



NATIONAL IDENTITY AND
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
FRANCO-BELGIAN SCULPTURE

JANA WIJNSOUW

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN ART HISTORY

ROUTLEDGE

National Identity and Nineteenth-Century Franco-Belgian Sculpture

This book elaborates on the social and cultural phenomenon of national schools during the nineteenth century, via the less studied field of sculpture and using Belgium as a case study. The role, importance of, and emphasis on certain aspects of national identity evolved throughout the century, while a diverse array of criteria were indicated by commissioners, art critics, or artists that supposedly constituted a “national sculpture.” By confronting the role and impact of the four most crucial actors within the artistic field (politics, education, exhibitions, public commissions) with a linear timeframe, this book offers a chronological as well as a thematic approach. Artists covered include Guillaume Geefs, Eugène Simonis, Charles Van der Stappen, Julien Dillens, Paul Devigne, Constantin Meunier, and George Minne.

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Abbreviations

AACB	Archive of Modern and Contemporary Art of Belgium
AMR	Archive (and Documentation) Musée Rodin, Paris
ANF	Archives Nationales de France, Paris
AP	Archives de Paris, Paris
ARAA	Archive Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp
ARAB	Archive Royal Academy of Fine Arts Brussels
ARB	Royal Academy of Science, Literature, and Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels
ARCM	Archive Royal Committee of Monuments and Sites
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
CAA	City Archive Antwerp
CABR	City Archive Bruges
CABX	City Archive Brussels
COARC	Conservation des Oeuvres d'Art Religieuses et Civiles, Paris
FC-CFL	Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris
INHA	Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris
KBR	Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels
KIK/IRPA	Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Brussels
KMKG	Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels
KMSKA	Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Antwerp
KMSKB	Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels
MSK	Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent
pba	Picture by author; all pictures were taken between 2012 and 2017
RKD	Netherlands Institute of Art History, The Hague
SAB	State Archives of Belgium, Brussels
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Acknowledgments

In *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) puts it: ‘*The truth is rarely pure and never simple*’. Only after four years of intensive research, do I realize the profundity of this plain truth. Even though Wilde also states, ‘*To define is to limit*’, I will attempt to name and acclaim but foremost sincerely thank those who contributed to this book.

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Introduction

Today, statues of great men and the occasional commemorated woman adorn the streets and squares of Belgium. The majority of these monumental depictions of characters from the pages of the nation's history books date back to the nineteenth century. They have now merged into the historical scenery of our cities, often silent stone or bronze witnesses of daily life that only overzealous tourists seem to notice. Perhaps serving as a subject to the occasional student prank, a lucrative source for thieves, or as a substructure for contemporary artists' designs, these monuments have become memories of a sovereign long deprived of power, a scientist respected but outdated, or a painter whose strokes dried centuries ago.¹ This is of course by no means an exclusively Belgian phenomenon. Today, the case of the bluntly ignored statues is a rule rather than an exception for the majority of sculptures spread across the European continent.

However, history has taught us on numerous occasions the way and enormous speed in which this situation can change. In 2014, anti-Russian protesters in the Ukrainian city Charkov went to great effort to bring down the colossal, 8.5 m high, statue of Vladimir Lenin (1963), claiming this sculpture, depicting the former head of State of a now neighboring country, was an insult.² While prior to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the presence of these Lenin-statues all over the country was tolerated without question, their existence became problematic the very moment matters of national identity and Russian supremacy over Ukrainian sovereignty became a political reality. While the creator, subject matter, iconography, or style of these sculptures remained the same, tilting political circumstances changed their significance nonetheless. This way, their role as testimonies of a historical and artistic tradition was abolished, by turning them into symbols of a newly risen foreign supremacy.

These violent actions against statues demonstrate how public sculptures can often shift from the periphery of our consciousness to its very center, becoming the focalization point of an insurgent attack on the underlying principles or anterior identity of the statue.³ In these instances, it becomes most clear how the nationality of art can become more than just a way of categorizing art and its creators.

This book is the result of a four-year PhD project conducted at the Department of Art, Music, and Theatre Sciences at Ghent University, supervised by Prof. Dr. Marjan Sterckx and Prof. Dr. Tom Verschaffel, and funded by BOF, Special Research Fund, Ghent University (Wijnsouw, *In Search of a National (S)cul(p)ture: The Local, National, and International Identity of Sculptors in Belgium (1830–1916)* (Unpublished dissertation, Ghent University, 2015)).

1 The Japanese installation artist Tatzu Nishi (1960), for instance, transforms historical monuments and buildings by wrapping them in a domestic space (Nishi, "Swapping Public and Private," in *Cultural Hijack: Rethinking Intervention*, ed. Parry, Medlyn, and Tahir (Liverpool University Press, 2011), 173–190; Neyt, "Kunst in open lucht belaagd door dieven en vandalen," *Het Nieuwsblad* (December 9, 2010).

2 Van der Velden, "Beeldenstorm in Oekraïne: honderden Lenins van hun sokkel getrokken," *De Morgen* (September 29, 2014).

3 A destruction of an image can transcend the act of vandalism when the underlying meaning of the image or that which it represents is the true subject of the act of violence, ranging from the Byzantine iconoclasm, to

2 Introduction

Returning to the Belgian situation, the question may rise which Belgian nineteenth-century statues would be subject to annihilation in the case of a national identity crisis. Would it be the French General Augustin Belliard (1769–1832), who, despite his French origins, was the first man to be commemorated by the newly founded Belgian state? Would the monument of the Flemish Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) be more susceptible to Walloon attacks? Or would the sculptures by Constantin Meunier (1831–1905), whose portrait was printed on the former national 500 francs bill, and is today probably still the best-known nineteenth-century Belgian sculptor, be targeted? In other words, what elements—subject matter, composition, sculptor, style, reception—contribute to the creation of a ‘national sculpture’? And which sculptures, common characteristics, and sculptors can therefore be considered truly ‘national’, and why?

This book acknowledges the nineteenth-century artists, who have now often been diminished to ‘*producers of the background noise of cultural banality*’.⁴ It questions the constitution, role, and influence of the national, regional, local, and international identity of sculptors in Belgium during the nineteenth-century, and discerns its impact on different levels of the artistic practice, from exhibitions and education to politics and public monuments. The influence of questions concerning national identity on both sculpture and sculptor, ranging from material, iconographic, and compositional to stylistic implications, are evaluated by means of thoroughly selected case studies that are combined with the nineteenth-century discourse on national culture.

This way, the emphasis within this book is on the actual implications of foreign and mainly French influences, comprising both Belgian sculptors’ trajectories abroad as well as the presence of foreign sculptors or sculptures in Belgium. As a *leitmotiv* through this research, stylistic evolution and innovation by Belgium’s leading sculptors are reviewed. This way, this research aims to elucidate on the development of sculpture in Belgium during the nineteenth century, and answers the question of whether there was such a thing as a nineteenth-century, ‘Belgian sculpture school’.

1 A Time and a Place for Everything: Geographical and Temporal Demarcations

As the Ukrainian case, as well as many others, has demonstrated, the national identity of sculptures and sculptors is by no means a static premise, pointing out the importance of a temporal as well as a geographical framing. The focus here lies with nineteenth-century Belgium, taking the founding of Belgium in 1830 as the starting point, and reaching well into the twentieth century.⁵

In the newly founded nation Belgium, nationality seems to have been of particular importance to artists choosing to pursue a career in sculpting. In order to legitimize

the seventeenth-century ‘Beeldenstorm’, or Soviet propaganda, e.g., Sterckx, “Goodbye hero!,” in *Ravaged: Art and Culture in Times of Conflict*, ed. Tollebeek and Van Assche (Mercatorfonds, 2014), 166–177; Besançon and Todd, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (University of Chicago Press, 2009); Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (Reaktion Books Ltd, 1997).

4 This is what author Joep Leerssen has identified as the process of ‘de-banalization’ (Leerssen, *When Was the Romantic Nationalism? The Onset, the Long Tail, the Banal*, (Nise, 2014)).

5 For similar questions applied to the Dutch Reign between 1815 and 1830 see the research of Anna Rade-maekers, at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen and Ghent University.

the nation from an artistic viewpoint, Belgian politicians and art critics reaffirmed the Early-Netherlandish paintings by Jan Van Eyck (c. 1395–1441) or Hans Memling (c. 1430–1494), and the Antwerp Golden Age led by Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641) as the nation’s pinnacles of artistic brilliancy. However, the position of sculpture in this excellent artistic tradition often remained vague, or even unsolicited.

In consequence, nineteenth-century Belgian sculptors were, at least initially, unable to rely on a former tradition that confirmed their style or unity as a ‘school’. Even those sculptors who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had attained an international career were considered isolated cases and incapable of truly exceptional creations. Oscar Roelandts pointed out in his “Considération sur l’Influence de l’Art Français en Belgique” (1941) that, despite the international career of some late-eighteenth-century Belgian sculptors, such as Gilles-Lambert Godecharle (1750–1835), Jean-François Van Geel (1756–1830) and his son Jean-Louis (1787–1852), Jean-Baptiste De Bay (1779–1864), or Mathieu Kessels (1784–1836), they had only seldom demonstrated innovation or originality detached from academic rules. According to Roelandts, even the presence of the French sculptor François Rude (1784–1855), who resided in Brussels from 1815 until 1827, did not leave a substantial mark on Belgian sculpture, as none of his Belgian contemporaries adopted Rude’s style, sculpture, or innovative education system.⁶

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that both art critics and politicians of the newly founded Belgium had little confidence in the sculptors of their own nation. Art critical journals at the beginning of the year 1830 barely mention Belgian sculpture. This, however, significantly changes over the course of the century, and is in grave contrast to the numerous appreciative reviews almost a century later. The symbolic end of this book is therefore the exhibition *Belgian Art in Exile*, organized in London in 1916, with a remarkably numerous participation of 23 sculptors compared to 61 painters. In the catalogue of the exhibition, the symbolist painter and Brussels Academy professor Jean Delville (1867–1953) explicitly mentioned the ‘national character’ of the Belgian school, in contrast to the French, English, and German schools, and emphasized precisely the international reputation of, among others, Godefroid Devreese, George Minne (1831–1905), Egide Rombaux (1865–1942), and Jules Lagae (1862–1931).⁷ By including the 1916 exhibition, its ambition to demonstrate ‘*the characteristic of our school of sculpture, one of the finest of the world*’, can be evaluated.⁸ In addition, the exhibition serves as a final point of reflection to assess the way in which the formation of a national Belgian identity influenced the development of sculpture in Belgium.

The geographical scope of this book is restricted to Belgium, but also elaborates on the role and influence of Belgian sculptors abroad, mainly in France. In order to demarcate this research, the foreign trajectories of over 400 Belgian sculptors were collected, revealing that Paris, Rome, and Florence were the most crucial destinations for Belgian sculptors.⁹ Because this research focuses on the implications of ‘foreign influences’ for the national identity of sculptors in Belgium, rather than the actual exhaustive study of their travels, the more obscure Belgian sculptors, who traveled and worked in peripheral,

6 Roelandts, “Considération sur l’influence de l’art français en Belgique,” *Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Belgische Academie*, IV, no. 5 (1941), 103–104.

7 Delville et al., *Belgian art in exile* (Bemrose & Sons Ltd., 1916).

8 *Belgian art in exile*, 4.

9 Dupont, *Modèles italiens et traditions nationales, Les artistes belges en Italie, 1830–1914* (Belgisch Historisch Instituut, 2005).

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sometimes even exotic places, and who can be considered exceptions, are not elaborately included.¹⁰

Instead, the focus lies with the stylistic evolution and innovation by Belgium's leading sculptors, the influence of foreign sculptors or sculptures in Belgium on their oeuvre, as well as the impact of their trajectories abroad. Consequently, next to Belgium, the influence of the Paris art scene, geographically and intellectually close to Brussels, and to a lesser degree that of Rome and Florence as an inspiration for sculptors, are included. International exchanges and the urge to manifest oneself were generally metropolitan phenomena. In particular, the role of cities like Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, and to a lesser extent Bruges, or Liège, may enlighten the often—but not necessarily—contradictory ambitions and interests of local and national authorities.

2 Statu(e)s Quaestionis

2.1 International Mobility and National Schools

Throughout this book, the Belgian borders, and therefore the edges of its fixed 'national school', are occasionally breached in order to survey the presence of the nation's sculptors abroad. The means of classification of artists in national schools, originating in the nineteenth century and expanding into modern art historical scholarship, has been increasingly though not systematically scrutinized. Clearly, the use of this category of 'national schools' cannot be ignored as a historical reality, or as a useful means of classification, even for current research. Present scholars do propose a more inclusive vision of national schools as fluid entities, part of a symbiotic system, and have devoted increasing attention to their intellectual particularity, as well as the role and impact of mobility and exchange.

The last decade saw numerous research initiatives on the voyages, careers, and reception of specific nineteenth-century artists departed from their native country. Recent publications, conferences, and exhibitions considered, for example, the travels and career of Paul Cézanne¹¹ (1839–1906), Auguste Rodin¹² (1840–1917), and Jules Dalou¹³ (1838–1904) in Britain; Henri Fantin-Latour¹⁴ (1836–1904) in Australia; and Gustave Courbet¹⁵ (1819–1877) in Belgium, or focused on the international identities of artists abroad, such as Rachel Esner and Margriet Schavemaker in their book about Vincent van Gogh

10 Most Belgian sculptors sent work to the most important European capitals to partake in local salons in Paris, London, and Amsterdam, or to other European cities hosting exhibitions, or World Fairs. In other instances, sculptors decided to travel abroad to visit relatives, study alternative traditions and examples, commission possibilities, etcetera. Louis Royer (1793–1868) received international acclaim for his monumental sculptures commemorating the most iconic figures in the national pantheon of the Netherlands; see: Verschaffel and Wijnsouw, "Royer Louis," Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms, <http://romanticnationalism.net/>.

11 Robbins, et al., *Cézanne in Britain* (Yale University Press, National Gallery, London, 2006).

12 Mitchell, "The Zola of Sculpture?": A Franco-British Dialogue," in *Rodin: The Zola of sculpture*, ed. Mitchell (Ashgate, 2004), 19–40.

13 Albinson and Briggs, *Dalou in England: Portraits of Womanhood, 1871–1879* (Yale Center for British Art, 2010); Pierre, "Dalou in England: Portraits of Womanhood, 1871–1879," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, 9, no. 1 (2010), n.p.

14 Elias, "Fantin-Latour in Australia," *ibid.*, 2, no. 2 (2009), n.p.

15 Marechal, et al., *Gustave Courbet en België, Realisme, van levende kunst tot vrije kunst*, Cahier KMSKB, XIII (KMSKB, 2013).

(1853–1890) abroad,¹⁶ Saskia de Bodt in her various works about Dutch painters in Belgium,¹⁷ in *Dutch Utopia: American Artists in Holland, 1880–1914* by Annette Stott and Nina Lübbren,¹⁸ in Tatiana Mojenok Ninin's *Les peintres Russes et la Normandie au XIXe siècle*,¹⁹ or in *Les peintres Italiens à Paris en quête d'identité (1855–1909)*²⁰ by Marion Lagrange.

Other recent scholarly works do not specifically elaborate on artists or particular case studies, but take the more general attraction and impact of foreign nations, for instance France and the Paris art scene as a subject, such as Tom Verschaffel's work on the reception of Belgian artists in France,²¹ or Gaëtane Maes and Jan Blanc's *Les échanges artistiques entre les anciens Pays-Bas et la France*.²² A similar transnational approach between Belgium and France is incorporated in the impressive exhibition catalogues *Parijs-Brussel, Brussel-Parijs: realisme, impressionisme, symbolisme, art nouveau: de artistieke dialoog tussen Frankrijk en België, 1848–1914*,²³ and *Brussel, Kruispunt van culturen*, in which sculpture is occasionally threatened.²⁴

Generally, however, almost all the aforementioned works take the 'central' Western countries and main metropolises as their central scope, and, with the exception of the mentioned exhibition catalogues, take painters as primary protagonists. Notwithstanding, the aforementioned literature about artists traveling and working in a different country than their homeland, as well as the more general publications on transnational exchange, may serve as useful comparisons, even though the particularities of the sculpting discipline, for instance working with often bulky and weighty materials and a less direct production process, cannot be overlooked.²⁵ In general, sculpture is a less studied

16 Esner and Schavemaker, *Overal Vincent. De (inter)nationale identiteiten van Van Gogh* (Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

17 de Bodt, "De Antwerpse Academie in een veranderende kunstwereld," in *Contradicties/Contradictions, Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen 2013–1663*, ed. Pas, et al. (Asamer, 2013), 203–215; "De Hollandse kolonie en het Brusselse kunstleven," in *Brussel, Kruispunt van culturen*, ed. Hoozee (Mercatorfonds, 2000), 69–76; *Halverwege Parijs, Willem Roelofs en de Nederlandse schilderskolonie in Brussel 1840–1890* (Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1995).

18 Stott and Lübbren, *Dutch utopia: American artists in Holland, 1880–1914* (Telfair Books, Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia and Singer Laren Museum, the Netherlands, 2009).

19 Mojenok Ninin, *Les peintres russes et la Normandie au XIXe siècle* (Editions Points de vues, 2010).

20 Lagrange, *Les peintres italiens à Paris en quête d'identité (1855–1909)* (Editions CTHS, 2010).

21 Verschaffel, "Een jury heeft geen reden van bestaan, Franse critici over Belgische kunst, 1831–1865," *Negentiende Eeuw*, 3, no. 1 (2006), 19–34; "Art and Nationality: The French Perception of Belgian Painters at the Paris Salons (1831–1865)," in *Vision/Revision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century French Culture*, ed. Harkness, et al. (Peter Lang, 2003), 123–137.

22 Maes and Blanc, *Les échanges artistiques entre les anciens Pays-Bas et la France* (Brepols, 2010).

23 Pingeot and Hoozee, *Parijs-Brussel, Brussel-Parijs: Realisme, Impressionisme, Symbolisme, Art Nouveau: De Artistieke Dialoog Tussen Frankrijk En België, 1848–1914* (Mercatorfonds, 1997).

24 Hoozee, *Brussel, Kruispunt van Culturen* (Mercatorfonds, 2000).

25 Albinson and Briggs, *Dalou in England: Portraits of Womanhood, 1871–1879*; de Bodt, "De Hollandse kolonie en het Brusselse kunstleven"; Esner and Schavemaker, *Overal Vincent. De (inter)nationale identiteiten van Van Gogh*; Lagrange, *Les peintres italiens à Paris en quête d'identité (1855–1909)*; Maes and Blanc, *Les échanges artistiques entre les anciens Pays-Bas et la France*; Mojenok Ninin, *Les peintres russes et la Normandie au XIXe siècle*; Pierre, "Dalou in England: Portraits of Womanhood, 1871–1879"; Stott and Lübbren, *Dutch utopia: American artists in Holland, 1880–1914*; Elias, "Fantin-Latour in Australia"; Sterckx, "Parcours de Sculptrices entre la Belgique et la France. Présence et Accueil," in *Cahiers de l'IRHIS, 2: France/Belgique—Sculpture*, ed. Chappay and Robichon. (s.e., 2007), 18–25; Robbins, et al., *Cézanne in Britain*; Verschaffel, "Een jury heeft geen reden van bestaan, Franse critici over Belgische kunst, 1831–1865"; Mitchell, "The Zola of Sculpture?: A Franco-British Dialogue"; Verschaffel, "Art and Nationality: The French Perception of Belgian Painters at the Paris Salons (1831–1865)," 123.

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discipline than painting, although nineteenth-century Belgian sculpture is not entirely unsolicited.

2.2 Sculpture in Belgium

Already in 1923, Marguerite Devigne, the first woman to hold a PhD in art history in Belgium and curator of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, published her *Catalogue de la Sculpture*, containing numerous nineteenth-century Belgian sculptors.²⁶ She continued to publish on Belgian sculptors,²⁷ as did contemporary author Sander Pierron, who offered an extensive overview of the development of nineteenth-century sculpture in the country.²⁸

After Devigne and Pierron, research stagnated, leaving a substantial gap until 1990, when Jacques Van Lennep edited an impressive book with essays concerning the development of nineteenth-century sculpture, including some thematic chapters and a biographic catalogue of the most important sculptors.²⁹ Even fifteen years after its publication, this book still offers a strikingly representative overview of nineteenth-century sculpture. It remains an important work of reference, together with some of Van Lennep's other publications, such as his chapter on the Belgian sculpture education in *Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 275 Ans d'Enseignement*, and in *De Beelden van Brussel*, which all served as a basis for this research.³⁰ Alain Jacobs (2006) has contributed to scholarship on Belgian sculpture through his book on sculptors from Malines,³¹ while some influencing books originate from a historical approach and mention specific public monuments and the nineteenth-century context of 'statuomania', such as *Duurzamer dan Graniet. Over Monumenten en Vlaamse Beweging*³² and *België, Een Parcours van Herinnering, Plaatsen van Geschiedenis en Expansie*.³³

The impact of international mobility of sculptors in Belgium in this context remains unsolicited in these publications. However, some scholars have included useful insights on the impact of foreign trajectories of sculptors within their monographs or thematically based publications on sculptures and their makers, such as June Hargrove on Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse (1824–1887),³⁴ Sura Levine on Constantin Meunier,³⁵

26 Devigne, *Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Catalogue de la sculpture* (s.e., 1922).

27 Devigne, *Constantin Meunier* (Brepols, 1919); *Thomas Vinçotte* (Brepols, 1919); *La Sculpture Mosane du XII au XVI siècle* (Van Oest, 1928); *La Sculpture Belge, 1830–1930* (Denis, 1942).

28 Pierron, *La sculpture en Belgique 1830–1930* (Edition d'Art Jos. Vermaut, 1932).

29 Van Lennep, *De 19de-eeuwse Belgische Beeldhouwkunst* (Generale Bank, 1990).

30 *Académie: Royale des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles* (KMSKB, 1987); *Catalogus van de beeldhouwkunst, Kunstenaars geboren tussen 1750 en 1882* (KMSKB, 1992); "Standbeelden en Monumenten van Brussel vóór 1914," in *De Beelden van Brussel*, ed. Derom and Marquenie (Pandora, 2000), 7–179.

31 Jacobs, *Welgevormd: Mechelse Beeldhouwers in Europa (1780–1850)* (Lamot, Museum Schepenhuis, Malines, 2006).

32 Art, "Het historisch monument: een bepaalde manier van omgaan met het verleden," in *Duurzamer dan graniet: Over monumenten en Vlaamse beweging* (Lannoo, 2003), 13–23.

33 Tollebeek et al., *België, Een Parcours van Herinnering* (Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2008).

34 Hargrove and Grandjean, *Carrier-Belleuse, Le Maître de Rodin* (Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2014); Hargrove, *The Life and Work of Albert Carrier-Belleuse* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1993).

35 Levine, "Een ode aan de Arbeid, een ode aan de Natie," in *Constantin Meunier, 1831–1905*, ed. Vandepitte (Lannoo, KMSKB, Brussels, 2014), 159–185; *Pauvre Belgique: Collecting Practices and Belgian Art in and outside Belgium* (University of Chicago Press, McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Boston, 2007); Levine and Urban, *Hommage à Constantin Meunier, 1831–1905* (Galerie Maurice Tzwern-Pandora, 1998).

Anne Pingeot on French sculptors,³⁶ Antoinette Le Normand-Romain on Rodin,³⁷ Inga-Rossi Schrimpf on Minne,³⁸ etcetera. In some cases, authors did scrutinize the phenomenon of transnational exchange and mobility while taking sculptors as a subject. The work of Micheline Hanotelle³⁹ and Marjan Sterckx⁴⁰ proved significant in this respect, as well as the edited volume published on the occasion of the conference *France/Belgique: Sculpture* organized and published by Frederic Chappey and François Robichon in 2007.⁴¹

This book uses these last publications as a starting point and targets to move beyond existing research. Within the restraints of the earlier sketched geographical and temporal framework, it aims to elucidate the national, and in extension also local and international, identities of sculptors in Belgium. The mechanisms and strategies characteristic of the cultural and artistic policies of nation-states, artistic movements and organizations, and of individual artists and art critics are researched in order to understand their meaning and role for the development of national culture, and its relation to sculpture in Belgium.

By analyzing these mechanisms for the specific yet representative domain of sculpture, and geographic case Belgium, the role of an artist's identity in both a nationalized and internationalized context can be discerned. Rather than focusing on an exhaustive mapping of the diaspora of Belgian sculptors abroad and of foreign sculptors in Belgium, the emphasis within this research is on the actual implications of 'foreign influences', comprising both Belgian sculptors' trajectories abroad as well as the presence of foreign sculptors or sculptures in Belgium.

A thorough analysis of the impact of this foreign agency for sculptors in Belgium may shed a new light on the role nationality, national culture, national identity, and character played in the creation of a 'Belgian sculpture school'. The influence of questions concerning national identity on both sculpture and sculptor, ranging from material, iconography, composition to style, are evaluated by means of case studies that are confronted with the nineteenth-century discourse on national culture and 'schools'.

3 In Theory

3.1 Matters of National Identity

Before plunging into the depths of the nineteenth-century art world, the research questions posed above may demand a certain degree of definition. When questions about

36 Pingeot, *La Sculpture Française au XIXe siècle* (Ed. de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1986).

37 Le Normand-Romain, *Camille Claudel & Rodin* (Ed. du Musée Rodin, 2003); *Rodin* (Flammarion, 1997).

Also see her work on French sculptors in Rome, *La Tradition Classique et l'Esprit Romantique, Les sculpteurs de l'Académie de France à Rome de 1824 à 1840* (Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1981).

38 Rossi-Schrimpf, *George Minne. Das Frühwerk und seine Rezeption in Deutschland und Österreich. 1897 bis 1914* (Unpublished dissertation, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, 2011).

39 Hanotelle, *Echanges Artistiques Franco-Belges entre les Sculpteurs dans le dernier quart du XIXe-siècle* (Ecole du Louvre, 1997).

40 Sterckx, "Dans la Sculpture, moins de jupons que dans la Peinture.' Parcours de femmes sculpteurs liées à la Belgique (ca. 1550–1950)," *Art&Fact, Femmes et Créations*, no. 24 (2005), 56–74.

41 De Potter, "Les Acquisitions de l'Etat français en matière de sculpture belge, 1919–1939," in *Cahiers de l'IRHIS, 2: France/Belgique—Sculpture*, ed. Chappey and Robichon (s.e., 2007), 48–53; Leblanc, "Alexandre Charpentier et la Belgique: un exemple de connivence artistique au temps de l'Art Nouveau," *ibid.*, 30–35; Sterckx, "Parcours de Sculptrices entre la Belgique et la France. Présence et Accueil," *ibid.*, 18–25.

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national identity are posed, an interdisciplinary approach presents itself and therefore directly implies the necessity to define certain elements and concepts from outside the field of art history. The anthropological, social, and political sciences have offered an impressively diverse array of definitions for concepts, such as ‘nationalism’, ‘nationality’, ‘national character’, and ‘national identity’. Joep Leerssen assembles these concepts with the common denominator ‘national thought’.⁴² This book accommodates some of the accomplishments from these disciplines, and combines them with the principles from its primary discipline, art history. Therefore, at the beginning and end of all theory, the foundation of any hypothesis in this research is the work of art itself, comprising possible meanings granted by the artist, public, critic, commissioners, and other factors.

Generally, the development of nationality and nationalism during and after the nineteenth century has been extensively researched. Scholars from various disciplines and ideological perspectives have devoted elaborate studies to the mechanisms of nationhood, national identity, and character and nationalism, such as Marxist historians Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson, philosopher Etienne Balibar, sociologist Anthony D. Smith, social anthropologist Ernest Gellner, post-structuralist linguist Homi Bhabha, and many others.⁴³

Already in the nineteenth century, Ernest Renan (1823–1892) questioned, ‘*Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?*’. Renan, who first introduced his book with the same title in 1882, proposed that modern nations were not established on a basis of natural principles, such as common language, race, or geographical borders, but rather by a resolve to nationhood. By means of this common ‘will’, or ‘consent’ as Renan calls it, to constitute a nation, a set of negotiations, both social and affective, were instigated. In order to adequately establish the nation, every member is therefore obliged to ‘forget’ certain aspects of its past that could prevail the forging of a common historical memory. By means of these oblivions, the myth of nationhood can be secured.⁴⁴ According to Renan, the function of practices of representation in this process cannot be underestimated. Representing the past, or as Renan suggested ‘the erroneous past’, for instance by means of sculpture, is essential to create and perpetuate a collective national character.⁴⁵

42 Leerssen, *Nationaal denken in Europa, Een cultuurhistorische schets* (Amsterdam University Press, 1999), 9.

43 Some of the most important publications considering nationalism are: Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism, Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early-Nineteenth-Century Social Movements* (The University of Chicago Press, 2012); Wodak and Auer Borea, *Justice and Memory, Confronting Traumatic Pasts: An International Comparison* (Passagen Verlag, 2009); James, *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: Bringing Theory Back In* (Sage Publications, 2006); Day and Thompson, *Theorizing Nationalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Zolner, *Re-Imaging the Nation, Debates on Immigrants, Identities, and Memories* (Peter Lang, 2004); Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed, Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1991); Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class, Ambiguous Identities* (Verso, 1991); Smith, *National Identity* (Penguin Books, 1991); Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (Routledge, 1990); Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ramirez, *Rethinking the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Wallerstein, *Studies in the Political Economy of the World-System* (Greenwood Press, 1988); Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press, 1983).

44 Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” in *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation? Et autres essais politiques*, ed. Roman (Presses Pocket, 1992).

45 “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” 55.

Recent scholarship pays growing attention to the construction, role, and function of national identity. A common ground between almost all authors is the attention devoted to the construction and importance of national consciousness, as well as its relation to modernity.

According to Anthony Smith (1991) in his book on national identity, three crucial components constitute a standard Western nation, the presence of a historic territory, a legal-political community and equality of members, and a common civic culture and ideology.⁴⁶ Closely associated with these characteristics are some fundamental features, that allow the existence of a national identity, namely a historic ground or ‘homeland’, often constructed through myths and recollections, shared legal rights and duties, an economic system based on internal mobility, and a communal public culture.⁴⁷ These last two elements constituting national identity are of crucial importance to this research, since sculptures, as a part of public culture, could both be the object and product of international mobility.

Because both national identity and the nation are complex constructs, consisting of various interrelated components, it is almost impossible to pinpoint their exact function. One of the most obvious functions of national identity is the socialization of the members of the nation as ‘nationals’ or ‘citizens’. This goal is achieved by means of a repertoire of shared values, symbols, and traditions, such as flags and anthems, but also artworks and monuments.⁴⁸ The realization of a national identity offers an important means of positioning the individual self in the world, thanks to the premises of a collective personality and its idiosyncratic culture, which may constitute an ‘imagined community’.⁴⁹

These ‘imagined communities’, as Benedict Anderson (1983) first defined them, were supposedly constructed by the gradual unification of centers and peripheries, thanks to the emergence of ‘print capitalism’.⁵⁰ Anderson explains that ‘print capitalism’—the emergence of capitalism combined with innovating print technologies recurring parallel to the Industrial Revolution—created a common language and temporality that stimulated new forms of unity around cultures and shared histories. Eventually, these ‘imagined cohesions’ resulted in a shared identity, characterized by a political and cultural consciousness and expressed in nationalism. The nation, and its conscious experience, are therefore a ‘performance’ of cultural identity, and remain a continuous, ever-developing process.⁵¹

This is in contrast to Ernest Gellner’s synchronous research (1983), in which he envisions national identity as a fixed plight.⁵² Gellner bases his theory on Max Weber’s thesis on modernization, and explains that the increased industrialization rationalized social life and increased bureaucracy, regulations, and efficiency.⁵³ His functionalist interpretation envisions nationalism as an artificial, constructed, top-down movement used to perpetuate social cohesions. Gellner points out the fundamentally illusory qualities of national identities—*the cultural shards and patches used by nationalism are often*

46 Smith, *National Identity*, 9, 12, 77.

47 Smith defines the nation as ‘a named human population sharing historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members’ (*National Identity*, 14).

48 *National Identity*, 17.

49 *National Identity*, 17.

50 Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 67, 110–111, 141, and 181.

51 *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 86–87.

52 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 17–22.

53 Day and Thompson, *Theorizing Nationalism*, 8; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 17–22.

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arbitrary historical inventions—and sketches a clear connection between identity, culture, and nationality, by stating,

*If a man is not firmly set in a social niche, whose relationship as it were endows him with his identity, he is obliged to carry his identity with him in his whole style of conduct and expression. In other words, his ‘culture’ becomes his identity. And the classification of men by ‘culture’ is of course the classification by ‘nationality’.*⁵⁴

Just like Gellner and Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm (1991) considers capitalism as a *conditio sine qua non* for the presence of nationalism and national consciousness, although their analysis of the means in which this occurs greatly differs. Hobsbawm elaborates on the construction of the nation and a national consciousness, and stresses the crucial role of the systems of representation in order to ‘turn subjects into citizens’, and therefore securing symbolic identification.⁵⁵

Parallel to certain aspects first posed by the Marxist theoretician Antonio Gramsci (1935), Hobsbawm states that a national consciousness is formed by, on the one hand, ‘cultural institutions’, generally managed by the state, such as language and education,⁵⁶ and on the other hand, by ‘invented traditions’ characterized by visual symbols and common cultural practices that envision the nation as a unit, creating variations of popular consciousness and securing the loyalties of ‘citizens’ to the nation-state. Within this framework, the process of ‘turning subjects into citizens’, and therefore perpetuating their national identification, was activated during the late nineteenth-century with the rise of a participatory democracy. Simultaneously, however, local and regional identities became increasingly complex and evolved into nationalist movements by the early twentieth century, sometimes endorsing extreme chauvinist patriotism.⁵⁷

The existence and importance of local and at the same time international identities are described by Anne-Marie Thiesse (2001), who elaborates on the possibilities of parallel identities. A common international identity of present Europeans, for instance, consists exactly of the fact that their forbears endeavored the creation of national identities, ‘*Rien de plus international que la formation des identités nationales*’.⁵⁸

Although all these theories situate the formation of national consciousness within the nineteenth century, art and other cultural expressions are almost always reduced to the status of side-products of social behavior. Most scholars define national identity as a social construction, and, when mentioning sculpture—usually by means of public monuments—define it both as symptomatic of as well as functionalist for national expression.

This is in line with Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieu de memoire* (1990), which he defines as ‘*a meaningful entity of a real or imagined kind, which has become a symbolic element of a given community as a result of human will or the effect of time*’.⁵⁹ As Nancy Wood

54 Day and Thompson, *Theorizing Nationalism*, 107–108; Gellner, *Thought and Change* (University of Chicago Press, 1964), 157.

55 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 25.

56 Day and Thompson, *Theorizing Nationalism*, 106.

57 Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*; Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, Europe 1789–1848* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962).

58 Leerssen, *When Was the Romantic Nationalism? The Onset, the Long Tail, the Banal*, 15; Thiesse, *La Création des identités nationales: Europe XVIIIe–XXe siècle* (Le Seuil, 1999), n.p.

59 Rothberg, “Introduction: Between Memory and Memory: From Lieux de mémoire to Noeuds de mémoire,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 118/119 (2010), 3–12; Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory*, Spring, no. 26 (1989), 7–24; den Boer and Frijhoff, *Lieux de mémoires et identités nationales* (Amsterdam University Press, 1993).

(1994) explains, this encompasses the foundation of a community's symbolic repertoire. Nora devotes particular attention to monuments, as he considers them as the most materialized expression of *lieu de mémoire*, which contributes as well as originates from the nation-building process.⁶⁰

In Belgium, Jo Tollebeek and Tom Verschaffel (1994) have published on the nation-building process and 'national schools', mainly during the nineteenth century, and its impact on several aspects of historic culture, such as the constitution of a Belgian history, as well as a national pantheon.⁶¹ As they state, national identity constituted the cohesion of a national culture, and implied the existence of certain independent characteristics that transcended individual members in their time.⁶² These nation-specific features were supposedly also present in art, resulting in the constitution and distinction of 'national schools'.

3.2 *The Image and Beyond*

In general, the question of the usage of images and art in this debate—as both illustrations as well as actual sources—has been the subject of a far less wide array of studies. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (2007) were among the first to introduce the discipline of 'Imagology', which they defined not as a form of sociology, but as a way of understanding a discourse rather than a society.⁶³ Focusing almost exclusively on literary works instead of visual representations, they argue that these 'images' unambiguously demonstrate that national characterizations mostly consist of commonplace and hearsay, rather than empirical observation or statements of fact.⁶⁴ The study of these 'images' of a nation could therefore single out the significantly active prejudices, stereotypes, and clichés from the total complex of imaginary images.⁶⁵

While Beller and Leerssen mainly focus on literary representations, the book *Narrating the Nation* (2008), edited by Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock, offers a broader vision on the different media narrating the nation, and next to literature comprises film, art, and music.⁶⁶ In one particularly relevant chapter in this book, historian Michael Wintle states that the narratives of national identity are perhaps most commonly mediated by print, but can also be communicated through visual

60 Wood, "Memory's Remains: Les lieux de mémoire," *History and Memory*, 6, no. 1 (1994), 123–149.

61 Tollebeek, "Het koppelteken van de nationale cultuur. De paradox van de eigenheid van België en Nederland, 1860–1918," in *Naties in een spanningsveld*, ed. Bemong, et al. (Uitgeverij Verloren, 2010), 14–32; Tollebeek et al., *België, Een Parcours van Herinnering*; Hoozee et al., *Mise-en-scène* (Mercatorfonds, MSK, Ghent, 1999); Tollebeek, et al., *Romantiek en historische cultuur* (Historische uitgeverij, 1996); Tollebeek and Verschaffel, "Waarom een natie haar geschiedenis schrijft," *Onze Alma Mater*, 53, no. 4 (1994), 470–481; Tollebeek, "Historisch besef in Vlaanderen, Identiteit en Vervreemding," *Ons Erfdeel*, 33, no. 2 (March–April 1990), 162–173.

62 Tollebeek and Verschaffel, "Waarom een natie haar geschiedenis schrijft," 472.

63 Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, ed. Dyserinck and Leerssen, *Studia Imagologica*, Amsterdam studies on cultural identity (Rodopi, 2007); Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Leerssen and Spiering, *National Identity—Symbol and Representation*, ed. Leerssen, *Yearbook of European Studies*, (Rodopi, 1991).

64 Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, 3.

65 *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, 11.

66 *Narrating the Nation*, ed. Berger, et al. (Berghahn Books, 2008).

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media.⁶⁷ However, as Wintle rightly notes, when exploring these alternative ‘carriers’ of narration, ranging from prints, cartoons, paintings, sculptures, films, to even flags and maps, questions should not be limited to the content of the studied image, but should include alternative inquiries after who made these images, when, why, who read them, and how.⁶⁸

This book offers a view on these different aspects that may contribute to an artist’s as well as an artwork’s national identity, and their grouping in ‘national schools’, focusing on the specific case of sculpture. Although an artist’s identity does not necessarily differ from that of any other random member of the nation, his or her persona and especially art are often functionalized to shape and perpetuate that very identity. This also implies the existence of an identity of art, which may be national, but in some cases also local, international, or none of the aforementioned. Since an image can never operate in isolation, images, or in this case sculptures, are at all times combined and confronted with a diverse array of written evidence, originating from both the artists and the public as art critics, in order to come to a well-balanced conclusion.⁶⁹

While Wintle’s main question centers on whether artists merely reflect contemporary politics and social relationships, or if they can be considered ‘ideological crusaders’, pursuing their own or their commissioners’ ambitions about how they think things should be, this research proposes to go one step further and include an art historical approach. In order to understand fully the place and impact of a work, the artwork as a whole, and therefore all questions proposed by Wintle, as well as the artistic impact, are taken into account. The artworks, as well as the artist, are considered a compendium both containing and engendering national identity. Instead of considering nationalism and national identity as mere sociological processes, this book proposes to study their impact on artistic developments. The focus on romanticism and the usage of the past in order to perpetuate national identity for instance, dominates current debates, while the incorporation of a national identity by means of the contemporary tradition and culture, and by means of other stylistic and iconographic developments, has too often been ignored.⁷⁰ In order to sketch a more inclusive overview of the national identity of both sculpture and sculptors in Belgium, particular attention is paid to the connection and circulation of artists, artworks, ideas, and theory. This is to understand the impact of foreign influences and their importance for the national culture of Belgium and its sculpture school.

4 In Practice

In addition to this theoretical framework, the reconstruction of Belgian sculptors’ national and international careers, as well as their commissions, artworks, education,

67 Wintle, “Personifying the Past,” in *Narrating the Nation*, ed. Berger, et al. (Berghahn Books, 2008), 222.

68 “Personifying the Past,” 223. Also, see Banks, *Visual Methods in Social Research* (Sage Publications, 2001); Barnard, *Art, Design and Visual Culture: An Introduction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

69 Wintle, “Personifying the Past,” 224–225. Also, see Banks, *Visual Methods in Social Research*; Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Use of Images as Historical Evidence* (Cornell University Press, 2001); Barnard, *Art, Design and Visual Culture: An Introduction*.

70 In this respect, Joep Leerssen’s definition of ‘Romantic Nationalism’ proves a useful concept. According to Leerssen, public, official culture, and in extension also sculptors, function as important sponsors of Romantic Nationalism, which is not to be confused with Romanticism as an artistic style. The conglomerate of all institutions within old and new states of the nineteenth century availed themselves of Romantic Nationalism’s self-legitimations, on a national, provincial, and municipal level, and expressed this in their public culture (Leerssen, *When Was the Romantic Nationalism? The Onset, the Long Tail, the Banal*, 13).