

Référence électronique

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The Drawing School of Bayonne

On the 27th of April 1778, prompted by the painter Pierre Lagleire (1745-1813), the Bayonne city council authorized the founding of a free Academic Drawing School which officially opened on the 21st of July of the same year. Pierre Lagleire, originally from Marmande, attended as a student the *Académie de peinture et de sculpture* of Toulouse* and then became secretary to the parliament’s president Bordeaux Lalanne (?-?) for six years (attestation of the 24th of November 1775). To ensure the creation of the school, Lagleire used all of his connections in Toulouse, Bordeaux and Bayonne. If the “list of people whose help was requested for the founding” (GG234) was destroyed in the fire of the council archives in 1889, other documents recount how he proceeded. On the 28th of March 1778, a certificate was written by the Royal Academy of Toulouse which was signed by the knight of Aufréry (Toulouse, 1736-1813) moderator, by Lamothe (1715-1785) permanent secretary and by Bardy (1709-1794)¹. It indicates that Lagleire “attended all his classes when he was student, was a role model of dedication and wisdom to his pairs” and the institution rewarded him with four prizes². Recommendations letters were also written by Nicolas Dupré de Saint-Maur (Paris, 1732-1791) when he was the intendant of Bordeaux city in December 1778 and by M. Hiriart, the Bayonne Priest, guarantying the painter’s religious observance.

With such an appeal, the Bayonne city council agreed to the Drawing School and asked that Lagleire seek affiliation from the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*** of Paris. The director of the drawing school of Poitiers and painter François Aujolest Pagès (Bordeaux, 1746-Poitiers, 1801) made the request on his behalf which did not seem to please the permanent secretary of the Parisian academy Antoine Renou (Paris, 1713-1801) who demanded that Lagleire not use a middleman. On the 24th of October 1778, Lagleire wrote to him directly asking him for a “legal and solid scheme” for the Bayonne school. Yet, the-then director of the Royal Academy, Jean-Baptiste-Marie Pierre (Paris, 1714-1789) wrote to d’Angiviller asking him to wait until Lagleire had proved his talent before agreeing to the

¹ This would be Christophe-Suzanne de Lamothe (1715-1785) and Jacques de Bardy (or Bardi) (1709-1794). Lamothe, council member of the Toulouse parliament, received the honor of being “an ordinary associate” to the Royal Academy of Paris in 1774 and was permanent secretary for 1774 to 1776 (after the Marquis of Orbessan). Il took part in the Salons of the Academy as a collector in 1759,1767, 1774, 1777 and 1784. On the Lamothe family, see Franck Florenson, *L’hôtel de Lamothe-Trilhe au cloître Saint- Étienne, 8 rue Sainte-Anne*, master’s thesis (supervised by Yves Bruand), Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1993. Bardy, was also a council member of parliament, and took part in the Academic Salons of 1768 and 1773. My thanks go to Marjorie Guillin for this information;

² The details of the prizes remain unknown.

* The Academy of Painting and Sculpture

** The Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture

patronage and praised the aldermen of Bayonne who considered the opening of the school only on a trial-basis. Lagleire continued his search for sponsors and befriended Jean-Etienne Montucla (Lyon, 1725-Versailles, 1799), first assistant of the King's Buildings, to whom he explained his attempt to officially open the school and asked him to be his intermediary with d'Angiviller. On the 26th of December 1778, the city council confirmed its support to the drawing school that will bring "real progress to the arts" and "benefit many".

After the documents had been signed by Bayonne and Versailles approving the rules and regulations, the school was set-up quite quickly. On the 16th March 1779, the final contents were sent to d'Angiviller who gave them to Jean-Baptiste-Marie Pierre on the 20th of March who only found two small amendments. He requested that the institutions papers be kept in one of the rooms for "constant and immediate access for research purposes" and that the treasurer not be "permanent". D'Angiviller then transferred the approved version to Lagleire on the 15th of May with a letter in which he expresses his desires to see the Academy be a success : "The great lengths you went to, or so I have been told, to see (the arts) flourish, and the opulence of the town of Bayonne give me hope in thinking that they will not go wasted in such a part of the Kingdom where the arts have not yet penetrated". On the 24th of May, d'Angiviller confirmed the approbation of the school and Lagleire, fully satisfied with the successful development of his project, replied to his letter in the same vein on the 29th of May, underlining the artistic void of the region and confirming the successes to come, not doubting that "these same arts, ignored until now, will show multiple progress in time"

The drawing school of Bayonne was said to be "in favour of the liberal and mechanical arts" (AD. Pau, C 58). To understand Lagleire pragmatic intentions, one has to read his "Réflexions sur l'établissement projeté d'une École royale académique gratuite de dessein dans la ville et cité de Bayonne, présentées à Messieurs les amateurs du bien public [s.d.] [Thoughts on the establishment of a Free Royal Academic School of Drawing in the city of Bayonne, presented to the Gentlemen Amateurs of the Public Good]". The artist begins his argument by briefly presenting Bayonne: "the town is one the furthest away from the Capital, the most pleasant and amenable to culture and fine arts of all the cities in the Kingdom". He defends the necessity of such an establishment and its universal interest: "it is only in towns that have Fine Art Academies that one can find skilled artists and good craftsmen of all kind (...) a mason, a carpenter, an ironsmith and number of other craftsmen remain ignorant of design, yet this talent is the touchstone & the compass that drives the edifice". He then argues Bayonne's uniqueness - as a town with a port and being close to Spain - capable of educating seamen and young Spaniards. His proposal of having the aldermen's portrait painted constitutes the high point of his presentation in order to win over his readers. In another document, more than likely written to respond to his detractors complaining about the cost of the school, he reassures the town council that "the city will have no part in that department", and claims that all the academy's expenses will be covered by the "associated amateurs".

According to Lagleire (in a letter of the 24th October 1778), the School welcomed around sixty students. The educational program remains unknown but the regulations that travelled from Bayonne to Paris and Versailles give an understanding of organizational intentions of the institution (« Projet de réglemens pour l'école académique gratuite de dessein

de Bayonne, 20 mars 1779 »³; « Projet de statuts et autorisation de l'école académique gratuite de dessein pour la ville de Bayonne, [s.d.] »⁴ ; « Projet de statuts et autorisation de l'école académique gratuite de dessein pour la ville de Bayonne, Versailles, 15 mai 1779 »⁵). It is revealed that :

- . The School will be under the authority of the Mayor and the aldermen of the town and that of the direction of the Royal Academy of Paris.
- . It will be composed of local artists, amateurs “chosen from the respectable people of the city, who for the love for the arts, will want to contribute to the expenses and maintenance of the school” and foreign artists. The project of the 20th of May 1779 specifies that “we can welcome all foreign amateurs and artists that present themselves, divide them into two classes, with a preference for those who express a love for the Arts, as they will contribute to the expenses and ornament of the school”.
- . The office, qui will get together once a month, will be composed of a President (the mayor of Bayonne), a permanent Director (named by the Royal Academy of Paris), professors, six administrators and a permanent secretary.
- . The permanent secretary will be in charge of all the paperwork that will be kept in one of the schoolrooms “in order to consult them if necessary and to do an inventory every two years”.
- . The Treasurer will give details of the expenses every six months.
- . The Director will be in charge of supplies and will be helped by 2 assistants.
- . The lectures will be given by a drawing professor, a geometry professor, an anatomy professor and an architect.
- . Correspondence will be established with the Royal Academy of Paris “informing the institution of its principal events, or to consult with the Academy when in difficulty”.

If the beginnings of the School seem straightforward in comparison with other institutions, the reality tells a different story. From 1781, the School's soundness is questioned due to its lack of financial support from the city council. Lagleire, already in financial predicament, asked the aldermen to be exonerated from his capitation. He reminded them of his dedication to the “Public Good” (Letter of the 9th June 1781) and that he was “an artist who gives his all and even his own money to promote the arts”, declaring “that it would not be unjust and not without prejudice to the law, to broaden the grasp of taxation to that of the general public to the advantage of those who for free”. This letter stresses the difficulties that the artist had to face, and he also argued that he supported “the Free Academic School of Drawing” “out of his own pocket over thirty months”. If the subject of his letter is tax

³ AN, O/1/1933/A, dossier 10, doc. 12, “Projet de réglemens pour l'école académique gratuite de dessein de Bayonne, 20 mars 1779,” collated and put online in *Les ressources d'ACA-RES, fonds d'archives*, consulted on the 20 of October 2019, <https://acares-archives.nakalona.fr/items/show/70>.

⁴ AN, O/1/1933/A, dossier 10, doc. 13, “Projet de statuts et autorisation de l'école académique gratuite de dessein pour la ville de Bayonne [s.d.], collated and put online in *Les ressources d'ACA-RES, fonds d'archives*, consulted on the 20 of October 2019, <https://acares-archives.nakalona.fr/items/show/71>.

⁵ AN, O/1/1933/A, dossier 10, doc. 21, “Projet de statuts et autorisation de l'école académique gratuite de dessein pour la ville de Bayonne, Versailles, 15 mai 1779,” collated and put online in *Les ressources d'ACA-RES, fonds d'archives*, consulted on the 20 of October 2019, <https://acares-archives.nakalona.fr/items/show/79>.

exemption, or at least the capitation, he also expresses his regrets and desires for the school: “Any other town, would have, without a doubt your Highness, rushed to take part in such an interesting cause for the Public Good and would have at least found the necessary housing for the education of its students as the elite of the Kingdom with commercial interest and consequence, that would be too poor to give a sum of five or six pounds per year and by doing so, would have given an certain advantage to their ill-fated fellow citizens. Unfortunately, the taste for arts is not a dominant taste in this country and this being the one and only reason I can fathom for the lack of assistance I have found in Bayonne”. Lagleire’s request like all the others, that are kept in the town’s archives, were all denied. The aldermen’s response was just as straightforward, replying that the artist “attacks the lack of taste for the arts in this country: one could say that he has yet to be educated”. They also justify their refusal for financial aid by reminding the artist of his own personal wealth, stressing that he can rely on the lucrative income of his second wife, Marguerite Costes, clockmaker in the one of main lanes of the town.

Having not found the help he had hoped for, Lagleire left Bayonne in 1783 for Poitiers, where he more than likely was welcomed by Aujolest Pagès. He offered his services as a portraitist and as a painter of religious scenes for churches and also gave drawing lessons. The painter gave the Academy one last shot in 1784, as indicated by a letter he sent d’Angiviller, with the new founded support of the Bishop of Evreux. In it, he asks for housing in Bayonne by suggesting the Chateau-Vieux (or Old Castle) and requests an income to “promote fine arts in this remote part of the Kingdom where they are unknown”. However, his requests remain unanswered: Montucla wrote in the superior part of the letter “The Count can do nothing in regards to what is asked and I replied to M. Lagleire at the time when he wrote to me, giving details”. The short-lived school of Bayonne came to an end.

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