

**François-Raoul Larche**, *La Tempête et Les Nuées (The Storm and her Clouds)*  
(Saint-André-de-Cubzac 1860 – 1912 Paris)

Bronze, dark brown patina, raised on a green marble base  
Signed 'RAOUL LARCHE, Siot-Decauville seal and numbered '582 L', engraved bronze plaque  
titled 'THE TEMPEST / RAOUL LARCHE'  
Overall height 24 inches (61 cm.)

provenance: George F. Harding Collection;  
George F. Harding Museum, Chicago, 1939;  
Art Institute of Chicago, bequest of George F. Harding, 1982;  
Deaccessioned in 2014

literature: D. Renoux, 'Raoul Larche, statuaire (1860-1912)' in *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français*, 1990, pp. 243-76.

note: François-Raoul Larche began his studies in 1878 under François Jouffroy, Jean-Alexandre Falguière, and Eugène Delaplanche at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris. Larche was a regular exhibitor at the official salons from 1884 onward and was awarded the Second Grand Prix in 1886 at the Prix de Rome competition. At the Exposition Universelle in 1900 he received a gold medal. After rather traditional beginnings, Raoul Larche became the quintessential Art Nouveau sculptor through the evocative power of his many works. A road accident in Paris on June 2, 1912 caused his premature death.

When Raoul Larche exhibited his *La Tempête et se Nuées* at the Salon of 1896 he shocked and divided the critics and the public. For an artist best known for exhibiting more peaceful subjects such as *Jésus enfant devant les docteurs* in 1890, *La Prairie et le Ruisseau* in 1893 and *La Mer* in 1894, the group was certainly a departure.

In his review of Larches' career, Renoux was troubled by *La Tempête* wondering at the artist's audacity in trying to illustrate something as "untranslatable" and "elusive" as a storm. For the critic Henri Rochefort it was a masterwork and he described the work as "Michel-angelesque".

Although highly original in sculpture, the theme of the storm was treated in some important paintings earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Géricault exhibited his *Radeau de la Méduse*, full of exhausted bodies at the Salon of 1819 and Eugène Delacroix used the theme for his *La Barque de Dante* in 1822. This inspiration is repeated in the latter part of the century with the evocation of *La Tempête sur les côtes de Belle-île* by Claude Monet at the Salon of 1886, and especially in sculpture by Rodin who started with his work on *la Porte de l'Enfer*, inspired by Dante, as early as 1880.

Raoul Larche depicts his storm as the dynamic movement of a swirling wave, carrying the bodies of four clouds, from which emerges a female figure in full extension, embodying the storm, her mouth open in a powerful screech and her arms outflung to destroy everything in her path.

With the repletion of the faces and the similar bodies *La Tempête et se Nuées* also appears to be metamorphosis of a single woman, going through various stages of tragedy and despair before rising from the turmoil a triumphant yet tragic heroin.

Raoul Larche won the award for sculpture at the Salon for this monumental work measuring over 3.50 meter high. The city of Paris commissioned a bronze example in this size. It was exhibited in the Salon of 1899, and then the Universal Exhibition of 1900 before entering the collections of the Petit-Palais. During World War II, the original cast was destroyed and the bronze melted to recover the metal.

After the success of the sculpture at the Salon, the artist decided to have the model edited by Siot-Decauville, the dimension reduced to a quarter of the exhibition plaster. The foundry offered the 85 cm high bronze for 3,000 francs, making Larche the second on the list of most expensive sculptors in the edition catalogues (the first being Jean-Léon Gérôme).

The price of the cast, the complexity of the model and the size of the sculpture explain why the edition was limited to very few samples. The chef-modèle of the Siot-Decauville foundry reappeared in 1993 and is now exhibited at the Musée du Petit-Palais in Paris.

Siot-Decauville also offered the present smaller version, which is 61 cm high. Our sample of this cast is a particularly fine and detailed example.