HILDE VAN GELDER (Ed.)

Constantin Meunier.
A Dialogue with
Allan Sekula
CONSTANTIN MEUNIER AND LEUVEN (1887-1897)
A LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP

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I don't know whether Leuven will remember much about the great soul who lived among its ancient buildings, but what I do know is that Meunier always spoke with tenderness of the ancient city where his work reached unprecedented heights.

A hundred years after his death Leuven is actively remembering the time when Constantin Meunier (1831-1905) lived in its ancient buildings. Undoubtedly the best known 19th century sculptor of which Belgium can boast, he began and ended his career in Brussels. The fact that his studio home in Ixelles, the district in Brussels where he spent the last five years of his life, has been set up as the Constantin Meunier Museum links the artist all the more with the city of his birth. Yet, at the height of his career Meunier also lived for eight years in Leuven and taught there for almost ten years.

There are usually explicit, but summary, references in biographies to this 'Leuven period' (the dates of which seem to vary) as nevertheless being his most fertile period artistically. In fact several chapters, sub-sections and even short articles have been devoted to this. This essay highlights the details of that episode in Leuven from the point of view of history rather than art history. It examines the nature of Meunier's relationship with the city and how it regarded him, what brought him to Leuven and drove him away again and the role his time in Leuven played in his artistic career. To what extent was this a love-hate relationship?

1. DOES LEUVEN WANT MEUNIER?

Not particularly wanted as a teacher

With the support of the government, Leuven first called on the services of Constantin Meunier around 1874 for the decoration of the newly built neo-Gothic church of St. Joseph's. He completed three or four massive religious paintings (Fig. 8) there and, according to his biographer André Fontaine, did this 'with love.' Nonetheless, Meunier had been applying in vain since 1876 for a job as a teacher at the Leuven Academy of Fine Arts. In 1883, while Meunier was living in Seville for six months, his wife, a pianist originally from Paris, discussed with the director of the Leuven academy, the painter Louis de Taeye (1822-1891), a potential job as teacher of painting for her husband at the academy. From Seville Meunier told her on 1 February 1883 what he had written to the director. He informed De Taeye that he was very keen on the prospect, but that he would stand formally as a candidate only once he had been assured in advance of winning. For, after defeats in former applications to the academies of Brussels (as long ago as 1863), Liège
and Mons, he did not want to be rejected again. He probably never wrote an official application because it was impossible to guarantee him the job. This uncertainty is also evident in a letter dated April 1883 from Seville to his friend, the Naturalist writer Camille Lemonnier (1844-1913), who had married Constantin Meunier’s niece Valentine a few months earlier: ‘We too might well be going to Leuven, but we can’t be sure yet. If this were to happen, which would be really nice, it would be good to meet.’

Yet three years later Meunier put in for another job at the academy in Leuven, this time for the post of director which had become vacant owing to the resignation of Louis de Taeye. Meunier, who was at his wit’s end with serious financial problems, was really hopeful of the job in Leuven, even though he associated it with a certain ‘academic dullness’: ‘... I am resting my last and only hope on the position of director in Leuven, which would at least put bread on the table, which I shall soon have to go without in this beautiful country. […] In short, I’m at my wit’s end and I hope just a little bit, or rather, a lot, that Leuven will want me, unless my art is regarded as a crime there too and I do not possess the necessary academic dullness for such a post.’

Not without a certain irony, disappointment and perhaps even bitterness, Meunier complained to his friend Edmond Picard (1886-1924), who, as well as being a lawyer, was an art critic and co-editor of the magazine L’Art Moderne together with Octave Maus and Emile Verhaeren, about the political wrangling that was always associated with the appointments. He gave Picard an account numbering four pages after a visit to Leuven, where he had met a few of the protagonists in the appointments game. He called mayor Vander Kelen and alderman Marquetry, both of whom promised him their support, charming gentlemen, but their comments made him suspicious. Meunier feared that he would be kept in suspense, as there now at the last minute turned out to be another candidate who had already been teaching at the academy ‘for at least fifteen years’. So Meunier was afraid – rightly as it turned out – that he would meet with the preference of the ‘middle class head of the local administration’ and he himself would be depicted as an artist with a certain merit, who would not, however, make a good director, which in Meunier’s opinion boiled down to a man without any talent other than for writing reports.

Meunier even expressly asked Picard for support via his magazine. In September 1886 he wrote: ‘It may well be, my dear Picard, that one of these days, when these much vaunted nominations officially appear, I shall ask for your cooperation in securing my success.’ After his unpleasant experience in Leuven this plea was all the more forceful and desperate: ‘If you think there is anything else you can do, please do it. But I have no idea what else you can do. – I can assure you that on my part, as you can see, I am not sitting around doing nothing either. I am doing my very best, but unfortunately without very much hope.’ Picard was prepared to defend his friend, in whom he steadfastly believed. He therefore asked the artist to keep him informed about the situation in Leuven, so that he could support him. But his support was (still) of no avail, as once again Meunier’s fears were proved right and his attempt was unsuccessful. It was the ‘phantom candidate’ Gerard Vander Linden (1880-1911), a sculptor who had been a teacher at the Leuven academy since 1865, who, in January 1887 walked off with the title of director.

The frustrated Meunier, now suffering from a serious lack of money, via Edmond Picard thus had a hand in the reports supporting his own cause in L’Art Moderne. In some articles Leuven came in for some extremely sharp criticism on this matter. In particular a ‘certain Leuven committee’ got it in the neck; it was accused of having given the district council a list of three candidates, on which Meunier’s name did not even appear! Only mayor Vander Kelen, who openly expressed his preference for Meunier, was spared from criticism and was even complimented. However, L’Art Moderne’s revulsion for the narrow-mindedness and ‘backwardsness’ of Leuven, also at an artistic level, was clear from its acerbic comments: ‘Truly, we can now say goodbye to any hope we continued to nurture that there was still a province to be found in Belgium, which has remained spared from the most ridiculous routine prejudices. There are ineradicable harcores of stupidity. You still come across people there who believe in history painting and thoroughly look into whether the candidates have any debts. What they want most is a good family man, a good husband and an impeccable civic guard. As if art wouldn’t work without keeping one’s house in good order. What’s more, they still believe in the Prix de Rome, in the good students of the academy and the proteges of Mr Galliau. They have no idea that all this is ancient history, an art of painting which has now been buried with all due ceremony and about which no one speaks any longer, unless it’s to say that it is dead, in no way capable of being resurrected and incomprehensible to future generations [...]’

As an endorsement of these accusations, the magazine did not applaud the visit by the members of the committee to the studios of all the candidates, but in fact dismissed it as a low trick, in which the committee’s main concern had been to check out the tidiness of the candidates, as though a disorderly studio indicated a similar policy as director. Taking Brussels as the criterion for artistic innovation, the magazine emphasized how much Leuven was the opposite pole to this and how far away from it was, ‘not five paces away, but a hundred or even two hundred paces, no even as far away as the Congo!’ They even joked that at the fact that, even though it had definitely decided to put a painter and not a sculptor at the head of the academy, Leuven had ultimately chosen a sculptor anyway. The columnists believed that Leuven could be saved from wasting away artistically only by attracting a nationally and internationally respected artist from the capital and pressed Meunier’s case. So the weekly periodical zealously advocated the award of the post of teacher of painting, meanwhile also made vacant by the retirement of the painter Louis Daels (1820-1893), to Meunier.

Even though letters of application had been coming in since the beginning of November 1886 following this retirement, Meunier did not write his official version to the Leuven college of mayor and aldermen until 29 March 1887. But this was preceded by a great deal of political manoeuvring. On 12 March 1887, just over a week after the terrible gas explosion at the Quarqen mine, which claimed the lives of 113 mine-workers and left a deep impression on Meunier and his work (see in particular The Fire-damp (fig. 9)), he wrote to mayor Leopold Vander Kelen. In this letter he asked his supporter if he could at last give him a decisive answer about his appointment, which they had previously discussed together in his studio in Brussels. Meunier repeated that he was prepared to come and live in Leuven and make his contribution to the teaching of art. The rental contract on his house in Brussels was coming to an end anyway and he now wanted finally to have some security. It appeared now to be just a matter of formal authorisation, as can also be seen from a long digression by Meunier on obtaining a suitable room for his lessons.
However, in his detailed reply of 15 March 1887 the mayor made it clear that he had already been doing all he could for some time to press Meunier’s case at the college of aldermen and to get the appointment off the ground, but that Meunier would still have to be patient for a while. Anyway, the mayor could not guarantee anything because the decision was out of his hands, but would be placed before the college of aldermen again the following week and they would then have to reach a definitive solution. He reassured Meunier by saying that he stood the greatest chance this time, on the explicit condition that he would move with his family and studio to Leuven. The mayor also hoped that the vacancy would not be advertised, which would only delay the procedure even further. That was exactly what happened, though, because at the last minute advertisements appeared the same month in the local *Journal des Petites Affiches*, in the liberal daily and weekly papers *L’Étoile belge* and *Le Libéral*, and in *Le Précurseur*. The advertisement went as follows: Academy of Fine Arts. The position of professor of painting is to be awarded. The incumbent will have to live in Leuven and open a studio there. Minimum salary: 3000 fl. Maximum salary: 6000 fl. Applications must be submitted to the secretary of the municipal council at the latest by next Monday 4 April. A few other artists replied to this, but one wonders whether this campaign was not done mainly *pro forma*, as the letters had to arrive at the latest by 4 April and the appointment was made the following day.

At the meeting of the municipal council on 5 April 1887, from which the mayor was absent, Constantin Meunier, who was by then already 56 years old, was finally almost unanimously chosen from seven candidates as teacher of painting at the Leuven academy. He may have been partly under pressure from the capital by the weekly *L’Art Moderne*, which gave its compliments, even before Meunier had been officially informed of the decision by letter (on 14 April), both to the artist and to the city, in its edition of 10 April.

Networking, lobbying and political manoeuvres behind the scenes therefore played a not unappreciable role in Meunier’s ultimate appointment. The official story, though, was that Meunier owed his appointment to the numerous successes he had already clocked up; more than his competitors at any rate. This was of course by no means unjustified anyway. Constantin Meunier, who began his career as a sculptor in the studio of the sculptor Charles-Auguste Fräkin (1817-1893), but very soon chose painting, with François-Joseph Navez (1787-1869), had been exhibiting at the Triennial Salons in Belgium since he was twenty years old and since 1861 also regularly in Paris. For more than thirty years he had shown almost exclusively paintings, but in 1885 he exhibited, for the first time since 1861, sculptural works again in Brussels at *Les XX* and at the Antwerp Salon. These were wax sculptures, including a *Puddler* (fig. 10) and *Dockers*, two of his best known sculptures which even at that time were already being greeted with praise by the contemporary press. In 1886 his *Hammermühl* received an honourable mention at the Paris Salon and Meunier did not miss the opportunity to allude to this in his official letter of application to Leuven city council: ‘I have already informed the council of the titles I can call on to support my petition: a long, and I may say, well-filled artistic career, with my artworks in the foremost museums in the country, and, furthermore, mentioned as a sculptor at the Paris Salon in 1886, etc., etc.” In the spring of the following year, the time of his appointment in Leuven, his *Puddler* was being shown in the Salons of Brussels and Paris.

In the Salon catalogues his address in Brussels was still given, but in the Paris Salon catalogue of 1888 it changed to *Rue des Récollets, 55* (Minderbroedersstraat) in Leuven. After 1891 the address in Leuven was to change again to *Staatsstraat* (in 1898 renamed *Boskenveldenlaan* [Allies Avenue] in remembrance of the allies), which was in a higher location. The reason for this was the great flood which swept the city on 25 January of that year, damaging Meunier’s house and possibly also his studio and various artworks. He wrote about this in, among others, a letter dated 9 February 1891: “[...] this circular reached me in Leuven, at about the same time as the floods which destroyed my home.”

*A mind of his own*

As the formal reply to the notification of his official appointment, in April 1887 Constantin Meunier let it be known by return that he was very grateful: ‘I wish to express my great appreciation and thank you for the confidence you have shown in me by entrusting me with these important duties. Believe me, gentlemen, I shall make every effort to earn that confidence.” Amazingly, after all the bickering Meunier still did not immediately set about gaining the confidence of the city council and the academy. Even though his teaching mandate was supposed to start on 29 April 1887, after the Easter holidays, and half way through April he had been asked to get in touch with the new director of the academy to organise it, the college of aldermen sent him a warning letter as late as on 13 June 1887. From this it appears that Meunier had still not done anything about installing himself in the city and starting his lessons there: “Our college understands that you have still made no moves towards taking up your duties. However, in the opinion of the director of the school, it is of great importance that your lessons in painting are organised immediately.” Pointing out that, according to the contract and administrative tradition, payment should not start until Meunier actively set to work, they expressly encouraged him finally to get in touch with the administrative offices and the director Vander Linden, to arrange when he was to come to Leuven. Clearly shocked by this letter, Meunier responded immediately, for two days later he started his lessons and took them regularly from that day onwards.

In the same warning letter from the city council Meunier was asked about his promise to set up his own studio in the city, to which he was obliged by his appointment contract. Although Meunier was initially given three months deferment to look for suitable accommodation in Leuven, half way through June – perhaps because they could not see it being done – the city made him a generous proposal: a studio was made available for him. The neglected octagonal university anatomy amphitheatre with tall windows, on the corner of the actual *Kapucijnenvoer* and *Minderbroedersstraat*, the street where long ago Dirk Bout’s (circa 1410-1475) had lived, would be equipped as a private studio for him (fig. 11). As a threat it was also added at the same time that this allowance could be withdrawn at any time. In return for the concession, the advance costs for the necessary basic repair work and initial equipping, it was proposed that he should augment the artistic collections of Leuven museum, under the supervisory eye of the art-connoisseur mayor. The college of aldermen had already decided on this by 31 May 1887: “[...] in exchange for this benefit the artist shall give to the municipal museum one or two
paintings, the subjects of which are to be advised by the mayor, who will also supervise receipt of them.38

Meunier responded enthusiastically to this proposal, declared himself in agreement with the conditions and at the end of the summer of 1887 installed his family in a house opposite the studio.39 On 10 September 1887 Meunier wrote to Picard from Leuven, obviously delighted with his almost completed studio: ‘I am waiting with great impatience for my studio here to be completed, so that I can concentrate my efforts on a great work. This studio, my dear friend, will be simply fantastic.’40 However, this reasonable proposal for repayment in kind was later to lead to conflicts between the city and Meunier, who did not comply with this agreement of his own accord.

The official letter confirming Meunier’s appointment and annual salary of 4,000 francs, also contained packages of subjects in which he was expected to lecture: (1) historical composition, (2) painting from nature, (3) decorative painting, (4) history of art and the archaeology of art, (5) picturesque and aerial perspective and finally (6) painting for girls.41 This last subject was supposed to form part of a course for girls, introduced for the first time in the academic year 1887-1888.42 This meant that Leuven was offering one of the first public art courses for girls in Belgium, as the doors of the Academies of Fine Arts in Antwerp and Brussels did not open officially to female students until 1889, after a great many petitions, and in Ghent until 1900.43 It was the following academic year when Meunier ultimately first taught one of the four subjects offered to girls, to be precise ‘Painting from nature, flowers, accessories, etc’, which in fact only one student attended, although there were at least ten girls.44 Although Meunier was therefore not yet teaching this last subject in 1887-88 he was employed at the time for seven subjects instead of six, as appears from the municipal council’s printed administrative reports.45

However, a note after the subject ‘picturesque perspective’ states that this was not given. This short message managed to produce an extensive exchange of letters between Meunier and the disgruntled mayor and his college of aldermen. Meunier was accused of having reneged on teaching this subject: ‘... In spite of repeated communications you have to date neglected to perform that part of your duties. The college of mayor and aldermen is sorry to have to express to you its dissatisfaction about this. This situation, about which we are justifiedly making a complaint, cannot possibly be repeated in the next academic year, and therefore strict measures will have to be taken [...].’46 When there was still no reply from Meunier, three months later, at the start of the new academic year, he was sent a reminder, with the additional threat that his salary would be reduced if a colleague had to take his place.47

Once again agitated, but clearly piqued, Meunier responded quickly, with a four-page argument, to prevent his salary being cut. He defended himself by stating that the city council had been wrongly informed, because he had indeed taken the subject ‘aerial and picturesque perspective’, but as he saw it: as a practising artist and not as a theorising mathematician.48 Moreover, he thought that if they chose to employ a painter of no small reputation he should no longer be made responsible for teaching the basic principles of perspective. In his opinion such an artist could certainly perfect the students’ application of perspective while they were painting. Nevertheless, after this incident Meunier’s package of subjects was rearranged to some extent and Louis Boschmans, who had applied for the job of teacher of painting at the same time as Meunier, from now on taught the subject ‘picturesque perspective’, but without any loss of salary for Meunier.49 Just over a year later director Vander Linden let the mayor know that Meunier, like all the other teachers, had been giving his lessons regularly since the beginning of the new academic year.50

At the beginning of January 1891 mayor Vander Kelen once again had to remind Meunier that he had promised to give two paintings to the museum in exchange for his studio and that it had already been agreed that he would hand over two of the three recently exhibited large paintings for the town hall. The descent into the coalmine and Departure from the coalmine.51 So he asked Meunier to have them delivered. This prompted the agitated artist to immediately take up his pen to – in his view – put a few things straight.52 According to him, it was not two paintings, but only one. Furthermore, he wished to delicately remind the mayor that he had invited him to his studio before the exhibition to choose one and that at that time the mayor had shown a preference for the large Borinage Landscape. Meanwhile, without having thought he had further committed himself in the presence of the mayor, he had sold the two paintings he was now describing. He therefore had only two paintings left of like importance: the large Borinage Landscape and Women Mineworkers, one of which the mayor could come and choose. If he did not care for the subjects, Meunier was willing to make another work, but in that case for a later date.

After a visit to Meunier’s studio around 22 January 1891 it was agreed that Meunier would donate Women Mineworkers to the city and that the painting would be collected as soon as possible.53 This was done at the beginning of February, therefore after the great flood of 25 January, which evidently did not damage the work. In his letter of 17 February the director of works confirmed that Women mineworkers had been moved to the hall of the college of aldermen.54 However, he took advantage of the opportunity to remind Meunier of his proposal to make a new painting, which seemed to him a better idea, in spite of the outstanding quality of the artwork he had received, since it would be possible to choose a subject that had some association with the city of Leuven. He specifically suggested taking the floods of 25 January as his subject, as this had the advantage that an important event in the history of the city would be recorded.55

Less than a week later and, with increasing displeasure, two and three months later the mayor put this proposal to Meunier,56 who was obviously less enthusiastic about it – after all, they already had his Women Mineworkers and he had been obliged to move because of the flood – since he did not reply until 25 May.57 Undoubtedly with reason, but perhaps also with a sly dig, he explained his late response by the large amount of work for his exhibits for the Salons in Paris and Berlin. He agreed to perpetuate the floods of 1891 and to present the mayor with a sketch before long. In no uncertain terms the mayor made it plain that the promise had been noted and that he expected the sketch soon, probably fearful that it would again take some time.58 Which is what happened, as only after repeated urging did Meunier deliver his sketch to the town hall on 12 March 1892.59 In order to set things in motion at last, Meunier was invited to the next meeting of the college of aldermen on 21 March to discuss the execution of his sketch. The mayor must have been quite exasperated with the artist whose candidature he had once
defended, for once again he had to send several reminders before Meunier got in touch again at the beginning of March 1894; the painting would be ready by September... He finally made his gift of *Foods in Leuven* (fig. 12) in 1900.

In spite of all these difficulties, the Leuven Catholic Circle still chose Constantin Meunier in 1895 for the commission for a public monument in honour of Father Damian or Jozef De Veuster (1840-1889) (fig. 2). Not entirely in line with the true build of the missionary, the tall, slim Armand Thiéry (1868-1955) acted as model for the figure of Father Damian. Considering the style and iconography of his other sculptural works it is no surprise that Meunier had difficulty reproducing the typical long, enveloping habit, but he found a way out by allowing a leprosy-sufferer, reminiscent of the suffering Christ, to shelter underneath it.

Even though Meunier also obtained an important commission from Brussels in 1893 for sculptures for the façade of Noord-Dame de la Chapelle and he was at that time fully employed by commission of the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts jointly with the sculptor Charles Van der Stepen (1845-1910), on the large-scale decoration project for the Botanical Gardens in Brussels, completing his Silver (fig. 13) for this in 1893, the bronze Damian was already finished by the beginning of 1894. In any case Meunier exhibited the group at the Triennial Salon in Antwerp, next to his *Puddler and The Firecamp*. Both already the property of the Belgian state. In the Salon catalogue it was stated below the title of the Damian statue that it was intended for the city of Leuven. The following year the plaster model (fig. 14) was shown at the Salon of Ghent and a bronze reduction in Brussels at *La L'Obro Éstébëtique* and in Paris. Visitors to the Paris Salon were able to read at that time in the accompanying catalogue that the Damian memorial had been erected in Leuven city park.

This was done with all due ceremony on 16 December 1894 by local and foreign dignitaries. This made it one of the first free-standing public sculptures in Leuven, since before the First World War you could count them on one hand. The statue was financed by a committee of prominent figures in Leuven, with the support of the Queen of Belgium. The bronze cast was made in Leuven at Van Aerschot, an ancient dynasty of bell-founders and bronze-casters, who had had premises in Leuven since the 18th century. Their offices and foundry were in Leopoldstrat and Statenstraat, at that time also Meunier’s address. Around 1894 the brothers Alphonse and Félix Van Aerschot also opened a shop in Brussels.

There was some heavy debate about the placing of the monument in St. Donatus park and letters flew forwards and backwards between the organising committee and the city council. In November 1895 the private – Catholic – organisation, which collected money independently and so was not (financially) dependent on the city, asked the city council if it could erect the statue, after it had been donated, on a suitable site. The first choice of the committee and Meunier was the University Square (*Hogeschoolplein*), because it had the right proportions in harmony with the statue and good accessibility and visibility for the numerous foreign visitors! However, the – liberal – city council refused this proposal. The plans for dedication in the spring of 1894 were therefore postponed, since Meunier could not order a plinth until the site had been decided. Out of the alternatives suggested by the city council, the city park, but chiefly the *Graasmarkt* [Grain Market] (today Herbert Hoover Square) where the statue ‘would not even disturb the market’, still seemed to Meunier and Baron Descamps to be the best. Ultimately, at its meeting on 16 February the city council itself decided on the city park and proposed erecting the statue or the scale-model of it in the park for a few days, so that the population could also have a say in deciding the best position for it.

Whether this actually happened is not known, but in any case from 1900 onwards the college of mayor and aldermen received letters and a petition from the church wardens of St. Jacob’s and the neighbouring residents asking to have the statue moved to the grass verge by St. Jacob’s church. The city council deemed this site more suitable than a public park and in 1907 the statue was moved. But on the occasion of the transfer of Father Damian’s mortal remains to Leuven in 1936 the city council once again received various well-argued letters in the following years asking to have the memorial moved, this time to the newly named Father Damian Square. This time, however, the city council dug in its heels.

Around the time of the dedication of the Damian statue, at the end of 1894, the Meunier family left Leuven. The constant requests from the city council, however justified, doubled the rankled Meunier, but it was mainly personal reasons that led to this move. Both of Constantia’s sons had died in 1894: the younger, George, a 24-year-old sailor, died of yellow fever in the winter in Rio de Janeiro and the elder son Karl, a talented engraver, died in 20 March in Leuven from influenza, according to some people as an after-effect of the floods. The remaining members of the family, who felt the absence of the two boys keenly in the house in Leuven, decided to close the chapter in Leuven and to return to the city of their birth and to family and friends.

Nevertheless, Meunier still continued to give lessons in Leuven for more than two years, in spite of the exhausting commuter journeys (he left in the morning and returned in the afternoon) and the less than brilliant students he had so far had. Alfred Delaunois (1875-1914) definitely deserves mention as an exception, but perhaps Adrien Henri Van Emelen (1868-1943), who, as the son of the Leuven sculptor Léon Van Emelen (1829-1900), made four façade sculptures for Leuven town hall, should also be counted. Anyway, in 1892 Meunier wrote to his friend, the nine years younger, but already celebrated French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), to say he was sending him this young student sculptor from Leuven.

At the end of April 1897, when Meunier was at last finally free from financial worries, but his health was declining, he officially gave his notice. At any rate, by 30 April director Vander Linden had already passed on his suggestion for replacing Meunier: drawing teacher Louis Boschmans was to take over most of Meunier’s subjects and he would himself take on Boschmans’ innovation in the subjects ‘decorative painting’ and ‘history of art’. When Meunier announced on 3 May that from that day he would no longer appear at the academy the accounts department was immediately notified to stop payment of Meunier’s salary starting from 1 May 1897 and several meetings were convened immediately. Not entirely unexpectedly, Meunier’s official letter of resignation did not follow until some time later. While the city council showed not the least sign of emotion in accepting Meunier’s resignation, he most certainly did. Remaining rather vague about his reasons, Meunier certainly closed the chapter on Leuven elegantly – or was there just the hint of irony in his choice of words? Important reasons and my health oblige me to do this. I shall always remember the wonderful years I spent in the calm and peace of your very picturesque and very artistic Flemish city with pleasure and emotion.
A posthumous favour to Meunier

At the time of his death inIxelles on 4 April 1905 Constantin Meunier was both nationally and internationally regarded as one of the important artists of the 19th century. Did this fame have any impact on the attitude of the city of Leuven to the artist it once rejected several times as a teacher, but on the other hand offered a studio and commissions? How was it to deal with the fact that this now internationally renowned artist, who constantly deferred giving his promised artworks to the city, spent part of his life in Leuven? Could Leuven see an opportunity for city-marketing?

Immediately after Meunier’s death the Leuven city council offered its condolences to his widow Léocadie Gorneaux and had flowers sent. The city decided, probably between 1905 and 1909, to put up a memorial plaque on the front of Meunier’s former studio, but the exact date of erection still needs to be investigated. The bilingual inscription, referring to his Leuven period, reads as follows: ‘Dans cet édifice élevé en 1744 par le savant docteur Rega a travaillé de 1887 à 1895 le grand sculpteur Constantin Meunier. / In dit gebouw opgericht in 1744 door den gelee- den dokter Rega heeft de groote beeldhouwer Constantin Meunier gewerkt van 1887 tot 1895’ (In this building erected in 1744 by the scientist Dr Rega the great sculptor Constantin Meunier worked from 1887 to 1895) (fig. 15). Strangely enough, Meunier is remembered as a great sculptor, whereas in Leuven he in fact taught for ten years as a teacher of painting. Also remarkable is the final year of 1895, since Meunier had already moved to Brussels the year before. However, since he still gave lessons in Leuven until 1897, it is not so surprising that he may still have used the studio for another year, as it was probably not immediately cleared, which is an enormous upheaval in the case of a studio.

Better known by the people of Leuven than this plaque, which is difficult to see and read, is undoubtedly ‘Constantin Meuniersstraat’. Whereas in Forest (Brussels) a square was given Meunier’s name, the Leuven college of aldermen decided on 20 March 1933 to name the new street between Voskuilstraat and Naamsevest after Constantin Meunier. Whether Meunier’s time in Leuven played a part in this decision seems likely, but cannot currently be confirmed. Anyway, it is impossible to deduce his period in Leuven from the present street sign, which gives only the dates of Meunier’s birth and death and the general label ‘sculptor and painter’ (in that order).

Four years after Meunier’s death grand celebrations took place in Leuven on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the restoration of the university. An exhibition of Brabant sculpture had also been planned, on the initiative of the Leuven sculptor Franz Vermeylen (1857-1922), whose father Jean-François (1824-1888) had for a long time been a teacher of sculpture at Leuven academy. This idea, for which special stationery had already been printed, was, however, cancelled at the beginning of 1909. But in February of that year it had already been replaced by the ambitious plan for an unprecedentedly extensive retrospective solo exhibition with almost the complete sculptural works of Constantin Meunier and, for the first time, an execution in actual size of a version of his ‘Monument to Labour’ (fig. 5). The pioneers were Canon Armand Thiery, defender, biographer and former friend of Meunier; Franz Vermeylen, whose studio was only a stone’s throw from Meunier’s and who himself also owned a few of the master’s artworks (including the paintings A step’s boy and The Brickmakers); sculptor Benoit Van Uytenbroek (1857-1927) and the painters Omer Dierickx (1853-1939) and Alfred Delaunois (1876-1944); Vermeylen took on the role of chairman of the exhibition organisation and Thiéry that of secretary. Mayor Léon Collins accepted the honorary chairmanship of the exhibition.

In barely three months, workers, subsidies (to the value of 18,000 francs) and artworks had been sought out and found, a poster designed (by Omer Dierickx) (fig. 6), invitations and a catalogue printed. The catalogue raisonné and bibliography it contains now perhaps still offer the most complete survey of Meunier’s work and what was published on it before May 1909. The substantial booklet was assembled by professor and canon Armand Thiéry, his (first-year) student Emiel Van Dievoet (who lived in Kapucijnenvoer, near Meunier’s studio) and Alfred Delaunois. But most importantly, in that short time span an impressive exhibition was set up, with 254 sculptures, 236 paintings, 46 water-colours, pastels and drawings.

Amidst great interest, on 9 May 1909 at 11 o’clock the retrospective opened its doors, or more precisely those of the brand-new Arenberg Institute in Naamsestraat. The sculptures were shown on the ground floor, paintings and drawings on the first floor and the monument in the garden. Both Franz Vermeylen’s opening address and Omer Dierickx’s article in Louvain Journal of that day were prime examples of the chauvinistic restitution of the dead artist by the city of Leuven, although not without criticism. Both also bore in mind the divided, less positive or indifferent memories of and attitudes towards Meunier of the people of Leuven. Vermeylen spoke of both pride and debt: ‘Belgium possessed a great artist and for eight years Leuven had the honour of counting Constantin Meunier among its residents. It is here that he created the majority of his best works. Leuven retains its memory of this with a legitimate pride and is delighted to have the opportunity today to acknowledge its debt.’ Dierickx was convinced that the Belgian people had the strange habit of appreciating something only once it had been approved abroad. He believed it was the same with Meunier and Leuven: Meunier lived there without being noticed until France imposed on them admiration for his work and they taught themselves to regard him as a great master.

In exchange for its subsidy of 3,000 francs Leuven city council asked that admission prices should be as low as possible (10 or 15 centimes), especially on Sundays, for the benefit of working people. A subtle homage to Meunier, but controversial. The exhibition committee was, after all, dependent on admission fees to iron out the expected deficit. Moreover, it declared that it was worried about the large number of small statues which might not be adequately protected if masses of people attended. After heated discussions about this in the college of aldermen and in letters to the organisers, these ultimately agreed to reduce the normal admission price of 1 franc to 25 centimes on the last three Sundays and Mondays of June. However, the city council, not satisfied with this, intentionally circulated in a press release that the admission price on those days was only 20 centimes! The committee, who felt it had been bypassed, responded fiercely that the city must then come up with their promised subsidies, since a large number of accounts had to be settled and the deficit was greater than planned.

The number of visitors is not known, but judging by the proceeds from admission fees it must have been somewhere between 6,000 and 10,000. This also included foreigners. This was obviously the intention, as can be seen, for example, from the poster (fig. 6) where the location was
stated as ‘Louvain-Belgique’. According to engineer Charles Jacques, the most important lender to the exhibition by virtue of his marriage to Constantin’s daughter Charlotte, most foreigners did not arrive in Belgium until towards the end of the exhibition.53 So immediately afterwards he was also asked to lend his collection for exhibitions in other interested countries.

From 8 to 23 September 1930, the year in which Meunier’s Monument to Labour was finally erected in Brussels, a new retrospective of Constantin Meunier took place in Leuven as part of the celebrations on the occasion of Belgium’s centenary. This was supplemented by artworks from (Leuven) contemporaries, the teaching staff, (former) students of the academy and people invited by the ‘Friends of the Museum’.54 Initiator and chairman Alfred Delaunois had been Meunier’s favourite student in Leuven and was now director of the municipal academy. There were 147 of Meunier’s artworks on show at this location: sculptures, paintings, water-colours, pastels, and in particular drawings and sketches and plans and scale-models by architects Mario Knauer and Emile Poly and Robert Puttemans for the Monument to Labour. The paintings shown The Floods (Heverlee) and The Supply Sloop (Floods in Leuven) are less well known, but interesting in the context of Leuven. Works by Constantin’s son Karl included a painting and an etching of the Leuven beguinage and an etching after his father’s The Firemill. Many of the works shown had a Leuven building, townscape or person as subject.

This catalogue is useful in that it also states the material of the sculptural works (there was, for instance, a wooden Pietà by Meunier and a small tin statue of his grandchildren) and, in particular, names the owners of all the works. It thus appears that the Leuveners Leopold Vander Kelen and Canon Thiery, who supported Meunier on behalf of the city, also bought work by him in their own right. Thiery, for instance, owned the Horse at the Drinking Place, of which a drawing was also shown. Many residents of Leuven were possibly seeing this impressive statue for the first time, since even though the first sketches for this horse had been made in the old armoury of Leuven, this was actually the only statue missing at the exhibition of 1909.55 Leopold Vander Kelen, who lent two paintings of a womanumineworker, also owned the small statue Woman Mineworker (fig. 16) and the painting Steel Casting in the Factories of Seraing.56 Just as at the previous retrospective, almost all the works were loaned from Meunier’s legacy which was managed by Mr and Mrs Jacques-Meunier. Only the shown plaster copy of The Firemill (fig. 9) and the painting Floods in Leuven (fig. 12) were items in the possession of the city of Leuven.57

Not a single artwork by Meunier had been bought for Leuven’s public collection. Whereas various Belgian and foreign museums had been buying artworks by Meunier since 1880 and are still doing so today, the city of Leuven and its museum did not pursue any conscious policy of forming a collection relating to Meunier.58 They did, though, receive several gifts between 1900 and 1948.59 The Jacques-Meunier family made a substantial donation in 1936 of three plaster sculptural works, The Sower (fig. 13), The Prodigal Son (fig. 17) and Maternity (fig. 18). They approached Alfred Delaunois and asked him to exhibit the sculptures as advantageously as possible, either in the town hall, the museum or the academy. In the donation letter they explicitly referred to the time Meunier spent in the city. ‘It is a gift, a reminder that we are giving to the city of Leuven of the time C. Meunier spent in the place where he made the most important of his works. It also serves as a reminder of his favourite student, Mr Alfred Delaunois.’60

The month after that the city council gave the order to have the items collected from Brussels with ‘a lorry and two agile workers’ and brought undamaged to the town hall.61 More than a month later, Delaunois reported to the college of aldermen that he was in possession of the three ‘most magnificent’ artworks, given by Mr and Mrs Jacques-Meunier and asked if he could place them in the vestibule of the town hall. To persuade them, he stressed the beneficial effect of this move for both the people of Leuven and tourists: ‘with the aim of in this way uniting the most characteristic works of the ingenious master for the further encouragement and enjoyment of art by our fellow citizens and strangers.’62 A few days later letters of thanks were sent by the city council to the donors and intermediary Delaunois.63 He was also asked to give the plaster models a bronze-coloured patina at the city’s expense.64

So, although the existing Meunier collection is not the result of deliberate acquisition strategies, there were nevertheless some plans in existence to link Meunier permanently and visibly to the city of Leuven and to reap some benefit from this itself. Following the retrospective exhibition in 1909, the first rumours of the erection of an actual Meunier museum in Leuven began to circulate. At the time Constantin’s son-in-law Charles Jacques already offered his cautious cooperation in this: ‘I know there is talk of a Meunier museum in Leuven, but these ideas are still being mooted and there is certainly no museum yet. When this museum actually exists, there will still be time enough to look at what will be put in it and under what conditions I will agree to give my cooperation.’65 Ultimately there was never a Constantin Meunier museum in Leuven, but there was one in Tilburg. The studio-house that Meunier had built there at the end of his life was opened to the public as the Constantin Meunier museum for the first time in 1939. The collection was almost entirely formed by the Constantin Meunier legacy administered by Charles Jacques.

Also in 1909, Canon Thiery expressed the desire that the Monument to Labour should sometime be given a place in Leuven, even though Meunier himself really wanted it to be erected in Brussels:66 ‘May the Monument to Labour, the main work that the master conceived in Leuven, one day be erected in that same city and keep alive there the memory of the great creator of art who brings such honour to the city.’67

**Wanted by some: an open-air Meunier museum**

Even before the opening of the Meunier museum in Brussels, in 1936 Edmond Dorn, socialist alderman and acting mayor of Leuven – therefore representative of the city who originated from Brussels, and rector Paulin Ladeuze – representative of the university – dreamed aloud of this idea. They conceived the grand, but never executed plan of redesigning the Volksplein (People’s Square) (at the beginning of the 19th century briefly called Place Napoleon and in 1940 renamed Montagneuse Ladeuzeplein) into a truly public Constantin Meunier museum in the open-air (fig. 19).68 These two gentlemen took Canon Thiery and Alfred Delaunois, among others, to one side and asked the Brussels architect Henry Lacoste (1885–1968) to work out a design and a scale-model (fig. 20).69 As the successor of Victor Horta at the Brussels academy,
he had drawn the plans for, among other things, the Kunstberg in Brussels. His first preliminary sketch was complete by the beginning of 1937. It was gradually extended to the Graanmarkt (called Herbert Hoover Square since 1980) and the city park, with a total of almost thirty sculptures by Meunier. From the start the organisers made it clear, however, that they could not promise that it would be carried out. Lacoste noted this, but nevertheless hoped, like the mayor, that the project would one day be implemented.\textsuperscript{[10]}

A letter dated June 1938 from Lacoste to the mayor contains a detailed description of his masterplan for the three public spaces, which were closely linked to one another. The site was built up from its lowest to its highest point according to a rising line ending in a climax, part of the Monument to Labour: Departing from the lowest point of the Volksplein, bottom level and departure point of the composition, you would go upwards via the French garden, with terraces laid out on that square, and come out in the English garden, which would occupy the whole of the Graanmarkt, and finally end up in St. Donatus Park. All this would form the Triumphant Path of Labour, ringed by artworks by the master Constantin Meunier. The culmination point of the composition at the top of St. Donatus Park would be the construction, bearing Meunier's bas-reliefs on its four sides (fig. 23).\textsuperscript{[12]} This attractively composed route past Meunier's statues was preferable also to be followed in that order by visitors as an educational and edifying circular route. A statue route in glorification of labour seemed an excellent idea for fostering the work ethos and an ideal educational instrument.

The at that time still unpaved Volksplein, lined with chestnut trees, with a natural slope of three metres, would then be arranged on the geometric French model with an elongated water basin with a fountain at the top, on the vertical axis four terraces with an equal number of water basins (covered in blue ceramic) and three little waterfalls as crossing points, and also stairs, stiff box hedges, 'neatly arranged plantings' with flowers, poplars and benches, and round the square no less than fifteen sculptures, on natural stone plinths and slightly screened by shaped spinneys, with centrally among them The Firedamp.\textsuperscript{[12]} The statue of the Belgian diplomat Sylvain van de Weyer by Charles Geefs, which earlier in 1923 had been transferred from the station to the Volksplein to make room for Wolters' war memorial, would have to give way to these plans.\textsuperscript{[13]}

The Graanmarkt and St. Donatus Park were to be restyled according to the more open type of English landscape garden with meandering water features and rocks (fig. 21). The avenue from the city park, to be called the Sacred Path of Labour was to be bordered with sculptures on plinths, which, continuing in a spiral, even through a lake, led to a kind of rotunda with four large reliefs of the Monument to Labour as its apotheosis (fig. 22). At the Graanmarkt firstly the statue to Edouard Remy dating from 1899 would be removed (fig. 25). The plinth was the work of the architect Victor Horta and the sculptures by sculptor Pieter-Jan Braecke (1888-1938), who took lessons at the Leuven academy before Meunier arrived there, but was certainly influenced by him, as can be seen from the Rémy monument.\textsuperscript{[14]} In its place there were to be three statues by Meunier: in the centre The Horse at the Drinking Place (fig. 24) and at the two ends Kesting Mover (or June) and Mover at Work.

They started with these last three statues that Lacoste had originally provided for the Volksplein. Bronze-caster Verbeyst had already agreed in the spring of 1937 to cast them in bronze and to deliver them to the site for the sum of 67,000 francs for the horse and rider and 35,000 francs for the two Movers.\textsuperscript{[15]} Verbeyst added that this was a special price because he wanted to give his workers, who were under threat of unemployment, something to do. In his request to Jules Hoste, minister of Education, in May 1937 to be allowed to make moulds of the two Movers in the possession of the Belgian state, Doms specifically used Meunier's time in Leuven as his argument and received a favourable answer.\textsuperscript{[16]} However, this did not go quite so smoothly for The Horse at the Drinking Place in February 1937. Leuven even had a plaster model, but because there was already a bronze copy in Ambiorix Square in Brussels and Brussels council had previously refused a request from Copenhagen to put up a replica, Leuven received the same negative reply, even after lobbying at the highest level. In September 1937 Lacoste nevertheless had the detailed drawings for his idea for the Graanmarkt sent to the town hall, so that the parks and gardens services could set to work, since the autumn was the ideal time for this.

It was not until the following autumn, on 7 September 1938, in the run-up to the municipal council elections in October 1938, that the city council organised a public showing of the plans in the town hall. Bilingual invitations were sent to 239 people. At a table on which the four-part mahogany scale-model measuring 6 by 2.20 metres with foam-rubber trees was on view, the architect who 'was warmly congratulated on his design' gave an, according to the press, 'first-rate account'.\textsuperscript{[17]} According to the journalists present and to the great delight of the organisers the evening was very well attended, principally by politicians and 'professors, intellectuals, lawyers, doctors of medicine, engineers, monks, teachers, etc.', in other words the upper classes.

Irrespective of the iconography of the planned programme, Labour, which suited the socialists down to the ground, it is actually rather strange, as the right-wing intellectuals also thought, that the most important initiator and convinced supporter of this project was a socialist. After all, the prestigious project promised to be very expensive and, with its stiff horses, was more likely to benefit the strolling bourgeoisie than the needy working class. The Volksplein was in fact constantly used for all kinds of popular entertainment and activities, such as the weekly market, circuses, fast-food stands, bowls games (such as the popular sport of grosse balle or poké) and the fair as the highlight. Paradoxically, clearly this site for ‘popular’ activities to make way for a park with statues of common workers was a thorny point of discussion on the political agenda.

It was in fact the socialists who were accused, in full election combat, by their conservative opponents, of paying too much attention to superficial embellishment of the city, aesthetic and useless luxury works instead of concentrating on genuine urban programmes and problems, such as slum development.\textsuperscript{[18]} Rex, the Belgian political party set up in 1935 by Léon Degrelle, on fascist, totalitarian and authoritarian principles, with a populist campaign expressly opposed the initiative and made it one of its election points. On 14 September 1938 their leader Paul Ouwersz published an open letter to mayor Doms, in which he sharply criticised the project. Ouwersz pointed out that a socialist would be better off worrying about the many impoverished backstreet areas or ‘passageways’ of the city, on which, furthermore, Rex organised a photographic exhibition. Not without irony Ouwersz invited the mayor to this as a return favour for his invitation to Lacoste's lecture at the town hall. In a special edition of Rex's election paper this subject was extensively reviewed and even provided with photographs of Doms' modern-style house in Brussels next to those of Leuven's slum districts.\textsuperscript{[19]} They believed that it was showing lack of respect to confront the mothers from Leuven's slum districts, who were fighting a daily battle.
to keep their children alive, with Meunier's bronze mother with her dead son (*The Friedländ*), which had cost so much money, in an immaculate park.

*De Volksstem* [The Will of the People], the weekly newspaper of the Belgian Workers' Party, took up the cudgel with a certain amount of difficulty against its right-wing opponent: 'The fact that we have actually heard out of the mouth of a Rexist the foolish, childish comment: 'Hands off the fair and don't touch the chip stand!' is enough to make any serious person roar with laughter. Especially if you know, as the chairman remarked, that architect Lacoste's project can be subjected to any desired changes and that every step will be taken to hold the fair in the centre of the city. There is no question of abolishing the fair or moving it to the ramps. That is quite clear and obvious. When the chairman made this statement, adding, let us not confuse art with chip stands, he was applauded. [...] However much the Rexists niggle and whine.'

Apparently there had already been some commotion among the people over the possible disappearance of the land for the fair and the market and Rex chose to take their side, a strategic move in the light of electoral considerations. *De Volksstem* had even need to defend itself in bold letters among its supporters in the above quotation by emphatically stating that the fair would not be abolished.

The socialist weekly rallied its own ranks behind the mayor's proposal and cited the importance of it for the city on the level of *city-marketing avant-la-lettre*: 'This was a large-scale idea which is of great value for the future of our city. Either Leuven goes along with the great course of art or our city will drop to a lower rank. [...] Let us hope that the attempt to create calm and beauty around the library is successful. It would mean prosperity and fame for Leuven.'

*De Volksstem* also pointed to the ethical importance of worthy surroundings for the university library: 'From the moment when Leuven jubilantly agreed to have the library built where it now stands, whatever city council was in power took on the moral responsibility to make the environment worthy of the building.'

The creation of a suitable, worthy and calm environment for the new university library (1921-28, the former one burned down in 1914) was the main reason for the Catholic university to rally behind the plan. Rector Ladeuze preferred not to have the noisy popular events in front of his library, which, on the contrary, needed the befitting silence, serenity, academic sérieux and atmosphere. Providing the library, which had been donated by the United States, with a more prestigious setting was also the argumentation Leuven had used to get the American financiers to cross the Atlantic to finance the surrounding area as well. The new library, full of symbols of American friendship, such as the memorial stones, the American eagle and 48 gilded stars in the clock towers (indicating the United States of America as they were then), was, after all, visited in the 1930s by thousands of tourists and delegates from all corners of the world.

Two weeks after the official presentation a further appeal was made during a visit to Leuven by American representatives from the Hoover Foundation to look at the scale-model. The price ticket was enormous, though. Lacoste estimated the grand plan at 45,900 francs, and this was without the plantings and, most importantly, the sculptures, the greatest expense of all! Rex intentionally brought this up during the election battle and prophesied a perhaps more realistic cost outline of 3 million francs. It was evident, therefore, that America would most certainly at the very least subject this to some scrutiny and it might then come as a surprise that Leuven was counting so much on America's financial support, without apparently providing any viable alternative. *La Dernière Heure* rightly commented that nothing had been said about this during the speech on 7 September 1938.

The socialists' intuition that the initiative would bring fame for Leuven in the long term was right, for even the foreign press reacted enthusiastically once – slightly late – they got wind of the project. The national press agency in Paris showed its interest in June 1939 and asked the mayor about illustrations and the reproduction rights, so as to provide the French press with documentation on the project. The mayor had to reply diplomatically to this, however, that it was only a draft, that nothing had been decided yet and that it was therefore premature to give it publicity. Six months previously the mayor, himself disappointed, had also had to disappoint the bronze-caster Verbeyst. In the run-up to the inauguration of the new municipal council the college of aldermen decided on 28 November 1938 that they would order, before it was too late, from Verbeyst Meunier’s two *Monitors* for the *Graanmarkt*. But just a few days after he had been telephoned with this good news the mayor had to tell him that the order could not yet be confirmed in writing because the municipal council still had to give its final approval and with the new Catholic-Rexist majority this proposal naturally no longer stood the ghost of a chance.

The project was therefore stopped at this political level in 1938-39. After the elections of October 1938 the purple liberal-socialist coalition broke up anyway, the Catholics came into power again and the Rexists gained themselves an alderman’s seat, this latter perhaps even partly due to their standpoint in the affair concerning the open-air Meunier museum. However, as well as this political change of power, the approaching war also played a part and, of course, the terrible lack of financial resources. In this connection it speaks volumes that the city did not pay Lacoste until January 1949, after various demands. Even without counting honorary payment or hours worked, he had incurred expenses for the plans, scale-model, relocations, etc., amounting to 25,000 francs. In view of the many efforts he had made for the Leuven city council voluntarily and without any assurance of a commission, it is embarrassing to see how much delay there was in payment, while the man on several occasions referred to being short of money and begged to receive at least a partial remuneration. The main reasons for this were the war and the death in 1940 of the two protagonists, Edmond Doms and Paulin Ladeuze. Lacoste’s scale-model and drawings, which he asked to have back in 1948, did not survive the war either, apart from a fragment.

The statue for Edouard Remy by Pieter Braecke did survive, though, and still stands in Hoover Square, where the spot intended for Meunier’s *Mower or Horse Drinking* has since been claimed by a debateable ten metre tall, copper manned air balloon. Only very recently, in 2004, there have been monumental sculptural additions to the city park and Ladeuze Square, by the Flemishman Daniel Buren (*Le Jardin Imaginaire*) and the Belgian artist Jan Fabre (*Totent*) respectively.
2. Did Meunier want Leuven?

Leuven's attitude towards Meunier was obviously not unambiguous. But neither was that of Meunier towards Leuven and its institutions and inhabitants. On the one hand, Meunier's perspective of the city was sometimes negative and belittling, especially when speaking to his foreign and worldly Brussels contacts. He would then accuse it of provincialism, small-mindedness and indifference to him and his artistry. His appointment in Leuven did not in fact go entirely smoothly and Leuven was on all kinds of levels smaller than Brussels. Besides, the city had no really strong tradition in the field of art (including sculpture), let alone of innovatory art. Despite several interesting, but not very well known sculptors and painters working in Leuven, it was not the most stimulating environment. Furthermore, several tragic personal events thwarted Meunier's Leuven period, including the flood in 1891 and the death of his two sons three years later.

On the other hand, Meunier specifically acknowledged in other documents the beneficial impact of his time in Leuven. After all, he enjoyed several positive circumstances there which were essential for his work and his private life, including material security, a spacious, light studio and peace and quiet. These things enabled him to devote himself freely to the expensive discipline of sculpture and to produce a very extensive body of work. Probably it is not putting it too strongly to say that Meunier owes his fame to a great extent to his appointment in Leuven and the good treatment and the solitude he found there.

With reluctance

Financial necessity was the main reason for Meunier to apply to the Leuven academy. As head of a family of four children he needed a regular income, and as André Fontaine said in 1923, he too was a good a father not to take his responsibilities seriously.129 That this financial necessity was still a reality in the year of his appointment is illustrated by a letter to Octave Maus, the chief defender of the avant-garde and 'pope' of art in Brussels. In this letter Meunier asks about the payment for his small bronze Woman Mineworker pushing a cart, which the painter Anna Bocho (1848-1936), one of the first admirers of his industrial works, bought at the exhibition of Les XX in 1887: [...] could you tell me when I shall receive the money for my Woman Mineworker? Unfortunately I am by no means rich and at the moment I am looking out on several starving crocodiles who are waiting for their prey with their mouths open... I am very sorry, my dear friend, to have to trouble you with this, since there is nothing in the world I abhor so much as talking about money!!! But, alas, a great deal of it is needed to be able to make works of sculpture and ... to eat!130

The monthly salary of round about 300 francs that Meunier had enjoyed in Leuven since 1887, approximately the same amount as that of the director, was apparently just sufficient to live decently and not to have to incur any new debts, as, according to Meunier, that would be fatal at his time of life.131 Anyway, only half of Meunier's salary would have gone to his wife for the house-keeping, the other half to his art.132 His wife may also have been involved in selling his artworks for extra income. For, in 1888 she visited the warehouses of the Brussels bronze foundry Compagnie des Bronzes to make arrangements for the reproduction (by the lost wax technique) and sale of her husband's statuettes Woman Mineworker and Blacksmith in the Compagnie's shops: Meunier was to receive 20% of the sale price as royalty, possibly increased by 10 francs in each case if he would himself be responsible for retouching the cast statues.133 So the family was still not particularly well off, since in the 1890s Meunier was still complaining in his letters to Edmond Picard about continuing financial constraint.134 He wrote to Auguste Rodin in 1892 that he could not yet give up the job, owing to financial insecurity.135 In spite of his (inter)national successes from the mid 1880s, though not directly with dealers and the public owing to the subject matter, the family probably did not experience real financial security until 1897, the time at which Meunier gave his notice to the Leuven academy. The fact that he had already exchanged Leuven for Brussels at the end of 1894 and yet still commuted to take his lessons until 1897, suggests that they still needed the income until then. Meanwhile they did buy a plot of land in Abdijstraat in bussels, and in 1900 they moved into their house-cum-studio there.

His regular income in Leuven at any rate enabled Meunier to devote himself freely to the expensive art of sculpture. He could even permit himself to refuse overly commercial offers. There is an anecdote according to which a wealthy Paris bronze-caster proposed giving Meunier a substantial sum to reproduce his statuettes by the hundred for sale, often disastrous for the career of an artist.136 Very surprised that the artist refused his offer, the Parisian suggested Meunier must then be very rich. He is supposed to have answered that the opposite was true, but thanks to his position at the Leuven academy he could get by. For, he said, he attached a great deal of importance to following up every copy he had cast, and this was maximum seven or eight of each statue, closely and 'with love', so that each one of them would be perfect. Having hundreds of them cast without being able to closely supervise the bronze casting seemed to him a nightmare.

Nevertheless Meunier found the move to Leuven mentally very difficult. He wrote frankly to Rodin saying he had been close to deep depression, but fortunately had been able to overcome it thanks to his family and friends and his work. After having made it clear to Rodin that he had been forced to make this decision purely for materialistic reasons and calling Leuven a stupid provincial backwater, he then nevertheless invited his friend to come to the city: 'An awful lot has happened since we last saw each other. I am now living in Leuven, where out of necessity I have had to take a position as professor at the local academy; this transplantation to a foolish provincial environment is having a deplorable effect on me and for a moment I thought that it would be the death of me. I was overwhelmed by such despondency that all my friends and loved ones were alarmed. I cannot look back on this sinister period without shuddering... I have now at last got over my pain and have started work again. Now that I am cured, I hope next year you will see in Paris a few of my 'machines' that you will like... But why don't you come to Belgium? I would be so pleased to receive you in my little retreat and let you make a choice there from the drawings, something you would like.137
Meunier repeated his wish that Rodin would come and visit him in Leuven many times in his letters. Whether he ever actually did is not currently known. Several renowned foreign artists apparently did find their way to his studio in Leuven, though: ‘His fame has spread meanwhile; artists coming from abroad have found their way to the sculptor’s studio, tucked away under the dome of the old amphitheatre.’ Among Meunier’s French friends the ones he liked most were the writer Octave Mirbeau and the sculptors Auguste Rodin, Jules Dalou (1838-1902) and Camille Claudel (1864-1943).

Not only to his foreign contacts, but also to those in Brussels Meunier several times let slip that he disliked the provincialism, the lack of dynamism and the boredom of the small university city, while enthusing about Brussels and Paris as vital metropolises of art. He wrote, for instance, to Octave Maus in 1891 that he was delighted to accept the invitation to exhibit at Les XX, because there at least there was some artistic vitality, which you could look for in vain at the official Salons. Moreover, he believed it would rejuvenate him and shake him out of the torpor which overwhelmed even the most alert people in the province, where he was left entirely alone and to his own devices. He also assured Maus that he was doing his level best to return to Brussels as soon as possible.

The fact that the avant-garde artists did indeed regard the people of Leuven pejoratively as ‘provincials’ is illustrated by a letter from the Dutchman Jan Toorop (1858-1928) to Octave Maus dated 1889. In this he writes of a public presentation in Leuven of a sculpture group by Meunier, at which Edmond Picard gave a speech: ‘I was in Leuven yesterday to see Meunier and to listen to Picard. Meunier’s group was superb and simple, grand and full of feelings. I enjoyed myself and Picard’s lecture was extremely interesting. He has been very successful with these provincials.’ Toorop was undoubtedly speaking here of The Freedoom (fig. 9), a mother grieving, bending over her dead son, like a modern Pietà or Stabat mater. Possibly Meunier wanted to show the plaster group, which is in Leuven’s possession and can now be seen in Leuven town hall, first to a small public in Leuven, before it left for the Paris World Exhibition of 1889. There Meunier won a medal of honour and unanimous admiration with this sculpture. Alfred Delaunois recounted how very impressed Rodin was and with him the French president: ‘[…] when this same plaster sculpture featured at the Paris Salon, the great sculptor Rodin, accompanied by the President of the French Republic, stopped by it and praised Meunier universally with the immortal words: President, take off your hat, we are standing before a genius.’ Neither did this accolade escape the Belgian state, for they ordered and bought a bronze version (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium), which was shown the following year at the Brussels Salon.

Meunier willing

Whenever Meunier’s Leuven period is discussed, the modernist concept that most frequently raises its head, both in contemporary and more recent literature and even in his own letters from Leuven, is that of the ‘aristocrat maudit’, the artist as an ignored, misunderstood genius. Invariably an image is invoked of the isolated Constantin Meunier, in solitary retreat, not in an attic room or an ivory tower, but in his Leuven amphitheatre, ceaselessly and fanatically creating. Once he had started work, he did not welcome intruders, as he did not want to be disturbed. You practically needed a reference to be received by the master, who did not have any practitioners or students there. In his article about Meunier Poinset gave the section on Leuven the title ‘The loner of Leuven’.

By extension even the street, district and the entire city came to be imputed with the adjectives monotonous, deserted and isolated, with their rather negative connotations. In his address on the occasion of Meunier’s exhibition in 1909 Baron Descamps said: ‘He retreated into a deserted and remote street. […] Once he had given his lessons, he shut himself away in that laboratory. And in a French periodical could be read, for example: ‘[…] that solitary and sober life of a good craftsman in the midst of the monotonous and the silence of provincial life, passing by quietly, with his apostle’s beard, attentive to all kinds of work, to all aspects of everyday life.’ His friend Lemonnier tried to depict the monotonous and isolation of the provincial city with even more words, and the silence of the street in a remote district of mainly churches and seminaries, which were fatal for any kind of social commerce and circulation. He also linked to this Meunier’s nightly time working sessions ‘while the city was asleep in the great silence of the night’. In this portrait Leuven and its politicians and inhabitants were identified with the indifferent, non-understanding and ‘backward’ environment of the genius.

Others have given a more positive interpretation to this tranquillity and Meunier’s attitude to it. According to Alfred Delaunois, Meunier deliberately sought solitude and therefore ultimately liked Leuven more than Brussels (fig. 25). He maintains that long after he had left Meunier still spoke with satisfaction of the city and the Leuven bourgeoisie to which he was very attached. Armand Thiéry also believed that Meunier benefited greatly from the silence in his studio in the remote Minderbroedersstraat. And on the occasion of Meunier’s subsequent retrospective in Leuven, someone wrote: ‘The peaceful provincial street was extremely suitable for promoting inspiration. The studio was, as it were, predestined to facilitate the master’s ingenuous work.’ He left only good memories behind there.

As loudly as Meunier initially protested about the boredom in the provincial city, he did increasingly acknowledge his quasi hermit’s existence in Leuven as a trump card, even an ideal state for being able to continue working with concentration and drive, without being distracted by all kinds of annoying mundane factors. In July 1892 his renewed invitation to Rodin to look him up in Leuven did anyway sound a lot more attractive than shortly after he had moved there: ‘I am very happy in this little corner of the country where no one is bothered about me, where I am enjoying monastic peace and quiet – isn’t this the ideal situation for an artist? If we two could be together, though, that would be perfect. For it seems to me, dear friend, that you, even you, would also like it here. So do try to come and surprise me here. The weather here is fine and the woods are cool. It would give us a slight respite. I am certain that our guest quarters would be to your liking. We would live the good Flemish life together while talking about art. Go on, do make the effort, it is so close to Paris, where it must be sweltering hot at the moment.’

Meunier sent a similar account of Leuven five years later to the German Georg Treu, who had dedicated a monograph to the sculptor. He described it as an exile out of pure necessity, which had at any rate put bread on the table, but had also filled him with deep melancholy and dejection. But once he had got over this he had thrown himself completely into his work and in
that period had produced all the works Treu knew, which, if he himself stopped to think about it, was an enormous body of work. From that moment onwards he also noticed that he was being taken seriously as a sculptor and that Paris, Dresden and now also Berlin were paying back all that work and that solitude a hundredfold.

But it was to the art critic Léon Tombu that Meunier gave perhaps the nicest summary of his ambivalent attitude to Leuven, even calling those years without doubt the best in his life: ‘Oh yes! I had a good time there! I lived in peace, practically ignored. Apart from a few friends from the art world – of Brussels – who came to visit me there from time to time, no one took any notice of me or what I was doing. And yet it was there that the most important evolution of my talent had ever experienced manifested itself. The initial ideas which were to lead to my Monument to Labour germinated and developed there, and indisputably I spent the happiest years of my life in Leuven. Now that I want for nothing, apart from my health, I am really beginning to miss it. And yet it was also there that I suffered the most terribly, since, as you may remember, I suddenly lost both my sons there, one after the other.’

Although the death of his two sons was one of the reasons for leaving Leuven, Meunier also later regarded his Leuven period as happy, because, in spite of his toils, his two sons were at least still alive there.150 Once again Meunier ventured to express his deep sorrow over this to his friend Rodin, although with some hesitation: ‘My dear Rodin, I had a son, a sailor, our joy, our pride. We have just had news of his death in Rio, broken down by yellow fever. On the basis of the old and dear affection which binds us in the spiritual relationship of art... I hope I have done right in telling you of my deep sorrow and my tears, have I? Previously I thought I often had cause to complain about life, but in the light of this death these things seem to be mere trivialities. [...] If you see Mirbeau, please tell him this!’

By contrast with what is sometimes maintained, this sad event did not have any direct effect on the power of sculptures like The Prodigal Son (fig. 17) or Ecce homo, since Meunier had already exhibited these sculptures earlier. It is possible that the realisation of The Prodigal Son in 1882 did have some link with the departure of his younger son on a long voyage, and maybe the sculpture did contain the father’s fear that his son would perhaps never return? It might also be worth investigating whether the bronze version which Meunier had done after the death of his sons and sold to a certain Mr. Coquelin perhaps shows slight differences. Meunier did at any rate send his apologies on mourning stationery to the buyer from the home of his daughter Charlotte and son-in-law Charles Jacobs for the delay in delivery because of this.151

Constantin Meunier did in fact make most of his works and many of the best ones in Leuven, especially as regards his body of work as a sculptor. It was a period of great productivity, which drew from André Fontaine the hypothetical comment that had Meunier died immediately after his Leuven period the world would still have seen all aspects of his genius.152 To name but a few, among the masterpieces he created in Leuven are the paintings Mineworkers of the Bottlepin and The Black Country and the sculptures Puddler, The Fireband Explosion, Man Drinking, The Horse at the Drinking Place, Glass-blower, Fisherman, The Prodigal Son, Ecce homo, Old Mine-Horse and Working-class Woman. The idea for his Monument to Labour and the execution of various parts for it, fully moulded sculptures and reliefs, were also given shape in Leuven, for in April 1894 he presented the final design in Paris.

Meunier’s Leuven period also coincided approximately with his international breakthrough. At the beginning of this episode he recorded his first successes at the Paris Salon and towards the end of it his international triumph really took off, with state commissions and large exhibitions in Paris (at Samuel Bing in 1896), Dresden, Berlin, Munich, Vienna and London. The foreign press could no longer ignore him and was almost unanimously full of praise. For instance, Meunier was given a great deal of attention in L’Art Français in the article about the Paris Salon of 1893: ‘Mr Constantin Meunier was obviously inspired by a well-known page from Mr Zola when he modelled that old mine-horse, which no single human being will be able to look at without feeling gripped by sudden deep compassion, as deep as the pits where that miserable horse suffered, is still suffering and will suffer until its death. Oh! Those eyes which have lost all impression of light. How well he has seen them, this Belgian sculptor! What sympathy he evokes in us, also with his Working-class Woman and his Mineworkers at the Exit to the Pit and his Puddler!’

It was also a sign of the absolute recognition of his talent abroad that Meunier was asked to be among the judges of his fellow-sculptors by sitting on the jury for sculpture of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (SNBA), founded in 1890. It was Dalou who personally invited Meunier to do this, probably on the suggestion of Rodin, vice-president of the sculpture jury that year, whom Meunier consulted to find out more about it: ‘Please be so kind, you who are familiar with the territory, as to tell me more about this newcomer, which has set itself up in Paris under the name of Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. I have received a personal letter about this from someone called Mr Dalou, the well-known sculptor, I assume...’153 Meunier finally exhibited a series of small bronzes at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts exhibition in 1890 and was a member of the jury, with, among others, the sculptors Dalou, Rodin, Injalbert and Bartholomé, in 1890, 1891, 1893 and 1895.

In 1893 he wrote to Rodin, for whom he had the greatest admiration and affection and whom he always tried to visit when he was in Paris, that he had accepted to be part of the jury again in order to be able to spend a few days with Rodin again.154 Rodin’s well-known charisma obviously did not just affect women. Although Meunier had great admiration for him, he nevertheless estimated his own work as not being far behind, for in 1890, maybe to thank him for the possibility to take part in the Société Nationale that year, he exchanged his small bronze Glassblower (1889), now in the Musée Rodin, for a small sculpture group by Rodin, Embracing Women.155 Happy that he now had a work by Rodin that he could show his friends, he gave the statuette a place of honour at his place.156

Meunier was – rightly – convinced that Rodin had played a crucial role in promoting his international career, at least to start with in France, and so expressed his gratitude to Rodin for this. In February 1890 he wrote from Leuven: ‘I believe I largely, if not entirely, have you to thank for all those expressions of honour with which I have been overloaded! in your beautiful fatherland, and I assure you that I could not believe my eyes.’157 In the same year the French state bought two of his sculptures, Blacksmith and a 2.2 metre tall Dock worker, for its collection in the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris. This happened at the same time as the Belgian State was just buying
its first sculpture (The Firelamp) by him. This made Meunier possibly the first Belgian sculptor whose work France had bought. Meunier immediately thought of Rodin as adviser and also commented on how unusual it was for the French state to buy work by a foreign sculptor: 'I am extremely happy. I have just received a letter from your Director of Fine Arts who notifies me that he is offering to buy two of my bronzes, my Blacksmith and my Doctor. I never expected such an honour, you understand, and I do not know how many times I have thanked you without this purchase, which I am sure includes you, dear friend. So tell me how these things are done, in the world of art. By the way, it cannot have been easy with a foreigner.' But that was not the end of it. Two years later the French State also bought, among other works, Meunier’s relief The globe (Musée d’Orsay) and in 1893 Paddlers at the Ferrnace. More commissions followed, such as that by the League of Human Rights for the monument in honour of Émile Zola for Paris.10

On the eve of his departure from Leuven both Meunier’s national and his international career thus been firmly set in motion.

In spite of the ambivalent attitude of sometimes wanting each other and sometimes not, which both Leuven and Constantin Meunier adopted towards each other, each had something to offer the other. Leuven did not ultimately get its large open-air Meunier museum, but the city houses many subtle visual, textual and archival traces of Meunier’s time in the city, so, if it wants to, Leuven will still for a long time ‘have many memories of the great soul who lived among its ancient buildings’.

1 With special thanks to Joël Ceelen (master student in Art History, University of Leuven), Laure de Hugues and Anne Piaget (Paris, Musée d’Orsay, documentation and chief curator of sculpture), Mike Soetens, Hilde Van Gelder and Piet Voldeman (archivist of Leuven city archives).

2 Je ne suis si Loudun se souviendra beaucoup de grande lité qui habita ses tours, mais je sais que Meunier porta toujours avec tendresse de la vieille ville où son labour avait cours des instants d’histoire pleistique.’ THERIÉ AND VAN DENBROECK 1999: 8. BELLEROW 1905: 144). All translations of citations by Suzanne Wolters.

3 Although there is currently no recent standard work on Meunier, he has been a fair amount of attention in almost all national and international publications about 19th century art (and sculpture). As far as reputation is concerned, Georges Limone comes a close second. For an extensive contemporary bibliography of Meunier, see THERIÉ and VAN DENBROECK 1999: 49-57.

4 THERIÉ AND VAN DENBROECK 1999: 28, for example, summarise the period under the heading La Fée Progrès à Louvain: Le grand picador. Meunier en Berchem, La Belgique.

5 St Joseph church was built between 1860 and 1871 (architect E. Leporée) and in 1970 had to make way for the building of the faculty of Arts of Leuven University. See HOEVEN AND VALENSE 2001.

6 It is unclear whether the wall-paintings and top paintings are on canvas. At the Brussels Salon in 1875 Meunier exhibited the cartoons for a wall painting: Ode à l’air de Forét de la bienheureuse Marie Alacoque for St Joseph’s church in Louvain. POISSON 1923: 151. According to THERIÉ AND VAN DENBROECK 1999: 128 there were four murals: The call of Mary, The comforting Orison, Christ at the tomb and The apparition of the Holy Heart in Saint Margaret’s Alacoque. According to van Denbroeck 1899: 95 and UTTERDENBERG 1899: 33 there were three paintings: The four age bringing homage to the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Maid Mary, The Holy Maidens prays for Divine mercy for the sinners and The apparition of the Holy Heart to Saint Margaret’s Alacoque. Records from 1890 and 1990 at the Van den Veen-Leuven museum contain further details on the artworks that came from St Joseph’s church which were housed in the museum and also indicate that there were originally three paintings. On an undated (c.1970) plan of the church and accompanying legend these paintings by Meunier, not specified in any greater detail, are mentioned. The inventories of sculptural figures and paintings received on behalf of the Municipal Museum from St Joseph’s church in Louvain (c.1970) mention one painting by Meunier which came from the side altar on the right. Eddy Fabre (unpublished work cited in 1983).

7 His letter dated 12 March 1917 to the future librarian of the church, indicates the same one painting by Meunier in one of the school chapels. An article in De Vlaamse Opzichter 22 March 1914, resulting from the threat of demolition of the church, indicates the same one painting by Meunier which was still in the church. In an article in Eendracht 12 March 1914, Meunier states that the church building is being taken down but will be two new chapels. It remains to be seen whether Meunier’s sculpture is still in the church.

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9 I leave on my right, a rosary of the Holy Heart in Louvain, this one hanging on the back wall of the church. THERIÉ AND VAN DENBROECK 1999: 128.

10 More on the Grand Vlaamsche Kunstzijde project in 1992, see the foreword by J. Roels.
Vendredi, 1er janvier 1899, p. 333

Le marché central de 25e arrondissement arrêta de vendre des fruits et légumes, des légumes, des poissons, des fruits, des légumes et des fleurs, des poissons, des fruits et des légumes, des poissons, des fruits et des légumes. Les marchés de 25e arrondissement de la ville de...
1984 were crucial in the decision of the site.

60 SAL, MA Loures (1839-1870), 4213: Lettre de François-Edouard Descamps et C. Mennier à la mairie du 8 novembre 1853.

61 SAL, MA Loures (1839-1870), 4223: C. Mennier à alderman Decrais, 1 January 1844.

62 See note 48, SAL, MA Loures (1839-1870), 3223.

63 This is attested by various letters (SAL, MA Loures (1839-1870), 1296; 11): the address in Schwabenbürg given in the Salon catalogue of 1855. This is in contrast to various authors who say that Mennier did not return to Brussels until 1854 or 1855.

64 Pâris, Archives Nationales (hereafter cited as AN), transcription by Pierre Proust and Michel Proust of a diary kept by Mennier, in which the artist noted that he received a letter from C. Mennier to A. Roboën in 1892: ENGELIN and MAREC, 20: 119-120. Mennier was still living in Brussels at the time of the Salon of 1876.

65 This is attested by the letters reported above, in which Mennier refers to his address in Schwabenbürg and his stay in Brussels in the 1860s. Mennier's name is also mentioned in the Salon catalogue of 1876. The address in Schwabenbürg is given in the Salon catalogue of 1855.

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...
Je suis tels heureux dans ce petit coin de pays où personne ne s'approche de moi — où j'ai le calme monastique — où je peux être l'âme de l'artiste. Si vous m'aimiez, vous vous trouveriez bien contrepét du morceau. Car je sens, cher ami, que vous aimerez cela aussi, tout. Tôt que donc de venir me surprendre, si il fait beau, les bois sont frais. Cela nous ferait une petite détente. Vous trouverez le gâte à notre goût, en même sur. Nous vivrons de la bonne vie d'habitude en parlant d'autre. Un effort,ainers, c'est si près de Paris où il doit causer maintenant. AMR. Lettre de C. Menier à A. Rodin de Lezons, le 16 juillet 1897.

TREIT, 1897: 24.


Que nous avons trois à Londres, disait il de son si de vie, un photographe, un triptyque pour le print de chaque jour, mais au moins des mots venants : THEUNT et VAN DERIWIT, 1897: 7.

Ménard Rodin, j'avais un fils, martin, monsieur, mon orgueil, nous venons d'apprêter sa mort à Rio, le faite de l'faune. Par sa défense et honneur d'affection que nous avons dans la même communion d'art. J'ai bien fait, il est ce, de vous dire non ou avec, et ses amis. L'Italien est en la possession de la vie pour l'italien avant cette mort. [...]. Si vous voyez Nefous dans le n'est ce pas? AMR. Lettre de C. Menier à A. Rodin, undated. [1894-95].

Enfin je suis un peu malheureux de la rencontre de ce malheureux qu'il est bien convenu que Monsieur Coquelin y aille de 700 francs. Je suis en ce moment bien heureux... dans ma famille, a combattre les chars sur Jacques de la vengeance. Paris, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique (BRB), 117288: 54. Lettre (en mauvaise condition) de C. Menier à un certain personnage, undated [1894].

DUFRENNE, 1892: 105.

M. Constantin Menier est sans doute inspiré d'un page Oedipe de M. Zola, lorsqu'il a modelé ce visage cheval de mine, qui est humain ne serait regardée sans un sourire d'un compassion voir et profond comme les piétés où ce malheureux cheval a souffert, lourd et souffrit jusqu'à la mort. Oh! Ces yeux qui ont perdu le sentiment de la joie, comme il les a bien vu, lui, la manter mâle belge! Quelle pli il nous arrache, ami, avec sa femme du peuple... et ses enfants!: JAYE, 1891. Similier praise is found, for example, in SAUNEY 1896. 280. For more references to Monet's work in the French press, see HENNEOTAL 1987: 107. Paul Gauguin also wrote about Monet in 1899, for example.

Taine n'est donc l'âme, vous êtes sur le monde, ce que c'est que cette nouvelle qui nous est Société Nationale des Beaux Arts à fondez à Paris, où je reçois de bien et une lettre personnelle d'un M. Dufy, je lui dois bien ce que je suis. AMR. Lettre de C. Menier à A. Rodin de Luneau, le 2 février 1897.

Un ancien de titre du jury pour les peintures avec vous Il bu... AMR. Lettre de C. Menier à A. Rodin de Luneau, 4 avril 1893.

L'église (11, 5, 1957) in the Musée Rodin (inv. 5, 971) was founded in Brussels, at J. Fienabren. The Musée Rodin also possesses Monet oil painting Monet en front de la maison (Monet devant la maison) (inv. 17727). The embroidered women (Robes Femmes Tatouées) are not located. Rodin also gave Monet a small plaster version of The Kiss. BRUNIS and

1001: 'Il est toujours connu que vous passez le soi de façon en échange de votre groupe. Je sens si heureux de faire affaire votre art pour mes amis chez moi. AMR. Lettre de C. Menier à A. Rodin de Luneau, le 5 juillet 1897. Cat. Musée Rodin, 1897: 103.}

1002: 'Je pense que tous les honneurs dont il a été confiés en votre main, vous savez que vous avez des œuvres dont il est certain, et que vous avez... AMR. Lettre de C. Menier à A. Rodin de Luneau, le 2 février 1897.}

1003: 'Je suis loin heureux, je viens de recevoir une lettre de votre Directeur des Beaux Arts qui m'a annoncé qu'il avait étudié pour m'acheter deux de mes bronzes, le Marqueterie et le Décorateur, bien loin de m'aviser de pareil honneur. Vous le comprenez, et je ne suis...
Fig. 8
Constantin Meunier, The Immaculate Conception of Mary, oil on canvas, 345 x 228 cm, years 1886. Leuven. (City Museum Vander Kelen-Mertens, Leuven, inv. nr. S/47/M). (Photo: Eric De Waesебегер)

Fig. 9
Constantin Meunier, The Pissand, bronzed plaster, 145 x 215 x 108.5 cm, signature on the plinth, 1887-1889. (City Hall, Leuven, inv. nr. C/252). (Photo: Eric De Waesебегер)

Fig. 10
Constantin Meunier, The Puddler, plaster (bronzed in 1936), 228 x 100 cm, signature on the plinth, 1893. (City Museum Vander Kelen-Mertens, Leuven, inv. nr. C/253). (Photo: Paul Laes)

Fig. 11
Constantin Meunier’s studio in the Minderbroedersklooster/see Des Ronelets in Leuven, the former amphitheatre on a postcard from before the First World War. (Leuven city archives)

Fig. 12
Constantin Meunier, Frogs in Leuven in 1891, oil on canvas, 57 x 110 cm, 1894-1900. (City Hall, Leuven, inv. nr. S/46/M). (Photo: Eric De Waesебегер)

Fig. 13
Constantin Meunier, The Sower, plaster (bronzed in 1926), 228 x 100 cm, signature on the plinth, 1893. (City Hall, Leuven, inv. nr. C/254). (Photo: Eric De Waesебегер)
Fig. 14
Constantin Meunier, *Father Damien*, first draft, plaster, approximately 1890–1891, Brussels, Museum of Constantin Meunier. (Copyright L’Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique)

Fig. 15
Memorial for Constantin Meunier outside his former studio in the Minderbroedersstraat/rue Des Recollets. (Photo: Eric De Waesberghe)

Fig. 16

Fig. 17
Constantin Meunier, *The Prodigal Son*, batined plaster, 89 x 38 cm, 1892–1895. (City Hall, Leuven, inv. nr. C/255). (Photo: Eric De Waesberghe)

Fig. 18
Constantin Meunier, *Maternity*, plaster (bronzed in 1936), 120 x 107 cm, signature on the plinth, 1905. (City Hall, Leuven, inv. nr. C/257). (Photo: Eric De Waesberghe)
**Fig. 19**
Coloured design for the transformation of the "Volksplein" (the current Mgr. Ladeuze Square) and the "Grasmarkt" (current Herreert Hoooversquare) to a museum of Constantine Meunier by Henri Lacoste. (Leuven city archives, MA 14:442, not dated [1937-1938]). (Photo: Eric De Waerbeegh)

**Fig. 20**
Contemporary picture of a part of the disappeared maquette, made by Henri Lacoste for the transformation of the "Volksplein" (the current Mgr. Ladeuze Square) and the library of the University and the "Grasmarkt" (current Herreert Hoooversquare) to an open-air sculpture parc of Constantine Meunier (Leuven city archives, MA 14:442). (Photo: Eric De Waerbeegh)

**Fig. 21**
Coloured overview, drawn in 1935 by Henri Lacoste for the transformation of the "Volksplein" (the current Mgr. Ladeuze Square), the "Grasmarkt" (current Herreert Hoooversquare) and the Sint-Donaatsquare to a museum of Constantine Meunier (Leuven city archives, MA 14:442). (Photo: Eric De Waerbeegh)

**Fig. 22**
Detailed design (1938) by Henri Lacoste for the transformation of the city park into a part of the open-air museum of Constantine Meunier culminating in the "Movement to Labour" (detail). The black squares on the design stand for nooks where Meunier's statues would have come. (Leuven city archives, MA 14:442). (Photo: Eric De Waerbeegh)

**Fig. 23**
Piette-Jan Bracque, "Movement to Edouard Remy" 1899 – Leuven, Herreert Hoooversquare (Photo: Eric De Waerbeegh)
FIG. 24
Drawing of Constantin Meunier’s statue Horse at the Drinking Place, embedded in the planned setting on the “Grasmarkt (current Herbert Hoover Square), at the background of the side-facade of the University Library in Leuven, 1938. (Leuven city archives, MA 14-442). (Photo: Eric De Waelegger)

FIG. 25
Drawing by Alfred Delaunoy of Meunier’s studio in the Minderbroedersstraat / Rue Des Récollets, as shown in the beginning of the exhibition catalogue (by Armand Thiery and Emile Van Deyvoet) of the grand Meunier-retrospective in Leuven in 1909.