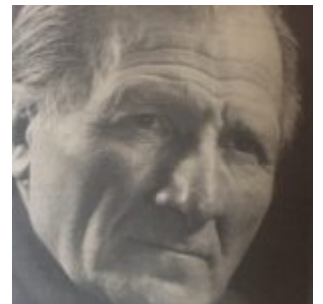


Georges Wasterlain The sculptor who inspired the commemorative medal for the 75th anniversary of the proclamation of St. John Baptist de La Salle as Patron Saint of all Educators

2025 marks the 75th Anniversary of the proclamation of St John Baptist de La Salle as the Patron Saint of all Educators. For this important occasion the Brothers of the Generalate in Rome decided to have a commemorative medal minted to honour this important date. Regarding the choice of what was to be reproduced on the medal, they opted for the reproduction of a sculpture that the Belgian artist Georges Wasterlain, a friend of the Brothers, had made for them.



Georges Wasterlain, (1889-1963), was a Belgian draughtsman, painter and sculptor, and a member of the *L'art vivant* group in Charleroi. He came from a modest background, a child of the working class.

In 1904 he took a course in industrial design at the *École industrielle*, but in his spare time he drew figures and modelled clay. He worked in various metal workshops, became a finisher in Le Havre in France and went down into the mines of Flénu and Ghlin.

In 1909, he did his military service with the 2nd Guide Regiment in Brussels, an opportunity that allowed him to live in this city and take a course in drawing and anatomy. Mobilised as a soldier in the First World War, he was wounded and taken prisoner in August 1914. During his imprisonment he devoted himself to his first works.

After 1918, he decided to leave his job as a miner to learn the art of painting and

sculpture on his own full-time. It was a difficult time for him and his family.

In 1925, at the *Maison de tous* exhibition in Charleroi, he exhibited a bust of a young woman, a *Hiercheuse* and a miner's head in the style of social realism inspired by Constantin Meunier. In January 1929, the Fine Arts Commission of the Province of Hainaut awarded him the *Prix du Hainaut*. He subsequently participated in numerous exhibitions and was celebrated by the official authorities as a talented working-class artist. In 1933, he co-founded the group and became its leader.

During the Second World War, Wasterlain met Joseph Spilette, editor of the *Journal de Charleroi*, who convinced him to take the path of conciliation with Germany, so that in April 1941, he became the first director of the *Communauté Culturelle Wallonne* (CCW).

In September 1941, together with other CCW artists, he participated in a series of exhibitions in Germany. In November 1944, he was arrested for collaboration with the enemy and sentenced to two years in prison. After his release, he moved to Aalst.

In this town is the small novitiate of the Brothers, whom he got to know and from whom he received several assignments.

These include the statue that inspired the commemorative medal created on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the appointment of St John Baptist de La Salle as the Patron Saint of all Educators. The statue was placed at *Sint-Jozef College*, also known as *Gulden Sporen College*, in the city of Kortrijk, Belgium.

In addition to this statue, 14 sculptures by the artist dedicated to the Stations of the Cross and a statue of the crucified Jesus have been preserved.

Religious concerns and inspiration from the sufferings of Christ were, in fact, central to his career.

He died on 8 March 1963 in relative anonymity.