

GALERIE OSCAR DE VOS
S I N T - M A R T E N S - L A T E M



George Minne (Ghent 1866 - 1941)

Kneeling youth

Circa: 1898

1898

Plaster

Signed on base: G MINNE

80 x 17,5 x 40 cm

With his sculpture The Kneeling Youth of the Fountain from 1898, George Minne created one of the most poignant and iconic sculptures of symbolism in Belgium and far beyond. The modest, kneeling youth – naked, slender, head bowed, arms folded across his chest – embodies an intense inner emotional life. The work is not a classical heroic nude figure, but a tranquil expression of introspection, vulnerability and existential loneliness.

The design of this sculpture is part of a series of five identical kneeling youths that together form The Fountain of the Kneeling. However, each of these sculptures was also created as an autonomous work of art and has been dispersed among various museum collections, including:

Musée d'Orsay (Paris, France)
Museum Folkwang (Essen, Germany)
Neue Nationalgalerie (Berlin, Germany)
Kröller-Müller Museum (Otterlo, Netherlands)
Museum of Fine Arts Ghent (Belgium)

Minne's interpretations of the Kneeling Youth had a profound influence on his contemporaries and later artists. The emphasis on inner experience, the ascetic body and spiritual intensity resonate with the visual language of Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele in Austria, and with the mysticism of Rodin and Meunier in France and Belgium. In contrast to Rodin's powerful dynamism, Minne opts for tranquillity and emotional intensity, elevating symbolism to a pure and sober visual language.

George Minne, a key figure in the First Group of the "Latem School" and closely associated with the writers of "La Jeune Belgique" and "Van Nu en Straks", sought pure, inner beauty in his work. The Kneeling Youth of the Fountain marks the beginning of modern introspective sculpture and is rightly considered his masterpiece.

This sculpture embodies the transition from the nineteenth-century academic tradition to a more modern expression in which the psychological dimension takes centre stage. The young man turns away from the world and inward – a universal human gesture that continues to resonate today.

Exhibitions

Similar item in the collection:

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

Literature

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1 (January 1985), p. 37, no. 3 (ill. other copy).

Bisanz-Prakken, M., *George Minne und die Wiener 'Moderne' um 1900* (Wien: Wienerroither & Kohlbacher, 2011) (ill. other copy).

Boyens, P., *Symbolisme in Vlaanderen*, exh. cat. (Zwolle: WBOOKS, 2022), 24-27, 135 (ill. other copy).

Creuz, S., 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.

Devohgelaere, H., "George Minne en de bibeloterie", in: *Kunst*, no. 10 (Gent: André Vyncke, 1930), pp. 235-240 (ill. other copy).

Engelen-Marx, *Beeldhouwkunst in België vanaf 1830, deel I A-D* (Brussel: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 2002), p. 258 (ill. other copy).

Gleis, R. (red.), *Decadence and Dark Dreams. Belgian Symbolism*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Nationalgalerie - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Hirmer, 2020), fig. 1, pp. 80-89, 114, 117, 300, 322 (ill. other copy).

Hoozee, R. (red.), *Veertig kunstenaars rond Karel van de Woestijne* (Gent: Museum voor Schone Kunsten/ Provinciebestuur/ Stadsbestuur, 1970), pp. 148, 149, nr. 69, 71 (ill. other copy).

Hoozee, R., M. Tahon-Vanroose & A. Alhadelf, *George Minne en de kunst rond 1900*, exh. cat. (Gent: MSK, 1982), pp. 12, 148-149, no. (ill. other copy).

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Hoozee, R., 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 (compare copy in bronze).

Hoozee, R., M. Tahon-Vanroose & C. Verleysen, *De wereld van George Minne & Maurice Maeterlinck*, exh. cat. (Antwerpen: Mercatorfonds, 2011-2012), pp. 185, 189, 217, 228 (ill. other copy).

Pas, W. & G., *Biografische lexicon plastische kunsten in België*, dl. 2 (Arto, 2000), p. 149 (ill. other copy).

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Van Puyvelde, L., *George Minne* (Bruxelles: Cahier de Belgique, 1930), no. 26, pl. 24 & 25 (ill. other copy).

Vogt, P. & W. Kreutzberger, *Museum Folkwang Essen. Das Museumgebäude* (Essen: Museum

Zeman, B. (red.), *Gewagte Visionen*, exh. cat. (Neuss/Köln: Clemens Sels Museum/ Wienand, 2023), pp. 88-89, 94-101, 150, cat.no. 12 (ill. other copy).

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.