



JACQUES LUCIEN SCHNEGG (1867-1909)

The Republic

Bronze proof with gold patina
Sand cast, without founder's mark
Signed: Lucien Schnegg
H. 102, W. 65, D. 30 cm

Bibliography

- *La Bande à Schnegg*, catalogue from the exhibition at the Bourdelle Museum, June-September, 1974, ed. Musée Bourdelle, Paris. Repr. #15, plate XXII.
- Frédéric Damay, "Lucien Schnegg, sculptor; his life and work," *Etudes Toulouses*, #81, 1997.
- Jean Alazard, "Lucien Schnegg and Contemporary French Sculpture," *Gazette de Beaux-Arts*, volume XIII, 1935, 1st semester.

The Republic is one of Lucien Schnegg's late works; in fact, it dates from the last year of his life, and was created for a competition organized by *Le Journal* in June of 1909, though in a letter to Rodin, who was on the jury, Schnegg commented that the sculpture had been "lovingly worked, and with no specific interest in the competition."

Schnegg had a monumental conception of sculpture and thought that, ideally, it should be harmoniously integrated into architecture. And yet, for him, ". . . grandeur is born of proportion, not of size."^[1] Schnegg was particularly known for his work with busts, and for models he frequently used people from his

immediate entourage because he liked to work with figures he'd observed over a long period of time. This is true, for instance, with the bust titled *Jane Poupelet*,^[2] which is a real masterpiece. "Faithful to the tradition of the best French portraitists, he made a serious study of fundamental structure and essential contours."^[3]

The bust of *The Republic* is a consummate demonstration of the two main facets of Schnegg's art: a simplification of planes, with particular attention to their lines, and a fluid and finished modeling. It's through a fusion of these two that he managed to charge this face with life, as it welcomes the light.

An extremely gifted sculptor, and Rodin's studio assistant, Schnegg was deeply influenced by the older master, and yet, unlike most of the artists who developed under Rodin, he managed to go beyond that influence. With other sculptors, including Charles Despiau and Alfred-Jean Halou, he advocated moving away from Rodin's exalted and lyrical style in favor of a reinterpretation of the ancient and a reintroduction of ideals promoting the calm, the serene, and the ascetic. Almost in spite of himself, he became an art theorist and the head of a group of independent sculptors that came to be known among critics as "la bande à Schnegg" ("Schnegg's Gang").

The Republic is a perfect display of his stylistic concepts; it presents a proud and determined woman, yet one whose features are delicate, balanced, and harmonious. She incarnates a timeless beauty that evokes the classical. Schnegg had developed his artistic sensibility through studies of the antiquities in the Louvre, but he was also influenced by French sculpture of the 18th century and by quattrocento Florentine marbles. Echoes of this latter tendency can be seen in the "Italianate" bust of *The Republic*.

While *The Republic* is a captivating sculptural composition, it is also a symbolic work. Wearing an imposing Phrygian cap, it is a version of Marianne, the allegorical figure of the French Republic, and thus it implicitly represents the French republican values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Phrygian cap was often confused with the pileus, the cap worn by freed slaves in ancient Rome, and so became a revolutionary symbol of liberty. On each side of the face, the lower part of the cap is ornamented with a cockade, the red, white, and blue rosette that symbolized revolutionary patriotism. And finally, the cap is crowned with two laurel branches, which are both the symbol of arts and letters and, when they are worn as a crown, of victory—another element inherited from ancient Rome.

In contrast to the heavy cap laden with symbolic attributes, the top of the bust is covered by the light tunic, like a second skin, that leaves the breasts visible. Traditionally, a breast either naked or revealed by drapery symbolizes its

nourishing aspect. Thus, Lucien Schnegg chose to represent *The Republic* by accentuating its revolutionary origins and antique roots. However, the revolutionary aspect remains subtle; its symbolic evocation is contradicted by the work's serene and peaceful attitude. This can be illustrated by comparing the piece to Alfred-Jean Halou's *Bust of the Republic*. Halou, Schnegg's contemporary and good friend, created a figure that is much more willful, fired by ideals, and less timeless and intimate than Schnegg's.

One of the sculpture's greatest admirers was Rodin, who was passionate about it. At Schnegg's funeral, he wrote in the preface to the book for the raffle he later organized for the benefit of Schnegg's widow and children,^[4] "(. . .) Lucien Schnegg had the courage to be a true sculptor; he gave so much of himself, and with the vigor of a reformer. He left many works in his wake, and many of them of unsurpassed beauty, as well as an indisputable masterpiece: the bust of the Republic. (. . .)." On another occasion, he remarked, "Lucien Schnegg was a great artist who unfortunately died too young, and just when he was about to reap the benefits of his remarkable works, one of the last of which, the bust of the Republic, is a masterpiece. He would have, without doubt, been one of the greatest sculptors of his age."^[5]

And it was at Rodin's instigation that a retrospective of Schnegg's works was organized at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1910, where *The Republic* was represented by a plaster. It was shown again in 1974 at the Bourdelle Museum's "Bande à Schnegg" exhibition. This bronze is quite likely the only one in existence.

^[1] Schnegg cited by Louis Vauxcelles in *Gil Blas*, 1909.

^[2] *Jane Poupelet*, 1897, marble, signed, 38 x 27,5 x 17,5 cm. Held at the Muesum of Art and Industry in Roubaix.

^[3] Alazard, 1935, p.117.

^[4] at the Georges Petit Gallery.

^[5] cited in Frédéric Damay, art. 1997.