

Auguste Rodin



Photograph of Auguste Rodin, c. 1880, University of California, San Diego

François-Auguste-René Rodin was born in Paris to working-class parents on November 12, 1840. He received his formal training at the Petite École where he studied the fundamentals of drawing and sculpture 1854 to 1857. Rodin then applied three times to the École des Beaux-Arts, and each time he was rejected. This was a serious setback to his career, as it was necessary to attend this school to gain the prestige and training to exhibit in Salons and receive public commissions. Thus, from the late 1850s until he won a prize at the 1880 Paris Salon, Rodin worked as a commercial artist, making decorative figures for buildings, sculptural groups, and portraits.

During his twenty years as a commercial artist, Rodin continued to pursue his hopes for a Salon career. In 1864 he submitted his first work, *The Man with a Broken Nose* (1863–64); it was rejected. In the winter of 1874–75 he traveled to Italy, where he saw the works of Michelangelo, whose muscular, expressive figures greatly influenced his art. Immediately after this trip, Rodin began the *The Age of Bronze* (1875–76), which he exhibited in plaster during January 1877 at the Brussels Exposition du Cercle Artistique and later in May in the Paris Salon. So accurate with the musculature of

the male figure that critics familiar with the polished surfaces of nudes sculpted by academic artists accused Rodin of taking casts of his model's body. Rodin sharply denied this and had photographs taken of his model to prove that he had indeed altered what he saw to create an artistic vision.

The *succès de scandale* and flurry of critical writing on his work brought Rodin to the attention of the public. In the spring of 1880 he again exhibited *The Age of Bronze*, this time in bronze, at the Paris Salon, where it received third prize. In 1900 at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, Rodin organized the first large retrospective of his work, which insured his position as the leading sculptor of his age.

Rodin quickly developed a distinctive personal style quite unlike the reigning tradition of classical realism. Instead of being mere portrait likenesses, his figures function like emblems of emotional or intellectual states, expressed by gestures and poses and heightened by powerfully modeled surfaces with vivid shadows and highlights. Various called Impressionist and Romantic, Rodin's eloquent sculptures in any event are always and unmistakably modern.

He came to be universally acclaimed as the greatest living artist, and Rodin's funeral, in 1917, was a state affair; thousands of onlookers lined the streets for the funeral procession and watched as a large version of *The Thinker*, which had long become identified with the artist's towering genius, was erected over his tomb.



Auguste Rodin, *Mask of the Man with the Broken Nose*, modeled 1863–64, cast 1925, bronze, 10 1/4 x 6 7/8 in., Bequest of Jules E. Mastbaum, Rodin Museum, F1929-7-55

a biography

Timeline

1840

1840 François-Auguste-René Rodin is born on November 12 in Paris

1845

1850

1855

1854 Attends the Petite École

1860

1857 Fails École des Beaux-Arts entrance exam (specifically sculpture)

1865

1862 Enters the religious order of the Society of the Blessed Sacrament for a brief time

1870

1864 Works in sculptor Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse's studio

1875

1865 Auguste Rodin, *The Cathedral*, modeled 1908; cast 1925, bronze, 24 1/2 x 10 3/4 x 11 3/4 in., Bequest of Jules E. Mastbaum, Philadelphia Museum of Art, F1929-7-40

1880

1870 Enlists in the 158th Regiment of the National Guard; discharged for nearsightedness

1885

1873 Enters a partnership with sculptor Antoine Van Rasbourn in Brussels

1890

1875 Exhibits *Mask of the Man with the Broken Nose* in marble at the Paris Salon

1895

1876 Travels to Italy to study Michelangelo

1900

1880 Wins bronze medal for *The Age of Bronze* at the Paris Salon; receives *The Gates of Hell* commission

1905

1885 Signs contract to create *The Burghers of Calais*

1910

1890 Auguste Rodin, *Thought*, modeled 1895; cast 1925, bronze, 17 3/4 x 15 5/8 x 16 1/2 in., Bequest of Jules E. Mastbaum, Rodin Museum F1929-7-47 [Portrait of sculptor Camille Claudel, Rodin's student then collaborator in many ways]

1915

1891 Works on a monument to writer Victor Hugo; receives commission for a monument for playwright and novelist Honoré de Balzac

1920

1898 Exhibits *The Kiss* and *Monument to Balzac* at the Paris Salon

1925

1900 Enjoys first major retrospective at Place de l'Alma, 150 works exhibited

1930

1906 *The Thinker* is installed in front of the Panthéon in Paris

1935

1910 Publishes *Les Cathédrales de France*, his studies on Gothic Architecture

1940

1915 Donates all of his work to the French government for the future Musée Rodin

1945

1917 Dies in Meudon, France on November 17

1950

1919 Musée Rodin opens in Paris

Auguste Rodin, *Self-Portrait*, 1858, pencil on paper, University of California, San Diego

Auguste Rodin, *The Hand*, modeled 1908; cast 1925, bronze, 24 1/2 x 10 3/4 x 11 3/4 in., Bequest of Jules E. Mastbaum, Philadelphia Museum of Art, F1929-7-40

Auguste Rodin, *Thought*, modeled 1895; cast 1925, bronze, 17 3/4 x 15 5/8 x 16 1/2 in., Bequest of Jules E. Mastbaum, Rodin Museum F1929-7-47 [Portrait of sculptor Camille Claudel, Rodin's student then collaborator in many ways]

Alvin Langdon Coburn (British, 1882–1966), *Auguste Rodin*, ca. 1906, gum platinum print, George Eastman House

Pierre Choumoff, *Rodin's funeral*, 24 nov 1917, Musée Rodin [Ph. 01381]



Auguste Rodin, *The Burghers of Calais*, modeled 1884–95, this cast 1985, bronze, 82 1/2 H x 94 W x 95 D in., Gift of Iris and B. Gerald Cantor, 1989, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989.407

fellow citizens for whom they expected to die. The story has a happy ending, however: when Calais fell under English rule, the pregnant Queen Philippa de Hainaut, not wanting her child to be born into such violence, successfully prevailed on her husband to have mercy on the six courageous men and spare their lives.

The citizens of Calais had long wanted to raise a monument to its selfless medieval heroes of the Hundred Years' War. Auguste Rodin began work on the subject in 1884, after the project was announced, and won the commission in 1885. His design gave equal prominence to each of the six men, showing them react to their ordeal with varying emotions ranging from thoughtful resolve and stiff stoicism to grieving compliance and disbelieving resignation to anguished horror and despair.

In a radical departure from artistic tradition, the life-size figures were not to be elevated on a high pedestal, but arranged in a loose group on the pavement of the city square. Rodin hoped "that if the group were placed very low, it would look more at home, and that would do more to make the public enter the spirit of misery and sacrifice."



Les Bourgeois de Calais by Auguste Rodin at the Stanford University Main Quad, Memorial Court

It was Rodin's standard procedure to isolate components of larger arrangements and turn them into separate, autonomous works. So, too, with the six figures of *The Burghers of Calais*, each of which exists as an independent sculpture. Seen on its own, the anguished stance of *Andrieu d'Andres*, with hunched shoulders and head grasped in tense hands, reads as the embodiment of suffering born from hopeless despair. Within the monument's narrative this all-too-human gesture helps to understand the character's personal brand of courage—not being fearless, but acting in spite of mortal fear.

Musée Rodin in Paris not only cares for Rodin's bronzes, marbles, paintings, and drawings, as well as his own art collection, it also continues the production of Rodin's sculptures in bronze. According to a provision in his will, sculptures may be made in editions of twelve—that is each of Rodin's works may be cast up to twelve times from the original plaster models. All these bronzes, including the ones produced in the twentieth century by the Musée Rodin, are considered originals and are individually numbered and dated; the posthumous casts additionally bear the copyright stamp of the Musée Rodin. Joslyn's bronze of *Andrieu d'Andres* is dated 1987 and numbered "6/8," indicating that it is the sixth in a group of eight. A further inscription, "Fonderie Coubertin," identifies the French foundry that executed the cast. *Andrieu d'Andres* was installed in Joslyn's Peter Kiewit Foundation Sculpture Garden in 2009.

Discussion Questions

What emotions can you see and feel when looking at *Andrieu D' Andres*?



Which has more impact: the six men standing together or apart, and why?



What do you think of Rodin's aesthetic?



Auguste Rodin (French 1840–1917)
One of the Burghers of Calais: Andrieu D'Andres
(*L'un des Bourgeois de Calais: Andrieu d'Andres*)

modeled 1898, cast 1987, bronze
79 1/2 x 35 x 49 in., Gift of John and Carmen
and G. Woodson and Anda Howe, 2004.21



The Gates of Hell and Joslyn's Eve



Auguste Rodin, *Gates of Hell*, this model, plaster, 1880; project continues until c. 1900; cast in bronze, 1925, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France, 40-11-15/1

In 1880 Auguste Rodin began work on the *The Gates of Hell* (1880–1917), when he received a commission from the French government to design the doors of the new Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. He worked most intensively on the *Gates*, which includes the statue of *Eve* (1881), from 1880 to 1888. He modeled over two hundred human figures, altering, removing, and adding them to the doors. The museum did not come to fruition, and by this time, too, the museum was housed not separately, as originally planned, but in one wing of the Louvre.

The *Gates* is loosely based on *Dante's Inferno*, a theme chosen by Rodin. The figures on the doors are souls in torment, writing in agony and despair. Some of the figures are drawn directly from Dante, such as *The Shade* (1880); some are from mythology, such as the Centaurs (1887); while others, like *The Thinker* (1880), are creatures of Rodin's imagination. Preliminary sketches indicate that Rodin intended *Eve* to be a central figure on the door. In the final scheme, however, she and *Adam* (1880), both life-size, flanked the doors.

Although the *Gates of Hell* was designed for a secular purpose and used an unorthodox mix of characters, its central theme is religious: Hell and Original Sin as exemplified by Adam and Eve. Rodin was a devout man (he briefly joined a religious order), and Rodin scholars agree that contemporary writers who shared a common pessimism

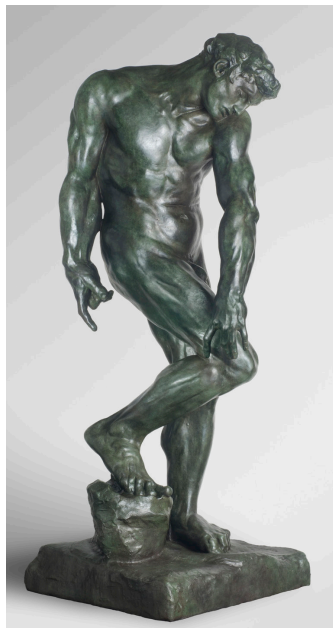


influenced him. Albert Elsen believes that "the *Gates* had 'no intended moral purpose' but are Rodin's compassionate commentary on the moral cost to society of the decline of orthodox religion and the addition to materialistic values."

Eve, in particular, was an especially popular religious subject in Salon sculpture at the end of the nineteenth century. At this time, religion was less concerned with the promise of future blessedness and more concerned with evil in the world, and Eve was a symbol of that evil. Rodin's *Eve* differs from many of the Salon Eves in that the serpent, the symbol of her fall from grace, is absent and that she does not represent an ideal of feminine beauty.

Rodin, typically, was not concerned with external symbols or beauty but strove for the intense emotional character of his subject. Eve expresses her intense shame through the torsion of her body. She twists away from the *Gate*, one arm shielding her bowed head from the spectacle of the Hell where her offspring dwell, while she lifts one leg up in the opposite direction. Rodin's *Eve* does not shield her lower body with one hand, as is seen in some portrayals, but rather hugs herself in the instinctive gesture of protection and despair, exposing her rounded stomach. Her shame is, perhaps, more for the consequences of her actions and less for her sexuality. The roundness of her stomach can also suggest her status as the "mother of all humanity." Supposedly, the model for this figure became pregnant, and Rodin, being the naturalist he was, unerringly copied the gentle swell of her body.

Auguste Rodin, *Eve*, 1881, bronze, height: 29 1/2 in., Given by Family and Friends in Memory of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar M. Morsman, Joslyn Art Museum, 1964.763



IMAGES (LEFT TO RIGHT): Auguste Rodin, *Adam*, modeled 1880–81; cast 1925, bronze, 75 1/2 x 29 1/2 x 29 1/2 in., Bequest of Jules E. Mastbaum, 1929, Rodin Museum, F 1929-7-125; *The Thinker*, 1879–89, bronze, 14 3/4 in., Unknown repository

Like his other great works, Rodin's *Eve* caused an outcry. Unlike the pretty, sensuous Eves commonly seen in the Salons, this contorted, frankly guilt-ridden Eve shocked the public. Nonetheless, *Eve* became a popular work in its own right (as did *The Thinker*), apart from its connection with the *Gates*, and it was reproduced frequently. *Eve* was produced in two editions: a small version, like Joslyn's, and a life-size version, about 67 inches high. There are differences in detail between the two (the position of the hands is slightly altered, for instance) and the relation between them is unclear. The prototype for the Joslyn *Eve* is not certain.

The small *Eve* communicates the strong emotion of Rodin's larger works. Although the surface is somewhat smoother and the body more streamlined than the life-size version, the patina is subtly mottled and the surface pitted to catch the light and match the raw emotion of its subject. Even more importantly, the emotion is conveyed not through the face, which is shielded, but through the bowed head and contorted form that suggests the shame and despair she bears for the sins of mankind.





AUGUSTE RODIN (FRENCH, 1840–1917)

**ONE OF THE BURGHERS OF CALAIS: ANDRIEU D' ANDRES
(L'UN DES BOURGEOIS DE CALAIS: ANDRIEU D'ANDRES)**

MODELED 1898, CAST 1987, BRONZE,
GIFT OF JOHN AND CARMEN GOTTSCHALK AND G. WOODSON AND ANDA HOWE
JOSLYN ART MUSEUM®, OMAHA, NEBRASKA, 2004.21