

GALERIE
OSCAR DE VOS



G E O R G E M E U N I E R 1 8 6 4 - 1 9 4 1

Kneeling youth of the fountain

Circa: 1898

1898

Plaster with gum-patine

Height: 79 cm

Minne worked on the theme of a kneeling figure throughout the 1890s culminating in 'Les agenouilles de la Fontaine'. Van Puyvelde writes enthusiastically of the piece: 'L'Agenouille de la Fontaine, répète à cinq reprises sur la margelle d'un puits, n'est-il pas l'image plastique la plus parfaite de l'âme qui se réfléchit sur elle-même, qui se complait à la méditation et qui peur de tumulte de la vie?' But according to him all the kneeling figures of this period are derived from the same source. 'Dans un mouvement d'abandon, ils se sont jétés à genoux et écoutent la voix de leur sang bouillant, le remous des passions montantes auxquelles ils n'échapperont pas, et, dans leur angoisse devant la vie, ils ont jété leurs bras au-dessus de leur poitrine; c'est un geste qui doit protéger ce qu'il y a plus pur dans leur intimité, contre la tragédie de la vie qu'ils entrevoient et devant laquelle ils se sont trop faibles.'

Minne settled in Brussels in 1895, and around this time a new theme appeared in his sculpture, that of the kneeling adolescent boy. This serie took several forms, the best-known of which is exemplified by the Kneeling Youth, his arms folded over his chest in a self-protecting gesture. Five of these figures, in large scale and placed in a circle, form the Fountain of the Kneeling Youths - called 'The Narcissus Fountain' by the poet Karl Van de Woestyne - which is near the Cathedral of St. Bavo in the city of Ghent. The project for the fountain was shown at La Libre Esthétique of 1899. Though criticized at the time, the fountain became the major work of Symbolist sculpture. More than one observer has noted the direct influence of this ascetic, introverted figure on the work of the young Wilhelm Lembruck.

Exhibitions

Sculptures of this subject are represented in the following collection:

- MoMa, New York, object no. 232.1962 (plaster);
- Museum Van Buuren, Brussels (brons);
- Musée d'Orsay, Paris, inv.no. RF 3256 (bronze);
- Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, inv.no. KM 125.732 (bronze);
- Kunsthalle, Hamburg, inv.no. S-1980-5 (marble);
- Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, inv.no. BEK 1292 (MK) (marble);
- Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Wenen (marble);
- Clemens-Sels Museum, Neuss (Germany), inv.no. 1964PI017 (plaster);
- National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, inv.no. 2011.10 (plaster);
- Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent, inv.no. 86874/cat.no. 5 (bronze).

Literature

- H. Devohgelaere, "George Minne en de bibeloterie", in: *Kunst*, no. 10 (Gent: André Vyncke, 1930), p. 235-240 (ill. of another sculpture).
- L. Van Puyvelde, *George Minne* (Bruxelles: Cahier de Belgique, 1930), no. 26, pl. 25 (ill. of another sculpture).
- Paul Vogt & Werner Kreutzberger, *Museum Folkwang Essen. Das Museumgebäude* (Essen: Museum Folkwang/W. Th. Webels, 1966), ill. 6 (ill. of another sculpture).
- R. Hoozee (red.), *Veertig kunstenaars rond Karel van de Woestijne*, exh. cat (Gent: Museum voor Schone Kunsten/ Provinciebestuur/ Stadsbestuur, 1970), p. 148, 149, nr. 69, 71

(ill. of another sculpture).

- Thys, H., "Vlaamse schilderkunst te Latem," in: *Mauretus* (Antwerpen: Verzekeringsmaatschappij Mauretus, 1978) (ill. of another sculpture).
- S. Creuz, P. D'Arschot, A. Dasnoy e.a., *L'Art en Belgique. Hommage à Luc et Paul Haesaerts* (Bruxelles: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1978), p. 87, nr. 43 (ill. of another sculpture).
- R. Hoozee, M. Tahon-Vanroose & A. Alhadelf, *George Minne en de kunst rond 1900*, exh. cat. (Ghent: MSK, 1982), p. 12, 148-149, no. (ill. of another sculpture).
- Belpaire, M.-J., "De Genste kunstenaar George Minne (1866-1941)," in: *Spiegel Historiae*, jrg. 20, no. 1 (januari 1985), p. 37, no. 3 (ill. of another sculpture).
- R. Hoozee, D. Lampens, P. Baudson e.a., *De eerste groep van Sint-Martens-Latem 1899-1914* (Brussel: KMSKB, 1988), p. 151, nr. 11 (ill. of another sculpture).
- R. Hoozee, *Vlaams expressionisme in Europese context* (Gent: SDZ-Ludion, 1990), p. 27, nr. 5 (ill. of another sculpture).
- W. & G. Pas, *Biografische lexicon plastische kunsten in België*, dl. 2 (Arto, 2000), p. 149 (ill. of another sculpture).
- Engelen-Marx, *Beeldhouwkunst in België vanaf 1830, deel I A-D* (Brussel: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 2002), p. 258 (ill. of another sculpture).
- R. Hoozee, M. Miyazawa, *Light of Flandres. Images of a beautiful Belgian Village*, exh. cat. (Japan: Himeji City Museum of Art, Bunkamura Museum of Art & Okuda Genso Sayume Art Museum, 2010), p. 35, nr. 5 (ill. of another sculpture).
- M. Bisanz-Prakken, *George Minne und die Wiener 'Moderne' um 1900* (Wien: Wienerroither & Kohlbacher, 2011) (ill. of another sculpture).
- R. Hoozee, M. Tahon-Vanroose & C. Verleysen, *De wereld van George Minne & Maurice Maeterlinck*, exh. cat. (Antwerpen: Mercatorfonds, 2011-2012), p. 185, 189, 217, 228 (ill. of another sculpture).
- I. Rossi-Schrimpf, *George Minne - Das Frühwerk* (Weimar: VDG, 2012), p. 41, 43, 212, 243, 250, 376, no. P21 (ill. of another sculpture).
- Robert-Jones, Ph. e.a., *Belgische Kunst - Belgian Art - L'Art Belgique*, exh. cat. (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1980), p. 135, no. 73 (ill. of another sculpture).
- Gleis, Ralph (ed.), *Decadence and Dark Dreams. Belgian Symbolism* (Berlin: Nationalgalerie - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Hirmer, 2020), fig. 1, 80-89, 114, 117, 322.

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.