

Statue of “the Unknown Wartime Woman - Peace needs women”.

On November 11, 2021, the city of Leuven will unveil the statue of the Unknown Wartime Woman, a gift from the Leuven Peace Movement and KU Leuven. The statue is situated on the Benedenplein - Jeanne Devosplein.

The reclining woman: the image of the Unknown Wartime Woman refers to the feminine dimension of war suffering. Women suffer heavily from war and conflict, in their own way. Not only they lose their beloved ones, but also, they are often victims of group and other violence. In recent history, rape of women has been used as a weapon of war in Africa, ex-Yugoslavia, Iraq, Syria ...

The seated woman: the image of the Unknown Wartime Woman also refers to the commitment of women in the midst of situations of war and conflict: they continue to take care of their family and community, including those who were injured (physically and psychologically) by the suffering during wartime.

The standing woman: the statue calls on women to engage actively in sustainable peacebuilding, as emphasized in Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council, which includes the slogan “Women Power is Peace Power”. The beckoning gesture calls on women to make their voices heard and to work for peace, at all levels, according to their situation and possibilities (family, neighbourhood, society, politics). Working together with many, women can influence political decision-making about resource use: moving from militarization to nonviolent conflict management and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in society.

For these reasons, the White Poppy is put next to the Red Poppy, which is the symbol for war commemoration. Both Poppies are in the logo of the Leuven Peace Movement. Each November 11 the Leuven Peace Movement wants to bring the idea into the limelight that women can develop an enormous strength when they engage actively for peace.

Leuven profiles itself more and more as a City of Peace. When the Leuven Peace Movement presented the initiative for a statue of the Unknown Wartime Woman to the city of Leuven, there was a very enthusiastic reaction of the city, which adopted the project in its Planning for the years 2020-2025. Also, the University KU Leuven sustains this initiative with great conviction.

Leuven is a city with more than 170 nationalities. The many woman, migrants, refugees, foreign students, coming from conflict areas and residing in and around Leuven, will recognise themselves in the statue. It is an expression of acknowledgment and respect for the long way these women have travelled, and the difficult process of integration they have to go through with or without their family. This statue can contribute to their integration and trauma processing.

Although the signification as remembrance of the statue does not come in the first place, a historic reference to war is present. Leuven has a rich history of women engaging themselves actively in the resistance against war and violence, and all these unknown active women deserve a place in town.

The sculptor of the stature of the Unknow Wartime Woman is Liliane Versluys, living in Leuven area, pacifist feminist, lawyer and also sculptor and painter. She wants to contribute to a better world by engaging herself against injustice and by unveiling with the power of images that what cannot be said in words. The inauguration will take place on the Benedenplein – Jeanne Devos plein in Leuven - behind the underpass tunnel of the railway station – at 14 o'clock.

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