

Rodin and the Birth of Modern Sculpture

August 13, 2024

“Come and see me tomorrow morning at Meudon. We will talk of Phidias and Michelangelo, and I will model statuettes for you on the principles of both. In that way you will quickly grasp the essential differences of the two inspirations”

– Rodin

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), “father of modern sculpture”

- Musée Rodin, Paris; Musée Rodin, Meudon
- Rodin Museum, Philadelphia; Cantor Arts Center, Stanford U., Stanford

Rodin and 19th c. sculptural tradition and practice

- Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (Rodin not admitted)
- Cf. Antonio Canova: Greek myth, finely finished images

Looking back to look forward

- Rodin at the Louvre: ancient Greek and Roman sculpture
- 1876 to Italy: Michelangelo’s sculptures
- 1881 to London: the Parthenon marbles (“Elgin Marbles”)

Working methods

- Clay and wax modelling
- Fragments and “incomplete” works as whole
- Assemblage

Reanimating the classical tradition

- *The Gates of Hell*, commissioned 1880 for planned Decorative Arts Museum
- *The Burghers of Calais*, commissioned by city of Calais, 1884-89

The Monument to Honoré de Balzac ”. . . the result of a lifetime, the pivot of my aesthetic”

- Commissioned 1891, rejected 1898; cast and installed in Paris in 1939

Reconsider: Rodin “father of modern sculpture”

- Cf. Alan Turing, *True, For Alan Turing*, King’s College, Cambridge (2024)
- Cf. modern admirers: Brancusi, Matisse, Moore
- Rodin and the Greeks, Michelangelo
- Back to the Rodin Museum, Philadelphia
 - Rodin’s clay, plaster, and wax: *Gates of Hell* first cast in bronze in 1917
 - *Burghers of Calais*, first cast in bronze in 1925 (Rodin Museum, Philadelphia)
 - Rodin and public competitions, commissions: history, literature
- Rodin gets the last word

Suggested reading:

- Albert E. Elsen, *Rodin* (Museum of Modern Art: 1963)
- Website for exhibit *Rodin in the United States: Confronting the Modern* (June 18-Sept 18, 2022): Rodin’s Process: Sculpture (The Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA)
- <https://www.clarkart.edu/microsites/rodin/about-the-exhibition/process-sculpture#:~:text=Rodin%20never%20carved%20marble%20himself,or%20plaster%20cast%20to%20stone.>