

Jean-Joseph Halleux (Battice, 1815-Dinant, 1876),
Liège, 1849
Terracotta
100 x 40 x 17 cm
GC.REL.02f.2018.016237
O 259/2018

A model of an altar for the Sainte Croix collegiate church in Liège

In 1847, the sculptor was commissioned by the Sainte Croix church administration board to create new sculptures for the building, which was in the process of being restored. In 1849, he presented a model of the altar of Saint Hubert, which was to be made at a later date. The centre of this lavish altar was intended to house, like jewel box, the statue of the saint, surrounded by reliefs depicting the key points in his life.

Jean-Joseph Halleux in the collections of the City of Liège's museums

In 1875, the Fine Arts collections acquired Cain, a bronzed plaster sculpture dating from 1858 that was so tormented that it marked, according to some, the pinnacle of Jean-Joseph Halleux's career. The collections also include the white marble bust of Godefroid Umé, an architect from the Province of Liège, produced and signed by the artist in 1875.

Currently, while restoration work is being performed on the Sainte Croix collegiate church, a third work that stands out due to its precision and fragility, has come to temporarily enrich our collections: the model of the altar of Saint Hubert. Indeed, since 2017, the collegiate church has benefitted from an extensive programme designed to study and preserve its buildings. In keeping with a fine tradition, a significant part of its moveable heritage has been transferred to the Grand Curtius museum, in addition to other elements that have been entrusted to it for many years. One of them is permanently exhibited at the museum, namely the three-part reliquary of the Holy Cross.

The model

This slenderly crafted terracotta model is a mock-up of an altar designed by Jean-Joseph Halleux (1815-1876) for the Sainte Croix collegiate church.

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At the top features the high point of the saint's life: his conversion. At the foot of the altar, he is depicted in recumbent position, wearing the symbols of his office, namely the mitre and crozier. The book traditionally held in the hand is placed beneath his head. The key of Saint Hubert depicted in his right hand is on display in the treasury of Liège Cathedral.

The sculptor drew inspiration from the pinnacles, arcatures and niches from the beautiful cathedrals of the Middle Ages, giving an impression of spires turned towards the heavens and paying witness to the 19th century taste for aesthetics, synonymous with the age of the cathedrals, and the idealised Gothic style of the 13th century. Liège still bears strong witness to this artistic movement known as Neo-Gothic.

The altar featured in this model was never built; it remained a fragile model, a dream modelled and fixed in time.

Christelle Schoonbroodt, Curator of the Religious Art and Mosan Art Department.

Further reading

Flavio Di Campli, “Maquette d’autel pour l’église Sainte-Croix à Liège (Altar model for the Sainte-Croix church in Liège)”, in the Neo-Gothic section of the Religious Art and Mosan Art Department, exhibition catalogue, Liège, Religious Art and Mosan Art Museum, 1990, p. 74-76, n°111.

Philippe Joris, “Aspects du patrimoine néogothique de l’église Sainte-Croix à Liège (Aspects of the Neo-Gothic heritage of the Sainte-Croix church in Liège)”, in the proceedings of the sixth congress of the association of French-speaking history and archaeology circles in Belgium, Mons, p. 931-940.

Jean-Joseph Halleux in the collections of the City of Liège’s museums.

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