

Anton van Wouw (Holland 1862 - South Africa 1945)

Bust of Shangaan

Signed and dated: A. van Wouw / S. A. Joh.burg / 1907

Inscribed: G. Nisini - fuse – Rome

Bronze H. 30.5cm., 12in.

Anton Van Wouw was born in Driebergen, Holland in 1862, and moved to Pretoria at the age of 28. Despite having taken classes in drawing and modelling at the Rotterdam Academy, it was some time before van Wouw gained commissions in South Africa, a country in which there were few opportunities for sculptors at the time. He received his first commission from the industrialist Sammy Marks (1844-1920) in 1899: a monumental sculpture of Paul Kruger (1825-1904), the President of the South African Republic, on Church Square.

Some of van Wouw's most celebrated artworks are his sensitive depictions of South-African sitters: Shangaan is one his defining models. Unlike many of his contemporaries, van Wouw worked in a realistic manner and did not portray his models through a colonial lens. His close attention to detail, and thorough understanding of anatomy, resulted in portraits with striking realism and vibrant expression, as

shown in this stately portrait of a young man with detailed musculature, frowning expression, and crossed arms.

While van Wouw modelled his sculptures in plaster from life models in South Africa, the casting process took place in Italy. He predominantly worked with two Roman foundries, the Massa foundry and G. Nisini. The present cast is a particularly fine example and includes a warm brown patina, finely chased surface, and well defined detail throughout.

Literature:

M. J. Cohen, Anton Van Wouw, *Sculptor Of South African Life*, Johannesburg, 1938