

Hagar

ALBERT TOFT (British, 1862-1949)

Albert Toft was one of the most productive artists forming the second generation of the New Sculpture movement. His network of friendships and collaborations captures the close-knit relationships that shaped the development of the period, being a close friend of Alfred Gilbert, Frederic Leighton and the painter John William Waterhouse, among others. As a sculptor, he contributed to the development of the discipline in England by mingling the style of his teacher Édouard Lantéri with the more symbolist leanings of Gilbert.



George Clausen, *Portrait of Albert Toft (1862-1949)*, 1913, oil on canvas, Birmingham Museums Trust

Toft was born near Birmingham in 1862, where his father worked as a modeller for the electroplating firm Elkington & Co. He descended from a lineage of skilled Staffordshire artists and craftsmen, including his father, Charles Toft, and brother, J Alfonso Toft. During his teenage years, he was apprenticed at the

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

world-renowned pottery manufacturer Wedgwood, while also taking evening classes at the Hanley and Newcastle-under-Lyme art schools. In 1881 he won a scholarship to study sculpture at the South Kensington Schools (renamed the Royal College of Art in 1896) where he was awarded silver medals for his second and third-year submissions. It was here that Toft would learn from the renowned sculptor Professor Édouard Lantéri, whose influence, along with that of Dalou, can be seen in Toft's best-known 'ideal works', such as *Fate-Led* (1892) and *The Spirit of Contemplation* (1901).



The Spirit of Contemplation, ALBERT TOFT, Sculptor.

Toft exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1885 with numerous successes. Some of his most notable works are *The Sere and Yellow Leaf* (1892), *Spring* (1897), *The Spirit of Contemplation* (1901) and *The Metal Pourer* (1915). In 1915 his sculpture *The Bather* was purchased using the Royal Academy's Chantrey Fund and is currently part of the TATE collection.

His impressive career led to his election as a member of the Art Workers Guild in 1891 and later his election as a fellow of the Royal British Society of Sculptors in 1938, with two notable works featured in *RBS: Modern British Sculpture* in 1939. Toft's legacy includes the book *Modelling and Sculpture* (1911) and a prolific exhibition history, including showcases at the Royal Academy, Walker Art Gallery, and the Royal

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts. He also left an enduring mark through public commissions like war memorials in Birmingham and Cardiff, Wales.



HAGAR.
—
ALBERT TOFT.

Hagar was first exhibited in 1904 as a plaster at the Laing Art Gallery, Special Inaugural Exhibition of Pictures by British and Foreign Artists.

According to the Bible, Hagar was the Egyptian slave of Sarai, Abram's wife (whose names later became Sarah and Abraham). Sarai had been barren for a long time and sought a way to fulfil God's promise that Abram would be the father of many nations, especially since they had grown old, so she offered Hagar to Abram to be his concubine.

Hagar became pregnant, and tension arose between the two women. In the Bible, it is seen that Sarai was despised in the eyes of Hagar as she had conceived whilst Sarai had not. Abraham gave Sarai the liberty to

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

treat Hagar as she pleased, perceiving Hagar as her servant. Sarai eventually dealt harshly with Hagar and so she fled.

Hagar fled into the desert. At a spring en route, an angel appeared to Hagar, who instructed her to return to Sarai and submit to her mistress, so that she may bear a child who '*shall be a wild ass of a man: his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him, and he shall dwell in the face of all his brethren*' (Genesis 16:9 - 12) and she was told to call her son Ishmael. She then returned to Abram and Sarai, giving birth to a son, whom she named as the angel had instructed.

Literature

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