

# GALERIE OSCAR DE VOS



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

The mason

Circa: 1897

1897

Plaster

H. 76 cm

Repatinated

Auguste Rodin's work was a point of departure for George Minne. But about 1891, after Rodin had patronizingly dismissed him with words of encouragement, Minne returned to Belgium.

At the time when sculpture was dominated by grandiose gestures of realism and late romanticism, and was often executed on a massive scale, Minne simplified and refined sculpture into small, compact works which, unlike Rodin, did not try to conquer space but shrank back into themselves.

Then, in 1896, having spent a year at the academy in Brussels, his most productive time began. Minne's early work is characterised by its often strong symbolist character. His withdrawn figures are imbued with a quiet mysticism that accentuates their spirituality.

His work contained only a few motifs that he explored repeatedly, which displays influence from Gothic sculpture and the Pre-Raphaelites. His major success throughout Europe began around 1900 and deeply influenced artists in Belgium, France and Germany.

The Mason (1897) displays George Minne's skills at their best and dates from an instrumental year, one year after the sculptor completed his celebrated work the Fountain with Kneeling Youth.

The Mason contains some of the mysticism but, above all, one marvels at the delicacy with which the artist conceived this concept. This sculpture Minne has been executed in bronze, wood and marble, but his plaster casting – which contains the crisp and sharp detailing – was closest to the artist. Evident in this sculpture is Minne's inventiveness in the depiction of the human figure. The body of The Mason is depicted in the most captivating gesture, physically exerting itself whilst contained in deep concentration.

#### Collections:

- Antwerp, Phoebus Foundation (wood, plaster)
- Brussels, Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, inv.no. 4791 (wood).
- Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts, inv.no. 1951-L (wood)
- Paris, Musée d'Orsay, inv.no. S RF 2010 3 (marble).
- Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, inv.no. ZV 3012.
- Dresden, Albertinum, Skulpturenslg. (1910).

#### Exhibitions

- 1899, Paris, Durand-Ruel, no. 195 (another exemplaar).
- 1899, Brussels, La Libre Esthétique, Exposition VI, no. 240 (another exemplaar).
- 1900, Paris, Maison Moderne (another exemplaar).
- 1902, Berlin, cat.no. 315 (Der Schnitzer).
- 1906-07, Berlin, Kunstsalon Paul Cassirer, no. 61 (another exemplaar).
- 1912, Köln, cat.no. 612.
- 1913, Düsseldorf, Flechtheim.
- 1913, Ghent, cat.no. 672.
- 1943, Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts, *Valerius De Saedeleer - George Minne* (ill. of another copy).

#### Literature

- Bombeke, R., P. Adams, F. Benijts e.a., *Acht van Latem*, exh. cat., 1993, nr. 33 (ill. of another copy in wood).

- Boyens, P., *Een zeldzame weelde. Kunst van Latem en Leiestreek 1900-1930* (Amsterdam/Gent: Ludion, 2001), p. 70, nr. 81 (ill. of another copy in wood).
- De Ridder, A., *George Minne* (Antwerpen: De Sikkel, 1947), no. 11 (ill. of another copy in wood).
- Engelen-Marx, *Beeldhouwkunst in België vanaf 1830*, deel I A-D (Brussel: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 2002), p. 2602 (ill. of another copy).
- Hoozee, R., M. Tahon-Vanroose & C. Verleysen, *De wereld van George Minne & Maurice Maeterlinck* (Antwerpen: Mercatorfonds, 2011), p. 168 (ill. of another sculpture in wood).
- Rossi-Schrimpf, I., *George Minne - Das Frühwerk* (Weimar: VDG, 2012), p. 82, 83, 175, 275, 247, 372, afb. 18 (ill. of another copy in bronze and wood).
- Vagianos, A., "The Sculpture of George Minne," in: *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*, pp. 52-64, fig. 4 (ill. of another copy in wood).
- Van Doorne, V., C. Baumann M.A., *Sint-Martens-Latem - Worpswerde 1880-1914 twee kunstenaarskolonies* (Deinze/Worpsewede: MuDeL/Grosse Kunstschau, 1996), p. 77, nr. 11 (ill. of another copy in wood).
- Van Puyvelde, L., *George Minne* (Bruxelles: Cahier de Belgique, 1930), no. 25, pl. 23 (ill. of another copy).
- Gleis, Ralph (ed.), *Decadence and Dark Dreams. Belgian Symbolism* (Berlin: Nationalgalerie - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Hirmer, 2020), fig. 1, 80-89, 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.