

GALERIE
OSCAR DE VOS



G E O R G E M I N N E 1896

The prodigal son

Circa: 1896

marble

1896

h. 58 cm

signed: G. Minne

This work from 1896 is one of the most intense and expressive sculptures from the oeuvre of the Ghent sculptor George Minne. This group is typical of Minne's iconography. Before 1900 Minne knew his most creative and innovative period in which he renounced academic style and social realism. His friendship with the symbolist poet Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) was no stranger to this. Both were interested in medieval mysticism and looked for other possibilities to represent the emotional world of man. Minne developed a style in which he no longer aspired to a realistic rendering, but rather to a depiction of the internalized emotion. Characteristic of Minne are the delicate, naked bodies that have been sculpted in a delicate way. Already in his earliest images he made in his twenties, such as "Embracing Couple" and "Fighting Men," the motif of the naked entwined bodies occurs. With 'The Prodigal Son' he brings this style to an expressive highlight. The reunion of father and son culminates in an explosive embrace where both their bodies merge, as it were. The image seems to be a visual representation of the ecstasy that occurs in the medieval writings of the mystical author Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381), of whom Maeterlinck has translated a work. The modelé also refers to the image of the same name by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917). This powerful representation of unbridled emotion is a harbinger of expressionist sculpture.

Exhibitions

- 1929, Brussels, Galerie Georges Giroux.
- 1982, Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, September-December 1982 (copy in plaster).
- 2001, Ghent, MSK, Een Zeldzame Weelde. Kunst van Latem en de Leiestreek 1900-1930, 17.06-23.09.2001, no. 14 (copy in permanent collection Museum of Fine Arts Ghent inv.no. 1982-G).
- Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts, permanent collection (copy in plaster).
- Leuven, Museum M, permanent collection, inv.no. C/278 (copy in bronze).
- Antwerp, Phoebus Foundation, permanent collection (copy in bronze).

Literature

- Van Puyvelde, L., L'Oeuvre de George Minne. Sculptures et Dessins (Bruxelles: Galerie Georges Giroux, 1929), p. 12, no. 19 (ill. van ande exemplaar).
- Van Puyvelde, L., George Minne (Bruxelles: Cahier de Belgique, 1930), 23, 57, 77, no. 19, pl. 17 (ill.).
- Campo, Campo & Campo 100, Grote Steenweg (Antwerpen: Campo & Campo, 1997), 97 (ill.).
- Hoozee, R., Veertig kunsenaars rond Karel Van de Woestijne (Gent: MSK, 1979), 47, no. 65 (ill.).
- Hoozee, R. e.a., George Minne en de kunst rond 1900 (Gent: MSK/Gemeentekrediet, 1982), 58, 123-125, cover, no. 55 (ill.).
- Rossi-Schrimpf, I., George Minne. Das Frühwerk und seine Rezeption in Deutschland und Österreich bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg (Weimar: VDG, 2012), 75-77, 81, 85, 102, 119-120, 127, 367, no. P14, (ill.).
- Hoozee, R. e.a., Wilhelm Lembruck - George Minne - Joseph Beuys (Gent: MSK, 1991), 131, 136, 143, no. 93 (ill.).

- Boyens, P. Sint-Martens-Latem: Kunstenaarsdorp in Vlaanderen (Tielt: Lannoo, 1992), 242-247, 566 (ill.).
- Pauwels, H., De eerste groep van Sint-Martens-Latem 1899-1914 (Brussel: KMSKB, 1988), 62.
- Leblanc, C., F. Eeckman, C. Verleysen, Nevia-Sint-Martens-Latem, tent.cat. (Brussel: Museum van Elsene, 2015), p. 84-85 (ill. ex. M-Museum Leuven).

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.