

A sculptor and a spy: Francesco Giambaldi (1867-1918) from Lecce to Paris

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Abstract: Francesco Giambaldi, an Italian sculptor, went to live and work in Paris shortly before the 1900 Universal Exposition, becoming an acquaintance of Rodin and a friend of Anatole France and Ernest La Jeunesse. Man of letters, well introduced into the circle of Bohemian life in Paris, his works included sculptures of figures such as Baudelaire, Gautier, Verlaine, Beethoven, Nietzsche, and Sappho. He collaborated with the journal *Coccarico* and helped create an innovative means of representing sculptures on postcards known as *photosculptogravure*. Giambaldi, however, had a second, covert, existence as a highly successful component of the Italian spy network in France. Codenamed Foulard, he infiltrated the anarchists and denounced them directly to the Italian ambassador in Paris. The article sheds light on this curious, somewhat behind the scenes, figure and, for the first time, recognises some twenty-eight of his oeuvres.

Francesco Giambaldi was born as Francesco Ignazio Annunziato Giambalvo, in Lecce, on 25 March 1867.¹ As his original surname suggests, on his father's side he hailed from a family of Sicilian origin, his grandfather having been an officer in the Bourbon army. He never knew his father (d. Lecce 2 December 1866), a clerk from Brindisi, who died at the age of 31, before Giambaldi's birth. To make matters worse, his mother, a seamstress named Maria Angela Mazzotta, was apparently kidnapped a few months later. Thus, orphaned at an early age, with no other relatives apart from a certain Giuseppe "Peppino" Mantovano, he left for Rome when he was 16 years old, after having studied the arts in Lecce. Before leaving to settle in Paris in the early 1890s, he also appears to have spent some time in Naples.²

Paris was the most thriving centre of modern culture at the turn of the 20th century, attracting artists from across the globe. Many had hoped to learn or perfect their profession, such as the numerous young foreign artists who flocked to the schools such as the Academie Julian or the Colarossi, or even apprenticed in the studios of the great and good, hoping to achieve success by rubbing shoulders with the likes of Rodin and other greats who were approved by the

¹ Archivio di Stato di Lecce, *Distretto Militare – Ruoli Matricolari di Lecce – classe 1867*, vol. 1, 24, listed as Francesco Giambalvi.

² In general, see Foscarini 2000, 122–23; Scuderi S. e Scuderi G. 2003, 349.

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State and recognised by the Salons. They came from all over the world, from Japan or from the Americas, although most young blood was European, of which the Italians, coming from a country with few viable alternatives, made up a fair part (Arthur 2014). Many of these young and aspiring artists also saw in Paris a promising art market and, like Medardo Rosso (Hecker 2019), proved to be quite successful entrepreneurs.

Once in Paris, where he was sometimes known as François, Giambaldi chose to change his surname from Giambalvo to Giambaldi in apparent admiration of Giuseppe Garibaldi (Tuccinardi e Mazzariello 2014, 18, n16). This name change was likely to have later put him in good stead. Whilst living in the French capital, he swung between times of good fortune and success, to moments of misery. Taking part in the Bohemian life and cultural circles of Paris, he became a close friend of the distinguished writer, poet and journalist Anatole France (1844-1924) and of the writer, caricaturist and critic Ernest La Jeunesse (1874-1917).³ His connections were undoubtedly quite extensive. On June 11th 1900 he attended a banquet at the Café Voltaire in honour of Rodin. The role-call on the occasion was impressive, and included such figures as Emile Bourdelle, Victor Champier, Octave Maus, Pierre Roche, Robert de Souza, Octave Uzanne, Ambroise Vollard, Oscar Wilde and many more.⁴ Giambaldi was probably well acquainted with Rodin. He is cited in Octave Mirabeau's splendid book on the work of Rodin, published at the start of the century (Mirabeau 1900). Only a few years later, Georges Grappe, curator of the Rodin collection, dedicated an appreciation of the Italian poet and Nobel prize winner Giosuè Carducci to Giambaldi (Grappe 1904). It may be no coincidence that Carducci was sometimes seen as an anarchist, as Giambaldi apparently did not go out of his way to hide his apparent sympathy for the anarchists, various important exponents of whom lived in Paris around 1900 (see below). The text by Grappe reminds us that Giambaldi was not only an artist, but also a man of letters and a poet. The first atelier of his that we know about in Paris was poetically described, significantly by Louis Dourliac, director of *Le Fureteur* (Dourliac 1901). Dourliac's symbolic rendering of its interior appears to list a number of Giambaldi's sculpted works representing Baudelaire, Gautier, Verlaine, Nietzsche, Beethoven and Sappho.

Sadly, the whereabouts of many of Giambaldi's works remain unknown. Around the turn of the century, he sculpted a bronze flower vase of a maiden against a draped tree-trunk (Dahhan 2000, 174), some examples of which were gilt (Fig. 1).⁵ The director of *Cocorico* magazine, Paul Boutigny, commissioned him to make a cheaper version that was mass-produced by the Erlotti foundry, sometimes using green patination (Fig. 2). The sculpture was then distributed to subscribers of the magazine (e.g. *Cocorico* 15, 5 August 1899). He later de-

³ On Giambaldi's lifestyle in Paris see his obituary published in *Augusta. Revista de arte* 1, 3, August 1918, Buenos Aires: 156.

⁴ See "Le Banquet de La Plume en l'honneur d'Auguste Rodin." *La Plume* XII: 487-88.

⁵ Bolli & Romiti auctioneers, Rome, sale 42, lot 101, 9 November 2020.

signed the cover of the 1900 Christmas issue of *Cocorico* (44), that has a female profile embossed on paper (*La Justice*, 8 Jan. 1902, 1; *L'Estafette*, 8 Jan. 1902). The same technique of embossing, but with a subtle light blue colour, was used by him for the *Nouvelle Imprimerie* (Cate 2005, 124). Giambaldi also designed a medallion of the Duke of Reichstadt (Napoleon II), which was produced in terracotta to be distributed to subscribers to the magazine *Le Fureteur* in 1901 (cf. also *Le Rigolo XX*, 1901, various issues and other magazines).

By 1901, and perhaps earlier, he was working on postcards and publicity posters, particularly using the technique of *photosculptogravure*. A prime example of this was a postcard for Vals St. Jean mineral waters, Val-les-Bains, Ardèche (Fig. 3).⁶ This was printed by Camille Sohet et Cie., Imprimerie d'Art, 1 rue Favart, Paris, specialists in the area. They also printed the visiting cards of Siegfried Bing's gallery "L'Art Nouveau" designed by Georges de Feure. Other typographers were also involved with Giambaldi, such as AHK, Paris (Fig. 4).⁷ Such were the cards success and popularity that Giambaldi decided to create a society to market the technique. Named the Société Biancani et Giambaldi *photosculptogravure*, it was dissolved on September 26th 1905 (*Archives commerciales de la France*, 28 October 1905, 1354).⁸ Interestingly, *photosculptogravure*, also known as *sculptogravure* or *photo-sculpture*, was similarly used by the sculptor Domenico Mastroianni (Arpi 1876-Rome 1962). He became a highly successful practitioner, also using colours to produce *sculptochromies* (Vicario 1994, 699; Sorbiello 2012, 114). Giambaldi and Mastroianni were in Paris at the same time and they were almost certainly in contact. Mastroianni was a self-taught and prolific artist, who developed a remarkable capacity to model surprisingly detailed subjects in clay, photograph them and then destroy them. It can be no coincidence that they both used *photosculptogravure* and both illustrated very similar scenes directly inspired by the Nobel Prize winning author Henryk Sienkiewicz' 1896 bestselling novel *Quo vadis*, chronicling a love affair between a young Christian woman and a Roman patrician during the reign of the infamous Emperor Nero (Woźniak and Wyke 2020, 195).⁹

⁶ According to Baillièrre (1905, 488–89), the French technical discovery of *sculptogravures* was a great novelty of 1903 and, apart from France, would soon be used by firms at St. Petersburg, Berlin, London, Barcelona, and New York, to advertise their products. Some of these were produced by Giambaldi.

⁷ Mastroianni's cards were often printed by A. Noyer in Paris, as well as by typographers in Poland and in Milan. On some of Mastroianni's postcards the technique used for the paper is called *chloro-platine*.

⁸ He is probably Antonio Biancani (Ravenna 1856-?), a printer and anarchist who fled to France and Paris in 1883 after having been sentenced to prison in Rome. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, Antonio Biancani was in Brasil and Argentina, where many anarchists were based, but may have returned to Paris after the police lost trace of him. See Canales Urriola 2016, 162n395 and *passim*. A "dessinateur-artiste et industriel" and "Biancani (A.) dessin. art." is attested in Paris from 1913 (*Didot-Bottin; Paris-Hachette*, 1913, 517).

⁹ The technique was also used by the French sculptor and illustrator J. Lamboursain for a series of postcards in 1905-6 illustrating the conclusion of the *affaire Dreyfus* (in the

Giambaldi designed a number of items edited by the Parisian art editor and jeweller Edouard Aimé Arnould, who exhibited them at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1902 (Arnould 1901?, nos. 43 and 107; Salon 1902, pl. 40; Duncan 1999, 283). These included a figural pewter vase depicting a couple kissing. Examples of the flower vase representing a maiden against a draped tree-trunk, previously distributed by *Cocorico*, were also retailed by Arnould.¹⁰ His speciality remained that of figural sculpture in marble and bronze (Fig. 5; see Appendix).

In 1902, his newly-rented atelier at 50 rue Saint-Georges was burnt down, also destroying his paintings and collection of wax models, including three maquettes of a sculpture of Mme Liane de Pougy (*L'Aurore*, 21 February 1902, 3). Indeed, by this time, he was already being internationally noticed as a sculptor, so much so that, à propos of his bust of the actor Paul Franck, Demoulin and Sakellion (1903) were able to write in a Greek journal that “In this work, the sculptor Giambaldi showed himself to be excellent”. Demoulin and Sakellion’s article probably followed a trip by Giambaldi to Sicily and then to Greece. During the voyage on a steamship, he met the well-known Danish archaeologist Frederik Poulsen (1876-1950), later Keeper of the Classics Department of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen (Poulsen 1905).¹¹ Poulsen described him as “a little, round and jolly gentleman of forty-two” and then went to on write:

Meanwhile the sculptor had brought out some cuttings from French newspapers to show me how famous he was. He passed a scrap to me, and I read: ‘Much interest was caused by Giambaldi’s group, “The Kiss.” (Fig. 6) No one can represent the female body like this sensuous Italian; he caresses the flesh, he fills it with spirit, he puts his longing and his pain into it. One can fancy one hears him sob...’

When back in Paris, Giambaldi soon moved to the prestigious Villa Maiesherbes at 112 boulevard Maiesherbes. The mid nineteenth-century block of flats still exists today and, in the early twentieth century, housed a number of important artists, forming a colony somewhat like the Cité Fleuri on Boulevard Arago at Montparnasse.¹² The list of residents, published on 1 January 1905, included the sculptors René Choquet, Paul Fournier, Agnes de Frumerie, Auguste Maillol, Malinet, Toni Szirmai, the painters Mlle. Cabarrus, Paul-Pierre Gomez, Robert

Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris – Fonds Dreyfus). Interestingly, Mastroianni produced a postcard with the same technique, illustrating President Émile Loubet, who graced Dreyfus. The Dreyfus cause was supported by the anarchists, amongst whose members might be counted Giambaldi (although a spy – see below). Mention should also be made of a series of *photosculptogravure* postcards with subjects recalling the *bords de mer* terracottas edited by Alphonse Hanne (1856-1908) at L’Isle Adam (Bloit, Fournier et Richemond 1998), probably created by Hanne, as some bear the words “Collection A.H., L’Isle-Adam”.

¹⁰ This last, stamped Arnould, was seen on auction on Ebay in May 2021.

¹¹ Poulsen’s 1905 article was later republished in English in Poulsen 1923, 185–87. On Poulsen see Østergaard 2012.

¹² For the Cité Fleuri see now Gutman 2020.

Kastor, Christian de Marinitsch, Eugène Pascau, de Schomen, Mlle. Valentino, Mlle. Waterlow,¹³ the designer Mme. Blondin, the ceramists Count Nils de Bark and William Lee, and the fencing instructor Michel Filippi (*Annuaire-almanach du commerce Didot-Bottin* 1905, vol. 2, 3207).¹⁴ Giambaldi, who along with Choquet and de Frumerie, had his atelier at Villa Malesherbes, was in the excellent company of some of the leading artists of the day, including a Hungarian, two Swedes, an Austrian and an Englishman born in Paris.

On 4 March 1905, another serious fire broke out in Giambaldi's atelier whilst he was with his model Sébastien Bertoni, working on a statue of *Christ socialist* inspired by the Bloody Sunday massacre at Saint-Petersburg of 22 January 1905 (*Gil Blas*, 9 March 1905, 3). He suffered burns to his face and hands as well as losing a large quantity of his works, including statues of the popular dancer Cléo de Merode, the figure of a maenad, and some Wagnerian items he was preparing in collaboration with the writer and poet Judith Gauthier (1845-1917), friend of Richard Wagner.¹⁵ The painter A. Maillard, whose atelier adjoined that of Giambaldi, also suffered some losses.¹⁶

Some three months after the fire, Giambaldi decided to travel to Italy and to the eastern Mediterranean. He briefly visited his home town of Lecce, where he spent some time with Donato Greco and met the eclectic doctor, scientist and historian Cosimo De Giorgi (1842-1922), who showed him the excavations of the Roman amphitheatre being brought to light in Piazza Sant'Oronzo (Valentini 1905).¹⁷ Whilst in Lecce he appears to have spent some time sculpting, but nothing is known or has come to light of his Apulian work.

After Lecce he left for Sicily, disembarking in October, so as to get to know his distant relatives at Santa Margherita del Belice, after which he returned to Paris (Scuderi S. and Scuderi G. 2003, 349). He was now a highly acclaimed sculptor and appears to have had numerous commissions.

He designed at least one marble statue of a water maiden (Fig. 7) for the Parc Miraton, the gardens surrounding a mineral water source in Châtel-Guyon (Raynal and Lefebvre 2013). He may also have worked at the Parc Watteau at Nogent-sur-Marne which, in any case, he apparently saved from the destruction that was to be caused by roadworks (*Journal Amusant* 10, 12 July 1919, 13).

In 1909, he exhibited various sculptures at the Salon Unioniste (Breuil 1909, 1153), including the head of Nietzsche, "Cain", "Adam" and "Samson vaincu".

¹³ Possibly Phyllis Gretchen Waterlow (1882-1965), daughter of the painter Sir Ernest Albert Waterlow. She is particularly well-known as the subject of one of the paintings by Waterhouse.

¹⁴ This had also been the residence of the important Danish art dealer and artist Willy Gretor (1868-1923).

¹⁵ The fire was highly reported by the French press as, for example, *Le Figaro*, 9 March 1905, 4; *Le Petit Journal*, 9 March 1905, 4; *Le Journal*, 9 March 1905, 3.

¹⁶ *La Petite République*, 9 March 1905, 4. Could this have been Auguste Maillard (1864-1944), who is usually listed as a sculptor?

¹⁷ See Rossi 2003, 86-96, for the amphitheatre excavations by Cosimo De Giorgi.

Paolo and Francesca and a head of Sappho were exhibited at the Salon d'Automn (P. 1909, 1; cf. Ricordi 1909, 876).

In 1911, he worked together with the sculptor and Dominican friar Louis Albert Gaffre (1862-1914), whose pseudonym was A. de Prémartin, on a statue of “Jeanne d’Arc sur le bûcher” for the old market square at Rouen, after having first presented a plaster model at the Salon des Artistes Françaises in Paris (*L’Universe*, 1 July 2011, 2).¹⁸ Although he is not known to have had a school, the sculptress Cécile Mancini would also appear to have collaborated with him.

In 1910, on the occasion of the Salon of the Union Internationale des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the writer and critic Ernest La Jeunesse wrote:

By uniting to the science of the thrill and the modern anxiety the notion of beauty and classical purity, traditional and outrageous, Francesco Giambaldi, writer, poet, philosopher, always agitated and prophetic, and serene to the point of beatitude, has something eternal. He is neither yesterday nor tomorrow, and if the word ‘genius’ could be combined with the word ‘talent’, if invention could be combined with perfection, this lyrical sculptor could be defeated, but we only have to take our pleasure and delight where we find it, by admiring (La Jeunesse 1910).

Giambaldi, curiously, had a second, covert, existence as an important and highly successful component of the Italian spy network in France since at least the year 1900. He answered directly to Giuseppe Tornielo, Italian ambassador in Paris from 1895 to 1908. Described as being of restless character, codenamed Foulard, Giambaldi infiltrated the anarchists and befriended exponents such as the goldsmith Arturo Campagnoli, Silvio Corio, Enrico Malatesta and the painter Felice Vezzani (Tuccinardi and Mazzariello 2014, 17–22).¹⁹ Interestingly, his work as an artist seems, at times, to have been closely linked with his life as a spy. For instance, his bronze flower vase made for *Cocorico* magazine was cast by the founder Erlotti, who was almost certainly the blacksmith Guglielmo Erlotti (Verona 1868-?), who had been expelled from France, possibly denounced by Giambaldi himself.²⁰

¹⁸ *Explication des ouvrages de Peinture, Sculpture, Architecture, Gravure et Lithographie des artistes vivants exposés au Grand palais des Champs-Élysées avenue Alexandre III, le 1er mai 1911*, 1e édition Paris, Imprimerie Paul Dupont 4, rue du Bouloi (1er arrondissement) 1911.

¹⁹ It is worth recalling the fact that Giambaldi’s surname was adopted by him to recall Garibaldi who, together with Giuseppe Mazzini, had headed the Italian republican and nationalist movements from which the Italian anarchists ultimately emerged. This would have put him in good light with the anarchists in Paris. His codename “Foulard” was surely a reference to the foulard commonly worn by Garibaldi and many of his redshirts.

²⁰ Tuccinardi e Mazzariello 2014, 62–3n113. See also the website *Chantier biographique des Anarchistes en Suisse s.v.* Erlotti. It may be noted that a foundry, Erlotti, Barbut et Cie at Suresnes, rue Emile-Ducleux 21, was dissolved in 1909 (*La Construction Moderne*, supp. 13, 26 [27 March 1909], 104), and that the society of an “M. Erlotti, fondeur, 18, rue de Paris”, at Puteaux was sold to M. Jeannin in 1911 (*Revue industrielle: revue mensuelle technique et économique* 42, 51 [23 December 1911, 10]).

He even briefly appears to have voiced his views in print, as in March 1908, when he published a paper on *À propos de la 'pacifisme de M. Faguet* in the journal *Revue de la Paix* vol. 13 (*Organe de la Société française pour l'arbitrage entre nations*).

We hear little about Giambaldi after around 1911. However, the Harry Ransom Center has a hand-written note by the writer Édouard Dujardin (1861-1949) inviting him to dinner at his home at Val-Changis in Fontainebleau in July 1912, along with Jean-Jacques de Morgan (1857-1924) a widely-travelled geologist, mining engineer and archaeologist. He had trained at the prestigious École des Mines and was excavating at the sites of Memphis and Dashur in Egypt and Susa in Persia. The dinner did not take place, as Giambaldi was summoned to Italy, but eventually the three men were able to meet up in October of the same year. It transpires, from the correspondence between Dujardin and de Morgan, that the latter, at least, was a fairly close friend of Giambaldi.²¹

What Giambaldi did during the war years is unknown, but he died in France on 12 January 1918. He was interred at Ivry-sur-Seine near Paris (*La Liberté*, 15 Jan. 1918; Ivry-sur-Seine burial register), and seems to have been largely forgotten.

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Appendix: Works (excluding paper)

The years mentioned below refer to the first time that a given work is attested.

1. Napoleon Bonaparte on horseback, based on the painting by Jacques-Louis David. Bronze. H. c. 45 cm. (Fischer 2004, 234, lot 1572).
2. Nude nymph in the waves. Gilded bronze. H. 94cm. (Heritage Auctions, 7th Nov., lot 33753).
3. Lamp of a maiden holding a flower bouquet. Bronze. H. 48cm. (Rops 2021, lot 6569).
4. Maiden against a draped tree-trunk. Versions in both pewter and bronze. Circa 1899. H. 25cm. (Arnould 1901?, no. 107; Salon 1902, pl. 40; Dahhan

²¹ I owe this information to the kindness of Elizabeth Garver of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

- 2000, 174). A different and cheaper version of the above was mass-produced by the Erlotti foundry to be distributed to subscribers of *Cocorico* magazine (*Cocorico* 15, 5th August 1899).
5. "Baudelaire" (Dourliac 1901).
 6. "Sappho", 1901 (Dourliac 1901) and 1909.
 7. "Gautier" (Dourliac 1901).
 8. "Verlaine" (Dourliac 1901).
 9. "Nietzsche" (Dourliac 1901; Breuil 1909, 1153).
 10. "Beethoven" (Dourliac 1901).
 11. Bronze vase with kissing couple, edited by A. Arnould (Arnould 1901?, no. 43; Salon 1902, pl. 40; Duncan 1999, 283).
 12. "Mme Liane de Pougy", 1902 (*Le Figaro*, 21 Feb. 1902).
 13. "Paul Franck", 1903. *La Revue du biens dans la vie et dans l'art* 3, 8 (1 August 1903), 22. Paul Franck was born on 19 July, 1870 in Paris as Paul Émile Franck. He was an actor, known particularly for his part in *Les Misérables*. He died on 19 May 1947 in Nice.
 14. "Le baisir", circa 1903. Bronze. H. 68cm. (Valentini 1905, 6).
 15. "Cléo de Merode", 1905. Destroyed? (*Gil Blas*, 9 March 1905, 3).
 16. "Christ socialist", 1905. Destroyed? (*Gil Blas*, 9 March 1905, 3).
 17. Maenad, 1905. Destroyed? (*Gil Blas*, 9 March 1905, 3).
 18. "Lo Schiavo" (Valentini 1905, 6).
 19. "Paul et Francesca", 1909 (Hoffman 1909, 6208).
 20. "Galilée moderne", 1909 (Hoffman 1909, 6208).
 21. "Jeanne d'Arc sur le bûcher", Rouen (Scuderi S. e Scuderi G. 2003, 349). Exhibited at the Salon 1911 and represented on a postcard (Buffalo State, The State University of New York).
 22. "Buste de Nietzsche", 1910. Exhibited at the Salon de l'Union Internationale des Beaux-Arts et des Lettres (Guilbeaux 1910).
 23. "Cain" (Breuil 1909, 1153).
 24. "Adam" (Breuil 1909, 1153).
 25. "Samson vaincu" (Breuil 1909, 1153).
 26. Water maiden for Parc Miraton. Life-size or larger. Marble. 1913? Represented on postcards.

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Figure 1 – Maiden against a tree-trunk, c. 1899. Gilded bronze. (Archive photo).



Figure 2 – Maiden against a tree-trunk, c. 1899, given to subscribers of *Cocorico* magazine. Bronze. (photo Bolli & Romiti).

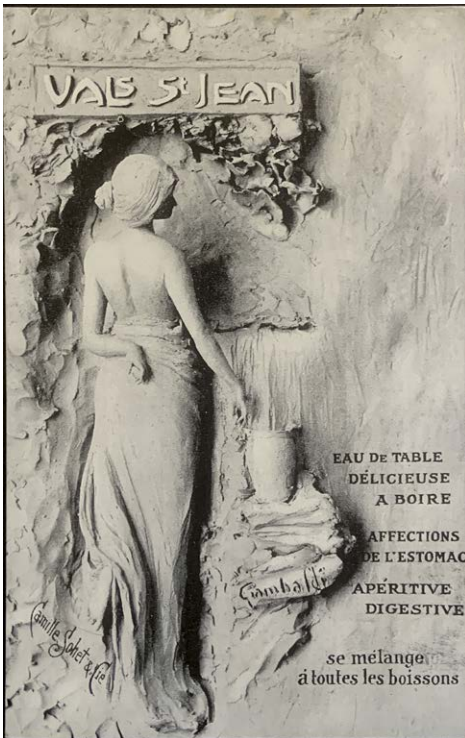


Figure 3 – Publicity postcard for the mineral water of Vals St. Jean, Valles-Bains, Ardèche, by Giambaldi (Camille Sohet et Cie, Paris).



Figure 4 – Postcard “Flirt” by Giambaldi (AHK - Katz, éditeur, Paris).



Figure 5 – Nude nymph in the waves. Gilded bronze. (photo Heritage Auctions, <<http://www.HA.com>>).



Figure 6 – “Le baiser”, circa 1903.
Bronze. (photo Jaroslaw Kotowicz).



Figure 7 – Postcard with a photograph of Giambaldi’s sculpture in the grounds of Parc Miraton at Châtel-Guyon, Puy-de-Dôme.