitalization turns cultural engagement into scalable value creation, mirroring startup innovation cycles: build, measure, learn. It does this by reducing operating costs, enhancing inclusion and opening global revenue streams – helping to redefine financial and cultural resilience.

Digitalization turns cultural engagement into scalable value creation

The digital transformation of the culture sector is generating innovative models that improve access, transparency and sustainability. VR and AR exhibitions are extending the reach of cultural experiences beyond geographic boundaries, enabling new forms of audience engagement and revenue generation. For example, the Natural History Museum in London has also launched an initiative using Microsoft HoloLens 2 headsets to present interactive holographic animations of species such as cuttlefish, Darwin's frog, and the coconut crab, alongside natural wonders like the Scottish Highlands and Africa's Great Green Wall. The fusion of multimedia technology with physical exhibitions provides a richer interactive experience and more accessible information.

As digital activities grow, green data centres ensure that cultural digitization aligns with broader ecological innovation goals, minimizing the environmental footprint of technological expansion. Finally, data analytics and digital membership systems are transforming cultural participation into recurring income streams, allowing institutions to reinvest in creative programming while fostering long-term relationships with audiences.

Policy and ecosystem enablers

For this convergence to succeed, government policy must enable innovation, investment and integrity in cultural finance. To strengthen the sustainability and innovation capacity of the culture sector, a comprehensive policy framework should be developed to align finance, skills and international collaboration.

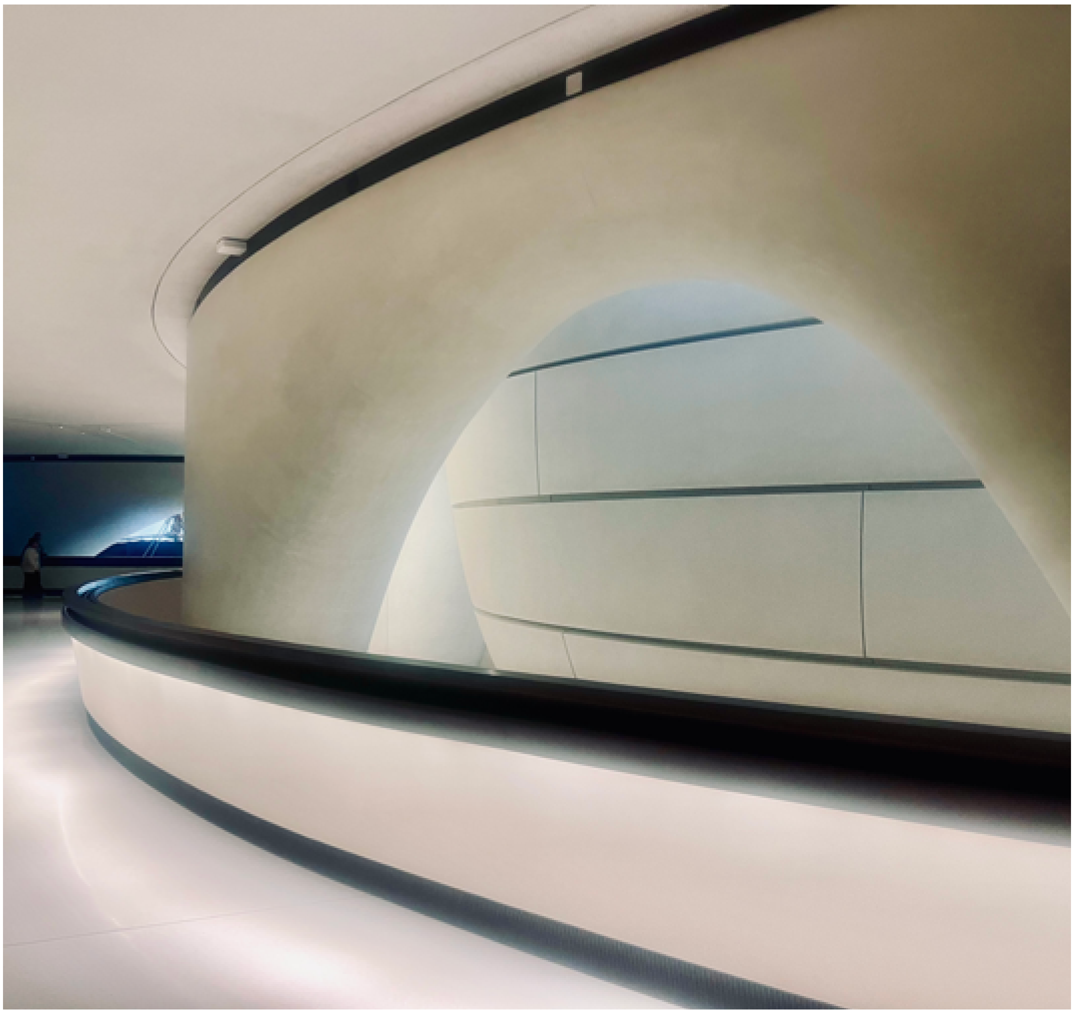
Guggenheim, Abu Dhabi

Government policy must enable innovation, investment and integrity in cultural finance.

Governments can introduce fiscal incentives to stimulate private and corporate investment in culture, unlocking new funding streams beyond traditional grants. In parallel, cultural impact funds should be established within cultural districts and rehabilitation programmes to catalyze creative entrepreneurship and heritage-led regeneration. The Japanese-Egyptian cooperation for the construction of the Grand Egyptian Museum, and the partnership between the United Arab Emirates, UNESCO and others in the reconstruction of Mosul's cultural landmarks, show how collaboration, knowledge, and finance-sharing can produce impactful growth.

Nomad, Abu Dhabi

Building cross-sector skills that merge curation, entrepreneurship and technology will be essential to manage this evolving ecosystem effectively. Finally, international cooperation between cultural institutions, investors and innovation agencies can help exchange knowledge of cultural financing, fostering global resilience and inclusivity in the cultural economy.



Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi

To consolidate this shift, the following should be future areas of focus:

- Cultural venture capital (CVC): Invest in creative technologies, AI applications and heritage innovation.
- Decentralized cultural finance (DeCuFi): Use blockchain to enable micro-investment and transparent funding for museums and cultural institutions.
- Circular cultural economies: Map and amplify the ripple effects of culture on tourism, well-being and environmental sustainability.
- AI ethics and cultural diversity: Promote inclusivity and representation in algorithmic curation and digital cultural platforms.
- Global cultural investment platform: Launch a platform connecting investors, policy-makers and creative institutions to foster cultural impact investment.
- Impact measurement framework: Adopt a model integrating financial, social and environmental metrics to assess cultural investment outcomes.
- Cultural finance literacy: Champion financial literacy in the culture sector through collaboration among policy-makers, academia and investors.

Nomad, Abu Dhabi

As highlighted in the World Economic Forum report Toward Common Metrics and Consistent Reporting of Sustainable Value Creation, long-term value creation is inseparable from ESG considerations. In the context of museums, revenue diversification allows these institutions not only to generate economic returns, but also to foster social inclusion, education and environmental responsibility. This financial resilience, in turn, empowers museums to maximize their social impact, transforming them into catalysts for sustainable value creation.

» Museums should explore new forms of financing in order to generate different forms of value in multiple sectors.
» Hybrid forms of financing allow museums to function effectively as impact enterprises, increasing their sustainability.
» A new framework – Cultural Capital Financing – could be conceived to help combine public funding with private investment, digital innovation and social entrepreneurship.

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Elena Raevskikh is Head of Research at the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, leading CultureSTATS-AD, the MENA region's first initiative for culture research and evidence-based policymaking. With 10+ years of international experience, she has contributed to over 20 major studies - from Abu Dhabi's first cultural baseline and biennial population survey to qualitative and economic analyses - bridging research, policy, and practice. Her work, featured in *Nature, Quality & Quantity*, and the World Economic Forum, supports collaborations with UNESCO, OECD, IFACCA, and others. She has taught in France and India and advised institutions across Europe, the UK, the US, and Japan. She holds a PhD from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris.

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Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi

DECORATIVE ARTS BETWEEN MEMORY AND MODERNITY

Interview by
Anne-Sophie V. Radermecker
with ***Géraldine David***

In this interview, Géraldine David, General Director of the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels, reflects on the renewed relevance of decorative arts in contemporary cultural life. The conversation explores how museums can frame these works not only as aesthetic objects, but also as entry points into broader questions of production, everyday life, cultural transmission, and social change. At a moment when issues of design, sustainability, materiality, and public engagement are gaining new importance, decorative arts offer a particularly rich lens through which to rethink the relationship between heritage and the present.

The Royal Museums of Art and History have undertaken a major renovation of the Art Nouveau and Art Deco rooms. Renovation projects often invite museum director and their curators to revisit questions of canon, hierarchy, and representation. Did this process lead you to reconsider certain narratives, periods, or types of objects traditionally overlooked in decorative arts collections?

This project is a long term project and the department of Decorative Arts has carried it on very steadily. The renovation was a real opportunity for the Decorative Arts to rethink not only the "masterpieces," but also how to display them, alongside less know artworks. Art Nouveau and Art Deco are often presented through a handful of iconic names and spectacular objects. We wanted to keep the pleasure of recognition, but widen the lens: to show how these styles were made, circulated and used. We also wanted to show very concretely how the styles evolved: for example, using chairs all over the period in order to illustrate the evolution of a very basic, yet fundamental, everyday object.

Concretely, this meant giving more space to objects and actors that are sometimes overlooked in decorative arts displays: works tied to women's creative labor and professional networks; applied arts that sit between "design" and "craft"; objects that speak to domestic life and social rituals, not only to prestige; and material cultures that reveal exchange and global connections.

Renovation forces you to ask: what did we inherit as a canon, and what do we want to transmit today? In that sense, the project was not just architectural : it was also intellectual.

Art Nouveau and Art Deco were originally deeply embedded in everyday life, industry, and commerce. How does the Art & History Museum approach this historical entanglement between aesthetics, production, and consumption in its renewed displays?

One of the strengths of Art Nouveau and Art Deco is precisely that they cannot be separated from production systems and consumer culture. In the renewed rooms, we deliberately present aesthetics alongside contexts: materials, techniques and the emergence of new publics. These were styles that shaped everyday environments such as interiors, advertising, department stores, transportation, leisure and they were also shaped by them. This is a work that the museum has been doing for quite some time: in presenting the store of the 'Wolfers frères' for example which really plunge the visitors within the experience of the buyer of the time.

We also try to make visible the chain of creation: designers, manufacturers, workshops, distributors, clients. Decorative arts become richer when they are not isolated as "beautiful objects" but understood as part of a broader ecosystem whether economic, technological, and social. This approach allows visitors to read the rooms not only as a sequence of styles, but as a story about modernity: how new technologies, new markets, and new lifestyles transformed forms, taste, and consumption. This approach is really visible in our 19th century galleries, that really aim at showing everyday life and everyday objects.

From your perspective, as the director of the Art & History Museum, how has the public reception of decorative arts changed in recent years, particularly among younger generations, and how can museums contribute to sustaining or renewing this interest?

Over the past years, I have seen a renewed curiosity for decorative arts, especially among younger audience. I think this is often driven by a desire for materiality, authenticity, and embodied experience in an increasingly digital world. Many people encounter Art Nouveau and Art Deco first through architecture, interior design, fashion, or social media aesthetics. In our more and more digital world, 'objects' can embody a sense of reality, that connects us to the tangible aspects of life.

Museums can play a crucial role by turning that attraction into understanding. We can connect the "wow effect" to deeper questions: craftsmanship and skill; the history of work and industry; the social ambitions and contradictions of modern design; and the complex relationship between beauty, status, and accessibility. Younger visitors often respond very strongly when we give them tools to decode objects. When we show that decorative arts are not "secondary" to fine arts, we show how central they were (and still are) to how societies imagine themselves.

Museums increasingly seek to address contemporary audiences who may encounter decorative arts first through fairs, private collections, or digital platforms. How do you see the respective and complementary roles of museums, collectors, dealers, and fairs in fostering a deeper appreciation of these fields ?

I see these worlds as complementary, provided we are clear about their different logics. Collectors and dealers often have agility, connoisseurship, and a sense of discovery; fairs can generate visibility and momentum; digital platforms broaden access and create communities. All of this contributes to the vitality of the field.

Museums, however, have a distinct responsibility: to provide a long-term, scientific based, public framework for knowledge, care, and interpretation. We can contextualize objects historically, compare across collections, and present them beyond market value: through provenance or context research, scholarship, conservation, and public education. Museums also guarantee access for diverse audiences, not only those already inside the circle.

Ideally, dialogue is two-way: museums can benefit from the expertise and networks of collectors and dealers, while the museum framework can deepen understanding, encourage ethical reflection, and enrich public appreciation. The key is transparency, shared standards, and a focus on the public interest.

Museums should help re-place decorative arts at the heart of cultural life—not as a "minor" category, but as a lens through which we can understand modern societies and imagine future creativity. Decorative arts sit at the crossroads of art, design, technology, ecology, and everyday life. That makes them incredibly relevant today.

Looking ahead, what role do you believe museum institutions should play in redefining the place of decorative arts in contemporary cultural life, both

as historical expressions and as sources of inspiration for present and future creativity?

Looking ahead, I believe museums have three roles. First: to safeguard and interpret heritage, including the complex histories of materials, labor, commerce, and cultural exchange. Second: to act as laboratories of attention, with spaces where visitors can slow down, look closely, and rediscover the stories embedded in objects. They are also places were you can have shared experience with your families or friends, in opposition with the isolation induced by our phones our computers. Third: to connect historical collections to contemporary creation, not in a simplistic way, but through meaningful dialogue with designers, artisans, architects, and artists. The museum often collaborates with Design Schools. Last year the ceramic collections of Ancient Greece, America's and Decorative art were used by students as inspiration material to create new pieces.

In a period where we urgently need to rethink production, consumption, and sustainability, decorative arts offer both cautionary tales and inspiration. Museums can help make that connection visible in showing how forms carry values, and how creativity can shape more conscious futures.

GÉRALDINE **DAVID**

Géraldine David has been General Director of the Royal Museums of Art and History (RMAH) in Brussels since January 2024. She holds a PhD in Economic History, specializing in the history of the art market, and is trained in both management and art history. Her professional path has been shaped by a constant dialogue between research, public service, and the practical realities of cultural institutions.

Géraldine David seeks to strengthen the position of the RMAH on Belgium's cultural map, while affirming a broader ambition: to develop the institution as a "museum of the history of humankind" in Belgium, where cultures are approached without hierarchy and where material heritage becomes a tool for understanding both past societies and present challenges.

WHEN ALGORITHMS BECOME CURATORS: CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AS AI GOVERNORS

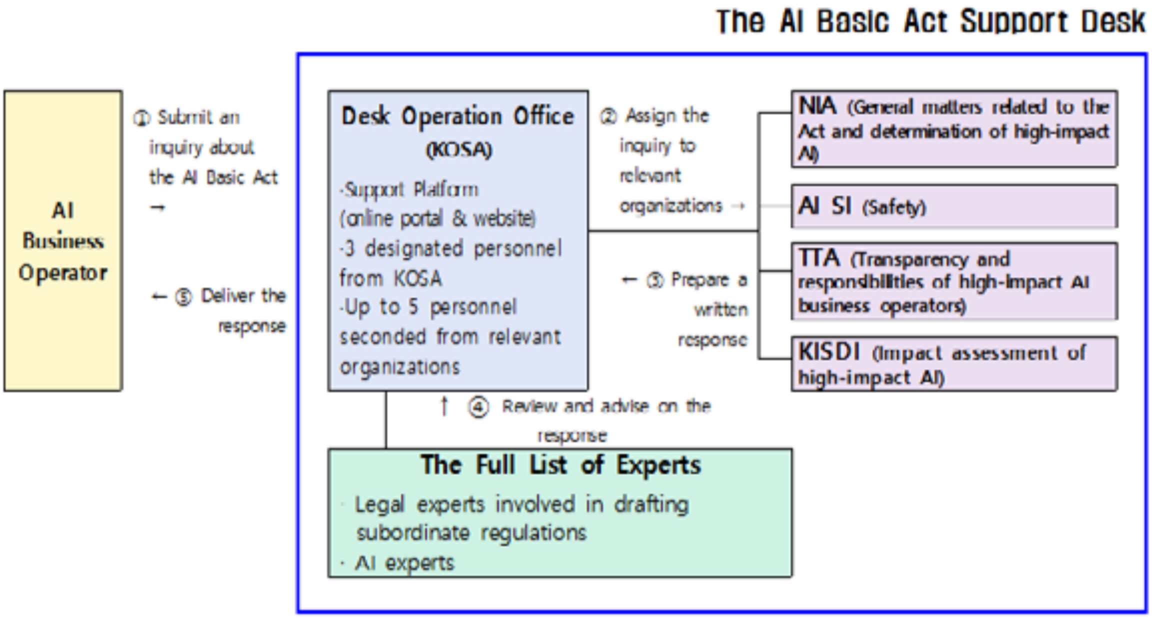
Mika (Jaeyun) Noh
Cultural policy strategist

The Grammar of Culture Has Changed

In January 2026, Korea's AI Basic Act came into force, establishing one of Asia's most comprehensive regulatory frameworks: mandatory risk classifications, national safety institutes, and ₩23.7 trillion (approximately $17 b illion USD) pledged in public-private investment to train 200,000 AI specialists by 2030. On paper, it is a story of impressive ambition. In practice, it exposes a fault line that should concern every cultural leader reading these pages.

Culture was systematically sidelined as mere 'downstream content'. National AI strategy documents prioritised semiconductors, autonomous vehicles, and medical diagnostics. Creative sectors—museums, archives, heritage institutions, the arts—received almost no dedicated governance consideration. The result was not merely administrative oversight; it produced practical failures that are now rippling through some of Korea's most prominent cultural institutions.

This is not exclusively a Korean problem. It is a global structural tendency, and it demands a new kind of leadership from those of us who work in culture.



The AI Basic Act Comes into Force to Lay the Foundation for Korea to Become an AI G3 @ Ministry of Science and ICT.

For much of the past decade, the cultural sector has engaged with artificial intelligence largely as an aesthetic conversation: image generators, AI-composed music, interactive installations that intrigue visitors and generate press coverage. These experiments have genuine value. But they risk obscuring a more fundamental shift. AI is no longer only a creative tool; it has become the underlying grammar of how culture is produced, distributed, and encountered.

Consider the scale of what is already in motion. Platforms curating over a million digital artworks globally are actively mediating what audiences see, value, and imagine. The National Museum of Korea's AI docents analyse gaze tracking, dwell time, and gait patterns to generate hyper-personalised routes. When Refik Anadol's Machine Hallucinations was exhibited at Korea's Futra Seoul in 2024, AI trained on more than 180 million images from public collections generated the works—raising immediate questions about whose cultural data was being used, for whose commercial benefit, and under what governance framework.

"Museums and cultural institutions are no longer only stewards of objects and narratives; they are emerging as stewards of hybrid human–machine systems that shape imagination, taste, and public knowledge."

This changes our mandate. Museums and cultural institutions are no longer only stewards of objects and narratives; they are emerging as stewards of hybrid human–machine systems that shape imagination, taste, and public knowledge. That is a governance question as much as a curatorial one: Who sets the rules for cultural algorithms? Who protects public values when platforms increasingly dictate aesthetic trends and cultural hierarchies?

Three Risks That Cannot Wait

The governance challenge crystallises around three interconnected risks, each of which is already producing concrete harms in the field.

Authorship

The question of who—or what—authors a cultural work is no longer theoretical. The US Copyright Office's 2025 rulings explicitly deny protection to pure AI outputs, requiring meaningful human intervention to qualify. Korea's 2023 Generative AI Copyright Guidelines from the Korean Intellectual Property Office draw a similar line, distinguishing 'AI generation' from 'human-authored edits'. Shanghai courts have gone further, rewarding only iterative human–AI processes in which creative direction is formally documented. For exhibition curators, acquisitions staff, and estates, these developments have immediate consequences: pure AI artworks occupy a legal grey zone that makes insurance, resale, and attribution a minefield.

Accountability

The EU AI Act, fully phased in by 2026, classifies many cultural AI applications—biometric visitor analytics, emotion recognition in immersive exhibits, deepfake detection tools—as 'high risk'. This means rigorous risk assessments, data governance audits, and mandatory transparency reporting. Institutions deploying these systems bear direct liability for the biases and harms they produce. The analogy that stays with me is Allegheny County's child welfare algorithm in the United States, which quietly rationed support through opaque scoring until public scrutiny exposed its flaws. The lesson is not that AI is uniquely malevolent; it is that opacity is not neutral. It is a political choice—and institutions that choose opacity will eventually face a reckoning.

1

MEANING

Human Domain

Before any AI tool is engaged, communities, curators, and cultural workers define the Why — values, symbolic boundaries, and cultural intent. This is not a prompt. It is a cultural brief.

↳ Joseon ceramics digitization: historians + descendant communities defined 'accuracy' before scanning began.

2

FORM

AI Domain

Only after meaning is locked does the machine execute. AI generates variations within strict human-defined parameters — exploring a bounded solution space, never 'creating' freely.

↳ AI is not the author. AI is the instrument playing a score written by humans.

3

CONTEXT

Governance Domain

The institution validates outputs against its public mission. Are sources auditable? Was intent preserved? Ethical Impact Assessment is not bureaucracy — it is accountability infrastructure.

↳ Every output is traceable to a human decision. No black box. No outsourced authorship.

Diagram of the three-layer co-creation model — Meaning, Form, and Context — as proposed by Mika Noh.

Public Trust

Edelman's 2026 Trust Barometer ranks museums and cultural institutions among the most trusted organisations globally—higher than media outlets or government. This is an extraordinary asset, and it is fragile. In Korea, the country's music copyright association banned pure AI-generated songs from the charts in 2025 to safeguard authenticity amid deepfake scandals. The underlying dynamic—virality weaponising synthetic content against cultural legitimacy—is not unique to music. If cultural institutions distribute unverified AI content without appropriate safeguards and disclosure, they risk forfeiting the public trust that makes them indispensable.

The Korea Paradox: A Cautionary Tale and a Useful Laboratory

Korea makes the stakes concrete. With 97 per cent high-speed internet penetration, a $14.2 billion cultural export economy driven by the Korean Wave, and now a comprehensive AI Basic Act, Korea should be the world's leading example of technology and culture in productive alignment. Instead, it has become a cautionary tale about what happens when technical excellence races ahead of cultural governance.

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art launched AI-powered visitor analytics in 2025, aiming to personalise routes through behavioural data. Implementation stalled almost immediately amid unresolved questions about data sovereignty, bias auditing, and public disclosure—none of which had been addressed by the broader national AI strategy. Separately, a smart museum initiative digitised more than 100 public institutions, but proceeded without cultural oversight, producing fragmented results rather than a coherent infrastructure.

The National Museum of Korea's AI-animated version of the Taepyeongseongsido—a historic Joseon Dynasty panoramic map—generated significant public controversy after the institution trained generative models on the work without explicit licensing or community consultation. UNESCO's 2025 warnings about AI fragmenting cultural memory, when digital replicas gain more visibility than originals, found a live case study in Seoul.

> *"You cannot engineer cultural intelligence with semiconductors alone. Technical leadership hits a hard ceiling without explicit cultural governance."*

The lesson is straightforward, even if the implications are demanding: you cannot engineer cultural intelligence with semiconductors alone. Technical leadership hits a hard ceiling without explicit cultural governance. For cultural institutions beyond Korea, the paradox is a preview of pressures already arriving. AI visitor tools, recommendation engines, and generative exhibition platforms are being deployed before governance frameworks exist to shape them. The question is not whether to act, but whether to act proactively or reactively.

$7B

Korea's 2024 AI infrastructure investment

Hardware. Semiconductors. Data centers.

<2%

of that budget reached the cultural sector

Museums. Archives. Heritage. Living culture.

We are building the hardware of the future without the cultural software to guide it.

This is not a technology gap. It is a governance vacuum.

7B$ AI chips & data centers. Culture? 2% (140M$). Not adjacent. Central—or lose it. By Mika Noh

From 'Human-in-the-Loop' to Authored Governance

The phrase 'human-in-the-loop' has become a kind of comfort blanket in cultural AI discussions. It conjures the reassuring image of a professional at the end of the pipeline, casting an expert eye over outputs before they are released. The problem is that in most deployments, that is precisely what it is: a human clicking 'approve' on something they did not shape. That is oversight as administration, not authorship.

Responsible AI frameworks are increasingly clear about where the real leverage lies.

Arts Council England's 2026 AI Toolkit and UKRI(UK Research and Innovation)'s cultural AI guidelines both argue that the decisive moment is not approval at the end of the pipeline, but constraint design at the beginning: which datasets are permissible, which aesthetic defaults should be explicitly rejected, what values define the output space. This moves institutions from last-minute vetoes to systems-level creative direction.

Art Center Nabi's Why Future Still Needs Us exhibition in Seoul, which ran from 2016 to 2017, remains instructive. Rather than deploying AI as an efficiency tool with human oversight at the end, Nabi's curators defined conceptual constraints upfront: make algorithmic bias experiential, not merely explained. Visitors encountered facial recognition failures through sound distortion and visual glitches, developing intuitive understanding of machine limitations in their bodies rather than abstractly. The institution positioned itself as an AI interpreter with a defined curatorial philosophy—not a passive platform.

A Three-Layer Model for Governed Co-Creation

Drawing on fieldwork across Korea, Europe, and East Asia, I have developed a practical co-creation model that attempts to locate institutional authority at the right point in the process. It operates across three layers.

Meaning is the domain of intent. Here, before a single prompt is written or a dataset is selected, curators and communities articulate the ethical frame, the thematic questions, and the explicit exclusions that will constrain what follows. This is not a brief in the conventional sense; it is a governance document. Arts Council England's public commitment that AI will not determine grant outcomes is one example of an institution declaring its meaning-level constraints to the public.

Form is the domain of generation. Within the constraints established at the Meaning layer, AI produces aesthetic variations. A Korean media façade project might use generative models to remix archival images of Seoul—but only within a dataset and parameter space that the curatorial team has pre-approved, and with explicit exclusions to prevent, for example, racialized stereotyping or the kind of techno-orientalist imagery that general-purpose models tend to default to. The AI is an instrument, not the author.

Context is the domain of governance. The institution evaluates outputs against its public mission, legal obligations, and trust responsibilities. This layer includes transparency practices—labelling AI-assisted works clearly—data governance policies for how visitor and training data are handled, and accountability structures. UKRI and UNESCO both emphasise that this contextual layer, comprising policies, documentation, and public explanation, is what turns experiments into responsible institutional practice. Without it, ambitious AI installations risk alienating the very publics they are meant to serve.

To make this concrete: imagine a museum commissioning an AI-assisted installation on 'The Future of the City'. A general-purpose prompt will almost certainly produce cyberpunk—neon skylines, flying cars, a narrow techno-orientalist imaginary that is precisely the homogenisation UNESCO warns against. An intent-driven approach at the Meaning layer might instead specify that 'future' should foreground care, slowness, and sustainability: public health, elder care, ecological repair, neighbourhood-scale infrastructure. At the Form layer, the AI generates visual and narrative variations drawn from locally grounded datasets—community archives, environmental measurements, oral histories. At the Context layer, the institution documents its constraints, discloses AI's role to the public, and invites critique. The exhibition is no longer 'AI did something interesting'; it becomes a traceable, accountable collaboration. We are not just using AI; we are curating its logic.

Five Questions for Every Boardroom

Governance cannot remain a theoretical commitment. It needs to become a set of operational habits. I have found that the following five questions, simple enough to fit on a single page, are robust enough to anchor a board-level strategy session and reveal where an institution's governance gaps actually lie.

Where does AI already influence us?

Most institutions are further along than they realise. AI is likely present in collection search interfaces, ticketing systems, donor analytics, website recommendation engines, and perhaps building management. Governance cannot begin until there is a clear map. The AI in Media Institute's 2026 work programme shows how sector-wide workflow mapping is essential before any framework can be credible.

Who defines meaning?

Are curators, educators, and communities shaping the thematic and ethical constraints for AI systems, or are those decisions being made by vendors and IT teams? UNESCO and CultTech panels emphasise that creative workers must be central to AI decisions, not consulted after the architecture is built.

How is intent documented?

Moving from 'we trust the system' to documented decision logs—which dataset was used, what constraints were chosen, who approved them, and how the public is informed—is the practical core of traceable governance. Arts Council England's toolkit provides a model that other institutions are already adapting.

What values guide AI metrics?

If an institution's mission emphasises diversity, accessibility, or decolonial practice, its personalisation and recommendation algorithms must be evaluated against those goals—not only against engagement rates or revenue. UNESCO's work on cultural data sovereignty insists that AI settings must actively protect vulnerable communities and underrepresented cultures.

Who is accountable?

Named responsibility—at board, executive, and operational levels—for AI decisions signals that accountability is a job description, not a vague aspiration. The emergence of roles like 'Responsible AI Tech Champion' at Arts Council England reflects a growing recognition that governance requires specific human owners.

The Architecture We Are Already Building

When I speak about AI governance with cultural professionals—in Seoul, in London, in international forum settings—there is a consistent pattern. Leaders who engage with AI governance only at the level of individual projects and installations feel perpetually reactive, chasing developments rather than shaping them. Those who are gaining traction have begun to understand that governance operates across four interconnected layers simultaneously.

Law establishes the boundaries of rights and ownership—and it is moving fast. Policy shapes funding priorities, and increasingly, funding bodies in the UK and elsewhere are embedding governance criteria into grant conditions. Platforms determine what is visible and discoverable; cultural sovereignty partly means negotiating the terms on which institutions participate in platforms they do not control. And AI systems themselves constitute the underlying grammar, the logic of selection that decides which patterns count as relevant, interesting, or significant. Cultural institutions cannot limit their role to choosing content; they have to shape the logic that filters, ranks, and recombines it.

The cultural sector has historically been adept at navigating the first two of these layers—law and policy—and has long experience operating within platform logics beyond its direct control. What is new is the fourth layer: AI systems as curatorial infrastructure. This is where the most consequential decisions are being made right now, largely without cultural sector input.

The stakes are particularly acute for institutions with significant collections of non-Western material. AI models trained predominantly on Western datasets consistently reproduce Western aesthetic defaults—even when explicitly prompted otherwise. Korean digital artists report that asking AI systems to imagine 'hanok futures' typically yields glass skyscrapers rather than the wood-grain subtlety of traditional Korean architecture. At a global scale, this is what Safiya Noble has called algorithmic oppression: not malice, but statistics. When probability becomes history—when the images that AI generates most easily become the images that audiences most often encounter—cultural averaging becomes a form of cultural erasure.

Governance as Cultural Design

Global governance discussions—from UNESCO roundtables on AI and intangible heritage to international AI governance summits—are converging on a single insight: governance is not a brake on creativity; it is a design practice. The way institutions set defaults, permissions, and accountability pathways effectively becomes their institutional culture.

Meaning cannot be automated. Generative models can produce plausible images and texts. They cannot decide what a society should remember, who should be centred, or which harms are unacceptable. That remains our work. Cultural institutions that take AI governance seriously—treating it as architecture rather than afterthought—build infrastructure for the human spirit that can survive and adapt in an increasingly automated, data-saturated world.

There is a useful asymmetry to keep in mind: AI will be everywhere. Trust will not. The cultural institutions that will matter most in the decade ahead are those that protect trust through traceable, value-aligned, publicly accountable AI practice—and that have the courage to claim their governance role before commercial platforms become the default cultural policymakers by default.

> *"AI will be everywhere. Trust will not. The institutions that will matter are those that protect trust through traceable, value-aligned, publicly accountable AI practice."*

MIKA (JAEYUN) **NOH**

Mika (Jaeyun) Noh is a cultural policy strategist and curator specializing in AI governance for cultural institutions. Working at the intersection of artificial intelligence, contemporary art, and public regulation, she develops human-centered frameworks that address how algorithmic systems reshape authorship, labor, and institutional authority.

She has advised the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and the Seoul Metropolitan Council on cultural and intelligent informatization policy, and co-founded and chairs the AI Art Forum, convening cross-sector dialogue on algorithmic accountability and cultural rights.

Through her curatorial work at Space Ba and her international research across Asia and Europe, she translates complex technological change into operational governance models. Her work argues that cultural institutions must evolve from content providers into active AI governors—ensuring that democratic values remain embedded in the systems that increasingly curate public culture.

BRAFA 2026 - Heutink Ikonen © Emmanuel Crooÿ

ProvEnhance – Belgian Federal Project with the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (BELSPO BRAIN-be 2.0)

PROVENANCE RESEARCH IN BELGIAN MUSEUMS

What a national survey reveals about collections, documentation and capacity

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Introduction

Provenance research – known as the reconstruction of an object's ownership history – has become a central concern for museums in Europe in an attempt to reach a more ethical approach to art market and embody society responsibility. Provenance research matters for scholarly accuracy, ethical collecting, transparency and the handling of claims linked to war-time spoliation, colonial collecting or other problematic transfers. Yet it is also labor-intensive. It depends on records, archives, databases, staff time, institutional priorities and, often, legal guidance. A survey conducted within the Belgian federal project ProvEnhance (BELSPO BRAIN-be 2.0) offers a rare overview of how Belgian fine art museums currently position themselves on these issues. The survey is important because it moves the discussion beyond a few large institutions to encompass the museum scene as a whole. The result is not a ranking of museums, but a map of capacities, bottlenecks and opportunities.

The survey had two linked goals. The first was descriptive: to document current practices in collection registration, access to documentary sources, awareness of provenance problems, and the actual organization of provenance research. The second was strategic: to identify the most urgent needs of museums and to clarify where collaboration, training or policy support could make the greatest difference. The aim was therefore not merely to count practices but to inform action. By locating strengths and weaknesses across institutions, the survey helps define where a Belgian methodology for provenance research might begin and which obstacles must be addressed before it can scale.

Data and methodology

The questionnaire, developed by the research team, was distributed in winter 2024-2025 to 133 museums identified as holding substantial fine-art and/or decorative-art collections. It was circulated directly through a bilingual mailing and more broadly through professional newsletters. The form was written in English, while respondents could answer in French or Dutch. In total, 43 responses were received, representing 42 museums; some responses covered more than one museum (Table 1). The survey included 40 questions divided into eight sections: museum profile, collection description, collection registration, available archives and documentation, provenance issues, provenance-research practices, needs and expectations, and closing information. This structure matters methodologically because provenance research cannot be understood in isolation. The condition of records, the age and typology of collections, the availability of archives and the size of staff all shape what research is realistically possible. The respondent pool was regionally balanced, with however a lower response rate for Wallonia. At this stage, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify general trends for further investigation in a later phase of the project. Current findings are thus exploratory.

The responding institutions include many major fine-arts museums, but also monographic museums, municipal museums, university museums and museums dedicated to a specific artistic practice. Most care for paintings, sculpture, works on paper and decorative arts, often spanning the seventeenth to twentieth centuries. Provenance challenges differ by museum profile. Municipal museums may depend on city archives that are dispersed or hard to access. Museums specializing in prints, medals or glass may face questions of multiples and authenticity. House museums and collections built around private donors may suffer from fragile archival survival. Local government is by far the main funding source for the museums surveyed, cited by 19 institutions. Regional or community subsidies come a distant second at 11, while private funding, federal support, and other sources each play a much smaller role. More importantly, the survey captured a museum field in which small teams dominate. Most responses came from institutions with limited scientific staffing, often fewer than five full-time equivalents. Only five institutions reported more than ten. Provenance research therefore enters an environment where curators and collection staff already carry multiple responsibilities. In this context, even basic documentation work can accumulate into a backlog. That point is crucial when interpreting the results: a museum may be aware of provenance issues without having the personnel needed to address them systematically.

Table 1. List of respondents

Location (Region/Province)	***City***	***Which museum are you answering the survey for?***	***#***
Brussels-Capital Region			**13**
	Brussels	BELvue Museum	
		Charlier Museum	
		House of European History	
		Maison Autrique	
		Van Buuren Museum & Gardens	
		Woluwe Museum and Albert Marinus Centre	
		Ixelles Museum	
		Jewish Museum of Belgium	
		Federal Parliament / Palace of the Nation	
		Royal Museum for Central Africa	
		Free University of Brussels - Modern and Contemporary Art Collection	
		War Heritage Institute	
		Royal Museums of Art and History	
Flemish Region			**20**
East Flanders	Deinze	mudel - Museum of Deinze and the Leie Region	
	Ghent	STAM - Ghent City Museum	
		MSK	
	Machelen-Zulte	Roger Raveel Museum	
	Oudenaarde	MOU Museum Oudenaarde	
	Sint-Martens-Latem	Gevaert-Minne Municipal Museum* Gust De Smet Municipal Museum*	

Location (Region/Province)	City	Which museum are you answering the survey for?	#
Antwerp	Hoogstraten	Hoogstraten Municipal Museum	
	Mechelen	Museum Hof van Busleyden	
	Schilde	Albert Van Dyck Museum	
	Antwerp	Royal Museum of Fine Arts (KMSKA)	
		MAS I Museum aan de Stroom	
		MoMu - Antwerp Fashion Museum	
		Museum De Reede	
		Plantin-Moretus Museum	
		Snijders&Rockoxhuis Museum	
Flemish Brabant	Diest	De Hofstadt Diest City Museum	
	Leuven	M Leuven	
West Flanders	Oostende	The James Ensor House	
		Mu.ZEE	
	Poperinge	Lucioen de Gheus Museum	
Walloon Region			**10**
Hainaut	Charleroi	Glass Museum	
		Pro Moneta. The Museum of Religious Medals	
	La Louvière	Centre for Engraving and Printed Images	
	Lessines	Notre-Dame à la Rose Hospital	
	Mons	City of Mons Museum Complex*	
	Tournai	Tournai Museum of Fine Arts	
Walloon Brabant	Louvain-la-Neuve	Museum L	
Liège	Liège	Liège Museum of Fine Arts (La Boverie)	
Luxembourg	Arlon	Gaspar Museum	
Namur	Namur	TreM.a - Museum of Ancient Art	

Results

Registration is relatively advanced, but provenance fields remain incomplete

One encouraging result is that collection registration itself is fairly widespread. Most museums have an internal database, and 31 reported that 75 to 100 percent of their collections are registered (Figures 1-3). Registration on paper is less systematic, and public online access remains much weaker than internal registration. Roughly half of the respondents make at least half of their collections available online. However, the key question is not only whether an object is in a database, but what kind of information is actually recorded there. Acquisition data are mostly present, but often only partially. Provenance data - understood as the chain of ownership - are even less complete. More than half of respondents register such information only partially, and exhaustive provenance data remain exceptional. This gap is fundamental. Without acquisition details and ownership history at object level, museums cannot easily identify risk cases, prioritize research targets or communicate transparently with researchers and the public. The survey therefore suggests that Belgium is not dealing with a simple absence of databases; it is dealing with databases whose provenance fields still require substantial enrichment.

Figure 1. History of the Collection – Is the History of the Collection Documented?

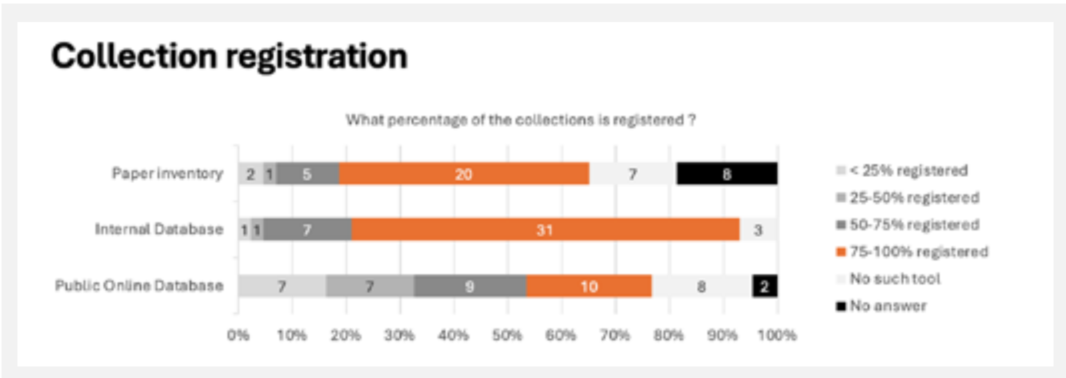


Figure 2. Collection Registration - What Percentage of the Collections is Registered?

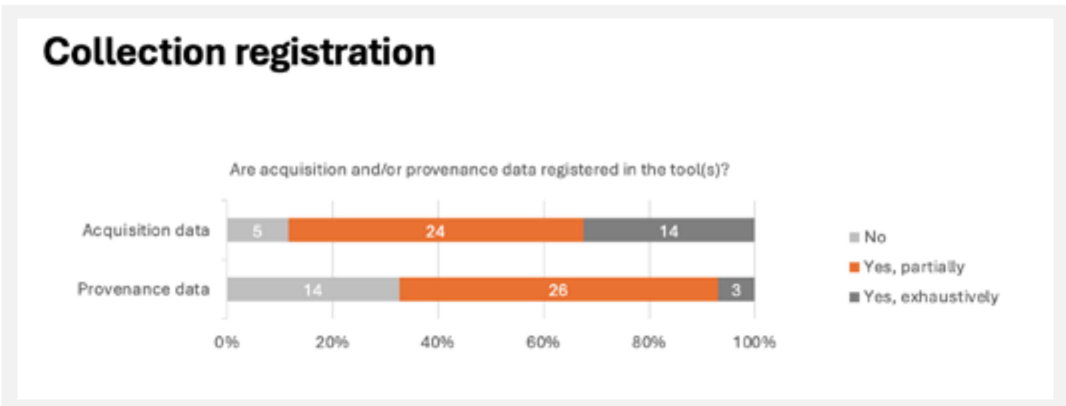


Figure 3. Collection Registration – Are Acquisition and/or Provenance Data Registered in the Tool(s)?

The sources often exist, but access and research tools lag behind

A striking finding concerns documentation and archives. Almost all respondents reported institutional archives and photographic holdings, and many also hold documentary files, private archives or auction catalogues (Figure 4). In other words, museums are not empty of sources. On paper, the evidentiary base for provenance work is often richer than one might expect. Yet accessibility is a major bottleneck. In most cases, these resources are available only to museum staff. A smaller group of institutions also allows access to external researchers by appointment, while fully public access remains rare. The survey comments describe a familiar paradox: archives are present, but underused because there is not enough time to organize them, verify them, digitize them or create finding aids. Museums may therefore possess the raw material for provenance research without having the means to turn it into a workable research infrastructure.

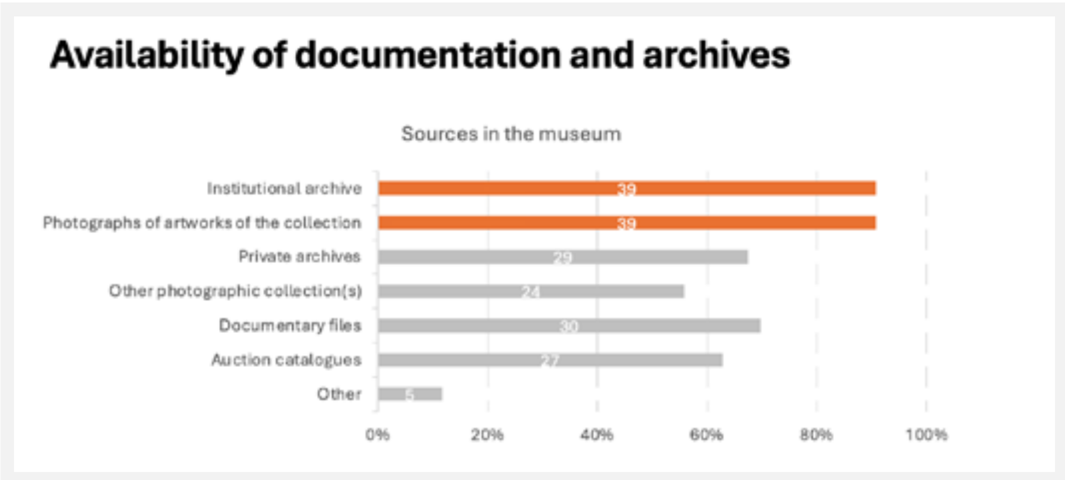


Figure 4. Availability of Documentation and Archives – Sources in the Museum

Awareness of provenance issues is real

Respondents do not appear unaware of the stakes. More than half assessed their institution as having good or expert knowledge of provenance issues, and 25 out of the 43 respondents said they are aware of problematic or incomplete provenances in their collections. This is a significant proportion and shows that provenance concerns are not marginal. When asked about the most problematic issues, the most frequently cited category was Second World War spoliation or unethical acquisition. Colonial history and human remains were also mentioned, though less often in our data set. This may reflect the type of museum surveyed. Respondents also pointed to structural problems: undocumented donations, inherited collections with weak ownership histories, deposits or externally owned works, missing inventory information, and authenticity questions in collections of multiples. These answers show that provenance problems are not limited to spectacular restitution cases. They also emerge from the everyday historical formation of museum collections and from older registration practices that did not systematically capture ownership history. Public pressure, by contrast, seems uneven. Nearly half of the museums had never received an external request about provenance, while a smaller group receives enquiries yearly or seasonally. Still, six museums reported that they had already faced one or more restitution claims or had restituted an artwork. Even if claim activity remains limited, the issue is not abstract.

The main bottleneck is not awareness, but research capacity

The sharpest result of the survey is the gap between awareness and action. Although many museums know that provenance can be problematic, more than half of respondents do not carry out provenance research. Only 19 institutions said that they do. Even among those, the work is usually targeted rather than systematic: project-based, linked to a specific exhibition, or triggered by a request. The survey highlights some of these reasons. Among museums that do not conduct provenance research, the leading explanation is lack of human resources (Figure 5). Some respondents also considered provenance research less relevant to their collections, particularly in certain monographic or specialized contexts, but staffing remains the dominant obstacle. Missing competencies were almost never singled out as the main reason. This is an important nuance. The field does need methodological support; the first problem is often not ignorance; it is lack of time, dedicated personnel and institutional room to do the work. This interpretation is reinforced by the organization data. Only two museums reported the equivalent of one to three full-time staff dedicated to provenance research. Elsewhere, the work is carried out mainly by curators, sometimes with help from documentalists, historians or project staff. Such a model can produce strong case studies, but it rarely supports long-term, collection-wide research.

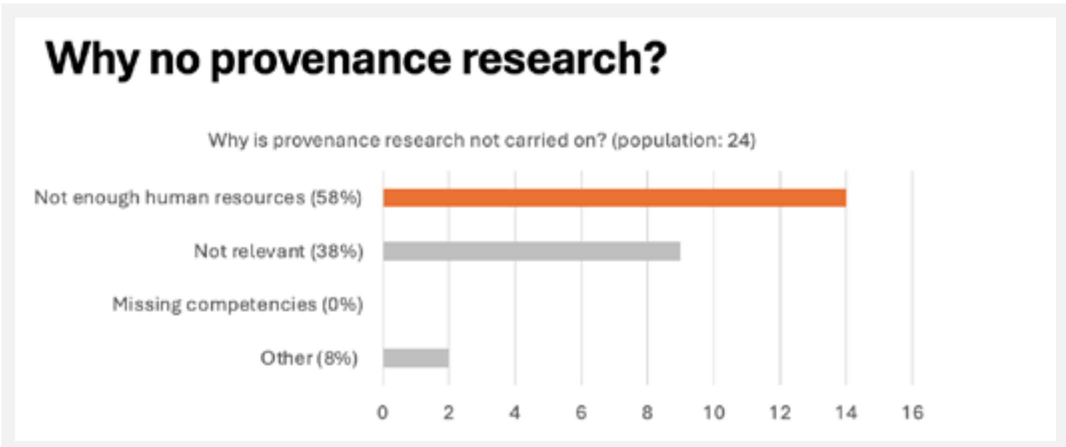


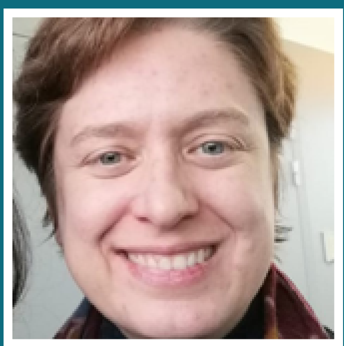
Figure 5. Why No Provenance Research?

Museums are asking for a support ecosystem, not just individual training

The final survey section points toward solutions. Respondents most often asked for human and financial resources, along with stronger institutional and political commitment. They also requested methodological guidance: training, expert networks, advice on how to prioritize objects, and access to specialist knowledge. A recurrent idea was the creation of a national reference point or expert center that could support provenance research and address ethical or legal questions. Needs related to sources were also concrete: digitized archives, access to databases and sales catalogues, and help with fragmented archival holdings. Finally, respondents stressed the importance of clear acquisition and restitution policies and a stronger legal framework at Belgian and regional level. Taken together, these answers suggest that museums do not simply want isolated workshops. They are asking for an ecosystem: staff capacity, shared methods, access to sources, legal clarity and structures for exchange. This is precisely where a project like ProvEnhance can have leverage.

Why this survey matters

This survey matters because it makes visible a national provenance landscape that is both more prepared and more fragile than public debate often assumes. Belgian museums are not starting from zero. Many have databases, archives and an awareness that incomplete or problematic ownership histories exist in their collections. But awareness alone does not produce systematic research. The survey reveals a field in which documentation is uneven, access tools are underdeveloped and staff capacity is the decisive constraint. This insight has practical consequences. For provenance research to move forward in Belgium, the question is not only for which objects is provenance problematic; it is also which institutions have the infrastructure to investigate them, document them and communicate findings responsibly. By showing where bottlenecks lie, the survey helps shift the conversation from moral expectation alone to research conditions: inventories, archives, expertise, time and policy. It also matters symbolically. Provenance research is sometimes perceived as a specialized concern for large museums or for exceptional restitution cases. The survey demonstrates the opposite. It is a sector-wide issue touching collection management, digitization, transparency, acquisition policy and public trust. Seen in this light, the survey is not simply a diagnostic exercise. It is a roadmap for building a more coordinated, scientifically robust and publicly accountable culture of provenance research in Belgian museums.



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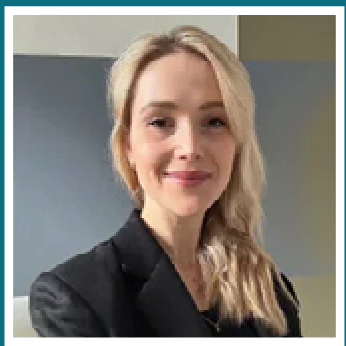

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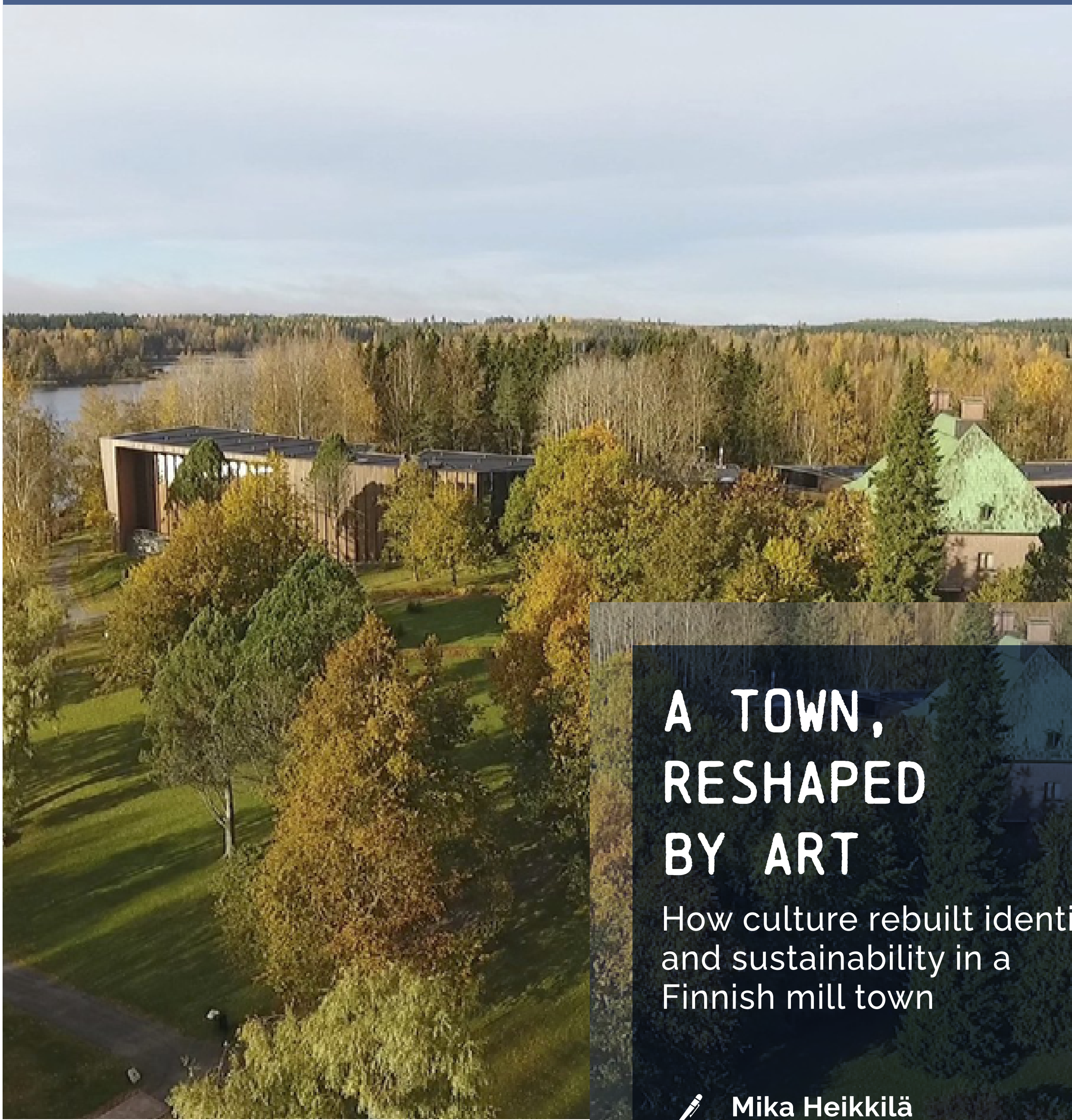


Serlachius Museum from air. Photo: Serlachius, Olli Huttunen

A TOWN, RESHAPED BY ART

How culture rebuilt identity and sustainability in a Finnish mill town

Mika Heikkilä
Visual artist and cultural strategist

Based on a conversation with **Pauli Sivonen**

In Mänttä, Finland, culture became the blueprint for renewal after industry collapsed. Director Pauli Sivonen shows how the Serlachius Museums turned a paper-mill town into a model of climate responsibility, inclusion and identity building. The story traces how art reshaped both infrastructure and belonging.

Mänttä is a mill town in central Finland that faced collapse when the paper industry shrank in the 1990s. A community once rich in taxable income from factories and workers suddenly lost its anchor. Residents had to decide whether they were a town in decline or a cultural place with a new identity. Across Europe, many small industrial towns have faced the same question as traditional industries contracted and cultural investment emerged as a new form of regional resilience. Pauli Sivonen, director of the Serlachius Museums, describes how choosing culture reshaped the town's future.

When Sivonen arrived from Helsinki in 2000, he expected only a short stay. Over time he saw how a museum could act as infrastructure rather than an ivory tower. Today the Serlachius Museums employ more than 50 people, work closely with the municipality and host exhibitions that reach far beyond the town's size. Mänttä, he says, shows how culture can become the defining resource of a small place.

Pauli Sivonen, Director of Serlachius Museums

Museums cannot stay as ivory towers. They must become part of the infrastructure that keeps a town alive

Cultural programming widened the town's reach. A Banksy exhibition brought 150 000 visitors to a town of fewer than 10 000 inhabitants. Hotels now rely on summer cultural tourism anchored by the museums. Population continues to fall and small shops still close as owners retire, yet cultural vitality has created enough demand to keep three hotels open. The role of culture, Sivonen suggests, is not to save everything but to give a town a living identity and draw new networks into its orbit.

The museum's exhibitions weave local history with global art. Mänttä's industrial story is always present, but not only from the viewpoint of company owners.

Working-class perspectives are recorded and shown, making the industrial past a shared heritage. At the same time, international artists engage with Mänttä's archives and often leave with new works that link global debates with local stories.

Serlachius mansion and Moose sculture. Photo: Serlachius, Susanna Yläjärvi

Inclusion has been deliberate. Schoolchildren, minorities and newcomers take part in projects that fit their contexts. A recent exhibition by a Ukrainian collective unexpectedly connected with 200 Ukrainian refugees living in Mänttä. Only after the opening did the museum realise the resonance it would have. The result was a powerful event where refugees shared their own stories in dialogue with the art.

The transformation was not symbolic alone. Serlachius became a laboratory for climate responsibility at a time when museums were still debating their role in the crisis. Sivonen calculated that the museum complex consumed as much electricity as 250 homes. Environmental action, he concluded, was not an optional slogan but a core duty. Serlachius invested millions in geothermal heating, solar power and battery systems, guided by the ISO 14001 certification that forces institutions to audit their full environmental footprint.

The trade-off was real. Money that could have bought new art went into sustainable infrastructure. Yet the investment brought its own return. Lower energy costs now repay the outlay, and Sivonen notes that reputation and credibility also grow when institutions act rather than only advocate.

Visitor transport posed another challenge. Mänttä sits three hours from Helsinki and more than an hour from the nearest cities. Most Finns travel by car, which undercuts climate goals. Serlachius created its own bus service from Tampere and offers shared-taxi booking through its website. The problem is not solved, Sivonen admits, but treating visitor travel as part of the museum's footprint changes how responsibility is measured.

Looking ahead, Sivonen says that core identity matters most. Museums can test digital formats or new partnerships, but their basis must remain art, collections and history. In his view, those roots give credibility to every experiment.

The Mänttä story shows both the promise and the limits of culture as strategy. Museums cannot replace lost industries or stop migration on their own. Yet they can rebuild belonging and responsibility. For Sivonen, art is most powerful when it helps a community see itself anew. The renewal of Mänttä suggests that sustainability, like culture, begins at home and that local initiatives can inform wider European thinking on culture-led transition.

What is non-negotiable is staying true to art, collections and history. That is where our identity begins.

Photo: Tommi Miettunen

MIKA
HEIKKILÄ

Mika Heikkilä is a visual artist and cultural strategist exploring how creativity strengthens communities and drives sustainable transformation through international initiatives such as ArtMingle, connecting art, policy, and social innovation.

General view of one room of the antique store in Brussels, with visitors.

OLD THINGS, NEW LIVES: HOW TODAY'S YOUTH APPROPRIATE ORDINARY ANTIQUES

Marine Lagasse
Postdoctoral researcher at the Université libre de Bruxelles, Research Group in Arts and Culture Sciences (GRESAC)

MOOVA – Making Old Objects Valuable Again. The Cultural, Economic Challenges and Sustainability Opportunities of Antiques in the 21st Century – is a research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC). Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the project addresses the question of how low-end antiques are safeguarded, valued, marketed, perceived, and consumed in today's society. While « ordinary antiques » remain largely underexplored in scholarly research, MOOVA aims to investigate their potential for developing sustainable heritage, business, and consumption models. Prof. Anne-Sophie Radermecker, the Principal Investigator (PI), brings together researchers from different disciplines to explore the economical, sociological and psychological implications of preserving and consuming low-end antiques.

The MOOVA project focuses on low-end antiques due to their position at the margins of the art market and cultural institutions. They appear to be frontier objects, that are both second-hand commodities with a functional value and ancient artefacts with cultural significance. One of the research axes aims at understanding the engagements of young individuals (Generation Z) with "ordinary antiques" – affordable art objects from day-to-day life, such as furniture, porcelain and ceramic pieces, glassware and silverware. The field survey conducted in Brussels, last summer, allows us to understand the relationships of young adults to these objects in everyday living and to what extent they perceive them as pieces of heritage to be valued[1] and preserved.

Are both second-hand commodities with a functional value and ancient artefacts with cultural significance.

Seventeen young adults (aged 18-30) were invited to visit the shop and encounter old objects in a real-life environment. The chosen antique shop features both vintage items and more ancient objects, dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. Following the stimulated recall methods [2], each participant was equipped with eye-tracker glasses to record a first-person video of their visit. The absence of researchers during their tour was intended to minimise observation biases and allow for more spontaneous behaviour. The recorded video was used during the interview session in which the participant was

The participants wear glasses equipped with a minicamera and an eye-tracking device that record a first-person video.

[1] The values can be public or private. The latter refers to the notion of « interest » in the sense that it is meaningful for individuals in a private sphere and not necessarily aligned with public and shared values [1].

invited to describe their discovery of the objects: how they approached them, what interested them and how they felt being in front of them. By surveying the encounter with these artefacts in a real-life context, we examined the ways of interpreting and relating to these objects and obtained an outlook on how visitors envision their incorporation into their everyday lives. The next section presents preliminary findings from the ongoing analysis.

Expressing individuality by diverging from contemporary conventions

During their visit of the shop, participants tended to linger over objects that aroused curiosity, either because they could not immediately identify their purpose (e.g. manual coffee grinder) or because the objects reminded them of their grandparents' decoration. However, in the vast majority of cases, their attention was drawn to pieces with aesthetic appeal. Beyond mere beauty, participants sought objects with original and unusual aesthetics, in contrast to contemporary products. Ordinary antiques were appreciated for their non-standardised aesthetic: retro style, colourful pieces, organic or rounded shapes. In this regard, participants frequently expressed a preference for more saturated colours and a sense of weariness with the neutral palettes (e.g., black, white, beige) commonly used in contemporary designs. Participants perceive this standardisation as a form of conformism, implying that "[we] don't express much" (Sasha, F)[2]. From this perspective, owning ordinary antiques becomes a way of standing out.

Beyond mere beauty, participants sought objects with original and unusual aesthetics, in contrast to contemporary products.

Yet, originality alone is not sufficient to inspire them to acquire a piece. Participants assessed each object in relation to their own stylistic preferences and domestic interior decoration. The aim for them is to find pieces that, while original, will blend harmoniously with their interior: "I find it more original, we find things that are much more timeless [...] It's not fashionable, but you make them fashionable yourself because in your interior they work" (Schiaparelli, F). Therefore, the challenge lies in the selection of antiques that can be combined with contemporary furniture and more versatile items from mainstream retailers such as Ikea (frequently mentioned).

Furthermore, an essential concern for the acquirers pertains to the compatibility of the items with their daily habits and needs. Additionally, ordinary antiques appear to inspire them with new practices and to introduce alternatives to the contemporary domestic conventions. During their tour of the shop, participants frequently experienced moments of projection [3], imagining how they might use an object for their own needs and incorporate it into their space. For instance, Solène (F) sat on a highchair, not only to assess its comfort, but also to visualise herself eating at the complementing high

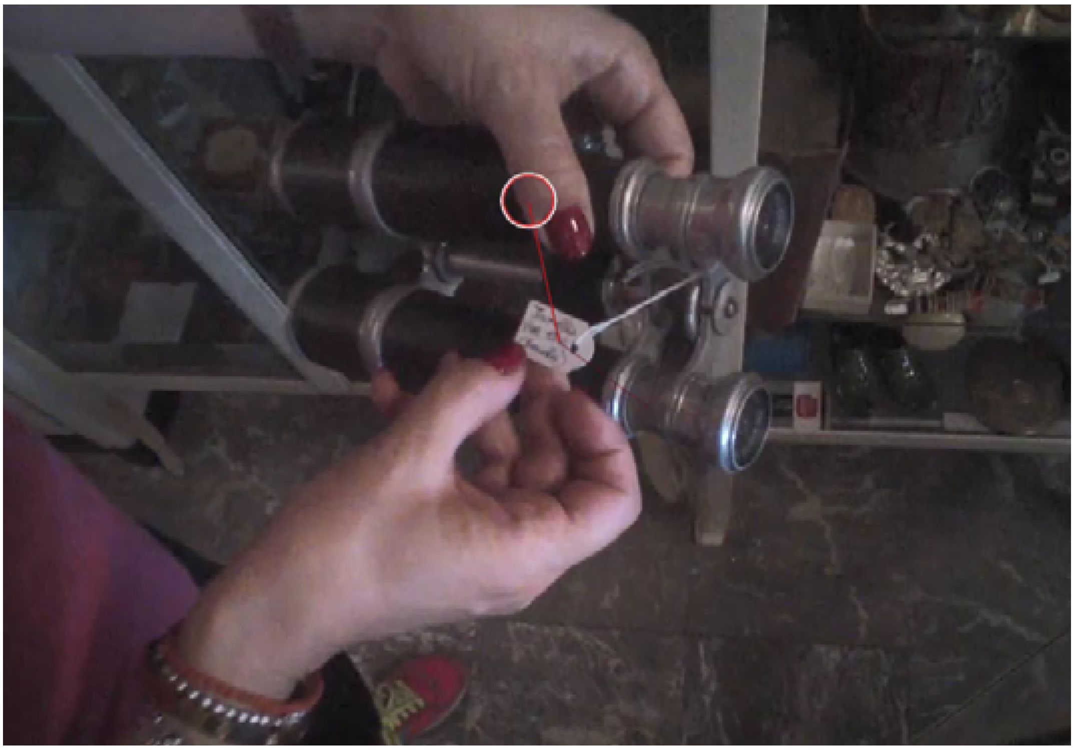
[2] All interview excerpts, which were originally in French, have been translated. The name used corresponds to the participant's pseudonym and the following letter (F, M or X) indicates their declared gender.

table. She further pictured the visual effect the ensemble would produce in her high-ceilinged room, elevating her view and taking advantage of the spatial volume. Starting with the interest for the highchair, Solene redesigned both the visual appearance of her interior and the ergonomics of her dining area, considering the high table as a legitimate alternative to a more traditional dining table. In the case of Otis (M), small perfume bottles, which initially charmed him with their finesse, triggered his desire to wear perfume, even though this is not currently his habit: "For my own use, yes. But I still don't wear perfume. I use deodorant, so I still need to find the link. [laughing]".

Consequently, these objects are perceived beyond their decorative dimension. It is then about making objects one's own in a deeper, more personal sense than simply owning them as material property. It is noteworthy that ordinary antiques appear to offer an effective means of expressing one's individuality and identity through non-standard aesthetics and the combination of different designs to create a more personal style. As it is well documented in psychology, the objects selected for display within the home are chosen for their symbolic value and contribute to shaping and expressing the individual's identity [e.g. 4,5]. The emphasis placed by participants on the utility of the objects is revealing of their desire to use them on a daily basis. Therefore, the objects that lie in their home need to be intrinsically part of their life.

Feeling connected to Humanity

While antiques are commonly known to bear witness to times gone by [6,7], our research highlights the co-presence of different levels of relationships with history. Antiques circulate in various spheres of private and public life (in homes, antique shops, museums, etc.) and, consequently, depending on the context, can take on a more or less intimate significance.



First-person view of one participant asking to see the old binoculars in the antique store.

In the environment of the antique shop, objects are in a waiting space, in a place open to the public, while awaiting to return to the private and enclosed space of a new owner. In contact with ordinary antiques, people are prompted to imagine the places these objects held in the daily lives of their previous owners. Even if the participants refer to important episodes of history or to famous figures (e.g. World Wars, Napoléon, Churchill), it is regularly through the experiences of anonymous individuals (soldiers, women of the 19th, etc.) that they fantasise about the history and trajectory of the object. Amazed by small binoculars from around 1900, Otis (M) says: "Firstly, it was used by people I don't know. [...] And I think to myself, well, maybe it was used during the First World War. Or maybe during a hunt by two great aristocrats or something. It's beautiful."

In this process, and despite the distance between their times, these objects allow to create a sense of proximity with these strangers, both occupied with simple matters of life and anonymous witnesses to a bygone era destined to leave only a few traces behind. Pepica (F) is one of the participants who shared this feeling in a particularly tangible way: "Because that crochet piece there, or the little doll, or the spear, someone made it. And I make things too. [...] I really feel a connection with other people [...] who did this before me." Additionally, these objects frequently elicit personal memories and feelings linked to familial history or childhood: the participants mentioned respectively their parents' work, their grandmother's crockery and furniture, and the chairs in secondary school. In this case, the history of the objects assumes an even more intimate dimension, recalling emotions associated with episodes of their own lives.

In all of these cases, old artefacts become singular through the traces (visible and invisible) of their past lives, with signs of wear and tear and deterioration serving as an index [8] of episodes in the life of the previous owner [9] and of the passage of time. However, this previous one's life regularly and seamlessly slides into the 'life of the object' itself: "If I go to an antique dealer, I need the object to have life and charm, not for it to be in perfect condition." (Carlotta, F). Thus, through their everyday use, the new owner will be able to perpetuate the life of this object and leave their mark on it, as the previous owners did before them. The object then becomes the legacy of both the former owner and the new acquirer, and they too will pass it on to an anonymous next person. As Schiaparelli (F) expressed:

> *"I love the fact that even though I will never know it, the object has a history, that there have been people who have owned it, who have lived with these objects. [...] I imagine myself when I'll be old [...] it would have pleased me to know that there is someone else [...] who would have taken it and appreciated this object as much as I do."*

The circulation and use of ordinary antiques contribute to nourish the feeling of connection with others.

In the circulation of the object and in the continuation of its life, the new owner will in turn become part of the history of the "human community". In this perspective, it is less a question of perceiving the "official" History behind these objects, but more a question of seeing in them traces of past individual lives. Due to their ordinary nature, these lives can be prolonged in the everyday activities of the new acquirer. Ordinary antiques evoke fragments of past lives that resonate with participants' own everyday experiences, while gently reminding them of the passage of time and reawakening an awareness of the fleeting nature of everyone's existence. The possession of these cultural artefacts thus seems to fulfil a need for community belonging [10], in the sense that everyone can feel part of Humanity [11]. They can feel connected to others, every individual being similar in their human nature, bound together by their everyday experiences as reflected in the objects of ordinary living.

The study of ordinary antiques fosters the attention to the ways in which people consider old objects, as usual utilitarian commodities or as meaningful cultural artefacts. While people can recognise both these aspects as one, it appears that those antiques are consistently valued for their singularity in many ways. The participants' consistent use of the terms "original" or "atypical" to describe the objects attests to a continual awareness of their distant origins, as they reflect different fashions and aesthetic standards. However, this does not mean that young generations have difficulty appropriating them. This study points to two complementary levels of appropriation. The first operates on a personal level, through the construction and expression of the self via a non-standard style. This "timeless style" is shaped by a mix of aesthetics, combining modern and retro pieces. The second process unfolds at a more collective level. The circulation and use of ordinary antiques contribute to nourish the feeling of connection with others. The perpetuation of the life and materiality of old objects seems to make the sense of belonging to the human community tangible. Through acquisition and reuse, successive acquirers can inscribe their own lives within a history larger than themselves, participating in the shared heritage of Humanity carried by the materiality of objects.

The perpetuation of the life and materiality of old objects seems to make the sense of belonging to the human community tangible.

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Find out more at: www.moova-erc.eu

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Photo credits Arabella Shelbourne @Asaperture

THE CRISIS IN ARTS JOURNALISM AND COMMENTARY

Simon Mundy
Journalist

It is always the prerogative of those passed official retirement age, like me, to complain that things were better when we were young. Often they were, usually they were not. There is one sliver of the arts world, though, where changes in policy, media, communication habits and consumer expectations have left the public and the artistic professions badly served. This is in the professional status and employment of dedicated arts journalists and critics.

Forty years ago there were newspapers and magazines, radio stations and TV arts shows that were not about lifestyle, entertainment and gossip. They had arts pages and programmes that relied on full time or retained staff who knew their field just as expertly as the financial and political journalists. They were backed up by reviewers who, although not paid very much, could earn a living by writing enough articles and appearing on those broadcast programmes.

The problem is not the volume of views, it is the space for professional and balanced reporting.

With very few exceptions this whole strata has been buried. There are plenty of outlets for opinion and publicity information; plenty of websites carrying amateur reviews and comment sections. Social (or antisocial, depending on your viewpoint) media throw reaction to uploaded content at followers instantly. The problem is not the volume of views, it is the space for professional and balanced reporting.

In finance and political reporting, the journal or website may have a particular bias but that is understood by its readers. Within that bias, reporters are expected to know their stuff and report with accuracy, at least in open democracies. In closed societies propaganda – the official view – is king and one should never trust it. Sadly, though, arts and heritage policy is not questioned with the same diligence. If none of the mainstream press have correspondents on the subject, how can it be? Yes, there can be occasional feature pieces commissioned (like this one) but where is the constant drip-drip of reporting on policy shortcomings that in the end will force change?

If none of the mainstream press have correspondents on the subject, how can it be?

At the same time artists know only too well that it is easy to fill their biogs with laudatory puff pieces from free media, but where are the quotes from trusted and named critics writing in admired journals that agents and promoters will consider when making bookings? Even the hired publicists are finding it hard to place coverage that will satisfy their clients. In the English language press the coverage has shrunk to a handful of newspapers and magazines that still give enough space to make comparisons effective. The contraction in local media is just as damaging as in national. I cannot speak for other cultural spaces but, from talking to my colleagues in France, Germany and the Netherlands, I gather there are similar concerns.

The result of all this is that very few young people are able to enter the profession, with either the training or the opportunity to make a success of their trade. They can be academics who write a bit, enthusiasts who review for free, bloggers who tout their opinions but as arts correspondents and full time critics – unlikely. They simply will not be able to earn a living or have a reputable journalistic career. Almost all those still active in the profession are either well over 50 or are young staff employed by magazine sites as underpaid editors, expected to paraphrase press releases, not apply their judgement.

Are there solutions or is it too late? I believe there are but they may be expensive and will require the arts business to realise what it is missing and co-ordinate to redress the balance soon and with urgency.

One is to admit that complaining to editors and media executives will not get anywhere but offering to cover the costs of an arts correspondent and a roster of critics in return for a guaranteed amount of coverage might. The associations of agents, venues and recording companies could ask for supplementary contributions from their members on the condition that they will accept the rougher aspects of the debate and not interfere in editorial judgements.

They simply will not be able to earn a living or have a reputable journalistic career.

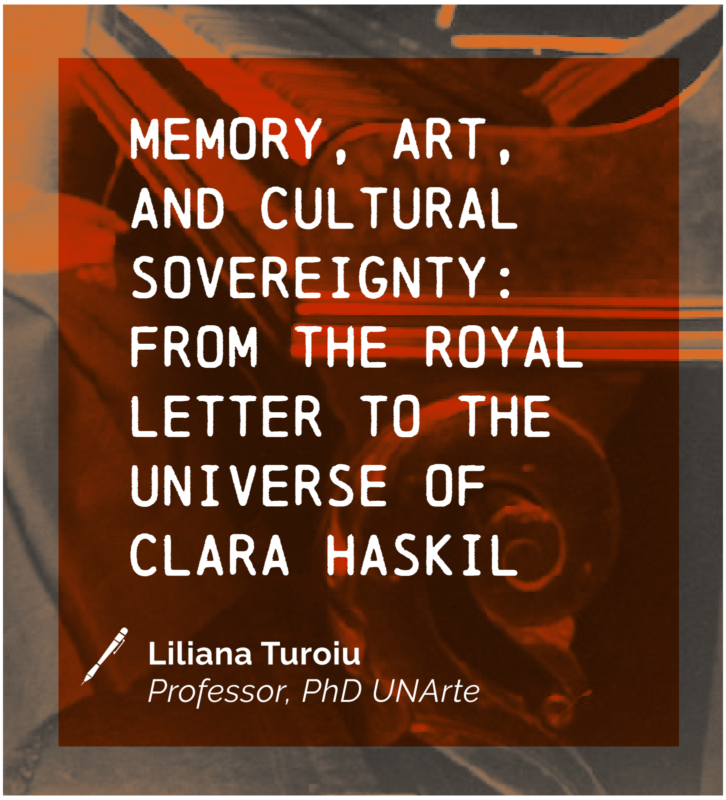
Another solution could be ambitious but global. Bring together the arts business to start (or upgrade an existing) web journal staffed by professionals on proper contracts, whether part time or full time. Either will give a pathway for young people wanting to become real arts journalists and commentators, not just treating it as a sideline to their other paid work.

Both solutions, of course, means that young people will want some training, which is where ENCATC comes in, its members providing courses led by people who remember how to question the official policies in public and know enough about the arts to have an opinion worth listening to.

Photo: Lidia Tirsu

SIMON **MUNDY**

Simon Mundy has been writing and broadcasting about the arts for fifty years. He was Visiting Lecturer in Arts Journalism at City University, London, for 3 years at the end of the 1980s, then left to be Director of Britain's National Campaign for the Arts, where he was also a founder of the European Forum for Arts and Heritage (now Culture action Europe). Since then he has directed festivals, written books and advised the Council of Europe and UNESCO, among many other bodies. He returned to arts journalism in a major way in 2018.



Young Clara Haskil (1895-1960)

Cultural diplomacy, defined in specialized literature as “the use of a nation’s symbolic and artistic resources to cultivate lasting relationships and shape perceptions beyond the logic of immediate politics”[1], finds its fullest expression not solely in the architecture of treaties or in official speeches, but also in discreet gestures capable of transcending protocol. This understanding resonates with what Joseph Nye later conceptualized as soft power — “the ability of a state to obtain desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion”[2].

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[1] Milton C. Cummings, Cultural Diplomacy and the U.S. Government, Centre for Arts and Culture, 2003
[2] Joseph S. Nye, Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics, Public Affairs, 2004

The present research starts from the premise that cultural diplomacy cannot be understood exclusively as an institutional mechanism or a representational strategy, but must be analysed as a relational, profoundly human practice, in which sensitivity, responsibility, and the recognition of artistic fragility become legitimate forms of cultural sovereignty. More precisely, cultural diplomacy manifests itself in the invisible bridges forged between individuals and institutions, in acts of intellectual generosity, or even in fragile objects which, traversing time, become bearers of memory and instruments of an intimacy unattainable through a strictly diplomatic language. Within this analytical framework, the life trajectory of the pianist Clara Haskil, born in Bucharest in 1895 and frequently characterized by contemporaries as embodying a rare conjunction of artistic genius and personal fragility, emerges—through the royal correspondence and archival materials examined in this study—as a compelling case study for understanding the intersections of art, ethics, and power in a European context shaped by political instability and intense cultural circulation.

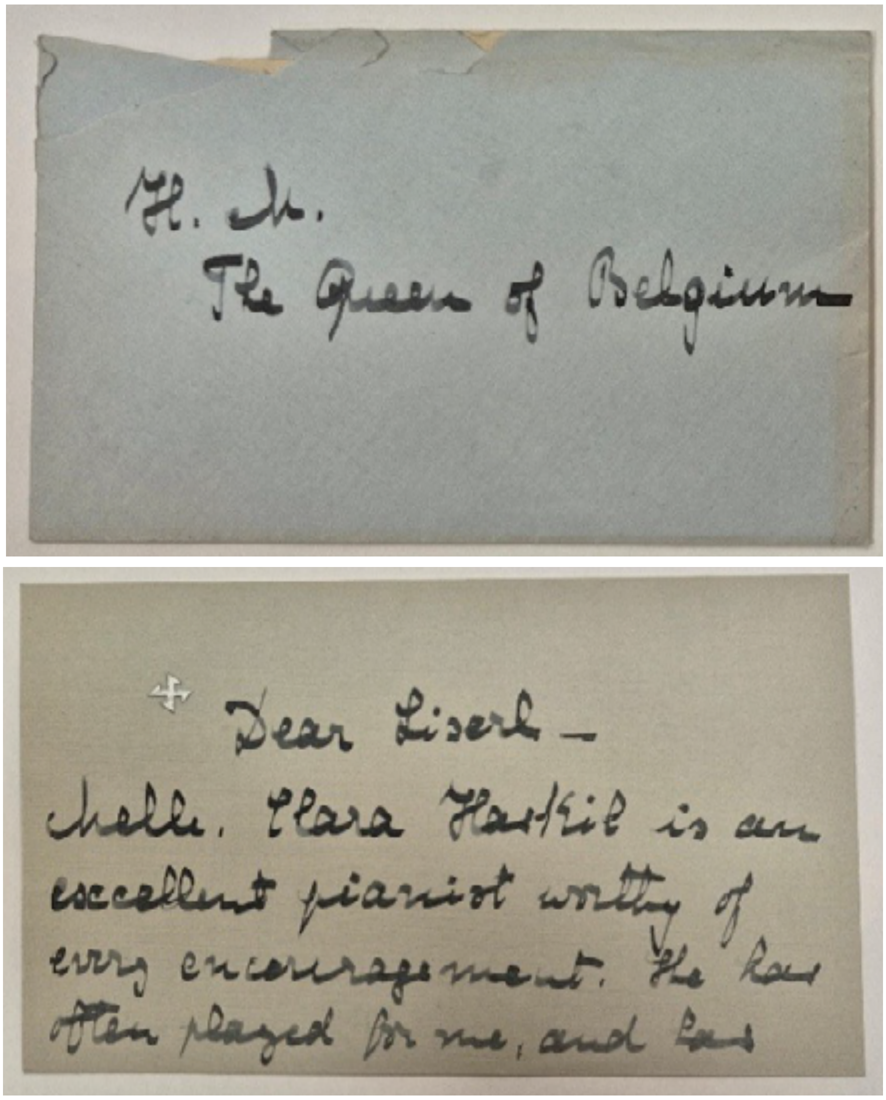
Cultural diplomacy cannot be understood exclusively as an institutional mechanism or a representational strategy, but must be analysed as a relational, profoundly human practice.

In recent years, I have approached the field of cultural diplomacy both from a theoretical perspective and through direct involvement in large-scale international projects, an experience that facilitated access to the concrete mechanisms of cultural exchange at the European level. This dual positioning, analytical and practical, oriented the present endeavour toward a close reading not only of official discourse, but also of the subtle forms through which culture is protected, mediated, and valued within contexts of power.

The present analysis focuses on the interwar period, specifically post–World War I Europe, a geopolitically fragile and fragmented space, yet animated by remarkable artistic vitality. In this context of profound political and symbolic reconfigurations, culture functioned as an instrument of reconstruction and mediation, while letters, recommendations, and gestures of patronage constituted early forms of European cultural diplomacy prior to its institutionalization. A letter from Queen Marie of Romania addressed to Queen Elisabeth of Belgium which I discovered with emotion in the Belgian Royal Archives, together with the correspondence of Henry Le Bœuf and an epistle written by Clara Haskil herself, fit into this framework as essential documents for reconstructing a network of protection, legitimization, and circulation of artistic value.

The fragile paper, marked by time and touched by those who once wrote and received it, carries more than information; it conveys the immediacy of human gesture.

Encountering such documents in their original form can profoundly transform the perception of history. The fragile paper, marked by time and touched by those who once wrote and received it, carries more than information; it conveys the immediacy of human gesture. Holding this letter, I understood that the document exceeded its archival function. It appeared as a living trace of an era in which art and culture served as subtle languages of diplomacy.


H. M.
The Queen of Belgium

Dear Liserl –
Mlle. Clara Haskil is an
excellent pianist worthy of
every encouragement. She has
often played for me, and has

Letter from Queen Marie: Archives of the Royal Palace, private secretariat of King Albert and Queen Elisabeth, 1043

The letter introduces the pianist Clara Haskil in terms that combine admiration and concern: “Mlle. Clara Haskil is an excellent pianist worthy of every encouragement.”

This brief statement reveals not only a personal recommendation but also a gesture of cultural hospitality. In Derrida's sense of unconditional openness toward the other, the act of writing itself becomes a form of invitation, an attempt to create a space where artistic fragility may find recognition and protection.

Clara Haskil demonstrated exceptional musical talent from childhood. She studied at the Bucharest Conservatory before continuing her education in Vienna and later at the Paris Conservatory. Her artistic development, however, was accompanied by severe physical and psychological challenges, including scoliosis, painful medical treatments, and recurring anxiety.

Despite these obstacles, her musical interpretations achieved extraordinary recognition. Those who encountered her playing often described an impression of absolute sincerity and transparency. Charlie Chaplin famously stated: "When Clara Haskil sits at the piano, God speaks."[3] and, violinist Arthur Grumiaux, one of her closest stage partners, testified: "I have never encountered a pianist with a purer sound and more natural phrasing"[4]. Likewise, her friend and admirer Dinu Lipatti remarked: "Clara does not play music; she reveals its essence"[5].

From the perspective of cultural studies, it is essential to observe that Queen Marie's letter does not function as a unilateral gesture, but as part of a broader dialogue characteristic of the period, in which cultural and monarchical instances subtly collaborated in support of artistic values. In this spirit, Paul Claudel lucidly observed that "the true image of a nation is not what it declares, but what it radiates"[6], while Jacques Derrida reminded us that hospitality—considered an essential component of cultural diplomacy—is "an unconditional openness toward the other, an incalculable act."[7] Examined together, these statements outline a theoretical framework in which seemingly minor acts, such as letters of recommendation, become vectors of a subtle cultural sovereignty.

In the Belgian archives, a document that completes this dialogue is Henry Le Bœuf's letter dated May 7, 1934.

A banker, philanthropist, and organizing spirit of Belgian musical life, known today especially for his role in founding BOZAR, Le Bœuf acted as a mediator between artists and the Royal House. Beyond his involvement in individual artistic destinies, Henry Le Bœuf exerted a quiet yet enduring influence on Belgian cultural life during the interwar period, contributing to the shaping of environments in which music and artistic creation could flourish.

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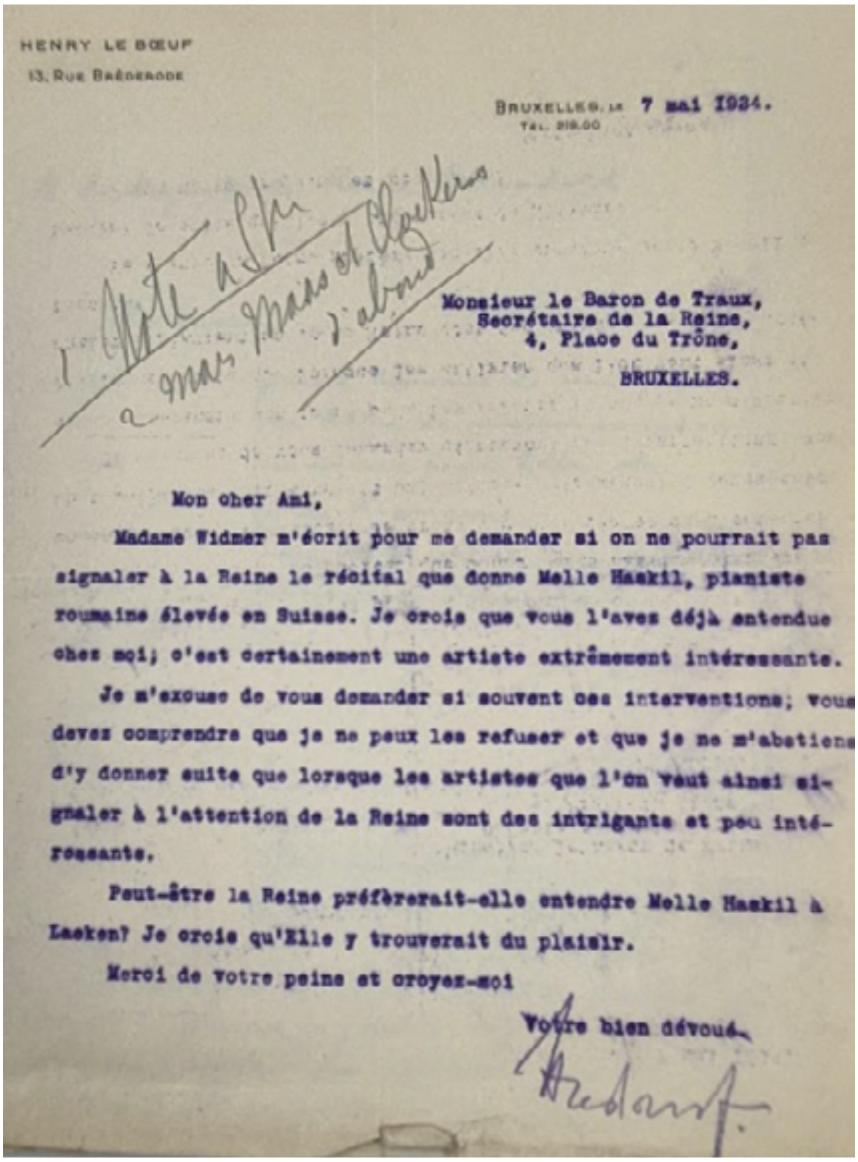
[3] Charlie Chaplin, statement in Pierre Freschl, Clara Haskil ou l'énigme du piano, Buchet-Chastel, Paris, 2008, p. 14.

[4] Arthur Grumiaux, interview in Revue Musicale Suisse, 1959.

[5] Dinu Lipatti, private correspondence, cited in Stephen Lehmann and Marion Faber, Clara Haskil: A Life, Northwestern University Press, 2011, p. 88.

[6] Paul Claudel, Positions et propositions, Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 45.

[7] Jacques Derrida, Of Hospitality, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 25.



HENRY LE BŒUF
13, RUE BRÉDERODE

BRUXELLES, LE 7 mai 1934.
TÉL. 218.00

Monsieur le Baron de Traux,
Secrétaire de la Reine,
4, Place du Trône,
BRUXELLES.

Mon cher Ami,

Madame Widmer m'écrit pour me demander si on ne pourrait pas signaler à la Reine le récital que donne Melle Haskil, pianiste roumaine élevée en Suisse. Je crois que vous l'avez déjà entendue chez moi; c'est certainement une artiste extrêmement intéressante.

Je m'excuse de vous demander si souvent ces interventions; vous devez comprendre que je ne peux les refuser et que je ne m'abstiens d'y donner suite que lorsque les artistes que l'on veut ainsi signaler à l'attention de la Reine sont des intrigants et peu intéressants.

Peut-être la Reine préfèrerait-elle entendre Melle Haskil à Laeken? Je crois qu'Elle y trouverait du plaisir.

Merci de votre peine et croyez-moi

Votre bien dévoué.

Henry Le Boeuf - letter: Archives of the Royal Palace, secretariat of Queen Elisabeth, Divers H/25

Addressed to Baron de Traux, the letter confirms not only his personal interest in Clara Haskil, but also the functioning of a complex mechanism of cultural recommendation in interwar Europe. The tone of the epistle reveals his sense of responsibility: "Je m'excuse de vous demander si souvent des interventions; vous devez comprendre que je ne peux les refuser…"[8]. This phrase indicates both the frequency of requests he felt compelled to mediate and the rigorous moral criterion guiding his selection. Le Bœuf specifies that he does not advance such requests when they concern "des intrigantes et peu intéressantes," implicitly establishing an ethical code of patronage: royal support must be reserved for authentic artists, not for aspirants lacking substance. His reference to Clara Haskil is unequivocal: "c'est certainement une artiste extrêmement intéressante."[9]. The adverb certainement marks the assurance of a firm aesthetic verdict, reinforcing Queen Marie's recommendation. This convergence between two distinct cultural authorities creates a coherent portrait of the pianist: a fragile being endowed with rare inner strength and a talent worthy of protection.

[8] Letter from Henry Le Boeuf: Archives of the Royal Palace, secretariat of Queen Elisabeth, Divers H/25
[9] Letter from Henry Le Boeuf: Archives of the Royal Palace, secretariat of Queen Elisabeth, Divers H/25

Private auditions were one of the principal mechanisms through which Queen Elisabeth identified and supported young musicians.

In closing, Le Bœuf suggests organizing an audition at Laeken : "Peut-être la Reine préférerait-elle entendre Mlle Haskil à Laeken ? Je crois qu'elle y trouverait du plaisir." Private auditions were one of the principal mechanisms through which Queen Elisabeth identified and supported young musicians. Le Bœuf's proposal thus signifies not merely the transmission of a recommendation, but the creation of a favorable framework for a decisive encounter between the sovereign's sensitivity and the pianist's art.

Seen together, the two letters offer a complex image of interwar musical patronage. They attest to the transnational circulation of information about Eastern European artists, to the collaboration between the cultural networks of European monarchies, and to the specific role played by Romania and Belgium in protecting these talents. Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, known for her deep interest in musicians from Central and Eastern Europe and for her unconditional admiration for George Enescu, stood at the very center of these networks of cultural protection.

At the same time, the documents contribute decisively to the reconstruction of Clara Haskil's cultural biography and confirm that, as early as the 1930s, the pianist was perceived as a first-rank artist, despite her vulnerability in terms of health and financial stability. Royal support and cultural patronage represented, at this stage, decisive levers of her artistic mobility.

In the context of Europe in the 1930s, these documents acquire broader relevance. It was a tense era, marked by the rise of extremisms, while the artistic world offered one of the few forms of European unity in the face of political fragmentation. Belgium, under the patronage of Queen Elisabeth, functioned as a cultural refuge, while Romania projected its international identity through culture, sensitivity, and intellectual nobility.

Both documents align along the same symbolic axis: one originates in Sinaia, the other in Brussels; together, they transform the destiny of a pianist into a sign of a sensitive Europe, ready to support fragility as a form of artistic grace. The reading of these letters therefore does not constitute a mere archival exercise, but rather a reconstruction of a geography of sensitivity and of an early form of cultural diplomacy. Before official cultural institutions, before European programs and major diplomatic initiatives, there existed intimate, profoundly human gestures that shaped the destiny of continental art. The Queen of Romania, together with the Queen of Belgium, a visionary mediator of musical life, and a pianist born under the sign of fragility - different destinies converging in a discreet

They transform the destiny of a pianist into a sign of a sensitive Europe, ready to support fragility as a form of artistic grace.

yet persistent point of light: the belief that art deserves protection, regardless of political circumstance.

From this perspective, the letters are not merely witnesses of a distant past, but acts of cultural sovereignty, testimonies to the way Europe built its identity through sensitivity, hospitality, and responsibility toward art. In them we recognize not only individual destinies, but the pulse of a civilization that, through beauty and fragility, rediscovered its means of endurance.

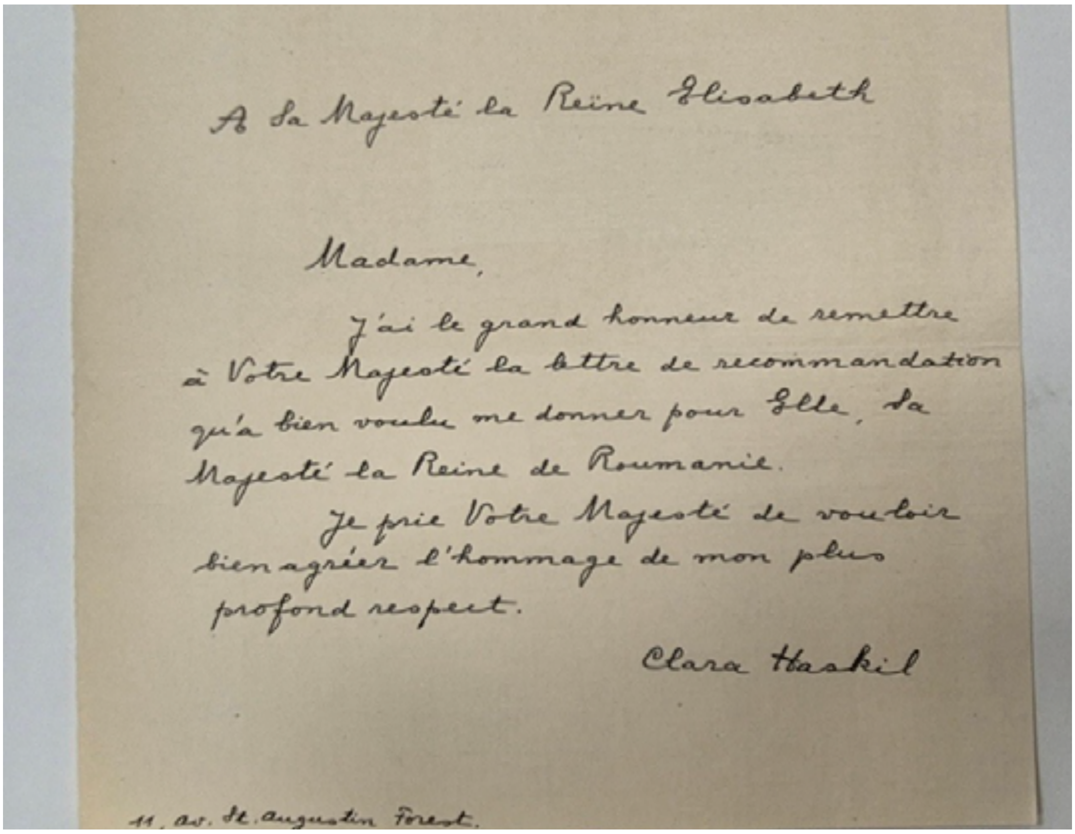
The two letters may also be read from a visual perspective, not only as historical documents. They carry a distinct aesthetic, reflecting two different ways of understanding writing, authority, and the relationship between art and power. Viewed through a sensitive lens, from a graphic standpoint, they become two images of the same era, expressed through radically different languages and forms.

Written on a typewriter and signed by Henry Le Bœuf, the second letter bears the imprint of functional modernity. The mechanical character of the letters, the rigorous alignment, the equal spacing between lines construct an almost impersonal surface, in which the author's subjectivity is deliberately subdued. It is the writing of the institution, of mediation, of efficiency. The typewriter transforms thought into print, voice into sign. It imposes a discipline of form that corresponds to the role played by Le Bœuf: mediator between artists and the Royal Family, lucid administrator of cultural sensitivity. The aesthetic of this letter is one of clarity, controlled distance, and organizing reason. Visually, it affirms the idea of a system: culture as mechanism, diplomacy as a functional network, art as a value to be evaluated, filtered, and supported through firm criteria.

From an aesthetic standpoint, this letter is a drawing: a composition of lines, pauses, and intensities, in which the signature does not conclude the text but concentrates it.

Queen Marie's letter, handwritten with pen and ink, belongs to an entirely different regime of the sign. Here, writing is not merely the bearer of a message, but the visible becoming of the body that traces it. The line is slightly tremulous, pressure varies, letters are not identical, repeated signs. The ink laid upon the paper preserves the rhythm of breathing, the hesitations, the accelerations of thought. It is a form of writing inseparable from gesture, time, and presence. From an aesthetic standpoint, this letter is a drawing: a composition of lines, pauses, and intensities, in which the signature does not conclude the text but concentrates it.

The archival file also contains a letter written by Clara Haskil herself to Queen Elisabeth. This document introduces a third perspective within the epistolary exchange: that of the artist.



A Sa Majesté la Reine Elisabeth

Madame,

J'ai le grand honneur de remettre à Votre Majesté la lettre de recommandation qu'a bien voulu me donner pour Elle, Sa Majesté la Reine de Roumanie.

Je prie Votre Majesté de vouloir bien agréer l'hommage de mon plus profond respect.

Clara Haskil

11, av. St. Augustin Forest.

Henry Le Boeuf - letter: Archives of the Royal Palace, secretariat of Queen Elisabeth, Divers H/25

Clara Haskil's letter opens with a carefully calibrated formula of reverence, neither excessive nor submissive: "J'ai le grand honneur de remettre à Votre Majesté la lettre de recommandation [...] de Sa Majesté la Reine de Roumanie."[10]

This formulation expresses not only respect for royal protocol, but also a profound understanding of her situation: the artist knows she stands at the intersection of vocation and the need for support. The tone betrays neither supplication nor ostentatious fragility; Clara Haskil presents herself with dignified discretion, fully conscious of her worth. The closing of the epistle is perhaps the most eloquent from the standpoint of her personality: "Je prie Votre Majesté de vouloir bien agréer l'hommage de mon plus profond respect."[11] This restrained and elegant formula closes the letter without emphasis or claim. It concentrates an ethics of the artist for whom art is not an instrument of social affirmation, but a space of interiority and moral exigency. In this sentence one senses not only respect for the addressee, but also respect for herself, for her own vocation.

It is rare to encounter, in archival documents, such a clear overlap between vulnerability and inner strength. Clara Haskil appears here not merely as a beneficiary of royal protection, but as a mature artistic conscience, capable of transforming fragility into a form of uprightness. Her genius asserts itself not through declarations, but through the controlled silence of discourse, through the refusal of any unnecessary rhetoric. This economy of words is fully consonant with the aesthetics of her musical interpretation: transparency, sobriety, truth.

[10] Letter from Clara Haskil : Archives of the Royal Palace, secretariat of Queen Elisabeth, Divers H/25
[11] Letter from Clara Haskil : Archives of the Royal Palace, secretariat of Queen Elisabeth, Divers H/25

Through this letter, Clara Haskil enters into direct dialogue with the other two epistolary instances analyzed earlier. If Queen Marie offers protection through the affective authority of gesture, and Henry Le Bœuf legitimizes through the institutional filter of competence, Clara Haskil responds through a quiet assumption of her own condition as an artist. Thus, the epistolary network closes into a coherent circle: sovereignty capable of recognition and promotion, the mediating institution, and the artist who, without explicitly asking, becomes recognized through the very dignity of her presence.

In this sense, Clara Haskil's letter is not merely a complementary document, but the point of maximum ethical tension. It transforms cultural diplomacy from a mechanism of protection into a space of encounter between fragility and responsibility, between talent and hospitality. Through her discreet voice, Clara Haskil becomes not only the subject of a history, but also its inner witness, offering this research an indispensable perspective on how genius can coexist with modesty and how personal dignity can itself become a form of cultural sovereignty.

> **Exchanges of ideas, values, and artistic expressions that create lasting relationships and shape mutual perceptions.**

Milton C. Cummings emphasizes that cultural diplomacy consists of "exchanges of ideas, values, and artistic expressions that create lasting relationships and shape mutual perceptions"[12], insisting on its profoundly human dimension beyond official frameworks. Applied to the case of Clara Haskil, this perspective allows her letter to be read not merely as an administrative act, but as a form of individual cultural sovereignty, in which personal dignity and modesty themselves become diplomatic resources.

The comparative reading of these letters also functions as a critical instrument for the present. It invites a re-evaluation of contemporary cultural diplomacy, reminding us that before being an institutional device, it is a relational practice, a space of encounter between fragility and responsibility. Where today's institutions risk confusing culture with marketing and art with representation, the interwar model offers a still-valid lesson: cultural diplomacy retains its legitimacy only when animated by substance, meaning, and an ethics of care for the other.

In contrast to this interwar form of cultural diplomacy, built on individual gestures, personal responsibility, and the recognition of fragility as value, many contemporary practices labelled "cultural diplomacy" seem to have lost precisely the ethical and human content that once gave them meaning. Numerous institutions reduce cultural diplomacy to strategies of visibility, national branding, or symbolic export, transforming art into an image-making tool rather than a space of authentic encounter.

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[12] Milton C. Cummings Jr., Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey, Center for Arts and Culture, Washington, 2003, p. 1–5.

As Joseph Nye warned, soft power loses its effectiveness when aggressively instrumentalized or stripped of credibility, becoming "disguised propaganda"[13] rather than genuine cultural attraction. Yudhishthir Raj Isar likewise observes that in many contemporary contexts, cultural diplomacy "has been absorbed by managerial logic and market imperatives, losing its reflexive and critical dimension."[14] Similarly, Louis B. Wright and Pascal Gielen underline that "the excessive institutionalization of culture often leads to its political and ethical neutralization through standardization, performance indicators, and simplified narratives."[15]

By comparison, the documents analysed in this study reveal a radically different paradigm, and offers an important lesson for contemporary cultural diplomacy. In an era when cultural initiatives are often framed through marketing strategies or national branding, the historical example examined here reminds us that cultural diplomacy derives its legitimacy from substance, authenticity, and care for artistic value.

The relevance of these historical gestures became particularly evident through my own professional experience. As General Coordinator of Romania's participation in the EUROPALIA Arts Festival in 2019, I observed how cultural events continue to function as spaces of encounter between artistic heritage and contemporary audiences. The exhibition dedicated to Constantin Brâncuși at BOZAR, the central event of the festival, demonstrated the enduring capacity of art to create shared cultural reflection beyond national boundaries.

Similarly, the 2018 unveiling in Ashford of the statue of Queen Marie of Romania, created by sculptor Valentin Duicu and donated by the Romanian state to mark the centenary of the Great Union, illustrated how acts of cultural commemoration can connect historical memory with contemporary public space. Installed in the sovereign's birthplace, the monument created a symbolic bridge between Romanian cultural heritage and British civic memory.

The letters examined in this study reveal how cultural diplomacy often emerges through gestures of recognition rather than through formal institutional frameworks. The collaboration between Queen Marie of Romania, Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, Henry Le Bœuf, and Clara Haskil illustrates a network of cultural solidarity in which artistic fragility was perceived as worthy of protection.

Seen from this perspective, cultural diplomacy becomes not merely a political instrument but an ethical practice grounded in responsibility toward artistic value. Between art and power there exists only one legitimate bridge: the recognition and protection of cultural meaning.

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[13] Joseph S. Nye, Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics, PublicAffairs, New York, 2004, p. 16–18.

[14] Yudhishthir Raj Isar, „Cultural Diplomacy: An Overlooked Dimension of International Relations", în International Journal of Cultural Policy, vol. 16, nr. 4, 2010, p. 379–394.

[15] Pascal Gielen, The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Politics and Post-Fordism, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2009; vezi și Louis B. Wright, Culture, Politics and International Relations, Routledge, London, 2015.

INSIDE GREAT MINDS

LILIANA TUROIU

Professor, PhD UNArte

Interview by GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens

This interview is part of the Éncatc's exclusive interview series, where we delve into the insights and perspectives of influential figures shaping the cultural landscape. In this session of the magazine, we engage with leading managers of cultural organizations and policymakers, exploring their innovative strategies, challenges, and visions for the future. In these times of changes and need of rethinking our relation to the private and professional life, this interviews uncover the stories and wisdom behind their impactful roles in shaping the cultural sphere."

What gives you the most pleasure in your day-to-day work?

Inspiring and being inspired in return. Teaching, writing, creating new projects, researching - these are all ways of opening paths. What gives me the greatest pleasure is seeing ideas take shape and realizing that a spark of inspiration can travel from one mind to another.

My primary training is as a teacher, and that remains my greatest source of joy. After more than twenty years of teaching at every level, I have come to understand that education is, in essence, a creative act. In a way, the teacher becomes a curator of collective energy and creativity. I also enjoy initiating cultural projects that transform ideas into experiences. It gives me great satisfaction when a project, or even a simple gesture, has the power to remain in someone's mind or heart.

What do you do to relax?

I enjoy spending time with my family and close friends, those simple moments when conversation flows naturally. I read a lot, travel, decorate spaces, sometimes cook for the people I love, and I enjoy gathering friends around a table. For me, relaxation often lies in these small rituals of life shared with people who matter.

At other times, relaxing does not mean escaping daily life, but simply looking at it from a different perspective. I often find myself in museums or galleries, in cities that breathe culture—Paris, Rome, Brussels, London, Venice, Madrid, or Bucharest—where discovering a new artist can become a small intellectual adventure. I have learned that inspiration often appears when we slow down and allow life to surprise us. I especially enjoy the company of good friends, some very young and full of energy, others my age or older, bringing depth and experience to our conversations. Together we explore exhibitions, festivals, or simply enjoy a lunch by a fireplace or on a sunny terrace.

Do you want to be liked or respected?

Love belongs to the intimate space of my home. In the public and professional world, I value respect, along with a certain elegance in human relationships that allows everyone the dignity of being themselves. In education and culture, relationships are fundamental. When people feel genuinely heard and their ideas matter, respect emerges naturally as a quiet form of recognition. Respect cannot be demanded or imposed; it grows slowly. I have never sought to be liked in a superficial sense. I am simply a calm, communicative person, dedicated to the projects I am part of.

Are tough decisions best taken by one person or by a group?

When working in international cultural teams, the diversity of perspectives becomes an extraordinary resource. I believe strongly in collective intelligence. At the same time, there are moments when someone must assume responsibility for the final direction. Leadership means knowing when to listen, and when to decide.

Do you read management books?

Yes, but not exclusively. I am equally interested in literature, essays, and reflections on art and culture. Sometimes a text about theatre or artistic creation can reveal more about leadership than a management book. In cultural professions, imagination and sensitivity are just as important as strategy.

What is your personal and professional background?

My journey began in a loving family environment, surrounded by attentive parents and affectionate grandparents. It was a happy childhood that nurtured my curiosity and confidence. As a child, I was drawn both to the rigor of mathematics and the freedom of the arts, two languages that shaped how I see the world. I studied at the Pedagogical High School, a school with a strong tradition of training exceptional teachers. Later I continued my studies at the National University of Arts in Bucharest, where I graduated top of my class and pursued my academic career, eventually earning my PhD. I taught there for over two decades.

Alongside teaching, I developed an artistic practice at the intersection of fashion, photography, and the written word, through exhibitions and interdisciplinary projects. This openness gradually led me toward cultural diplomacy - a field that fascinated me for its ability to create dialogue between people and cultures. I have had the opportunity to meet remarkable figures from the worlds of art and culture. Looking back, I feel that education, art, and cultural diplomacy are part of the same search: the search to create meaning and bring people closer. Beyond my professional life, I feel deeply fulfilled as the mother of two extraordinary children, who remind me every day that the most beautiful form of creation is life itself.

What's your leadership style?

I would describe it as open and creative. I believe in leadership based on continuous growth. I do not like to dwell on past achievements. For me, every project is an opportunity to learn and move forward. Leadership means balance between vision, responsibility, and respect for the people you work with. I believe in creating spaces where ideas can circulate freely and where everyone can contribute.

What's your communication style?

I prefer communication that is clear and empathetic. Listening is essential. Dialogue, for me, is not only about words, it is about openness, attention, and the ability to meet the other person. In the recent years, my involvement as an Ambassador within ENCATC and BRAFA Art Fair has allowed me to meet artists, curators, collectors, and cultural leaders from around the world. These encounters are extremely stimulating, each conversation can become the spark for a new project. More recently, within the FAMES Art and Music Festival, at EEB4, I had the opportunity to create cross-curricular moments that connected students with cultural institutions and visionary artists. I have tried to create spaces where dialogue can happen naturally, places where students do not only learn about art, but experience it. In that sense, education, like art, like communication, should remain alive, authentic, and open.

Who inspires you?

I am inspired by artists, thinkers, and by the people I encounter along the way. Nature, travel, and the quiet beauty of flowers are also constant sources of inspiration. My children, now teenagers, also inspire me deeply, offering new and unexpected perspectives on life.

Among artists, I admire those who turned creation into a way of reflecting on the world: Constantin Brâncuși, for the purity of his forms, Federico Fellini, for the poetic universe of his cinema, or Peter Brook, who revealed theatre as a space of truth. Over the years, I have also had the privilege of meaningful conversations with remarkable personalities. I often remember conversations with George Banu in Paris, whose reflections on theatre possessed rare intellectual elegance; encounters with composer Vladimir Cosma, with Pascal Bruckner, Joana Vasconcelos, or the choreographer Gigi Căciuleanu. I was also deeply inspired by Doina Lemny, whose scholarship on Brâncuși is remarkable, and by the extraordinary musician Gheorghe Zamfir, whose pan flute seems to tell the story of an entire world. These encounters, among many others, have left a lasting impression on me. And yet, one of my greatest sources of inspiration remains working with students. Their energy and curiosity are contagious.

What does success look like to you?

Success is not simply visibility or recognition in international projects. For me, success appears when a project creates meaning and opens perspectives, especially for young people. If a student discovers a vocation, if a cultural project brings people together, or if an idea inspires, then I feel my work has value.

What gets you out of bed in the morning?

The feeling of being part of a living, constantly evolving world, and the responsibility to contribute, even in a small way, to its beauty. Every day holds the possibility of a meaningful encounter, a new idea, or a simple gesture that matters. Surrounded by inspiring people and in constant dialogue with young minds, each morning begins with purpose.

Perhaps, in the end, we wake up each day simply to continue this quiet conversation with life, still dreaming as we did in our youth, still believing in beauty, and carrying within us the memory of the places, the moments, and the people we have truly loved, whose presence in our lives has left a lasting light.

LILIANA **TUROIU**

Liliana Țuroiu is a professor, researcher, and former diplomat with a background in visual arts and extensive experience in European cultural diplomacy. An art educator with more than twenty years of teaching experience across all levels—from secondary education to university—she has dedicated much of her career to inspiring younger generations through the arts and interdisciplinary projects at UNArte and EEB4. She holds a PhD in Art from the National University of Arts in Bucharest, where she also taught for many years, combining academic research with artistic practice at the intersection of visual arts, fashion, and writing.

Liliana Țuroiu has served as President of the Romanian Cultural Institute and as Director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Brussels. Her work in cultural diplomacy includes the coordination of major international cultural programmes, notably EUROPALIA Romania 2019, including the landmark exhibition dedicated to Constantin Brâncuși at BOZAR. She is an ENCATC Ambassador and served as guest editor-in-chief for ENCATC Magazine - the issue no. 6, actively engaging in European cultural networks and initiatives that foster dialogue between education, art, and cultural policy.

She has been awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Republic and holds the title of Honorary Ambassador of the City of Ashford.

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ENCATC thanks its members and partners for their collaborations to this issue of the magazine!

ENCATC Magazine is a new digital publication with its inaugural issue launched in June 2020. It is meant to educate, entertain, raise awareness, and inform on various topics related to cultural management and policy. It is also created to offer an additional space for the publication of articles to our members, as well as a space for knowledge transfer to our partners (EU, UNESCO, ASEF, etc.).

Our contributors are leading academics, researchers, experts, practitioners, and policy makers. They are recognised by the industry we belong to as influencers. For our magazine, they are generously providing us with high-quality content, commentary, the best industry practices, and personal stories. Their contributions aim to help ENCATC to achieve its mission of helping the cultural sector become stronger and more sustainable. **This publication is made possible thanks to the financial support of the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.**

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ENCATC is the leading European network dedicated to advancing cultural management and policy. Established in 1992, this membership-based NGO unites over 100 higher education institutions and cultural organizations across more than 40 countries.

As a dynamic platform for collaboration, ENCATC fosters the exchange of knowledge, methodologies, comparative research, and innovative practices. It also conducts regular assessments to address the evolving training needs of the cultural management sector from a distinctly European perspective.

Through its diverse working groups, projects, activities, and events, ENCATC actively shapes the future of cultural management and policy. Its impact is further amplified by its unique positions: Consultative status at the United Nations, NGO in official partnership with UNESCO, and Observer status to the Steering Committee for Culture of the Council of Europe.

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