



George Minne (Ghent, 1866 – Sint-Martens-Latem, 1941)

Kneeling Child, first half of the 1880s

Charcoal on paper, 52 x 41 cm

Signed lower right: *George Minne*

A kneeling naked child looking down, a theme which ran through the work of George Minne, one of the main Belgian sculptors of the end of the 19th century, and which appears here at the beginning of his work.

George Minne



The son of an architect, George Minne was born in Ghent in 1866. He attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent from 1879 to 1887. After a basic training, he took architecture courses before heading towards sculpture. He then had Ghent sculptor Louis Van Biesbroeck as his teacher. His first sculptures disconcerted his master with their anti-academicism, while their simplicity and magnetism commanded the admiration of Maurice Maeterlinck and other Ghent symbolist poets for whom Minne created illustrations. During his years of studying, Minne also became friends with symbolist landscape painter Valerius De Saedeleer.

George Minne exhibited for the first time at the Triennial Salon of Ghent in 1889. Although his works did not reach the general public, they attracted the attention of Émile Verhaeren and the group *Les XX*, who invited him to exhibit at their salon in 1890. He subsequently became a member of *Les XX*, but also of the Ghent progressive circle *Wij willen*. In France, he took part in the salons of the *Rose Croix*. Minne also exhibited at the *Libre Esthétique* exhibitions in Brussels as well as at the Venice Biennale.

George Minne married in 1892 (he had eight children) and decided in 1895 to leave Ghent, which had refused his sending to the salon and denied him any subsidies, for Brussels, where he took sculpture lessons from Charles Van der Stappen at the Academy of Fine Arts, where his work was appreciated. He also received the first prize for sculpture in 1896, probably for his *Three Holy Women* (fig.1). The Brussels period was particularly creative. After several themes of puny adolescents rendered with great sobriety, Minne sculpted *The Kneeling* in 1898. He repeated the sculpture five times, following the example of Rodin, whom he admired, to create his *Fountain of the Kneelings* (fig.2) which is considered his masterpiece. In 1899, Minne, encouraged by his friend Valerius De Saedeleer, settled in Sint-Martens-Latem. He only

left the village during the First World War, which he spent in Wales. He died there in 1941, ten years after receiving the title of baron.

George Minne's work was appreciated in Belgian avant-garde circles, but also abroad and, more particularly, thanks to Henry Van de Velde and critic Julius Meier-Graefe, in Austria and Germany, where it was exhibited among others at the Vienna Secession. He therefore influenced sculptors like Ernst Barlach, Käthe Kollwitz and Wilhelm Lehmbruck, establishing himself as the originator of Expressionism. He also marked the art of painters Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele.

Émile Verhaeren thus summarized his work: "*Minne raidit en des poses inédites et nerveuses ses maigres mais très vivantes figurines. Son art est âpre, personnel, ému.*" (Minne stiffens his thin but very lively figurines in new and nervous poses. His art is harsh, personal, emotional.)

Kneeling Child

George Minne's early drawings are relatively little known and mainly concern studies of human figures. The Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent has some drawings from the second half of the 1880s, including a wash drawing picturing a shoemaker (fig.3), as well as sketchbooks from the 1890s. Our drawing, still very academic, must be set in the early years of Minne's apprenticeship at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent. We know that he followed the live model classes of Ghent painter Théodore Canneel from 1884 to 1886.

Minne includes the naked young boy in a triangular composition. He illuminates his body through the contrast with the background, which he darkens with dynamic strokes that do not occupy the entire surface. The body is not idealized or simplified as in his later works. If this pose is rendered with realism, it nevertheless announces the numerous bodies of stylized young kneeling adolescents interspersing Minne's drawn and sculpted work (fig.2 and 4). From 1890 onwards, the figures depicted by Minne became longer and more fragile, in a more mystical representation. His characters therefore translated the malaise and existential suffering that only the withdrawn pose and the lowered face of this drawing can announce.

Illustrations

In the text : Photograph of George Minne.



Fig.1 : George Minne, *Three Holy Women*, 1896, Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.



Fig.2 : George Minne, *The Kneeling / Fountain of the Kneelings*, Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts.

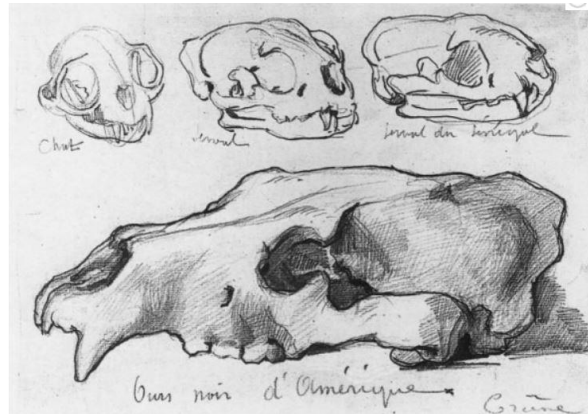


Fig.3 : George Minne, *The Shoemaker*, 1887 / *Studies of animal skulls*, 1883-88, Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts.



Fig.4 : George Minne, *Studies in a sketchbook*, 1891-98, Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts.

Resources used

HOOZEE (Robert), *George Minne*, in : *Du Réalisme au Symbolisme, L'Avant-garde belge 1880-1900*, Bruges, Fondation Saint-Jean, 1995, pp.215-223.

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George Minne (georgeminne.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be).

George Minne, in : Kik Irpa.