

# BOWMAN SCULPTURE

## **ANTON VAN WOUW (South African, 1862-1945)**

Anton van Wouw (1862-1945) is considered the father of South African sculpture and is well known for his portraits of the Shangaan, the indigenous people who lived in southern Mozambique and in the Northern Transvaal or Limpopo province of South Africa. The original Shangaans took their name from the Zulu warrior Soshangane and were once the rulers of the Gaza Empire. Van Wouw spent a great deal of his time in the wilderness and developed an immense admiration for the Boer nation as well as other indigenous groups.

Born in Driebergen in the Netherlands, van Wouw studied drawing and modelling at the Rotterdam Academy of Art, soon discovering that his talents lay more towards modelling and sculpting. This led to training in the studio of Belgian sculptor, Joseph Graven. In 1890, after his studies were finished, van Wouw left the Netherlands to join his father in Pretoria who had emigrated to South Africa seven years previously.

Ten years after moving to Pretoria he received his first commission which came from the financier and industrialist Sammy Marks. He asked the sculptor to create a monumental statue of Paul Kruger, President of the South African Republic and renowned as the figurehead of the Boer Resistance against the British during the Second Boer War (1899-1902). The statue still stands today at Church Square in Pretoria.



Anton Van Wouw working in his studio circa 1910.

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Van Wouw worked on smaller sculptures and busts which were cast in the Netherlands and Italy (later in life he used Vignoli, a local foundry in Pretoria). He had his first solo exhibition of smaller works in Pretoria in 1908, and a year later, his work was included in an exhibition at London's Fine Art Society. The renown and acclaim that he was already enjoying was further boosted by his masterpiece – the *National Woman's Monument* in Bloemfontein. When it was unveiled in 1913, he was awarded the Cross of the Knightly Order of Oranje-Nassau by the Dutch government.

In addition, Van Wouw was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Pretoria in 1936 and the Medal of Honour for sculpture from the South African Academy of Science and Art the following year. His work is in a number of museum collections including Ashby's Gallery, Cape Town, Durban Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Cape Town.

Van Wouw's home in Pretoria is now the Van Wouw Museum, a Dutch national monument.