

Corpus from a Crucifixion Group
Late 13th century
Germany, Westphalia



87 x 16 x 13 cm; limewood, polychromed and gilded; loss of arms and toes; some general surface damage and losses to the gilding and polychromy

Provenance:

Manoir de la famille De Lebioles Spa, Belgium;
Private Collection, Belgium

An emotionally laden limewood sculpture of Christ crucified. Although the arms of the corpus are lost, the body of the figure is arranged in the S-shaped curve common to Gothic Crucifixions. The figure of Christ wears a rope-like crown of thorns on his sloping head, his large eyes are closed and his eyebrows furrowed. He has a sunken face and thin cheeks that hang down, creating deep pockets of shadow at either side of his closed mouth. He has a long straight nose and a short beard. Christ's hair is shoulder length and patterned with stylised lines. The parallel lines representing ribs on the emaciated torso are coupled with a deeply sunken stomach and thin legs. The legs are bent at the knees and covered by a long perizonium, which clings to the thighs and creates dense folds of drapery on Christ's left. A deep wound is present on Christ's torso and speckles of red polychromy give evidence of the likelihood that blood was once painted on Christ's chest. Gilding is present throughout the perizonium.

Due to its size, this figure probably formed a part of a Crucifixion group that once decorated the rood screen of a church. It was probably on a large crucifix, accompanied by the Virgin and St John the Evangelist, and would have been brightly gilded and polychromed. Such sculptures were extremely common in the middle ages and although many have been destroyed

during waves of reform movements, revolutions and wars, some examples still exist to illustrate this (fig. 1).

Stylistically, the corpus bears resemblance to crucifixion groups from Western Germany dated to the second half of the 13th century. The long perizonium with densely packed drapery folds on Christ's left thigh and smoothly falling drapery on Christ's right is consistent with these figures (fig. 1 -2). The same can be said of the rope-like crown of thorns, large closed eyes and drooping, anguished facial features. The gentle S shaped curve to Christ's body also illustrates the sculptor's awareness of late 13th century trends that are making their way from France to the Western part of the Holy Roman Empire at this time.



Fig. 1
Crucifixion Group
Upper Rhine or Northern France
c. 1275
Inv. No. 999



Fig. 2
Crucifix
Germany, Westphalia
c. 1275 – 1300
Schnutgen Museum A20