

GALERIE
OSCAR DE VOS



G E O R G E M I N N E 1 9 2 2

Eucharistic Christ

Circa: 1922

1922

Charcoal drawing

23 x 34 cm

Signed and dated lower right: George Minne 22

At the beginning of the First World War, George Minne fled to Great Britain. Throughout the war he remained as an exile in Wales, living successively in Aberystwyth and Llanidloes. Although also Gustave van de Woestyne and Valerius De Saedeleer - the friends-artists with whom he had stayed a decade earlier in Sint-Martens-Latem - sought refuge in Wales during the war, their mutual contacts remained limited. Minne suffered greatly under his isolation. Added to this was the uncertainty about his three sons who were fighting at the front. During these years, an extensive series of finished drawings was created, varying in size from small formats to monumental drawings, up to two and a half metres in size. Minne drew them primarily in charcoal and mainly on paper. The subject matter of these drawings is limited: mothers embracing their children, waiting women, young people, pietas and Eucharistic Christ figures.

In Minne's pre-war work, Christian themes were the exception rather than the rule. In this period, the artist worked with universal themes, in which he especially put a deeply human emotion and expression in his subjects. Minne did base himself on Christian themes - for example, the figure of The Prodigal Son or John the Baptist - in order to subsequently deepen this iconography and to refer to a more universal level. It is now remarkable that Minne literally started working from stories from the Bible during the war years. From this period, for instance, more than forty drawings are known that have Christ as their subject. The Passion story in particular intrigued the artist, resulting in drawings of the bearing of the cross, the crucifixion, the entombment and the Eucharistic Christ. In this drawing, Minne reduced the theme to its essence. A humble Christ sits at the table and extends his right hand, the sign of his sacrifice to humanity. With the highly suggestive charcoal, the artist conveyed the eternal gesture of Christ giving his body in a very penetrating manner.

Exhibitions

- 1982, Kortrijk, Bank Brussel Lambert, *Belangrijke meesters van de Latemse School*, 18.12.1981-14.01.1982, no. 18.

Literature

Boyens, P., Sint-Martens-Latem. Kunstenaarsdorp in Vlaanderen (Tielt: Lannoo, 1992), 569 (ill.).

Artist description:

During his education at the Ghent Academy for the Fine Arts, Minne became friends with the symbolist authors Grégoire Le Roy and Maurice Maeterlinck. These young symbolists had an extraordinary influence on the young artist, who at that time had already distanced himself from academicism.

Minne made his debut as sculptor at the Ghent exhibition of 1889 and his participation was vehemently opposed by the press and the public. His progressive form language found an audience only at the exhibitions of the Brussels avant-garde circle, Les XX. He was present at these exhibitions from 1890 to 1893. Minne became acquainted with the Brussels art milieu, where he became friends with Emile Verhaeren. He also caught the eye of the French symbolists already early in his career. In 1892, Sâr Péladan invited the artist to his famous Salon de la Rose-Croix.

In Ghent, he tried to form a front against a conservative public. As member of the association Wij willen, he confronted the local Cercle Artistique et Littéraire, which followed a conservative path. His native city indeed was not especially well disposed to him. In 1895, his entry for the Ghent exhibition was even rejected. Despair led him back to Brussels, where in 1895 he registered for the sculpture class given by the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts. Instructor Charles Van der Stappen supported his pupil and found him an atelier. Via Verhaeren he also came into contact with Henry van de Velde, at that moment one of the protagonists of Belgian Art Nouveau. And Van de Velde's international contacts led Minne to the influential German critic and collector Julius Meier-Graefe, who would confer European fame on the modernism of Minne. Around

the turn of the century, Minne exhibited in avant-garde milieus in Germany and Austria. He was worshiped at the Viennese Secession; *Ver Sacrum*, the periodical publication of the association, even dedicated an entire number to his work. He also enjoyed wide fame in France and exhibited among others at the Galerie Durand-Ruel and the Galerie L'Art Nouveau of Siegfried Bing.

In the summer of 1899, Minne went to Sint-Martens-Latem, probably on the advice of his friend Valerius De Saedeleer, who he knew from his academy years in Ghent. Together with Karel van de Woestijne, he would become the intellectual leader of the so-called first Latem group. Minne was the only member of this circle of symbolist artists who remained faithful to the village throughout his entire life, with the exception of the war period.

Minne experienced his Welsh years as oppressive. The continuous uncertainty concerning the fate of his sons at the front paralysed Minne and his wife. He did take part frequently in the group exhibitions organised by the Belgian government throughout all of Great Britain. Like his friends De Saedeleer and Van de Woestyne, he could also count on the support of the De Graaff-Bachiene family, a Dutch couple living in London who owned works by Belgian artists in exile.

In the period between the wars, the sculptor enjoyed great fame on the Belgian and international art scene. Numerous exhibitions were dedicated to his work. And in 1931 he was elevated to nobility.