

GALERIE OSCAR DE VOS SINT-MARTENS-LATEM



**HIGHLIGHTS
BRAFA 2015**

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

De verloren zoon [*The Prodigal Son*]

1896

Bronze

58 x 33 x 16 cm

Signed: G. Minne

Like many other artists of his time, George Minne finds his inspiration in medieval art. The purity of his work is reminiscence of the religious and spiritual creations of Gothic sculpture. Minne realises this purity and simplicity by removing the narrative context from the work. His themes are often personalised by mother and child, but in this case by father and son. *De Prodigal Son* was borrowed from a parable in the New Testament in which a son returns to demand his inheritance from his still living father. The son squanders the money on his sinful and meaningless life. When all the money is gone, he is forced to take a job. At that moment, the son comes to his senses and decides to return home and ask forgiveness of his father. Instead of punishing him, the father welcomes him home and they celebrate his return. The unconditional love between parent and child in this story has been a source of inspiration for many artists. In this sculpture, Minne carves the father's face, especially the eyes, in sharp lines. His expression is moving and intensely emotional. The facial expression and the resolute strength in his body reflect disbelief, relief and gratitude. The son's face is expressionless. His physical condition reveals the bony structure and weak, helpless posture of his body. The two bodies melt together beautifully, but their physical expressions contrast. *The Prodigal Son* exudes an inner concentration and restrained style. A gripping embrace suggests an inseparable relationship between father and son. The theme is elevated to a universal monument of brotherly love and grace. The theme of this sculpture is close to that of Rodin's *Fils prodigue*. The choice for the theme of human suffering unsurprising when one realises that at the start of Minne's career, he was well aware of the Symbolist writers and poets who called existential problems into question. After his move to Brussels, Minne meets important Symbolist colleagues such as artists Jan Toorop and Johan Thorn Prikker, with whom he shares an interest in the political situation. Their work reflects a similar interest and style. The elongated limbs, presented in an almost decorative way, are typical for the Manerist style of these Symbolist artists. In fact, *The Prodigal Son* reveals the modernist tendency from which Expressionism will emerge. Similar work can be found in the Ghent Museum for the Fine Arts, Museum der Modern Salzburg and Museum M in Leuven. A copy was also a part of the former collection of Valerius De Saedeleer and Jules De Bruycker.

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Gustave Van de Woestyne (Ghent 1881 – 1947 Uccle)

Deeske op het veld [Deeske in the Field]

1908

Mixed technique with gold leaf on paper

60 x 38.5 cm

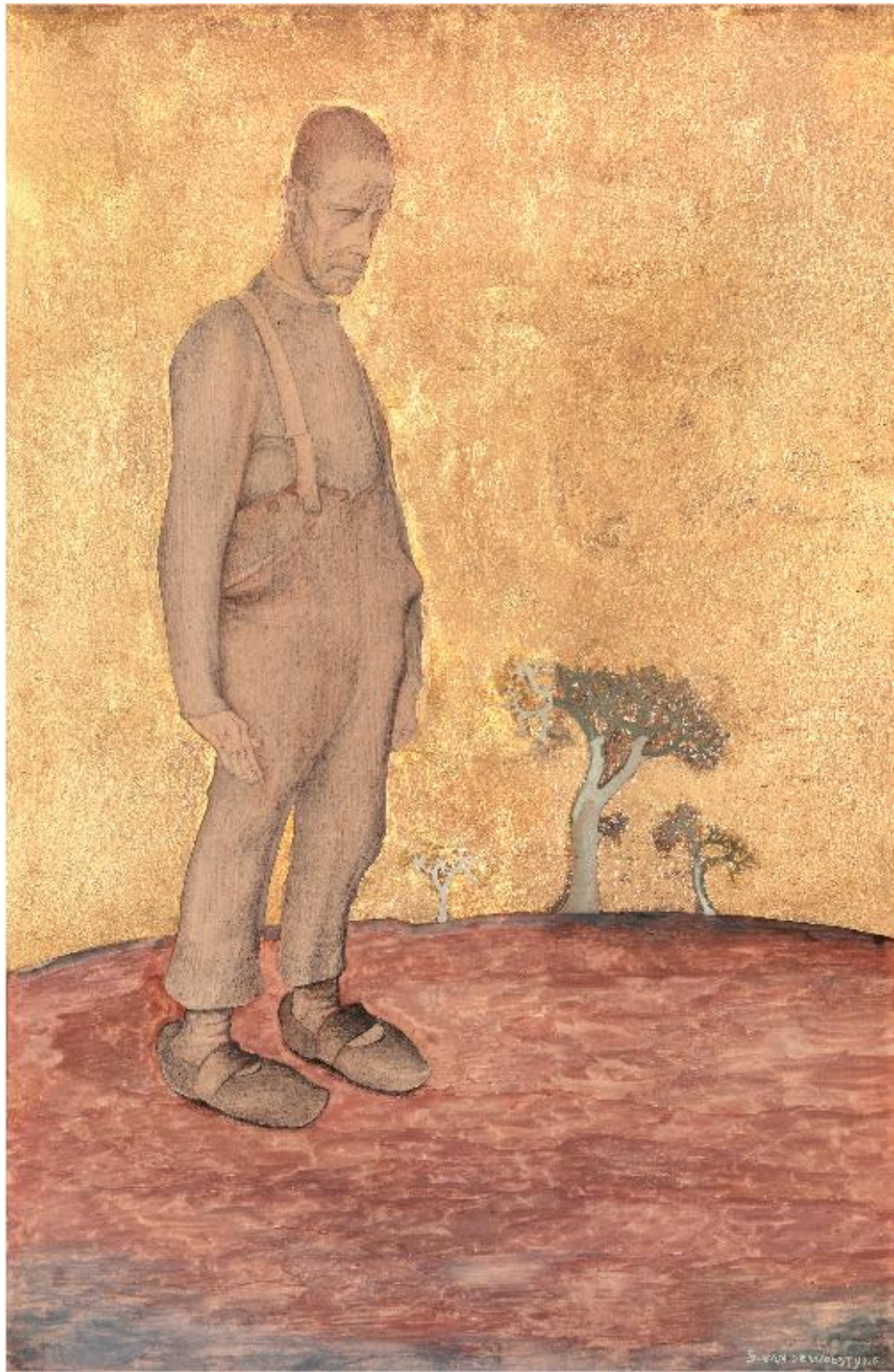
Signed lower right: G. VAN DE WOESTYNE

Origin: F. Coppieters-Eggermont, Ghent

The impressive portrait of *Deeske in the Field* is part of the series of portraits that Gustave Van de Woestyne painted around 1907-1908 in Sint-Martens-Latem. The main motif of peasants, the poor, the blind and the destitute are inextricably linked to Latem. Van de Woestyne's peasant portraits have a grand and almost brutal monumentality that at the same time are naturalist and expressionist. Deeske Cnudde (1883-1926), who appears regularly as model, plays the leading role here. The artist has an intense bond with Deeske, who personifies precisely the simplicity and spiritual strength Van de Woestyne is seeking in Latem. *Deeske in the Field* is the most mature work of this series. While according to tradition, Deeske was a short, stocky man with a long face, ruddy nose, folds of skin in the neck and straight hair, in this work he exudes the great character of a classical hero. In an ideal landscape, he stands fully self-absorbed, deep in thought. Conspicuous, in addition to the monumentality of the figure, the linear character of the clear lines, the coordinated use of colour and the sharp analysis of the almost drawn presentation are: the grooves in the man's face and hands, his strange posture and the near absence of spatiality. The features of the Flemish Primitives and Bruegel most valued by his brother Karel Van de Woestyne achieve their fullest expression in this work. Oneness with the Flemish landscape and appreciation for the simple life of the peasant are depicted against a gold background that highlights the essence of Deeske's exterior and interior. The artist does not opt for a landscape perspective, but overlays the background with gold leaf, an ancient symbol of purity. The totality evokes a tranquil mood reminiscent of Byzantine icons and works from the Italian Quattrocento. It is also reminiscent of the distinctively expressive peasant heads of Bruegel.

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Gustave De Smet (Ghent 1877 – 1943 Deurle)

De verliefden [Lovers]

1921

Oil paint on canvas

140 x 99 cm

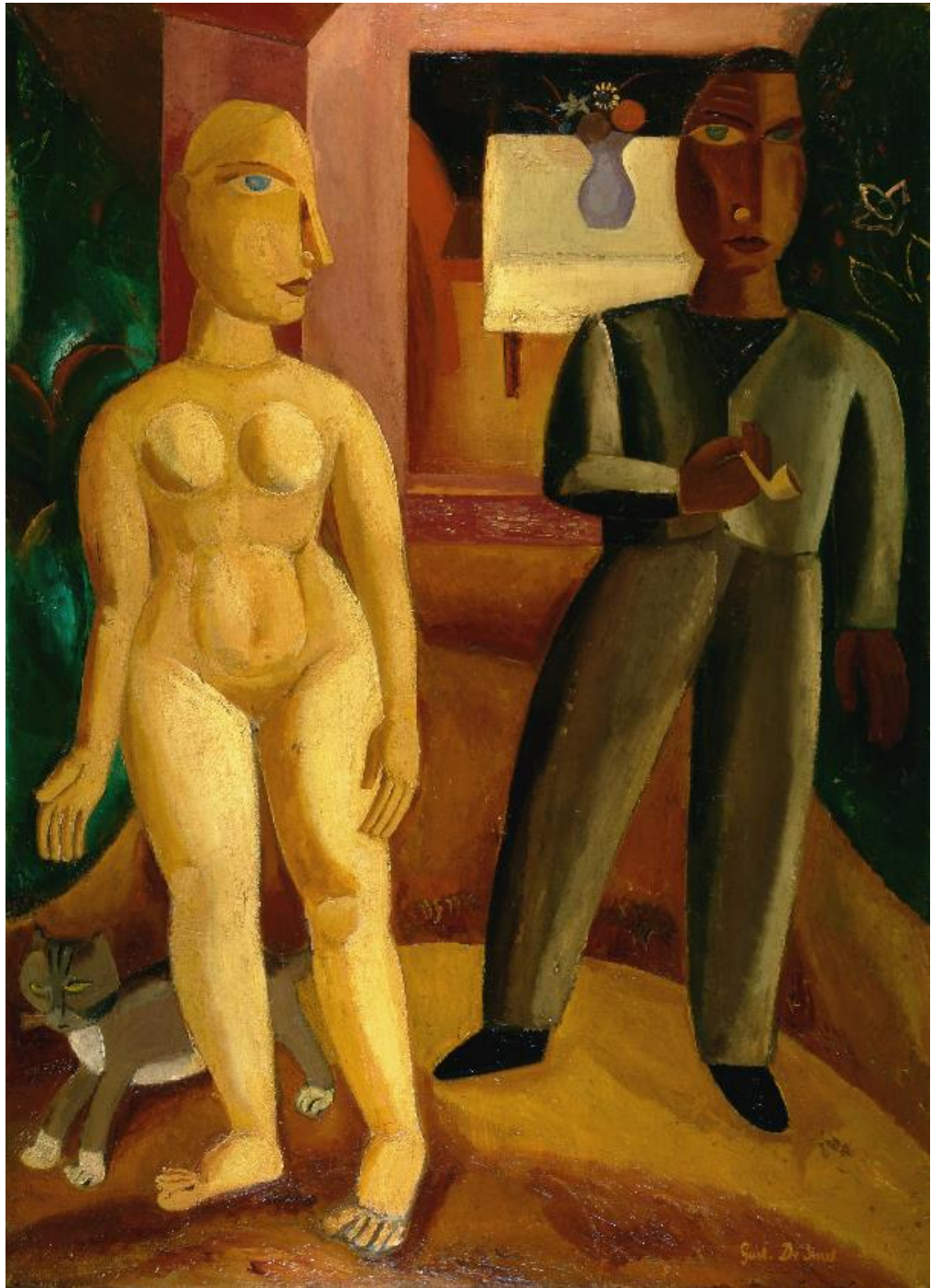
Signed bottom right: Gust. De Smet

Origin: P. Boendemaker, Amsterdam; L. Gestel, Blaricum; Campo, Antwerp (1964).

Around 1921, Gust. De Smet paints an impressive series of immense figure compositions. The high point of which is the work *De verliefden [Lovers]*. During this period, De Smet is in close contact with Constant Permeke. The affinity with the powerful style of the Ostend artist is also present in this painting. Via Permeke, De Smet probably comes into contact with the possibilities inherent in large formats, and from this moment on, his paintings are more monumental. De Smet's angular setting and extreme stylising are based on the work of French Purists such as Léopold Survage and André Lhote. Like the works of these French artists, De Smet's image violates the laws of perspective. The canvas is dominated by two characters, the future couple. The man standing in front of the house – which soon will be their marital home – is clothed. The girl is naked. She stands with her back to her friend, without hiding her naked body. Moreover, with her right hand, she appears to be making an inviting gesture to the young man. The cat at her feet refers to her fickleness and striving for independence. The figuration, especially the body of the woman, is based on the cylindrical figures of Fernand Léger. Around 1920, this French artist removes the individual character of the characters in his work, and presents them as mechanical beings. The spatial silence and the feeling of eternity in *Lovers* are related to the work of Léger. However, the inanimate creations of Fernand Léger differ from those of storyteller Gust. De Smet. The story he presents in this masterpiece has a universal force with an almost biblical character. The artist in fact creates a tension between diverse aspects of love: seduction, relationship, the unknown and the future. The painting is among the latter works that De Smet started during his Dutch years and it once belonged to the collection of Dutch artist Leo Gestel. He was De Smet's guide in the Amsterdam artistic world during the early years of the First World War.

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Constant Permeke (Antwerp 1886 – 1952 Ostend)

De woonwagen [The Caravan]

1928

Oil paint on canvas

136 x 111 cm

Signed and dated lower left: Permeke / 1928

Provenance: M. Gevers, Antwerp; Baron M. de Schaetzen, Brussels; G. Van Geluwe, Brussels.

In the masterpiece *The Caravan*, Constant Permeke brilliantly depicts strength and physical effort, linked to an impoverished social situation. On a long country road with a strongly ascending perspective, two figures push a caravan. They are two wretches, a man and a child, without a real home and without a real purpose in life. Their journey is hopeless and endless. And the painting is presented without perspective, literally and figuratively. The composition is alternately composed of thickly painted zones in the background and sparingly applied sections in the characters. Remarkably, the head, torso and feet of the man are sketchily drawn, as are the hands and feet of the child. Reduced to their essence, they take on a general character, allowing the artist to give expression to movement and power. Strong mastery of technique is also needed to give sensitivity to the enormous yellow patch, allowing it to no longer be felt as flat. The duality between the monumental and exquisite detail is again present in the massive dominance of the caravan and the two figures against the picturesque nature of the small figure with the bicycle in the doorway at the top of the canvas. Permeke focuses not so much on the individual, but on the vagabond life in general. He gives a more universal significance to *The Caravan*, a context that is not defined by time and space. All elements are in service of this generalisation. Thus, the almost monochrome colour patches are broken only by a few colour accents, strengthening the dark, hopeless resignation of the protagonists. Moreover, the drawn and painted zones reduce the person to a rudimentary essence, to a solitary existence amid a godforsaken, hostile environment. All components exude bleak poverty: the shabby clothes of the characters, the rickety caravan, the wasteland through which they journey. In *The Caravan*, Permeke shows himself a visionary who foresaw the powerlessness of humankind during the crisis years. Permeke intuitively chooses a format that coincides with a harmonious rectangle, a perfect doubling of the golden rectangle (biauron). The road disappears in the top edge of the painting, at the division of the golden section. *The Caravan* is a classical masterpiece.

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Rik Wouters (Mechelen 1882 – 1916 Amsterdam)

Allée Rose A [*Rose Lane A*]

1912

Oil paint on canvas

65 x 75 cm

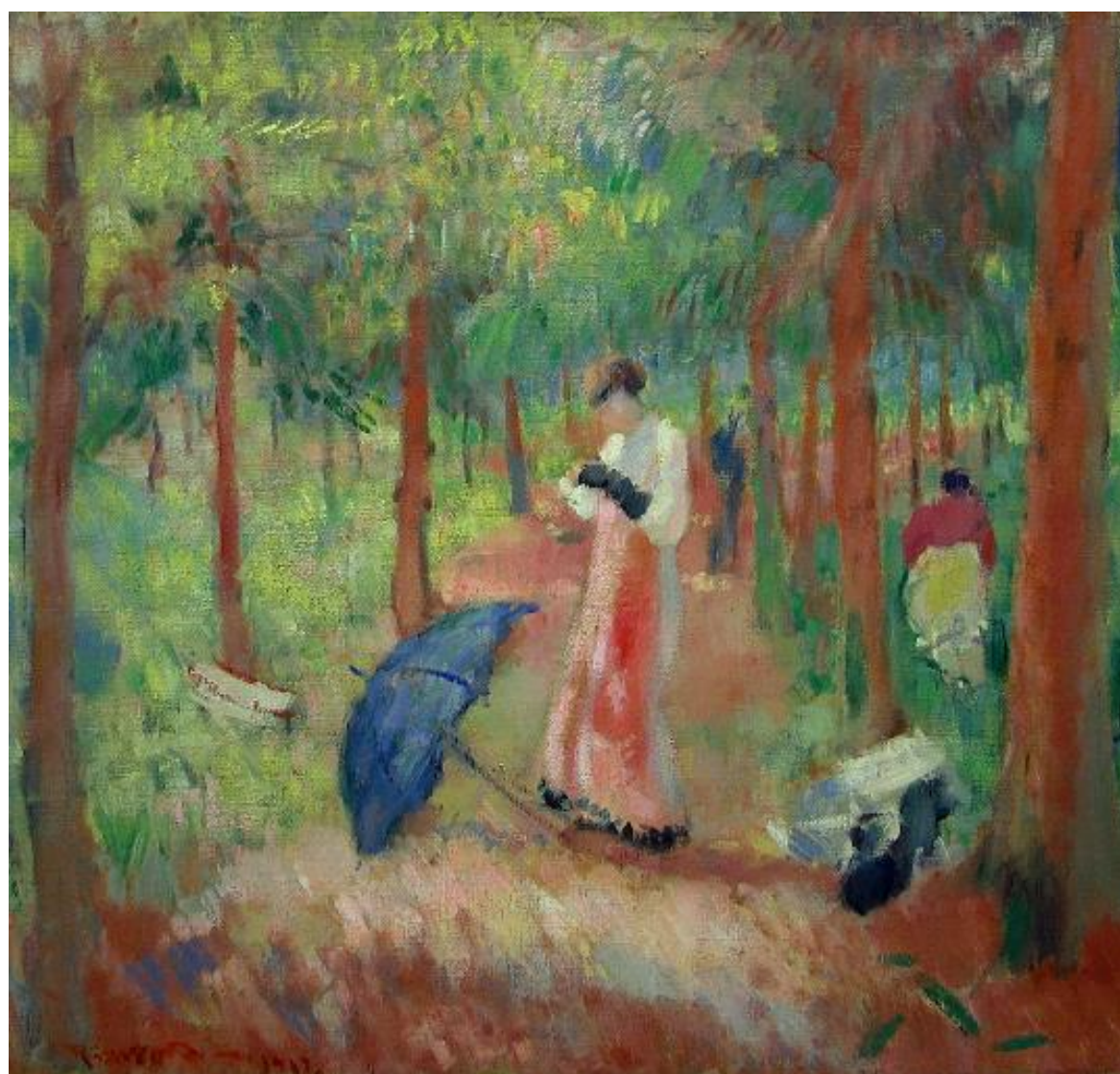
Signed and dated lower left: Rik Wouters 1912

Provenance: Baron A. de Broqueville, Brussels; G. Giroux, Brussels; J. Bourjou, Wemmel; J. Krebs, Brussels.

Rik Wouters begins to paint around 1900, first portraits and then allegorical and symbolic compositions to which he adds a new luminosity. Wouters uses a Pointillist technique with broad, bold dots. He uses wax to give his painting a dull effect and experiments with diverse types of media. From 1907, the painter lives with his wife Nel in Bosvoorde. Here the artist paints mainly interiors and still lifes with a knife using broad strokes. The lightness in Wouters' work rather depends on composition, harmony and contrast, causing the colour patches on the canvas to take on a life of their own. In 1910, the artist meets Simon Lévy, a great admirer of Cézanne and Van Gogh, who sends him reproductions of Cezanne's work. From 1911, Wouters again attempts to give greater fluidity and transparency to the paint material by mixing the paint with turpentine. It is applied with a brush in a thin layer that is translucent in places. The artist strives for better composition of the image and for clearer form. 1912 is the pivotal year in his career: at the beginning of this year he meets Georges Giroux with whom he concludes an agreement to exhibit in Giroux's gallery. In 1912, Wouters paints some sixty canvases. The proceeds from his first exhibition allow him to go to Paris. There for the first time he comes in direct contact with the oeuvre of Cézanne. From this moment on, he will use greater structure in his compositions. After Paris, he travels to Cologne and Düsseldorf and there sees the works of Van Gogh, Cézanne and the German Expressionists. He leaves Impressionism behind, and no longer paints with many small touches of colour. The brush scarcely touches the canvas, and more and more parts of the medium remain visible. In the painting *Rose Lane A* we again recognise something of Ensor in the fluttering colours that, however, here are the result of light strokes. The intensity and the freedom in the use of colours, as well as the tempestuousness of execution, are unmistakably linked with Fauvism. In 1912-1913, the painter reaches the masterful high points of his short career. During this period, Wouters completes his most cheerful paintings in the style of Fauvism. His palette brightens and becomes luminous, as can be strongly seen in the painting *Rose Lane A*.

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