



Jean Delville (Belgium 1867 - Belgium 1953)

Prometheus / Prométhée

Jean Delville (1867–1953), the Belgian Symbolist artist, had a ‘monumental’ vision of the art of painting.

This can be seen in *Prométhée* (1904–07, 500 x 250 cm, Université Libre de Bruxelles), a canvas described in the catalogue of the 1907 triennial exhibition in Brussels as a ‘decorative painting which could ornament a temple of science, a university or an institute’. This chimed with the artist’s determination, at the turn of the twentieth century, that idealistic works should be sited in public places.

Referencing the precepts advocated by Joséphin Péladan (1858–1918), Jean Delville saw the artist as an artist-mystic, playing a spiritual role as a guide to the sacred, and this determined the gigantic size of his works. It was also in 1907 that he proposed in his article ‘Le principe social de l’art’ (in *La Belgique artistique et littéraire*) that art is a ‘civilizing force’ and as such should find a place in modern society. It was through his conceptual vision of social art that he sought to make humans feel the essential immateriality of things.

The present work, which is a new discovery, is the 'first study' for Prométhée, showing the prophet as a bearer of light, a visualization of the spiritual elevation of human beings, thanks to the intervention of an initiate, a superman.