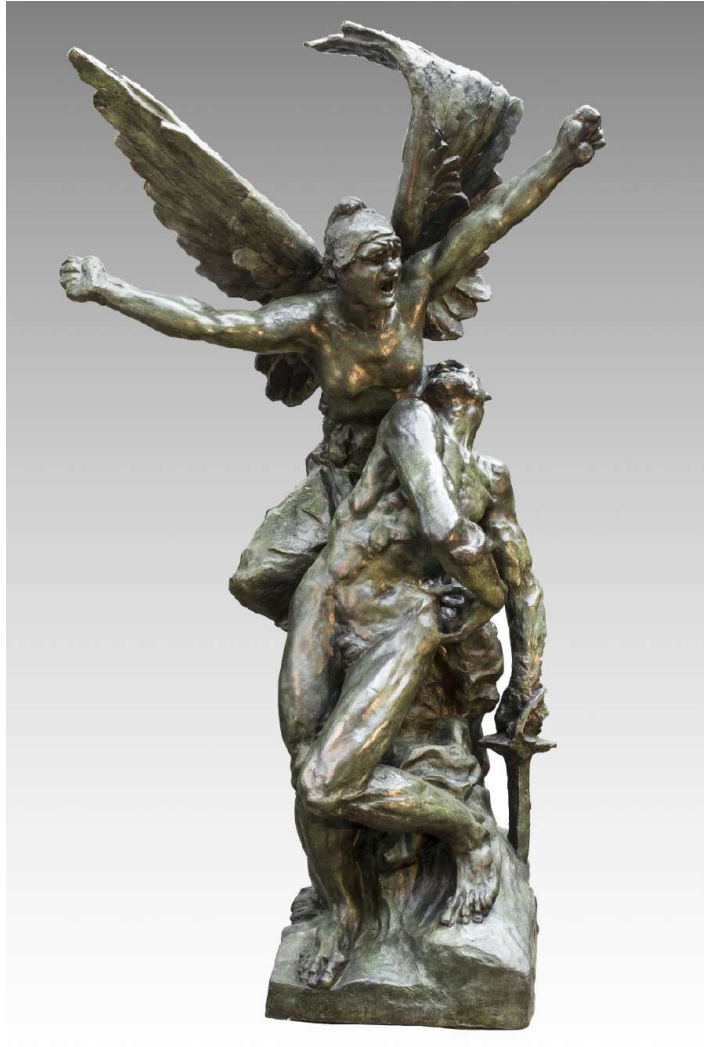


Akim Monet Fine Arts, LLC



Auguste RODIN (1840-1917)

La Défense
The Call to Arms

Bronze

90 ⁹/₁₆ x 45 ¹¹/₁₆ x 33 ¹/₄ in. (230 x 116 x 84,5 cm)

Ed. 8 + 4AP

1912-1918

To be cast by the Musée Rodin, 2021. The bronze will be inscribed A. Rodin, © by Musée Rodin and numbered, dated and stamped with the foundry mark

PROVENANCE

Musée Rodin, Paris

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AUTHENTICATION

A certificate of authenticity, signed by the Director of the Musée Rodin, is given to every purchaser of an original bronze by Auguste Rodin

This work will be included in the forthcoming *Auguste Rodin catalogue critique de l'oeuvre sculpté* currently being prepared by the Comité Auguste Rodin at Galerie Brame et Lorenceau under the direction of Jérôme Le Blay

OTHER CASTS IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Musée Rodin, Paris, France, 1917, cast by Alexis Rudier, without number (assimilated I/IV)
National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, Japan, 1920, cast by Georges Rudier, without number (assimilated II/IV)
Vina del Mar, Chile, 1961, cast by Georges Rudier, without number (assimilated III/IV)
La Seine Musicale, Boulogne-Billancourt, France, 2017, cast by Fonderie Coubertin, number 1/8

NOTES

While the elections of January 1879 confirmed the Republican regime in France, Rodin, who had finally been accepted at the Salon and had just won interest in 1877 with his *Age of Brass* and had yet to see any of his works purchased by the French state, sought to earn his reputation and livelihood as an independent artist. Winning a public competition was the best way for a young artist to achieve this end. In 1879, two important competitions were launched, the first for the design of a Monument to the Republic and the second for a Monument to the Defense of Paris. The latter was to be erected at the Rond-Point de Courbevoie, where the defense of the capital had been organized in 1870.

Possibly to differentiate himself from another sculptor, Aimé-Jules Dalou, who was taking part in the first competition, Rodin decided to try his luck in the second, the guidelines of which were published on 6 May 1879. The competition called for a group of two figures that would be cast in bronze. The deadline for submitting maquettes to the Palais du Luxembourg was 5 November. Like most of the other entries (about a hundred), Rodin's group was composed of an allegorical figure and a warrior.

But instead of being defined by the costumes or symbols accompanying the figures, the work distinguished itself by the manner in which the broken rhythm of the warrior's body contrasted with the dynamism of the female figure. The latter surged upward out of the composition, like Carpeaux's *Genius of Dance* at the Opéra de Paris, with her arms outstretched, fists clenched, and mouth wide open, like Rude's *Genius of Liberty* on the Arc de Triomphe (and which Camille Claudel accused Rodin of copying). But the drooping broken wing of Rodin's female figure gives her a more human quality by making her seem more vulnerable. Meanwhile, the dying warrior is a direct transposition of the Christ of Michelangelo's *Pietà* (now in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence, which Rodin had gazed upon "with deep emotion." Rodin never sought to hide his references, whether direct or indirect.

"A robust combatant, fatally wounded, staggers and falls, while a sort of ferocious Valkyrie, the Genius of War, howling, grimacing with rage, flings out her arms in exasperation, intoxicated by the carnage and, face against the wind, sings her hymn to death." (Arsène Alexandre, 1900). Judged to be too revolutionary, apart from the fact that the identity of the allegorical figure in a Phrygian cap was unclear (was she the embodiment of Paris or Liberty?), this group, pulsating with an ideological violence quite exceptional in Rodin's oeuvre, was eliminated in the first round of the competition on 29 November 1879. The roughness of the modeling, suggested rather than detailed, must certainly have contributed to frightening the jury, who eventually chose the entry submitted by Louis-Ernest Barrias, a sculptor a year younger than Rodin. Officially declared the winner in May 1880, Barrias's monument was inaugurated on 12 August 1883. *"The worthy experts who made up the jury preferred a stodgy cream puff by Mr. Barrias, [winner of the] Prix de Rome, which earned this sculptor the right to be elected, four years later, member of the Academy of Fine Arts."* (Judith Cladel, 1936).

However disappointed he may have been by the jury's decision, Rodin never disowned his work. On the contrary, he carefully kept his maquette and exhibited it on numerous occasions from 1899. As early as 1883, according to Maillart, but probably not until in 1891, he had a bronze cast made of the figure of the Genius alone. Raised on a spiral base, "this Genius of War who—with arms outstretched in a supreme entreaty, fists clenched convulsively, shattered wing drooping—desperately calls for victory or death," assumes a fantastic appearance that only enhances her audacity. The first recorded cast of the two figures group was made in 1893 by the founder Griffoul & Lorge. It was very probably the bronze now in Edinburgh. Rodin may also have been encouraged by Bourdelle, who was working on the Monument to the Dead, the Combatants and the Defenders of Tarn-et-Garonne for the city of Montauban (1895-1900). But theirs was a mutual influence, for the Rodin's group must have been uppermost in Bourdelle's mind when he designed his own monument, whose stirring figure of France and particularly the tortured masks of the warriors have resonances of *The Call to Arms*.



The Call to Arms in the workshop, Jean Limet

After 1914, war made *The Call to Arms* topical again. Rodin was still searching for a means of casting it on a monumental scale. In 1882, he is thought to have entered it – unsuccessfully – in an open competition held by the Chilean government for a monument to Arturo Prat, a hero from the War of the Pacific (1879-84). In 1906, he had the torso of the Genius enlarged by Lebossé, but again nothing came of the project. In 1912, when the French newspaper *Le Matin* launched a national appeal fund to supply the army with airplanes, Rodin was quick to donate his figure group: "The patriotic feelings stirred in the world by the subscription you have launched to give France the airplane, a formidable and sublime weapon, has inspired me to take part, independently of the monetary fund, by donating one of my works: *The Call to Arms*. I am going to hand this work over to you. You will be able to decide which place it should occupy to commemorate the historic page that you have opened in the history of our national defense. The purpose of my donation is above all to remind people that we all agree with a noble idea".



Léonce Bénédite and Etienne Clementel posing in front of *The Call to arms*, anonymous

Little information about this project exists, but there was obviously much work to be done before the group could be used as a monument. In 1912, while Maurice Bunau-Varilla, owner of *Le Matin*, was organizing the casting of the bronze (now in the Musée Rodin), probably for means of publicity, Lebossé was summoned to Meudon and urged to return to work. But at the end of the year, Rodin was so dissatisfied with its progress that Lebossé abandoned work on *The Call to Arms* until spring 1915. The subscribers to the fund no doubt informed Rodin that erecting a monument was not their prime objective. Although donations continued to flood in, the project once again fell through.

On 29 May 1915, Lebossé told Rodin that "as agreed, I shall start work again on the bust of *The Call to Arms* next week." Despite the difficult conditions and a lack of assistants, he did work on it for several months in a row; the bust was enlarged to five times its size, a genuine feat of skill. On 26 December 1916, the occasion for which Rodin had been waiting nearly forty years finally presented itself: J. Baart de La Faille, secretary of the League of Neutral Nations (a strongly anti-German organization) asked him whether he would be willing to design a monument commemorating the defense of Verdun.

"Perhaps you are going to ask me why I haven't approached a Dutch sculptor? First, we have no sculptor who can equal you. Then, any sculpture that a Dutch artist might produce on this subject would only be a feeble imitation of what the soul of a Frenchman, who for two-and-a-half years has been experiencing what war means, must feel." Bénédite replied on Rodin's behalf that his state of health and preoccupation with the creation of the museum prevented him from working on a new monumental sculpture, but added, "among the master's works there is a group that is entirely appropriate: *The Call to Arms*, which could be reworked in the desired size." Baart de La Faille accepted this offer and, in 1918-19, while the Verdun Committee collected the funds, Lebossé, assisted by Charles-Émile Jonchery, finished the double enlargement of the group, then doubled its size again, thereby producing a Monument to the Defense of Verdun four times as large as the original group.

In spite of controversies about the fact that the final enlargement (four times, ie 4,60 m) was finished after Rodin's death, the monument was thus cast by Rudier in 1919 and unveiled in Verdun on 1 August 1920. A few months previously, Lebossé had imprudently allowed the maquette to be photographed alongside the enlargement, whose "fuller forms" were evident. This provided him with the opportunity to recall the "conscientiousness [that he had] always applied to [his] work, a conscientiousness to which Mr. Rodin had borne witness on many occasions by honoring him with the titles of 'collaborator' and 'friend.'" He then specified that it "was impossible in this kind of work" to execute a strictly mathematical enlargement and, for example, "to multiply by four the depth of the holes would be detrimental to the ensemble's overall light," and he produced letters from Rodin "which ordered him to put much more material and more thickness in *The Call to Arms*."

One final role remained for *The Call to Arms* to play. In September 1948, it was chosen as a design for a postage stamp for a public safety campaign, launched by André Malraux and the political movement RPF (Rassemblement du Peuple Français, or Rally of the People of France) to support General Charles de Gaulle.

- Musée Rodin, Paris



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