VIII

DECORATIVE ARTS

Under the heading "decorative" are to be found those items of material, historical, or cultural significance which make reference to the Dreyfus Affair, and have an aesthetic dimension, but which are frequently subject to a practical purpose. This category includes costume which subsumes military regalia, uniforms, weaponry, etc. (D.u.1-5). The decorative arts also comprise items designed with an official or ritual purpose. Such works typically espouse an open ideological message, often stated in the conventional terms found in various honors, awards, commemorative medals, currency, and philatelic design. (See D.m.1-7).

Contrary to caricature, and the aggressive denigration and contention frequently found therein, the decorative arts may therefore be considered to represent the "positive" even "official" counterpart of satire. This no doubt accounts for the frequent satirical treatment of art and particularly the decorative art of the monument by caricaturists of the period. Allegorical style and the usage of various personifications might be adapted and reversed by satirists (see the Musée des horreurs) and "high" art might similarly be utilized as a target or vehicle of attack (e.g. the celebrated Burghers of Calais by Rodin--adapted for caricature in D'Ostoya's contribution to L'Assiette au beurre). Any consideration of the honorary and "positive" aspect of the decorative, however, is relative and depends on point of view. See, for example, the open espousal of hatred implicit in the medal dedicated to General Mercier by the well-known sculptor Baffier. (D.m.3).

Among the many commemorative objects in the honorary genre of the medal, the most celebrated is surely that dedicated to Emile Zola, the author of "J'Accuse...!" for which a subscription was opened in 1898. (D.m.4). Bronze facsimiles in the collection document this so-called "Charpentier" medal, which had been cast in honor of the great writer and named for its designer, the turn-of-the-century sculptor and decorator Alexandre Charpentier.