



Kasteel van Loppem

STICHTING JEAN VAN CALOEN

Web Magazine

of the Castle of Loppem

No. 3 — April 24, 2023

New additions to
the castle

A Maline doll depicting the Infant Jesus, hand raised in blessing. A new purchase for the Loppem Castle collection that engages with other depictions of the Infant Jesus



At the time of the last Burgundian duke, Charles the Bold, and Margaret of Austria, Regent of the Netherlands, Mechelen developed into one of the most thriving centres of carving in the Southern Netherlands. Testimony to this are the famous Maline dolls or *poupées de Malines* that were made from the mid 15th to the mid 16th century. These small figurines, usually 20-35 cm high, were carved in wood and, as well as the Madonna and Child above, depicted the female saints popular at the time such as Barbara, Catherine, Anne, Elizabeth, Agnes, Dorothy, and so on. The figurines typically have a round face with a large forehead (the ideal of beauty of at the Burgundian court) and thin, somewhat pouting lips, small eyes and blushing cheeks. These little dolls were carved by a sculptor and then covered with a rich polychrome of bright colours such as red, green and blue and also generously gilded by a painter or decorator. The figurines were intended for personal devotion, for instance at home in the bedroom or a private chapel, in a monastery cell or a beguine's room, and could be used either on their own or incorporated into a family altarpiece, an "Enclosed Garden" (a retable with or without doors). Production was impressive. We might easily call it

Infant Jesus, Hand Raised in Blessing

Walnut, polychrome, gilded

H. 34,5 cm

Mechelen, early 16th century

Jean van Caloen Foundation,
Loppem Castle

mass production, and the Maline dolls were a sought-after export product. The market for them stretched to the furthest outposts of Europe, such as the Azores and Madeira, and even beyond. Since the Southern Netherlands were controlled by Spain, the carvings also ended up in India, the Philippines and South America.

Such Maline dolls, a fraction of what was once produced, can be found in many museums and private collections. Jean van Caloen (1884-1972) was also able to acquire a number of them. At Loppem Castle, there is a *Madonna and Child with Grapes* as well as a *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (Anne with her daughter Mary and her grandson Jesus).

An auction¹ in June 2022 provided an opportunity to add a Maline doll depicting an *Infant Jesus, Hand Raised in Blessing* (h. 34.5 cm, walnut, polychrome, gilding, early 16th century) to the collection. The doll represents a nude infant in a standing pose. The child's right hand is raised in blessing, whilst its left hand holds a globe. In view of the size and red colour, this may however be an apple, a reference to Jesus as the new Adam (and Mary the new Eve). Whether a globe or an apple, the message is the same: Jesus, with his coming to earth and his sacrifice, is the saviour of humankind.

Whatever the case, the little boy with his blond curls, large forehead and slight smile looks winsome. But the underlying message is serious. His gesture of blessing and the attribute of the globe or apple are a reference to his role as *Salvator Mundi* or Saviour of the World.

His future crucifixion and resurrection will allow him to save humanity. This stereotypical iconography was highly sought after, not just here in the Southern Netherlands, but also in Portugal and Spain, above all in monasteries and convents, again as an object for personal devotion. Numerous examples still present on the Iberian Peninsula bear witness to this. But colonial expansion overseas meant that such figures of the Infant Jesus with his hand raised in blessing also ended up in Mexico, Peru and Brazil as well as India, the Philippines (for example the

popular *Santo Niño de Cebú*), China and Japan. This form of representation was adopted by local artists. That makes the recent, informed purchase discussed here a particularly interesting addition to this collection. Exhibited just a few metres away, it shows how a Maline doll was interpreted a century later at the other side of the (known) world, due to the expansion of Christianity. Such representations are not only found in wood, but also in ivory in India, China and Japan. One such ivory doll is also on display at Loppem Castle.

Malinois dolls as models for the Spanish and Portuguese colonies

This Indo-Portuguese figurine of Infant Jesus with its hand raised in blessing, although clothed in this case, is clearly inspired by those created a century before in Mechelen. Note the instruments of the Passion on the apron, from bottom to top: the nails, whip, ladder, chalice, water pitcher and basin, veil of Veronica and the cross on the hill at Golgotha.



Infant Jesus of the Passion
Wood
Indo-Portuguese, 17th century
Porto, Museu de Arte sacra

On the same theme of Indo-Portuguese art, the collection of the Jean van Caloen Foundation also includes an interesting ivory Pax. We see a similar depiction of the Infant Jesus. This one does not have his hand raised in blessing, but is portrayed above a ship, in front of the cross with a ladder and a sponge on a pole (two instruments of the Passion). The *Salvator Mundi*, once again with the globe, is holding on to the sail on which we see the five stigmata: the hands and feet with the heart between them. God is looking down on the scene. Again we find Jesus, through his sacrifice, as the saviour of the world.

In addition to the figure of the Infant Jesus, standing with his hand raised in blessing as *Salvator Mundi*, the Infant Jesus also appears in the Indo-Portuguese tradition in a recumbent pose. Jean van Caloen managed to purchase two figures of this type for his collection. The two iconographies (the standing, blessing Infant and the recumbent Infant) are different and should be interpreted differently. The so-called 'sleeping' Infant Jesus is not asleep, since his eyes are open or half open, and the index finger held against the mouth is a meditative pose, the one we sometimes adopt ourselves when thinking deeply. In the context of personal devotion, the person who owned such a figure could reflect personally on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross followed by his resurrection, and of course on their own life as well.



Pax
Ivory,
H. 10,4 cm
Goa, 17th century
Jean van Caloen Foundation,
Loppem Castle



Infant Jesus, Hand Raised in Blessing
Ivory, polychrome, gilding,
H. 18,8 cm
Ceylon, 17th or early 18th century (?)
Jean van Caloen Foundation,
Loppem Castle

Recumbent Infant Jesus
Ivory, polychrome, gilding,
H. 16 cm
China, 17th or early 18th century (?)
Jean van Caloen Foundation,
Loppem Castle



In the 16th century, the Infant Jesus was depicted nude in the context of his birth, of course, as a newborn baby in the manger. However, Jesus is often depicted nude as a toddler as well, as we see in the case of this Maline doll. Incidentally, as well as this carved Infant Jesus, there is an interesting contemporaneous painting by Joos van Cleve (also known as Joos van der Beke, around 1485-1540/1541) held by the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid. The little painting that dates from around 1530, *The Infant Christ on the Orb of the World*, depicts the young Jesus, once again nude, hand raised in blessing and this time not holding the globe but standing on a crystal globe with three pairs of wings and holding the cross. Once more, this is an explicit reference to Jesus as an innocent child, whose future crucifixion will save humankind.

Benoit Kervyn de Volkaersbeke



Joos van Cleve (Joos van der Beke)
 (ca. 1485-1540/41)
Infant Jesus on a Globe
 Oil on panel,
 H. 37 cm x 26 cm
 Around 1530
 Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid

Notes

1. Auction by Rob Michiels of the collection of Paul De Grande (castle of Snellegem on June 23, 2022), lot 493.

Sources

C. Ceulemans (e.a.), *Mechels houtsnijwerk in de eeuw van Keizer Karel*, Stedelijke Musea en OKV, 2000.

F. Cairon and D. Steyaert, *Made in Malines. Les statuettes malinoises ou poupées de Malines de 1500 -1540. Étude matérielle et typologique*, Brussels, 2019.

