

FREEDOM MONUMENT





The unveiling of the Freedom Monument. November 18, 1935.

The Freedom Monument is one the most outstanding historical, architectural and artistic monuments in Latvia. It was erected using donations from the people as a symbol of Latvia's independence, which shows the respect and affection the Latvian people have towards their fatherland and freedom. The idea to build a monument dedicated to Latvia's freedom was first announced in 1920, during the final days of the battles for independence. The project design competition was held in several rounds and lasted eight years. The monument's foundation stone was put into place on November 18, 1931.

The Freedom Monument was unveiled and dedicated on November 18, 1935. It was constructed using sculptor Kārlis Zāle's (1888-1942) design called *Mirdzi kā Zvaigzne* (Shine Like a Star). Ernests Štālbergs was the lead architect on the project, with the iconic Freedom statue made by the Swedish metal craftsman Ragnar Myrsmiden (1889-1989).

The idea of Freedom is depicted on the monument in a clear architectural and sculptural language, enriched by symbolism and the depiction of historical events within the sculptural groups: an obelisk as a bright and rousing carrier of the idea of freedom, inspired by the characters and symbols on



Kārlis Zāle's 100th birthday celebration. October 28, 1988

the monument leading upwards to the statue of Freedom, which holds three stars above her head, symbolizing the three historical regions of Latvia – Kurzeme, Vidzeme and Latgale. The universal ideas depicted on the Freedom Monument are expressed in a spiritual and artistic form. The sculptural characters are genuinely, morally and aesthetically enlightening.

The Freedom Monument is 42.7 meters tall. The monument is made up of 56 sculptures divided into 13 sculptural groups on several levels.

The sculptural group on the first level of the monument has a common thematical concept and it symbolizes the core values of the Latvian nation – family, hard work, spirituality and the unshakeable strength of the nation.



Family



Protectors of the Fatherland



Labor



Spiritual and Intellectual Work

The second level sculptures are the depictions of the nation's dreams and ideals: Lāčplēsis, Chain Breakers, Latvia, Vaidelotis (gray granite). This level also features two illustrative relief sculptures, which tell about the struggles of the past: The Revolution of 1905 and the battle against Bermond's army on the Iron Bridge (travertine).



Lāčplēsis



Vaidelotis



Chain Breaker



Latvia



Revolution of 1905

Battle against Bermond's army on the Iron Bridge



At the top of the 19-meter high obelisk (travertine) stands the statue of Freedom (copper). The monument's central element features a terrace with two reliefs, one depicting the return of soldiers, while the other the procession of the Song and Dance Celebration (travertine).



Returning Soldiers

Procession of the Song and Dance Celebration



The Latvian Armed Forces' Guard of Honor stands at the base of the Freedom Monument.

The Freedom Monument has been restored three times: 1980–1981, 1998–2001 and in 2017.



Popular Front Rally (1990)



Lāčplēšis Day. November 11, 2009.

Engraved onto the monument's façade facing Old Town are the words – FOR FATHERLAND AND FREEDOM (author, poet Kārlis Skalbe).



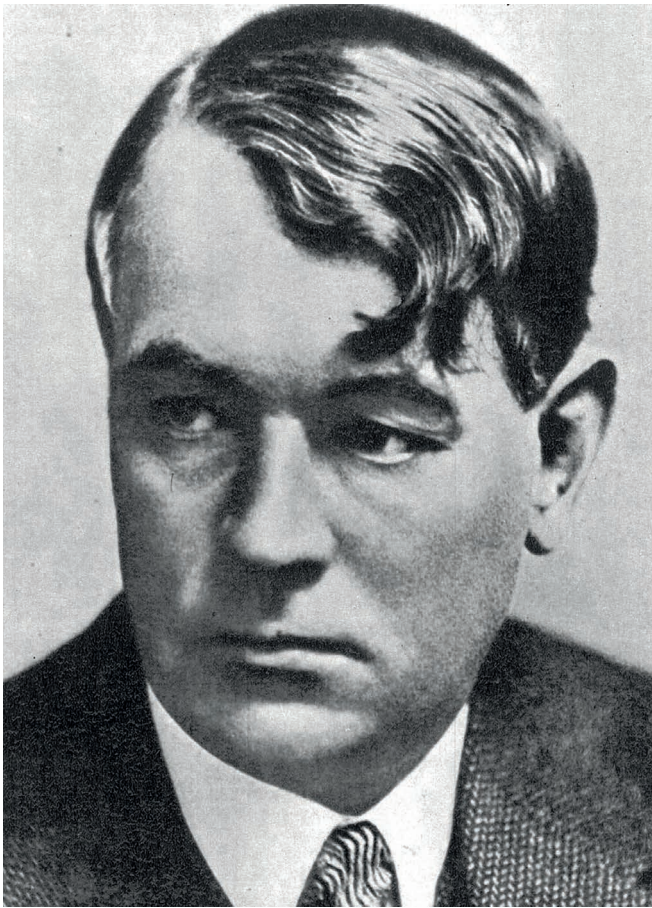
Latvia in flowers (2015)

As a gesture of respect to Latvia's independence, the base of the Freedom Monument is where foreign delegations, dignitaries and high-ranking officials and guests lay wreaths or flowers.



Song and Dance Celebration (2013)

The Freedom Monument is a place where people gather not only to commemorate tragic events in the nation's history, but also to celebrate.



Kārlis Zāle. 1920's.

Author of Freedom Monument Kārlis Zāle (Zālīte), born October 28, 1888 in Mažeikiai and died February 19, 1942 in Riga, spent his childhood in Liepāja. From 1909 to 1913 he was an unenrolled student at the Kazan Art School's Sculpture Department. Later, he went to Moscow where he worked in the workshop of the prominent sculptor Stepan Erzia. Zāle continued his studies in Petrograd – in 1916 at the school of the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of Art, from 1917 to 1918 as an unenrolled student at Imperial Academy of Art and the Petrograd Free



Sketch of Freedom Monument drawn by sculptor Kārlis Zāle (1925)

Art Educational Studios. In 1921, Zāle also went to Berlin to continue his studies, where he got acquainted with modernism (abstractionism, constructivism, cubism) trends in art. In 1923, the sculptor returned to Riga.

Kārlis Zāle is the pioneer of Latvian monumentalist sculpture, and is seen as the greatest sculptor in the nation's history. His works, especially the Brethren Cemetery ensemble and the Freedom Monument, are artistic masterpieces, in which the sculptor speaks in the language of symbols and allegories. They are generalized and permeated with philosophical meaning, expressing the desire of the people for freedom, love of



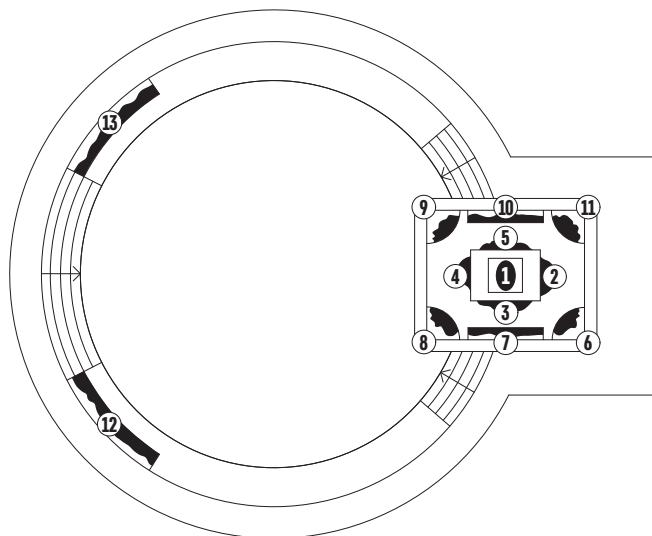
Metal craftsman Ragnar Myrsmøden (1935)

their nation, hard work and the beauty of the ethical values maintained by Latvians throughout the centuries.

Kārlis Zāle created the Freedom Monument (architect E. Štālbergs, metal artist R. Myrsmøden) and the Riga Brethren Cemetery's ensemble (architects P. Feders and A. Birzenieks, garden architect A. Zeidakš). His work also includes the monuments dedicated to Oskars Kalpaks in Meirāni (1927), Andrejs Pumpurs at the Great Cemetery in Riga (1929), Fallen WWI Riflemen in Smārde (1936), Liberators of Riga from Bermond's Army at Sudrabkalniņš in Riga (1937, architect E. Štālbergs), Soldiers Fallen in the Independence Battles in Jaunpiebalga (1930, architect A. Birzenieks), as well as private memorials at cemeteries in Riga, Valmiera, Trikāta and Viļķene. Kārlis Zāle also worked as a professor at the Latvian Academy of Arts and headed that Master Workshop of Sculpting. He is a recipient of the Order of the Three Stars (Commander Grand Cross, 1st Class), the Fatherland Award (1938), as well as a Grand Prix winner at the World Fair in Paris (1937).

Kārlis Zāle has been laid to rest at the Riga Brethren Cemetery.

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- 1 – Freedom
- 2 – Latvia
- 3 – Lāčplēsis
- 4 – Chain Breakers
- 5 – Vaidelotis
- 6 – Labor
- 7 – Revolution of 1905
- 8 – Spiritual and Intellectual Work
- 9 – Family
- 10 – Battle against Bermond's army on the Iron Bridge
- 11 – Protectors of the Fatherland
- 12 – Returning Soldiers
- 13 – Procession of the Song and Dance Celebration



Rīgas pieminēkļu aģentūra

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