



Press release

Mu.ZEE breezes out → Venetian Galleries

Statuettes. Small Sculpture at Home

28/03/2026 - 03/01/2027

When reflecting on 'sculpture', many people's minds initially turn to monumental works and statues. Yet a large number of sculptures are small in scale: compact, portable objects executed in bronze, stone, terracotta, wood, plaster, or other materials. These small sculptures were often intended for the private sphere, namely domestic interiors. The exhibition ***Statuettes. Small Sculpture at Home*** explores the diverse roles such works have played in people's homes, from 1880 to tomorrow. It draws on Mu.ZEE's rich collection and is complemented by a number of exciting loans.

In the modern, post-1880 period, long after the Gothic carvers and their statues of saints, domestic sculpture continued to fulfil some of the genre's age-old functions. Within the bourgeois interior, religious sculpture retained its appeal, serving as an object of private devotion and tradition. Antique portrait busts, which played an intimate role as personal mementos and were sometimes modelled on death masks, endured well into the twentieth century.

Alongside these grand, historical genres within small-scale sculpture, the exhibition deliberately does not shy away from the lesser ones and the pejorative connotations often associated with this kind of work. In around 1900, a significant number of statuettes – "mere" figurines – were produced serially, sometimes in inexpensive materials such as plaster or porcelain, as part of a broader process of democratization and commercialization. Some statuettes derived their artistic value primarily – or even solely – from their source material: the high-quality antique or contemporary sculptures they reproduced in miniature. Others can be classified as archaeological or antiquarian curiosities, once commonly found in cabinets of curiosities and artists' collections. More recent artists continue to play with this oscillation between so-called 'high' and 'low' art.

Inherent to the statuette are the notions of 'scale' and 'version': small-scale sculptures often refers to larger works, offering a manageable and portable version to place on the mantelpiece at home, or presenting alternative variants, versions, or multiples within a series of the same work. Most importantly, many statuettes and small-scale sculptures made it possible to integrate art into the interior. In the fin de siècle and especially during the

interwar period, this decorative function led to the production of high-quality ornamental and functional statuettes by renowned sculptors. Mu.ZEE's collection includes an outstanding core group of Art Deco statuettes by artists such as Oscar Jespers, Oscar De Clerck, and Jozef Cantré, as well as – of course – the sculptural works of Constant Permeke. This decorative and integrated function of small sculpture continues to find expression in contemporary art galleries.

Ultimately, the scale of statuettes makes them easy to carry and handle. Owners and consumers are thus afforded the rare opportunity to hold and move these artworks, experiencing directly the tactility of their surfaces and materials. This exhibition also explores this literal – and sometimes figurative – sensual quality of small-scale sculpture.

Featuring some 100 sculptures, paintings and works on paper, Mu.ZEE guides visitors to the Venetian Galleries through a century and a half of small-scale sculpture in Belgium, from Marthe Donas and Oscar Jespers to Aline Bouvy and Pascale Marthine Tayou.

Mu.ZEE also aims to give small sculptures found in today's living rooms a central place within the public space of the Venetian Galleries. Related stories are captured and shared with visitors. This participatory project underlines the exhibition's subtitle: *Small Sculpture at Home*.

ALL INFO

muzee.be

info@muzee.be

Tuesday to Sunday: 10:00 AM – 5:30 PM

PRESS

Press materials available at muzee.be/press

Contact: pers@muzee.be

+32 473 53 38 15

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