WHILE WRITING this 250th Editorial, European leaders are gathering in Brussels to discuss a series of urgent crisis-fighting measures at an informal EU summit. A hot topic generating international news headlines, politicians are struggling to find agreement on the next steps to calm the euro-zone debt crisis. During what now seems to be a more serene age, my first trip to Brussels—the capital city of Belgium and also of the European Union—was in March 1979. At that time I was travelling with my husband Stephen Markbreiter visiting Asian art galleries in European cities. We attended the 24th Antiquités Fair of Belgium held at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, rue Royale 10, 1000 Brussels. I remember that the forty-seven dealers at that exhibition showcased handsome furniture mainly from France and Belgium with some drawn from Holland and England. European wood sculpture, sometimes polychromed, was also well represented, as were tapestries and Art Deco objects. The Asian displays included Japanese armour and netsuke, Chinese export ceramics and China Trade oil paintings.

We also spent a delightful afternoon, thirty-three years ago, at the Asian sections of the Royal Museums of Art and History (RMAH) at Parc du Cinquantenaire 10, 1000 Brussels. The largest national museum of Belgium, the collection is held in a classical columned building. The museum possesses an excellent decorative section on the Indonesian shadow plays. Then, surprise, a whole room devoted to Vietnamese ceramics and bronzes, collected between 1912 and 1938 by the Belgian businessman Clément Huet (1874–1951) during the time he lived and worked in the north of Vietnam (see the article on pages 94–103, “The Passion of a Collector: The Vietnamese Collection of the RMAH” by Miriam Lambrecht, Head of Section, Curator of the Collection of India and Southeast Asia at RMAH). I was particularly impressed with the display of bronze drums from my birthplace of Vietnam. So as a Vietnamese, it is my pleasure that the Asian collections of the RMAH are covered in this Special 250th Edition of Arts of Asia. I am also delighted that we feature two fascinating articles on the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM), which houses one of the largest collections of musical instruments in the world (over 7000 instruments).

Dr Michel Draguet, acting General Director, provided the following insightful remarks: “The Royal Museums of Art and History, Belgium, boast exceptional collections which highlight paramount aspects of the art, culture and civilisation of the countries encompassing the Asian continent. The artefacts on display shed light on the ties linking Belgium with nations such as China, Korea and Japan, but also with Vietnam, Indonesia and Burma. Thanks to our collections, Brussels, Belgium and our European partners alike are able to immerse in the sounds and colours of Asia; undoubtedly also to the delight of thousands of readers of Arts of Asia, the editors of which I hereby offer my profound appreciation for their excellent initiative.”
Hong Kong has been my home for fifty-three years, where I have witnessed the extraordinary developments in the art scene of the former British colony. Since 1970, when my husband and I established Arts of Asia, we have played an active and continuous role in the appreciation for Asian art not only in Hong Kong, but also around the world. We are proud of our contributions, in particular for introducing the major international auction houses to this metropolis. I was one of the first to approach Sotheby’s and Christie’s head offices in London advising them to hold regular sales in Hong Kong where there are so many wealthy and eager collectors as well as experienced and knowledgeable dealers for Chinese art. In recent years both companies have benefited from exponential growth in the region. For example Bill Ruprecht, President and CEO of Sotheby’s, announced on March 30th, 2012 that “our business in Asia last year reached US$1 billion for the first time”.

Clearly Hong Kong has now firmly established itself as one of the most important and exciting art hubs for collectors, dealers and museum experts from around the world. During the second half of May there were a string of high profile international gallery openings, the staging of three art fairs, the Bonhams and Christie’s Spring 2012 auctions and important museum exhibitions, including the much anticipated Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) exhibition at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in Sha Tin. This show, which opened on May 18th, featured fifty-six original works from the Musée National Picasso in Paris which has a collection of some 5000 pieces. The paintings were selected to introduce to Asian audiences the depth and breadth of the Spanish artist’s work. Anne Baldassari, President of the Musée National Picasso, said: “We could have just shown a masterpiece from his blue period, one from cubism and one from surrealism, but I think it’s more interesting to see the process. Here you can see self-portraits, the people who worked with him, people he was in love with, his children.” This exhibition which runs until July 22nd is another example of the high level of interest in Asia and China for Western art and prestigious works of the finest quality.

Also on May 18th Sotheby’s Hong Kong unveiled its new HK$56 million state-of-the-art gallery space comprising the entire 5th floor of One Pacific Place in Admiralty. It is the company’s third such facility after London and New York and will significantly expand Sotheby’s business in Asia. Although it carries the highest rent of the three, the 15,000 square feet area will allow for more auctions in addition to the current Spring and Autumn sales. At the well-attended opening party Kevin Ching, CEO of Sotheby’s Asia, said: “We have been planning the expansion for two years and have been looking for a suitable space in a good location. This flexible space will allow us to regularly host auctions, exhibitions, lectures, special events and other cultural programmes throughout the year.” Sotheby’s President Bill Ruprecht added: “The expansion of our Hong Kong premises is the first of many developments Sotheby’s is planning in the region, and particularly in China, to respond to the needs of our ever-expanding client base in this exciting market. This transformative space will increase the level of activity and the range of objects we will offer to clients in Asia on a regular basis.”

May 18th was a busy day as Ambassador Torben A. Gettermann from the Royal Danish Consulate General in Hong Kong invited me to attend a reception for Bruun Rasmussen Auctioneers of Fine Arts that evening. Founded in 1948, Bruun Rasmussen Auctioneers is located in Copenhagen, Denmark and is one of Europe’s leading auction houses. The company provides a trustworthy platform for private sellers...
Chinese glass snuff bottles belonging to Hedda and Lutz Franz; illustrated in the new book FranzArt Glass containing 167 rare snuff bottles and vessels.

and collectors from all over Europe. Each year more than 80,000 lots are sold for fine art, antiques, wine, Oriental art, stamps, coins, jewellery, modern art and Danish design. I am delighted to illustrate Robin Markbreiter’s photographs taken at the beginning of the reception held at the Four Seasons Hotel where important personalities in the Hong Kong art circles were present.

On the previous day Kasper Nielsen, Bruun Rasmussen’s Department Head for Fine Art and Antiques, made a special visit to the Arts of Asia offices, library and study centre to explain his company’s strategy for Fine Art and Antiques sales (which take place four times a year with a well-produced and informative catalogue), as well as online sales. He said, “Recently we have experienced an increasing interest from Asian buyers. Taking this into consideration, we have decided to promote our company and sales platform to a wider range of dealers and collectors in Hong Kong, thus connecting the European sellers more directly to the Asian markets.” I believe he will have great success and readers can learn more about this auction house by visiting www.bruun-rasmussen.dk.

My friends Hedda and Lutz Franz have lived in Hong Kong for approximately thirty years and we share a passion for collecting Chinese works of art, especially snuff bottles and paintings. Through their series of Franz Collection books they are helping to widen people’s knowledge in the field of Chinese art, and I commend them for their hard work.

FranzArt Jade, the first volume in the series and winner of the Silver Award for Hardcover Books at the Chicago Gold Ink Awards 2011, contains 170 fine snuff bottles and works of art, illustrated, described and catalogued. The second volume in the continuing series, FranzArt Glass, contains 167 rare snuff bottles and vessels, displayed with descriptions in the main section, and sequentially catalogued at the back of the book with provenance details, publishing and exhibition history, and notes. These lavishly illustrated cloth-bound books are impressive, 36.5 x 28.5 cm. Considerable thought has been put into the book’s artistic presentation, such as the front cover with large block-pressed Chinese characters meaning “Glass”. For more information please visit CA Design Book Club (www.cadesignbookclub.hk). There is a 10 per cent discount for members of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society.

To conclude my Publisher’s Editorial for our Special 250th Edition I would especially like to mention for readers’ attention the Biennale des Antiquaires which takes place under the dome of the Grand Palais in Paris—another city that is very close to my heart having studied there some sixty years ago. This event celebrates the exceptional beauty and craftsmanship of rare objects from antiques to contemporary jewellery. Under the aegis of the Syndicat National des Antiquaires—SNA (the National Antique Dealers Union), the 26th Biennale des Antiquaires presents some 150 exceptional exhibitors from September 14th to 23rd, 2012.

Christian Deydier, President of SNA and one of the world’s leading experts in Chinese archaeological works (see “Christian Deydier in an Interview with Tuyet Nguyen”, Arts of Asia September–October 2010 issue, pages 14–20), has entrusted Karl Lagerfeld, one of the most respected and influential fashion designers in history, to be the artistic director of the event. The Biennale, regarded as the quintessence of French luxury and lifestyle, attracts many art lovers and antiques collectors worldwide. With Asia’s growing interest in antiques, Christian Deydier has been busy travelling and promoting the fair in Hong Kong and Greater China. He has also invited Wallace Chan, an internationally renowned jewellery artist, to be the first Chinese jeweller as well as the first Asian to exhibit in the Biennale des Antiquaires. Mr Chan will showcase his one-of-a-kind designs alongside nine of the most esteemed jewellery houses from the Place Vendôme. I anticipate this fair will be among the most glamorous art and society events of the year.