1 Monumentality and European geopolitics in the 19th century

In this age of virtual monuments[76] and intangible heritage, one should remember that there was a time when memory was tangible and enduring, providing public space with a narrative intended to embody what a community held to be essential and worthy of transmission. The trend to 'tear down' statues since 2010 has been a stark reminder of this past reality, which knew its finest hours in the 19th century. Yet, as Robert Musil put it, these monuments, such as mute witnesses, were unique in that no one ever looked at them. Some artists set a goal to overcome this indifference and challenge such conformism. They ideated works that would defy the test of time and withstand changing mentalities. Their work had to be made indestructible and irreplaceable by integrating it into space to the point that they would become one with the landscape. To quote the historian Maurice Agulhon, this was 'argument by feat.'[77]

One sculptor-architect embodies this time in the 19th century when monumental sought to identify with memorial: Auguste Bartholdi. When he died in 1904, the man who had authored one of the world's most famous monuments, the Statue of Liberty, was consigned to oblivion and the scorn reserved for academism. Thus began a century of solitude. Only at the dawn of the third millennium did the sculptor and his work re-emerge with the presentation, in 2012, of an original model of the Statue of Liberty at the Musée d'Orsay, and in 2020, when the Lion of Belfort was elected 'Favourite monument of the French.' Bartholdi had been swept away by a wave of rejection of the edifying and moralising republican statue frenzy[78] dedicated to the celebration of 'great men', which had transformed 19th-

76 Jessica De Bideran, « Du document patrimonial au monument virtuel : les nouvelles mémoires du patrimoine », *Cahiers de la SFSIC*, n°10, juin 2014 (Questions de recherche : mémoire et sciences de l'information et de la communication), p. 66–72.

77 Maurice Agulhon, « Bartholdi et le soleil », *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, t. LXXXIX, mai-juin 1977, p. 188.

78 Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir, l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914*, Flammarion, 1989.

century towns into 'open-air pantheons'.[79] However, it may be interesting to examine the sculptor's work nowadays, as he invented a new form of heritage that incorporated the landscape dimension and lent a new impact to the message.

This is the case with the Statue of Liberty, which reinvented a site, and the Lion of Belfort. Flanking the base of Vauban's citadel, the Lion was intended as a 'palladium', visible from all sides, public, secular and compulsory, from which the main communication routes were to be reorganised to facilitate the town's demographic renewal after the French defeat of 1870. Bartholdi sought to take up a challenge that was both architectural and symbolic. He meant to patrimonialise a military defeat that had amputated two 'provinces' from France (Alsace and part of Lorraine), and that would be a source of national remorse until the end of the First World War when these provinces returned to the national fold. Studying the genesis of the Lion is of further interest to historians and anthropologists, as it provides insight into the conditions (political, geopolitical, and financial) governing public statuary in the 19th century and its contribution to the history of political symbolism and republican identity. The Lion of Belfort emblemises the most tragic event to hit France in the last third of the 19th century, as well as the most difficult one to accept, convey and celebrate. Analysing it through the conflicts to which it gave rise and the changes in how it was perceived is an excellent way to approach the processes of heritage protection at the end of the 19th century and the conditions that presided over the creation of public memory.

The city that saved the honour of France deserves a monumental tribute

A quick reminder of the facts, which were tragic and humiliating for France. On 19 July 1870, Napoleon III declared war on Prussia. On 2 September of the same year, France capitulated at Sedan, and Prussia invaded the country, laying siege to Paris. At Versailles, in the Hall of Mirrors, on 5 October 1870, William I (1797 – 1888), King of Prussia, became the first emperor through the proclamation of the German Empire. France had lost the war but won the Republic, proclaimed on 4 September 1970 at the Hôtel

79 Christel Sniter, « La guerre des statues. La statuaire publique, un enjeu de violence symbolique : l'exemple des statues de Jeanne d'Arc à Paris entre 1870 et 1914 », *Sociétés & Représentations,* 2001/1 (n° 11), p. 264.

de Ville in Paris. In Belfort, the siege lasted until 13 February 1871, and it was courageously led by young Colonel Denfert-Rochereau, a Republican and Socialist. Yet the Prussians would not leave until the 5-billion war indemnity had been paid on 2 August 1873. The Treaty of Frankfurt, which ended the war (10 May 1871), stripped France of Alsace and Moselle but confirmed the decision to leave Belfort in French territory. This was an honourable consolation. Yet, in the national imagination, this agreement was viewed as 'a victory in defeat'. French towns endeavoured to name streets after Belfort, as is evident nowadays.

Dissensus and power issues arose right from the outset of the commemoration process. The projects 'were unable to symbolise the union of the inhabitants of Belfort in patriotism.'[80] The first monument to be erected—with difficulty and amid controversy between Republicans and clerics[81]—after the siege was the *Monument des Mobiles*, in the Vallon cemetery (known as Pré Gaspard) at the entrance to the town, where 2500 defenders and 262 civilian victims had been buried in a pit during the siege. This modest sandstone work, voluntarily devoid of allegory, was located on the periphery of the town. The inscription on the monument was non-committal, '1870–1871. Belfort, in memory of its defenders who died during the siege'.

Even before this monument's inauguration (21 October 1873), consideration had been given to building another monument, which would be more central, more original, more 'memorial', which would embody the idea of courage to 'perpetuate the memory of this resistance in a remarkable way', according to the newspaper *Le Libéral de l'Est* (21 February 1872). Indeed, the legend had swiftly spread that Bismarck had left Belfort for France as a tribute to the suffering endured by the people of the town and the courage of the troops mobilised during the siege. The town council opened a competition. In vain. The mayor then approached Auguste Bartholdi. A sculptor born in Colmar (1834–1904) in the Haut-Rhin region, whose fame was rising, he had fought in the war alongside the famous Garibaldi.

80 Jean Martelet, « Le patriotisme et l'idée républicaine : leurs incidences sur le monument du cimetière des mobiles et le projet du Lion monumental (1870–1874) », *Bulletin de la société belfortaine d'émulation*, n° 96, 2005, p. 97.

81 This is how Jules Clarette, in his *Histoire de la Révolution de 1870–1871*, describes 1873: 'Never before had there been such crude and idiotic insults between the various parties vying for control over the country. Never before had hatred brought such corrosive foam to the lips, never before had ink left such stains on the reputations it splattered and the fingers that held the escritoire or the rostrum of insults'.

He had become the statue sculptor of Alsace in mourning and made a name for himself with the Voulminot Monument.[82] He had already made one attempt to shake statuary out of its commemorative drone through a project for an immense lighthouse on the new port of Suez to mark the inauguration of the Suez Canal in 1869. The project was rejected but was repurposed a few years later in New York, where it gave birth to the Statue of Liberty. The young artist was so enthralled by the project that he waived his right to any remuneration. From the outset, he came up with the idea of erecting the Lion he had in mind against the sheer drop of the Citadel. Bartholdi had learnt the lesson of Egypt during his journeys there in 1855 and 1869: he made full use of space, as the artists of Khufu and Ramses II had done at Giza and Luxor. As though a monumental work were worth less in itself than in the singularity of the site in which it is set and revealed. As though it were created only to merge with and become consubstantial to its environment.

Bartholdi wrote to the mayor, explaining that he wanted 'this work to be very personal to the city and not one of those monuments that can be installed anywhere, with complex allegories and painstakingly researched allegories, that can be applied to almost anything. […] Placed there, the monument will identify with the fortress's appearance, becoming a kind of palladium visible from every direction: the town, the surrounding area, and even from a passing traveller. This is a unique site, and we should make the most of it'.[83] The sculptor meant to create a patrimonial landscape. On 4 May 1872, the newspaper *Le Journal de Belfort et du Haut-Rhin* announced that 'M. Bartholdi has offered to have a monumental Lion executed in high relief on the vertical wall of the château'.

A politically correct lion: Bravery over revenge

Bartholdi intended to immortalise a lion. He chose allegory over personalisation. Indeed, who could be a consensual and available 'hero'? Adolphe

82 On Bartholdi, cf.: Robert Belot, *Bartholdi, l'homme qui inventa la Liberté*, Paris, Ellipse, 2019; *id.*, « Le Lion de Belfort comme lieu de mémoire : sémiologie politique d'un monument patriotique », Exhibition Catalogue: *Bartholdi, le Lion*, musée Bartholdi, Colmar, 2004, p. 107–131.

83 Letter to the Mayor of Belfort, 12 August 1872, Archives Municipales de Belfort (AMB), 1M 31.

Thiers? He was seen as responsible for the downfall of the Commune, although he had striven hard to hold on to Belfort, 'for the sake of honour'.[84] Gambetta? His overly politicised and 'Caesarian' image was inappropriate for the role. Denfert-Rochereau? Too much of a Socialist and a Freemason. As a candidate in the legislative elections of the Territoire de Belfort, he had been defeated by Émile Keller, an Alsatian patriot but fiercely papist. A Marshal? But all the Marshals had failed in their mission, including Mac-Mahon, who would soon become President of the Republic. None of them would fit the bill. Yet it should be noted that he was fond of this idea. In fact, the artist revisited an idea he had already presented in October 1863, entering a competition launched by the Paris City Council for the erection of a monument commemorating the defence of the City of Paris at the *Barrière de Clichy* during the siege of 1814.[85] Two terracotta sketches, a plaster model, and two photographs in the storerooms of the Musée de Colmar bear witness to the existence of this non-award-winning group, which features a lion in the round, its mouth open and its right paw raised, ready to strike. It was this furious feline that Bartholdi would initially reuse eight years later. The stamp on the 1873 subscription forms depicted the fawn in profile, one front paw raised. Other drafts were produced, reflecting the various stages the artist had to go through, from correction to correction, before delivering the final model we know today in the summer of 1875. From aggressive at first, the animal, depicted at times walking, lying down, or standing up, progressively acquired serenity. This was no coincidence.

The Lion was famous even before it was born. 'There is no one in Belfort who, over the last two years, has not been repeatedly questioned by foreigners about the progress of the construction of the monumental Lion'.[86] One of the issues of the very popular magazine *Magasin Pittoresque* featured an impressive reproduction: 'The Lion of Belfort, which we describe from an already colossal plaster model, will be one of the most gigantic works of sculpture of modern times. It will leave the Lion of Lucerne far behind.[87] It will compare only to the famous sphinx of Giza, the most prodigious

84 Nicolas Bourguinat, Gilles Vogt, *La guerre franco-allemande de 1870. Une histoire globale*, Paris, Flammarion, 2020, p. 252.

85 Régis Hueber, « Bartholdi belluaire » in *Catalogue de l'exposition de Colmar et de Belfort Bartholdi, Le Lion* (5 juin 2004–2 janvier 2005).

86 *Le Journal de Belfort*, 17 May 1876.

87 The Lion of Lucerne was designed by Berthel Thorvaldsen and sculpted by Lukas Ahorn in 1821. It commemorates the sacrifice of the Swiss Guards defending the Tuileries on 10 August 1792.

sculpted monument of ancient Egypt'.[88] At the *Palais de l'Industrie* on the Champs Élysées, it proudly stood as one of the highlights of the 1878 World Fair. The Paris City Council considered acquiring a reproduction in repoussé copper to decorate the new Buttes-Chaumont park. A committee appointed for this purpose approved the project and invited the Prefect to deal directly with the artist.[89] It would take almost four years to complete the monument. By early 1880, the scaffolding had been removed, and the Lion finally appeared on display for all to see and also exposed to the first criticism. It is a pity—one could hear—that the animal's countenance, with its mouth raised, is partly masked, that its overly extended right foreleg resembles a stiff tree trunk and that the rounded flank lessens its muscular power; it is also a shame that its mane looks like a 'hood' from which the head emerges, 'small and petty in proportion to such a vast body',[90] and that the material used was not white limestone but Vosges sandstone.

The Lion was inconsistent with 'Revenge' (against Germany), a sentiment long ascribed to the French due to its use by nationalists and Charles Maurras. Yet it could not withstand the scrutiny of historians who saw it more as a 'fantasy',[91] which concealed the acceptance of a fait accompli in truth. This lion is not looking east but south, from whence no danger can come. Bartholdi defended himself, saying, 'There is nothing violent about it, and I think that the gossips who would have us believe that it might offend the Germans will be disappointed'.[92] Although he 'wholeheartedly shared in the joy that must have been felt in Belfort at the news of the treaty'[93] (the Franco-German treaty of 15 March 1873 by which Thiers had definitively obtained, in exchange for the advance payment of the 5 billion war debt, the retention of Belfort in the French fold and the evacuation of the occupied regions), he had no intention of turning his 'quadruped', as he called it, into the standard-bearer of a Germanophobia that was alien to him. He was well aware of the complexity of the message that his work was meant to express:

88 *Le Magasin Pittoresque*, 0ctober 1876.
89 Paris City Council meetings of 11 August and 7 December 1878. Archives de Paris, V1D1 69 and V1D1 78.
90 *Le Journal de Belfort*, 14 January 1880.
91 N. Bourguinat, G. Vogt, *La guerre franco-allemande de 1870, op.cit.*, p. 388.
92 Letter from Bartholdi to his mother, 3 September 1875. Bartholdi Museum Archives, Colmar.
93 Letter to an unnamed addressee, undoubtedly the local person responsible for the subscription, 31 March 1873, AMB, 1M 31.

> 'It (the sculpture) is meant to commemorate *neither a victory nor a defeat*; it is a glorious fight whose tradition must be passed on to perpetuate it [...]. The monument is a colossal representation of a harried lion, cornered and still terrible in all its fury'.[94]

There can be no doubt that Bartholdi understood the general trend of opinion, which did not identify with anti-German, bellicose nationalism. As a man of compromise, he was also aware that offending the new government replacing Thiers would be unthinkable. On 21 June 1873, he told his mother his fear that the Ministry of Moral Order would ask the Belfort town council to abandon the project: 'I think that in the end, nothing will be done in Belfort. They fear it will be a demonstration favouring Mr Thiers, whom the government dislikes. You see, the moral order is quite healthy ...' The artist's choice of the animal thus revealed its full meaning, reflecting his political acumen.

A divisive and arduous subscription

The Town Council approved the project on 4 October 1873 but requested a subscription. This was the customary funding method for monumental heritage at the time. A double subscription was launched by a Belfort committee and a Paris committee. The Lion seemed to command a consensus in Paris between the right and the left-wing parties.[95] Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, the *Union Républicaine* senator; Désiré Barodet, the anti-clerical Gambettist deputy; the Duc de Broglie, head of Mac Mahon's government; and the Comte de Chambord, grandson of Charles X and contender of the Legitimists, all donated to build a creation presented in the spirit of reconciliation. This reconciliation was meant as a sign of appeasement towards Germany. Thus, the Paris committee explained that they had decided to support the subscription because the monument was to evoke 'indomitable resistance' and a 'glorious memory of duty accomplished'. And free of vindictive sentiments.

The head of the Belfort committee was of the same opinion. He felt that the Lion would create a link between France and Alsace: 'Thus, it will con-

94 Letter to the Mayor of Belfort, 12 August 1872, AMB, 1M 31.

95 Emmanuelle Riche, « Les Belfortains et le Lion (1871–1914) », mémoire de maîtrise, Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Haute-Alsace, Mulhouse, 1996.

secrate the invaluable attachment to their dual allegiance to the French and Alsatian homelands.' There was even a political truce in Belfort. Besides, was not the chairmanship of the local committee held (by the mayor's delegation) by the reactionary and clerical Auguste Juster, the man the republican movement detested? Yet, the truce was short-lived. The left-wing shift of the county council and the municipality refocused the political game and politicised the Lion. The left-wing newspaper, *Le Libéral de l'Est* shunned the subscription to avoid promoting the local committee. The Freemason lawyer Michel Thiault and Dr Louis Fréry, a future Member of Parliament, expressed their hostility to the 'clerics' on the committee. Consequently, the Belfort committee struggled to raise funds. This was hardly fitting for the town that had saved France's honour! Contrary to the legend, there was no marked enthusiasm. Quite the opposite, in fact, as a legal dispute would arise later over how to use the residuary subscription funds. At the civil court hearing in December 1881, Bartholdi and Juster's lawyer stated, 'As the first subscription attempts in our town were unsuccessful, it was Mr Juster who took over the case'. At the appeal hearing, another lawyer explained, 'The first subscriptions launched in Belfort were unsuccessful. It soon became apparent that the town had made many sacrifices. It was not Belfort's role to provide the funds for a work that was meant to glorify the town'.[96] The head of the Belfort committee appealed to a patriotic reflex, 'Let us learn to be a little more Alsatian every day'.

Freemasons, priests, pastors, Jews from all over France and, of course, a vast number of Alsatians and people from Lorraine joined in a brilliantly executed operation. The national success of the operation served to encourage the people of Belfort and favoured political union. The venerable Michel Thiault, who was initially hostile to the project, endorsed it and encouraged the Grand Orient to participate in the subscription.[97] The Grand Orient would soon welcome Bartholdi to its Alsace-Lorraine lodge, where he would meet Gambetta again. Left-wing politics was finally coming to terms with the project. By 16 January 1875, more than 100,000 francs had been raised, twice the amount Bartholdi originally estimated was needed. The *Journal de Belfort* rejoiced, 'This will be an exceptional monument, as it is identified to the physical nature of the town. Placed above the town and visible from afar, it will be eminently national, as the subscription has

96 Quoted by E. Riche, *op.cit*, p. 15.
97 According to Jean Martelet, *art.cit*., p. 109.

already shown. It is a sort of crown that France has awarded the patriotic Alsatian town,[98] which has so valiantly safeguarded the country's honour'.[99] However, Belfort would fail to live up to the symbolic mission assigned to it by a battered France. How the town treated the Lion showed it was hardly worthy of such a crown. Admittedly, the geopolitical context interfered. The worst was about to happen for the artist.

The geopolitical context in Europe deprives the Lion of an inauguration

Bartholdi and the people of Belfort were denied the joy of inaugurating this remarkable monument. For several weeks, the Reich authorities had been raging against what they perceived as a resurgence of warmongering in France, with a press campaign relaying this feeling. A toast by Léon Gambetta (President of the Lower House since February 1879) on 8 August 1880 in Cherbourg had reignited speculation about the President's alleged double game. In expressing the hope that France would 'Regain its place in the world', was he not covertly preaching a call to arms? In fact, he was only reasserting his mantra that 'major reparations can be produced by law' and 'immanent justice'.[100] The *Gazette d'Allemagne du Nord* threatened to punish Paris for these 'incitements to revenge': 'If republican France, led by Mr Gambetta, wishes to continue the traditions of monarchical France and follow in the footsteps of Louis XIV, Louis XV and the two Napoleons, we must resign ourselves to the fact that we cannot count on lasting peace with France. The peaceful majority of both countries must know who is disturbing their peace'.[101] The German newspaper's comments, which rekindled painful memories, were not taken lightly in Paris. Freycinet's cabinet endeavoured to dampen spirits. Escalating its military ambitions would not be in France's interest, as it was building a colonial empire for which it needed support, at best, and neutrality, at worst, from the other European powers. This inauguration issue serves as a reminder of France's fragile situation at the time. Republican France stood alone amidst hostile monarchic powers. During the conflict, Europe had been conspicuous for

98 At the time, the city of Belfort was part of the Haut-Rhin department.
99 *Le Journal de Belfort et du Haut-Rhin*, 22 August 1874.
100 Quoted by Gérard Unger, *Gambetta*, Paris, Perrin, 2022, p. 286.
101 *La Gazette de l'Allemagne du Nord*, 23 August 1880.

its 'forbearance' and 'passivity' towards France.[102] As Gambetta wrote in a letter, 'Europe let her be crushed. Europe thought it could do without her (France)'.[103] As a matter of fact, the primary objective of Bismarckian diplomacy was 'the isolation of France'.[104] And Bismarck certainly knew how to exploit Franco-German antagonism. To win German opinion over to his side, 'He did not hesitate to pretend he believed in her (France's) bellicose character'.[105]

Bartholdi was well acquainted with Gambetta from the war; he shared the latter's opportunistic Republicanism, which was anything but bellicose. He would design a monument to Gambetta, erected in Ville-d'Avray in 1891. Both men were in favour of European peace and the balance of power. However, Gambetta's image was more potent than the reality of his politics. When he became President of the Council in November 1881, the British magazine *Punch* ran the following headline: 'Léon or (Napo-)Léon Gambetta? That is the question'.[106] Under pressure from the French government, the City of Belfort abandoned plans to turn the inauguration into a national event. Bartholdi resigned himself to the fact that an inauguration was 'impossible due to the political circumstances'.[107] He was dejected that he had not been able to convince people that his work 'in no way bore the character that malicious tongues lent it'. The artist had been sure that using the animal metaphor would protect his work from political appropriation. Even before the first scaffolding had been erected, he explained that this would be 'A funereal monument to great and painful memories. Its design will avoid anything that might stir up sensitivities. No one will be able to fault it'.[108] Auguste Bartholdi put his flag in his pocket. In late August

102 N. Bourguinat, G. Vogt, *La guerre franco-allemande de 1870, op.cit.*, p. 284.
103 Letter written by Gambetta to Juliette Adam, 17 October 1876. Quoted by Jean-Philippe Dumas, *Gambetta. Le commis-voyageur de la République*, Paris, Belin, 2011, p. 89
104 Jean-Paul Bled, *Bismarck*, Paris, Perrin, 2011, p. 235. In the late 19th century, France's foreign policy aimed to loosen the stranglehold by building closer ties with Russia and England.
105 Jean-Philippe Dumas, *Gambetta, op.cit.,* p. 87.
106 Quoted by Jean Garrigues, « Gambetta en représentations : commis-voyageur ou homme providentiel? », in : *L'entre-deux électoral : Une autre histoire de la représentation politique en France (XIXe-XXe siècle)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 108.
107 Register of Town Council proceedings, 17 November 1882, AMB, 1M 31.
108 Letter written by Auguste Bartholdi to his mother, 22 August 1875. Bartholdi Museum Archives, Colmar.

1880, he settled for a small evening ceremony, almost improvised, on the sly, without even informing the people of Belfort:

> 'Mr Bartholdi, who had come to put the finishing touches to the Lion of Belfort, decided to surprise the townspeople by lighting up the monument with a Bengal fire on Saturday evening during the musical retreat to enhance the effect of this grandiose work of his sculptural talent. The result was a beautiful glimpse but one that passed too quickly for most onlookers to enjoy.'[109]

At this point, one might wonder whether there is any other monument in the world as famous and renowned as the Lion of Belfort that has only ever been inaugurated with a barrage of flares, barely enough to liven up a local patronage party. Three weeks later, in Paris, the Place Denfert-Rochereau was getting ready to welcome the replica of the Lion, which still stands to this day. Auguste, a Parisian, would have wanted a fine 'patriotic celebration' in the heart of Paris. Yet, at the last minute, the planned speeches were cancelled at the government's request. The main concern at the time was to spare Chancellor Bismarck. Fearing compromising public outbursts, the government allowed only military music and a discreet fireworks display. It is clear that commemorating a defeat is challenging, especially when the victor is watching from the vantage point of his increasingly dominant position in Europe. It is also easy to understand why so few monuments are dedicated to the 1870 war on French territory.

In Berlin, however, the Victory Column (*Siegessäule*) was erected with great fanfare on 2 September 1873. A bas-relief features a mosaic illustrating Prussia's significant battles, including the 1870 war. In 1939, Hitler decided to showcase the column and transferred it from *Königsplatz* to *Grosser Stern*, where it still stands today. It faces two other monuments, one dedicated to Bismarck and the other to Von Moltke. In 1945, the French asked the Allies to have it demolished, but the Soviets, the Americans and the British rejected the request. The American delegate felt that 'its destruction could have worldwide repercussions …'.[110]

109 *Le Journal de Belfort*, 1 September 1880.

110 Quoted by Bernard Genton, *Les Alliés et la culture. Berlin, 1945–1949*, Paris, PUF, 1998, p. 115.

After the offence of the inauguration, the insolence of the courts

1880 ended in ambiguity and frustration. After eight years of effort, this conclusion left Belfort feeling that the job had been botched. In recognition of the artist's refusal to accept any form of remuneration, the town council expressed its sympathy for Auguste's selflessness and decided to present him, as a token of its appreciation, with 'A gold medal bearing the town's coat of arms (...) minted by the Paris mint (and) which will bear on one side an inscription recalling the event whose memory it is intended to perpetuate'.[111] But the disappointment he may have felt at the lack of official tribute was compounded by a bitterness that was all the greater because of the town council's casual attitude.

Let us go briefly back to 1878. On June 7, the Council voted in favour of erecting a monument in one of the town squares to commemorate the role of the two people to whom the town owed the privilege of remaining in France: Adolphe Thiers and Colonel Denfert-Rochereau, the reactionary and the Socialist.[112] Some people argued that this project, in which Dr Charles Fréry,[113] the Lion committee's regular adversary, played a major role, was designed to compete with the Lion![114] A subscription was launched, adding to the 2000-franc credit already granted by the Council. Bartholdi entered the competition organised by the town and presented an (overly) ambitious project featuring an allegory of France consoling the City of Belfort flanked by the statues of Thiers and Denfert facing one another at either end. The mayor of Belfort discarded the project in favour of another candidate, Antonin Mercié, with a more modest submission: an Alsatian woman in traditional dress holding up a dying Mobile in one hand and pointing a gun at the enemy with her other hand. Yet, the subscription was not very successful. The war was past. Too much may have been asked of the people of Belfort (and others). Revenge had become a rhetorical and platonic posture. The mayor, Louis Parisot, then decided that this monument, known as '*L'Alsacienne*' (also known as the '*Quand*

111 Town Council meeting, 28 October 1880, AMB.

112 It should be noted that initially, as evidenced by the town council meeting of 12 February 1878, the project only concerned Adolphe Thiers. Colonel Denfert-Rochereau was added later on.

113 Charles Fréry was a Member of Parliament for Territoire-de-Belfort from 1881 to 1885 and a Senator from 1887 to 1891.

114 André Larger, « Le Lion… et après? », *Bulletin de la Société belfortaine d'émulation*, n°95, 2004, p. 129.

Même' statue or the 'Thiers-Denfert Monument'), should be financed using the residuary funds from the contribution collected by the Lion committee, around 15,000 francs.[115] After all, Mercié's project, like Bartholdi's, was 'intended to glorify the town's defenders', Belfort's chief magistrate argued, and the Committee, which was nothing more than 'an emanation of the town council', was free to use the funds it had raised on its initiative. The council unanimously approved this proposition.[116]

This initiated a long and procedural dispute between the town of Belfort and the Parisian Lion Committee. The latter objected to the misappropriation of the residuary funds and demanded that the treasurer temporarily freeze the subscription money. Quite naturally, Bartholdi backed this request. He explained that work on the Lion had not yet been completed: the commemorative inscription had yet to be engraved, the wall behind the animal's head, which was essential for the silhouette to stand out, had yet to be cut, the rockwork on the pedestal was not finished, and the work needed to clear the monument had yet to be done on the surrounding area (in particular a small garden area on the Lion's terrace). The Lion could not be visited. It would not be open to visitors until much later! Unfortunately, his arguments were unheeded. A lawsuit was filed, in which Bartholdi, a Freemason, was supported by Auguste Juster, a cleric. The Belfort civil court ruled against him, and the Besançon Court of Appeal upheld the judgement on 26 May 1882.

The press went into a frenzy over the war of the two monuments intended to exalt national unity. This memorial vaudeville continued, however, as Parisot (who had been defeated in the municipal elections of February 1881) still considered himself the acting chairman of the Lion Committee, even though he was no longer mayor. A new lawsuit was filed against the new mayor, Jean Nicolas Simon. Parisot won the appeal, but the town went to the Court of Cassation. This final move was rendered pointless when Louis Parisot returned to office in the elections of 4 and 11 May 1884. Following a series of procedural twists and turns, he was forced to seek satisfaction from the French *Conseil d'État* by decree of the President of the Republic. This ended the residuary funds trial. On 31 August 1884, '*L'Alsacienne*', Mercié's monument paid for in part with funds earmarked for another monument, was inaugurated to the sound of cannon fire, whereas

115 Research into the artistic ownership of the monument « Quand Même », Archives municipales de Belfort, 1M 32.

116 Town council meeting, 17 December 1880. AMB, 1M 32.

the Lion had been granted only official silence by the authorities four years earlier! Auguste Bartholdi felt deeply disgusted with the town's customs, where ingratitude and bad faith rivalled. The town councillors went so far as to withhold the minting of the medal that they had promised him! Torn apart by infighting, the town council seemed incapable of recognition and showed little concern for a project with which, however, the local population had immediately identified. Dejected, Bartholdi would write in 1889 that 'The former town council, having diverted the funds for the Lion from their intended use, funds that I had worked to collect, has acted towards me in such a way that I will never again do anything in Belfort unless I am called upon to do so by an official act or vote of the town council'.[117]

Another court case would keep Bartholdi busy. He issued a warning to the shopkeepers in Belfort who were using his Lion in various reproductions without ever having thought to ask his permission, although he owned the copyright to the work. He felt robbed of his work and meant to redress 'this abuse' through legal means. He then appointed an official custodian. Yet, the traders remained indifferent to his threats. One of them dared to reply that Bartholdi had no claim to the Lion because 'he did not create anything, as to create means making something which does not exist before; yet, Bartholdi found his subject in nature. The Lion did not wait for Mr Bartholdi to exist…' In 1901, legal action was taken and upheld on appeal.

Would the barely erected Lion fall to ruin?

In May 1882, Bartholdi lost his trial. The Lion was yet to be completed and could only be seen from a distance. Therefore, in November 1882, he attempted to apply to the Prefecture Council for 3,000 francs in compensation. This Council declared itself incompetent on the matter. Hence, on 30 September 1883, the sculptor asked the town council to complete his work to make it accessible to the public. The council approved this request. However, the situation changed with the municipal elections of 1884. Moreover, the residuary subscription funds had been donated to the Thiers-Denfert committee. The press went up in arms. In 1884, one could read, 'Will this

117 Letter to Mr Grosborne, 21 January 1889, AMB, 100 W 19.

poor Lion be left to fall into ruin'?[118] Four years later, the situation had not changed. The *Journal de Belfort et du Haut-Rhin* (11 February 1888) reported on the scandal:

'Visitors who stop in Belfort to admire "*Quand Même*", Mercié's work, and Bartholdi's Lion are left with a very poor impression of the pitiful appearance of the latter monument. Carved into the rock on which the citadel[119] is built, the noble animal collects all the water from gutters, kitchens and bedrooms on its sinewy spine. The corrosive properties of some of these liquids have left indelible marks on the animal's spine. The other parts of its body are covered in thick pinkish moss. (…) So far, the town council has done nothing to put a stop to this deterioration.'

In truth, the people of Belfort demonstrated a distanced or indifferent attitude towards the tragedy they had experienced. The will to forget accounted for their limited interest in the Lion and in the memory of the conflict in general. The town councillors were committed to the town's renaissance, which was reaping the benefits of the influx of Alsatians. The population of Belfort rose from 6,257 in 1867 to 39,731 in 1911. The town welcomed many 'optants' (Alsatians who had chosen to retain French nationality). A secondary school was to be built for them. The Mulhouse bank branch was transferred to Belfort, as was the customs office. A new municipal theatre was built. A new district was to be created between the Savoureuse and the old town. *The Société Alsacienne de Construction Mécanique* (Alsatian Mechanical Construction Company) set up business there (later to become Alstom). As the mayor stated, 'All this new population, all these projects, all these institutions, if they come to fruition, will undoubtedly bring prosperity and well-being to Belfort'.

A new town council headed by Paul Lalloz and the prospect of a music festival, which was expected to draw large crowds, brought about a welcome change. A cleaning-up and works plan was initiated in June 1888. The Lion was even granted a (not in the best of tastes) coat of varnish as the French President of the Republic, Sadi Carnot, was expected to visit Belfort. But it wasn't until the spring of 1890 that a solution to the monument's accessibility was found: the French Alpine Club succeeded in negotiating with the military authorities (who had jurisdiction over the citadel) to take charge of visits to the Lion, appoint a permanent caretaker and carry out work on the terrace. It was only 13 years after the fawn had been delivered that the

118 *Le Libéral de l'Est*, 9 October 1884.
119 This was not true, but the legend spread nevertheless.

inscription was finally engraved on the pedestal. Incidentally, the artist was not even consulted! On May 1, 1890, the public was finally allowed to climb to the terrace and admire the quadruped for a fee of 1 franc. From then on, it was a growing success, reaching a peak of 15,628 visitors in 1902.

Bartholdi would return to favour through the memory of another war. Very early in 1889, plans began to pay tribute to General Lecourbe, who had organised another siege of Belfort in 1815, during which he had been killed. The wish to erect a monument had been expressed at the time but had never been acted upon. Émile Grosborne, one of the town councillors, suggested associating Thiers and Denfert—who until now had only been entitled to a rather discreet medallion on the monument in the Place d'Armes—with this tribute. He also asked Bartholdi if the latter might consider reworking the project he had submitted for the competition won by Mercié. A subscription was launched, but it proved unsuccessful.

In early 1898, a new idea emerged, this time for a monument to Lecourbe, Denfert, and Thiers. This was when Bartholdi resurfaced. Apparently determined to forget the past, he recommended building a monument that would unite the emblematic figures of the three sieges: Commandant Legrand (1813–1814), General Lecourbe (1815), and Colonel Denfert (1871). 'This is an apotheosis that few towns can celebrate!'[120] he wrote the mayor, to encourage him to agree to the project, which would glorify his constituents and their ancestors. In a letter to the mayor dated 28 March 1902, he reiterated his interest in this exceptional historical landmark, 'I believe that Belfort is the only town to have withstood three sieges in a single century without falling. It is a remarkable and exceptional subject that cannot be repeated elsewhere'. Despite his weakened health, Bartholdi saw this as an opportunity to achieve a final feat and perhaps compensate for his earlier humiliation. The mayor, Charles Schneider, was amenable to the idea of 'rectifying a regrettable omission concerning the man who saved Belfort'. The town council voted in favour of the project in October 1901. A 40,000-franc credit was voted by the municipality, and a subscription was immediately launched. Far from holding grudges, the artist wholly committed to this final project and, once again, refused any form of payment. He was interested in the project because it would be included in the new section of the town under construction, the Quartier Neuf, built on the site of part of Vauban's fortifications. True to his urbanist conception of the

120 Letter written by Auguste Bartholdi to the mayor of Belfort, 9 October 1901. AMB, 1M 33.

sculptural approach, he saw this as an opportunity to make his mark on this new territory. This was to be the '*Trois Sièges*' Monument on Place de la République, renovated in 2024.

Bartholdi was finally able to present his model at the Paris Fair in 1903. However, he died on 5 October 1904. He would not witness the erection of his last work. He would be spared the posthumous vicissitudes of his life's work and the new insult from the town council, which sparked a fresh dispute. As a result of the sculptor's demise, the municipality felt released from its commitment to him. On 15 October 1904, just ten days after Bartholdi's death, the town council cancelled the project as it had been designed and commissioned another sculptor. Jeanne, Auguste's until then self-effacing wife, fought with dignity and secured compensation after nine years of protracted negotiations, marked by threats of legal action and appeals to arbitration, in which she demonstrated a surprising tenacity. She challenged the mayor and threatened to take legal action: 'Could it be, because he [Bartholdi] has gone down into the grave, that his confidence should be deceived, that his work should escape him, and with it the glory he was entitled to hope for? Could it be that Belfort, I would like to say the City of Belfort, should abandon him as life has, cruelly, and that a foreigner to Alsace should take his place for a monument essentially to the glory of Alsace?'.[121] Presumably, at the instigation of Eugène Lux, the town's architect, the town council had sought to appoint one of Lux's friends, a certain Gustave Umbdenstock, who was also born in Colmar and had won the Prix de Rome.[122] Then, Antonin Mercié, Bartholdi's rival, was approached.[123]

After a long series of twists and turns, an agreement was reached in March 1910. On 15 August 1913, a year before her death, Jeanne-Émilie Bartholdi attended the inauguration of the '*Trois Sièges*' Monument, partly financed out of her funds, reworked and completed by the two sculptors she had chosen. By that time, another war, this time a world war, was looming. Bartholdi's honour had been restored, Colonel Denfert-Rochereau finally received the tribute he deserved 42 years after his feat of arms, and the town was reconciled with its past. It was as if a page of history

121 Letter written by Jeanne Bartholdi to the mayor of Belfort, 25 October 1905, AMB, 1M 33.

122 cf. André Larger, *art.cit.*, p. 150.

123 Ultimately, Louis Noël, the artist Bartholdi had appointed to assist him, would complete the work with the help of Jules Dechin.

had been turned. Remarkably, the official speeches on this occasion did not mention Alsace-Lorraine and showed no belligerent, Germanophobic spirit, although France and Germany were on the brink of a new conflict. Antonin Ratier, Minister of Justice, made only a discreet reference to current events: 'The time is still far off when your lion, having accomplished its mission, will be able to close its eyes and let its head drop'.[124] Instead, these speeches emphasised Bartholdi's artistic genius and expressed the gratitude the city owed to his widow.

The Belfort paradox further illustrates the argument that the memory of wars is often conflictual. Heritage does not always soften the blow, and evoking the past does not spontaneously promote reconciliation and harmony.

The Lion reclaimed by nationalists

It was undoubtedly a kind of betrayal for the pacifist and liberal Bartholdi to gradually witness the political exploitation of his lion (especially the Parisian lion) by the far-right.[125] To mark the 25th anniversary of the end of the siege, the town of Belfort did not consider it essential to focus the 5 and 6 April 1896 ceremonies on the Lion. The official speeches were lenient and far from marked by bellicose exaltation. This was not true at Place Denfert-Rochereau in Paris. There, the nationalist leader of the Ligue des Patriotes (founded in 1882), Paul Déroulède, delivered a heated speech that heralded the drift of French nationalism towards an authoritarian, anti-parliamentary and xenophobic attitude. The *Journal de Belfort et du Haut-Rhin* did not view this favourably, and the newspaper's reaction sheds light on the perception that the people of Belfort, and the French in general, had of the Lion and, through it, of the matter of Alsace-Lorraine.

> 'To be honest, we fail to see what Mr Déroulède's new feverish outburst can add to our prestige, how it will improve the tense situation on the Alsace-Lorraine border and, above all, how it will benefit the people annexed to the two provinces, who are forced to live there under the law of the conqueror. We believe that when it comes to patriotism, the most silent is still the most active and the best'.

124 *Le Haut-Rhin républicain*, 17 August 1913.
125 Zeev Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885–1914. Les origines françaises du fascisme*, Paris, Fayard (nouvelle édition), 2000.

This was an allusion to Gambetta's famous words regarding Alsace-Lorraine: 'Always think about it, never talk about it'. Meanwhile, the poet François Coppée used the Lion to confuse—in his poem 'Au Lion de Belfort'—patriotism with the 'duty' of 'holy hatred'. Bartholdi was a stranger to the 'authoritarian patriotism' that paved the way for the putschist General Boulanger: he was instead attached to what might be called a form of 'liberal patriotism'. At the end of the century, the Lion on Place Denfert-Rochereau became the rallying spot for the new nationalist ceremonial, which was hardly consistent with what the monument represented. While in exile in Spain, having been banished in 1899 following his attempted coup d'État, Déroulède published, in 1901, an appeal in *Le Drapeau* to his supporters to go en masse (in fact, only a few would respond …) to the statue of the Lion of Belfort 'as a sign of protest against the government'. By then, the Lion was no longer an abstract and consensual patriotic symbol; it had become a political weapon. The protesters, frequently forbidden from speaking up by the police, shouted: 'Down with the Ministry! Down with the Freemasons and the Jews!'. François Coppée, the first poet to laud the Lion, followed suit in the *Ligue de la Patrie française* (French Patriot's league).

Yet, in the new force field of turn-of-the-century nationalism, Alsace-Lorraine became an alibi. Déroulède himself conceded that '(…) before liberating Alsace-Lorraine, we should liberate France'.[126] Domestic policy procedures had taken precedence over foreign policy. The Lion, a perfect example of apoliticism, had become the butt of a political recuperation of which its creator would not have approved. Thus, in 1907, the newspaper *La Croix de Belfort*, which supported the nationalist cause, viewed the erection of a monument to Jacques Trarieux—the first president of the Human Rights League—a stone's throw from the Lion on Place Denfert-Rochereau, as a provocation. The newspaper explained the incompatibility of both monuments, 'one symbolising national defence and the other a reminder of the nefarious, so clearly anti-French, Dreyfus campaign'. While Bartholdi identified with the 'Patriots' Republic',[127] he certainly did not with the nationalist and anti-Dreyfus party. His creation had escaped him. Some had politicised and radicalised it, although, at least in Belfort, the local political

126 Paul Déroulède, *Qui vive? France! Quand même. Notes et discours, 1883–1890*, 1910, quoted by Jean-Jacques Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La France, la nation, la guerre : 1850–1920*, Paris, SEDES, 1995, p. 177.

127 In the words of Raoul Girardet, *Le nationalisme français. Anthologie. 1871–1914*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1983, p. 37.

class of all persuasions seemed determined to preserve it as a sanctuary above the fray.

The very concept of the Lion had been designed to avoid this kind of recuperation. Using this quadruped was a challenge which was not to be underestimated. Bartholdi had not meant it as an allegoric or symbolic lion; he studied the animals at the fawn farm in the Jardin des Plantes. He wanted an animal representation that was reasonably close to its natural state. Such a total absence of political representation is precisely a guarantee of sustainability because it means the monument is free from the univocity of its edifying signification, offering spectators and the public opinion a space of freedom they can invest in as they wish. Who would ever think of tearing down a monumental animal? Therefore, the Lion of Belfort is unique in that it is both hyper-historicized and anhistorical since it is a living being that refers to a non-human universe.

The animal was not designed and perceived as a promise of reconquest; if nothing else, it was a protective 'bulwark' in case the Germans meant to invade the country again. It expressed no desire for revenge or vengeance. It was as if the new order resulting from the Frankfurt Treaty could not be called into question. One notes that Alsatians were fond of flocking to Belfort on July 14th, in particular, to honour the Lion. Belfort had become the Alsatians' 'capital'. On 14 July 1895, the number of admissions to the Lion peaked at 1,220, a record figure. The press of the time was quick to stress this, pointing out that it was a naive expression of confidence in the military establishment. 'Hope' is what people came to glimpse; it was a fraternity they wanted to nurture. Georges Ducrocq's account is interesting in this respect. Founder of the magazine *Les Marches de l'Est*, he published a story in 1913 of a trip he took to (this is the title of the book) *Les Provinces inébranlables* (The Unshakeable Provinces):

> 'I know nothing more beautiful, vibrant than a 14 July celebration in Belfort, under a magnificent summer sun. The crowds that flock that day from all over Alsace, from the Sundgau and the Haut-Rhin, from Colmar and Mulhouse, are of exceptional interest to us French people. They dictate our duty. These winegrowers, these vigorous farmers, these ruddy-cheeked tall girls who are moved by the passing soldiers, who clap their hands and weep at the sight of the flag, have the right of it. They have retained the enthusiasm, the fiery love of the three colours that represent freedom for them. Without a second thought, they applaud

> military glory and panache. [...] This is why Belfort remains their capital'.[128]

Some historical research has shown that the nationalists could not change what was obvious: the French had accepted the loss of the Alsace-Lorraine and were not ready to go to war to win them back. Military heroism could not become a re-founding myth because the war was unpopular. No one wanted to remember that collective lassitude and desertion had begun as early as December 1870.[129] Against all expectations, the 8 February 1871 elections had consecrated the pacifist monarchists over the Republicans, who supported the continuation of the war. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the Alsace-Lorraine issue and the theme of Revenge were virtually absent from the 1881 electoral campaign. In his famous speech given on 9 August 1880 in Cherbourg—which had highly offended the Germans—Gambetta defined the proper attitude to show as follows: 'Our hearts do not beat for bloody adventure, but for the remainder of France to stay whole, and so that we may count on the future to know whether there is immanent justice in what comes in a timely fashion'.[130] The spirit of revenge affected only a 'fraction of public opinion'.[131] Nostalgia, affliction and grief prevailed.[132] The scant interest shown in the Lion de Belfort by public authorities and the general public (Alsatians excepted) says it all.

Modern artists mock the Lion and reject 'official' heritage.

However, it had become a witness to a bygone time when monumentalism was regarded as the epitome of heritage institutionalisation. Bartholdi had to contend with the fundamental social trend to shake off the yoke of 'commemorative tyranny'. As the art historian June Hargrove rightly said, monuments 'in their immoderation are akin to the race of dinosaurs that

128 Georges Ducocq, *Les Provinces inébranlables*, 1913, quoted by Raoul Girardet, *op. cit.*, p. 248–249.

129 Jean-Jacques Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La France, la nation, la guerre, op.cit.,* p. 95.

130 Gambetta quoted by Charles Seignobos, *L'évolution de la 3e République*, in *Histoire de la France contemporaine depuis la révolution jusqu'à la paix de 1919, sous la direction d'Ernest* Lavisse, Hachette, 1921, p. 78.

131 François Roth, *La guerre de 1870*, Paris, Poche-Pluriel, 1990, p. 709.

132 Laurence Turetti, *Quand la France pleurait l'Alsace-Lorraine*, Strasbourg, Nuée bleue, 2008.

gigantism doomed to extinction'. The future was in that 'dreadful statue', according to an old-school teacher, Rodin's *The Thinker*, a model of which was placed in front of the Pantheon in 1904 as an experiment. This was the year Bartholdi died. This was the year Constantin Brancusi came to Paris, three years before a certain Picasso painted *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Art was on the brink of a revolution. There was 'a widespread need for innovation in the plastic arts'[133] in various forms (Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, etc.), and the avant-garde was paving the way.

One sculptor from the Bartholdi generation who fared better was Auguste Rodin. Picasso, to name but one, was in contact with Rodin. The Spanish artist was keen to see Rodin's first personal retrospective, which was held in Paris, Place de l'Alma, on the sidelines of the 1900 World Fair.[134] Art was on the brink of a revolution. Bartholdi was unable to withstand this trend. He was the victim of his reputation and honours. He was already an outdated symbol of a style that no longer had a place in the artistic and heritage field. Writer and art critic Joris-Karl Huysmans dealt him the final blow only a year after the sculptor's demise. In 1905, he published *Trois Primitifs* after visiting, for the second time, the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar, where he admired Grünewald's masterpiece, the Issenheim Altarpiece. A closer look at the fountain in the small cloister had shown him 'a rather sadly perched red statue of Martin Schongauer.' Unexpectedly, because this sculpture is a remarkable achievement by Auguste, given that the figure seems alive, his comment is cruel and unfair: '… this is official art, an emetic for the eyes, Bartholdi's work'. Bartholdi would long remain trapped in the nefarious category of official arts and 'patriotic jibes.'[135]

Bartholdi was a victim of the fundamental social trend of shaking off the yoke of 'commemorative tyranny'. As the art historian June Hargrove rightly said, monuments such as the one glorifying Victor Hugo, designed by Auguste's friend Louis-Ernest Barrias and inaugurated Place Victor Hugo in Paris in 1902, 'in their immoderation are akin to the race of dinosaurs that gigantism doomed to extinction.'[136] Auguste Bartholdi had to bear the brunt of the stigma of academicism that affected monumental art. In

133 Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Les Avant-gardes artistiques, 1848–1918. Une histoire transnationale*, Gallimard-Folio, 2017, p. 330.

134 Claude Jurdin and Hélène Pinet (dir.), *Rodin en 1900. L'exposition de l'Alma*, Paris, RMN, 2001.

135 Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Trois Primitifs,* Paris, A. Messein, 1905, p. 52.

136 June Hargrove, « Les statues de Paris », *in Les Lieux de mémoire*, sous la direction de Pierre Nora, t.2, Quarto-Gallimard, 1997, p. 1880.

1859, at a time when public statuary had started invading public space, Baudelaire stated that he loved 'brutal and positive' sculpture, which, such as 'a stone ghost, seized one' and carried you away to 'the most fundamental archives of universal life.'[137] Yet, this was no longer true on the eve of the 20th century.

As early as 1905, the press began to lament the fact that the streets of Paris had become annexes to our necropolises.[138] The first serious study of the receding tide of monumental art is entitled *Statuomanie parisienne. Étude sur l'abus des statues*[139] (Parisian statuary. A study on the excessive use of statues). Denouncing this excess would become a trendy theme in the pre-war period following the First World War. In his book *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), Louis Aragon warned that 'Humanity would perish from statuary frenzy'. In 1933, the Surrealists issued a questionnaire to indicate which Parisian monuments should be transformed or taken down. The replica of the Lion of Belfort, Place Denfert-Rochereau, was in the line as a patriotic symbol after the slaughter of 1914–1918. André Breton wanted it to 'go chomp at the bit'. Paul Éluard suggested 'perching' on the Lion's back 'an underwater diver holding a pot with a hen in his right hand'. Tristan Tzara favoured 'spearing it with a huge rod and roasting it in flames of bronze'. In 1922, Robert Desnos was referring to Bartholdi when he said that 'pawns get their lion's share in art'. Yet, Max Ernst would be the one to take the anti-leonine satire the furthest in his surrealist novel-collage *Une semaine de bonté ou les sept éléments capitaux*.[140] In it, he developed some of his favourite themes: anti-clericalism, rejection of the family, sexuality, criticism of the bourgeoisie and rejection of patriotism and authority. The last part of this strange book features quotes by Jean Hans Arp, André Breton, Paul Éluard and Marcel Schwob. In 1896, the latter, who was the dedicatee of Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi*, put forth a new definition of art that was the antithesis of what the Colmar sculptor embodied: 'Art is the

137 Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976, p. 670 & p. 488.

138 Simon Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution*, Peter Lang, 2007, p. 153.

139 This study is signed by Gustave Pessard. It is Volume #36 of the Bibliothèque du Vieux Paris. Parisian gardens, avenues, crossroads, pavements and facades were overrun by over 900 statues or busts of figures, not to mention the 72 monuments still in the planning stage in 1912.

140 Simon Baker, *op.cit.,* p. 60–61, p. 186–187.

opposite of general ideas, it describes only the individual, it desires only the unique. It doesn't classify; it declassifies.'

In Bartholdi, irreverence and modernity had found a scapegoat.

Conclusion: The Monumental abuse

Auguste Bartholdi embodies a generation of statue sculptors who manufactured heritage for the sake of heritage. He described his approach in an unpublished letter from 1878, in which he told a friend that the City of Paris had just agreed to acquire a replica of the Lion:[141]

> 'The city council's decision is not merely the acquisition of an interesting work of art; it is a tribute to Alsatian patriotism and indirectly a tribute to the patriotism of the people of Paris during the siege. *It is a remembrance of the past, placed for all the population to see, with a view to the future* …'[142]

The Lion of Belfort provides a better understanding of the nature and limits of public statuary in the 19th century. Displayed in public areas, monumental sculpture inevitably has a political dimension. It implies a dependence and an obligation between the artists and the authorities, from the State to municipalities. This is the paradox of technically conservative art, exploited by every regime, an 'intrinsically depoliticized and extrinsically politicized'[143] art. Generally speaking, one should not forget that from the second half of the 19th century onwards, the field of heritage operated according to the law of the field of power.

A master of monumental art, Auguste Bartholdi was very much in step with this century of urban renewal, which offered sculptors many opportunities. Public monument sculptors were no ordinary sculptors. They depended on public commissions, which they sometimes solicited. Despite the dynamism around monumental art, it was a tiny market, and he had to contend with his 'competitors' (a term he often used), convince local

141 At the time, as he mentioned in this letter, the replica of the Lion (in fact, the original model presented at the Fair) was to be placed in the Buttes-Chaumont.

142 Letter written by Bartholdi to 'Mon cher ami' (My dear friend) (unidentified), Paris, 8 December 1878. Archive de Paris.

143 Albert Boime, *Hollow icons: the politics of sculpture in Nineteenth-Century France, Kent, Ohio, and London*, The Kent State University Press, 1987. *Id.*, *The unveiling of the national icons: a plea for patriotic iconoclasm in a nationalist era*, 1998.

authorities to accept his plans, fight to find funds (often by public subscription) and assert his aesthetic point of view. This called for compromise. It implied setbacks. It meant exercising patience and diplomacy and being unable to express oneself freely. It meant having a network of relations. The Statue of Liberty, Bartholdi's only self-commissioned work, entailed a 15-year struggle against indifference and countless obstacles, which left him feeling defeated and bitter, not to mention the unresolved issue of the reproduction rights stolen from him. In Clermont-Ferrand, the *Vercingétorix*, a much less famous example, was the result of an arduous 35-year journey buffeted by military and political events. The history of public statuary is often the history of its associated lawsuits. This was the case in Belfort, and it lasted several years. In Marseille, Bartholdi was involved in legal proceedings over a fountain monument that lasted from 1859 until his death. Behind the polished image of the sculptor filled with glory, there is another reality that the historian has a vocation to illuminate. Bartholdi is sculpture as a martial art!

However, historical heritage in excess has been the death of historical heritage. Auguste Bartholdi's memory undoubtedly suffered from this general 'loss of dignity' that affected the artists who contributed to transforming public sculpture 'from the status of artwork to that of street furniture',[144] as Maurice Agulhon put it. Bartholdi would appear to be one of the victims of the monumentalisation of Republican France and the untimely celebration of great men or great principles. His memory resurfaced a century later, prompted by the renewed interest in heritage that marked the late 20th century, brilliantly analysed by Pierre Nora. The city that had caused it so much grief would finally inaugurate the Lion of Belfort in 2010.

144 Maurice Agulhon, « Les transformations du regard sur la statuaire publique », *in La Statuaire publique au XIX^e siècle*, Éditions du Patrimoine, 2004, p. 18.