



RODIN: TRUTH, FORM, LIFE: Selections from
the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Collections -
Ephemera

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RODIN: TRUTH, FORM, LIFE Selections from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Collections Wall Labels

Fairfield University Art Museum

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When Rodin sat for this photograph in ca. 1880, he was about 40 years old and about to begin work on *The Gates of Hell* and *The Burghers of Calais*.

Rodin in his studio in Meudon, about 1902. A study for the *Monument to Balzac* is on the right in the photo.

Rodin's studio at Meudon about 1900, with the plaster version of *The Gates of Hell*.

Balzac in Dominican Robe

Modeled 1893, cast 1981

Georges Rudier Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of 12, numbered 9/12)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

In this sculpture, Rodin elongates Balzac's figure and also introduces some indications of his life and career in the monk's robe (his preferred apparel when writing), and the pile of books and papers at his feet.

Nude Study of Balzac (Type C)

Modeled ca.1892, cast 1976

Georges Rudier Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of 12, numbered 12/12)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

Balzac was renowned for his corpulence, his appetites, and the disproportion of his body (his legs were short). Scholar Albert Elsen writes that Rodin took on the task of “creating for an impatient committee of sculpturally unsophisticated writers a heroic public monument destined for the heart of the nation’s capital. The subject of this daunting effort was a short, fat, ugly man who wrote books.” In this study, Rodin gives Balzac more physical strength than he really had – perhaps suggesting the writer’s intellect could overcome his physique.

Bust of Young Balzac

Modeled 1893, cast 1983

Godard Foundry (published by Musée Rodin,
edition of 8, numbered 1/8)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

Rodin generally preferred to model his portraits from life, but Balzac had been dead for four decades when the sculptor received the commission to design his monument. The sculptor was able to glean some information from a few early photographs, as well as portrait drawings, written descriptions, and even a suit of Balzac's clothes. In search of authenticity, Rodin traveled to the author's hometown of Tours and found a local who matched the author's physiognomic traits, using him as a source for the portrait heads.

Jean d'Aire, Second Maquette

Modeled 1885-86, cast 1970

Susse Foundry (published by Musée Rodin,
edition of 12, numbered 1/12)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Jean d'Aire is emaciated, conveying the deprivation of his starving city, but his expression suggests courage and resolve in the face of death. He holds a cushion on which lie the keys to the city of Calais. Rodin modeled his figures in the nude first, so that he could be sure the entire body conveyed the sought-after emotion; only when he was sure of the expressiveness of the nude would he cover the figure with clothing.

Monumental Head of Jean d'Aire

Modeled ca.1908-09, enlarged 1909-10, cast ca. 1978
Georges Rudier Foundry (published by Musée Rodin,
edition of unknown size, numbered 5)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

In the process of completing his *Burghers of Calais*, Rodin made many studies of the models, both nude and clothed. He did the entire figures as well as just parts of the figures, such as hands and heads. The finished monument proved to be very popular, and there was also a lively market for bronze casts of these studies, not only to-size but also enlarged and reduced in size. The *Monumental Head of Jean d'Aire*, in particular, sold very well.

Despairing Adolescent

Modeled 1882, cast 1975

Godard Foundry (published by Musée Rodin,
edition of 12, numbered 3/12)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

The sinuous lines of the upstretched arms, the reverse S curve that starts at the youth's lower hand and crosses his chest to work its way down the right side of his body, the head leaning backward so as not to interrupt the formal importance of those arms – all of these elements demonstrate Rodin's ability to use naturalism in service of expression.

Head of Shade with Two Hands

Modeled ca. 1910, cast date unknown

Alexis Rudier Foundry (edition of unknown size, numbered 2)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Rodin loved to experiment with arrangements of hands and heads. It's unlikely that this piece was created with a specific meaning in mind; rather, it was probably made to see how the juxtaposition of ready-made hands and a head would interact in terms of scale and placement. A clue lies in the fact both of the hands that appear in the sculpture are *left* hands – they could not be the hands of the Shade itself.

Monumental Head of the Shade

Modeled ca. 1880, cast 1995

Godard Foundry (published by Musée Rodin,
edition of 4, numbered II/IV)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Among the figures that Rodin detached from *The Gates of Hell* when the commission was canceled were three muscular figures atop the doors, who turn to each other as they gesture downward into the morass of Hell.

These are *The Three Shades*, whose poses, muscles, and expressions speak to Rodin's interest in Michelangelo and his muscular, striving figures. Eventually, the figures of the individual shades were separated and became fodder for Rodin's fertile imagination in his creative use and reuse of parts. By separating the head of this shade from its body, the sculptor was able to present it in different ways, including upright, giving it a very different mood than that of its source.

Narcisse

Modeled ca. 1882, enlarged and retitled 1890, cast 1985
Godard Foundry (published by Musée Rodin,
edition of 8, numbered 8/8)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

This piece was not included in *The Gates of Hell* when the plaster model was first shown, but Rodin included it in a later version. He also showed it independently of the *Gates* project, in versions both enlarged and reduced in size. At times, *Narcisse* was combined with other figures, while at other times it had arms. Rodin even once used a reduced version of the sculpture as the handle on a vase. When the figure was enlarged to the size shown here, Rodin exhibited it under the title of *Narcisse*, the Greek god who fell in love with his own striking reflection in a pool; enchanted by his own good looks, he was unable to pull himself away and soon died.

Metamorphoses of Ovid

Modeled about 1885-89, cast date unknown
Perzinka Foundry (edition of unknown size,
numbered 10)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Rodin was one of many 19th-century artists to explore the previously-taboo subject of lesbianism. He did a number of pieces with lesbian themes in the mid-1880s, including this sculptural group, which appeared at the upper right corner of *The Gates of Hell*. Rodin drew inspiration from a story told in the Roman poet Ovid's epic *Metamorphoses* of the hermaphrodite Glaucus, who fell in love with the beautiful nymph Scylla. Rodin depicts Glaucus in her female form, making love to Scylla. In 1914 a gallery catalogue described it: "One, coiled up, hunches her body like a tight spring, her legs tense, her back rounded, while beneath her reclines her conquest in the most passive abandonment."

Study for Torso of the Walking Man

Modeled 1878-79, cast 1979

Coubertin Foundry (published by Musée Rodin,
edition of 12, numbered 10/12)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

This sculpture was once thought to have been executed in preparation for *Saint John the Baptist Preaching*.

However, scholars now think that it was made from parts of the plaster cast of the already-done *Saint John* in preparation for a new sculpture, *The Walking Man*, which was created about 1900. Rodin used casts of the torso and upper thigh of one of *Saint John's* legs to make this study; because those casts were first made in 1878-1879, this *Study* bears that date, even though it was not assembled until 20 years later.

Ixelles Idyll

Modeled ca. 1876, cast 1981

Coubertin Foundry (published Musée Rodin, edition of 8, numbered 4/8)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

From 1871 until 1877 Rodin lived in Brussels, where he worked in relative obscurity designing sculpture for a number of buildings, including the Bourse (stock exchange), the music conservatory, and the Palais-Royal at the Palais des Académies. His studio was in the pleasant suburban village of Ixelles, and the title of this sculpture commemorates the location of its making. The contrast between the smooth surfaces of the two infants' bodies and the minute detail of their hair and playthings attest to Rodin's interest in expressive surfaces.

Bust of Jean Baptiste Rodin

Modeled 1860, cast 1980

Godard Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of 2, numbered 2/2)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Rodin's father (1803-1883) was a conservative family man who worked hard his entire life, first as a clerk in a police station and then as a police inspector.

Jean Baptiste Rodin seems to have been a quiet, unremarkable person. For his time and background, however, he was remarkable in one respect: he supported his son's aspirations to be an artist. Indeed, he recognized his young son's talent when no one else did. In an undated letter in the archives of the Musée Rodin, Jean wrote to his Auguste:

You must not construct your future on sand so that the smallest storm will bring it down. Build on a solid, durable foundation [so that] the day will come when one can say of you as of truly great men – the artist Auguste Rodin is dead but he lives for posterity, for the future.

This bust is one of Rodin's earliest pieces, made when he was twenty years old. It was likely based on ancient Roman portrait sculpture he had seen at the Louvre, and speaks to his interest, at this stage of his career, in following tradition and in building the "solid, durable foundation" of which his father wrote.

Heroic Bust of Victor Hugo

Modeled 1890-97 or 1901-02, cast 1981

Coubertin Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of 12, numbered 7/12)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

Hugo (1802-1885) was a national hero in 19th-century France. By the time he was 30, he was the most famous French writer of his time, renowned for his poetry, plays, and novels. His bestselling book *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) created such interest in the Paris cathedral – which had fallen into decrepitude after the Revolution – that a major restoration campaign led by the young architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc was launched in 1844 (during this restoration, a spire was added to the cathedral; it was this spire that was destroyed by the fire of 2019).

In 1889, Rodin received the commission to create a monument in Hugo's honor for the Panthéon, a building that serves as a mausoleum for great French citizens. In modelling this portrait, Rodin focused on the emotions and creativity of the man who he described as: "Hercules [...] Something of a tiger, or an old lion. He had an immense animal nature. His eyes were especially beautiful." Like a number of his other public commissions, Rodin's design for a full monument was never approved for the Panthéon. However, since the author himself was so revered, portrait busts adapted from the larger monument sold well as independent pieces.

Mask of the Man with the Broken Nose

Modeled 1863-64, cast 1979

Coubertin Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of 12, numbered 12/12)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

During the winter of 1863-4, the young Rodin was working on a clay head modeled after a local handyman. One night the temperature in his meager studio plummeted and the wet clay on the modeling stand froze, causing the back of the three-dimensional head to crack and break off. Rodin was always receptive to the serendipity of accidents and already interested in the notion that part of a figure could be expressive and therefore the whole, so he considered the *Mask* to be worthy of exhibition. In 1865 he submitted it to the Paris Salon, but its “incompleteness” and the ugliness of the face – especially the battered nose – made it anathema to the jury’s notion of aesthetic “beauty,” and it was rejected.

Rodin later told one of his supporters:

That mask determined all my future work. It is the first good piece of modeling I ever did. From that time I sought to look all around my work, to draw it well in every respect. I have kept that mask before my mind in everything I have done. [...] I have never succeeded in making a figure as good as *The Broken Nose*.

Saint John the Baptist Preaching

Modeled ca. 1880, cast 1925

Alexis Rudier Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of unknown size)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

In 1913, Rodin reminisced about the day when an Italian peasant from the Abruzzo region came to his studio in Paris to offer himself as a model:

As soon as I saw him, I was filled with admiration; this rough, hairy man expressed his violence in his bearing, his features and his physical strength, yet also the mystical character of his race. I immediately thought of a Saint John the Baptist, in other words, a man of nature, a visionary, a believer, a precursor who came to announce one greater than himself. The peasant undressed, climbed onto the revolving stand as if he had never posed before; he planted himself firmly on his feet, head up, torso straight, at the same time putting his weight on both legs, open like a compass. The movement was so right, so straightforward and so true that I cried: 'But it's a man walking!' I immediately resolved to model what I had seen [...] That's how I came to make *The Walking Man* and *Saint John the Baptist*, one after the other. All I did was copy the model that chance had sent me.

Saint John the Baptist was a popular subject in Rodin's time, but other artists tended to follow Biblical descriptions more closely: depicting the Saint as a child or roughly-clothed adult, accompanied by traditional attributes, and gesturing so as to bless or baptize Christ. In contrast, Rodin's *Saint John* was nude, carried no attributes, and made an ambiguous gesture. Despite this – or perhaps because of it – the piece was one of Rodin's most popular. It was eagerly sought for exhibition loans and there was an active market for both exhibitions and sales of casts in the original size (80 inches tall) and in two different reductions (19-20 inches and 31-32 inches).

Critics wrote in admiration of the musculature of the figure's back, and were not bothered that it did not match the emaciated front of the ascetic's body. In 1901 the critic Mauclair wrote:

Everyone today feels that the hand that modeled *Saint John the Baptist* and erected *The Gates of Hell* is the only one powerful enough, in Europe and in this century, to seize hold of sculpture in its entirety and pull it out of the rut into which it could easily have got bogged down.

Final Head of Eustache de St. Pierre

Modeled ca. 1886, cast 1995

Godard Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of 4, numbered II/IV)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

As related by the *Chroniques* by Jean Froissart (ca. 1335-1400), when the mayor of Calais reported to his people the English king's conditions for ending the siege of Calais:

They all began to cry and weep, so much and so bitterly that there is no heart in the world so hard that having heard and seen them would not have pitied them [...] A moment later there arose the richest burgher, Sir Eustache de Saint-Pierre, who said: "Lords, it would be a great misfortune to let such a people die here of famine when one can find another means. I have such hope of finding grace and pardon from Our Lord if I die in order to save these people, that I want to be the first: I will willingly strip to my shirt, bare my head, put the rope around my neck, at the mercy of the king of England."

Hand of God

Modeled 1898, cast date unknown

Alexis Rudier Foundry (edition of unknown size)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

The Hand of God was born of inspiration. Stanford University Professor and Cantor advisor Albert Elsen wrote:

“When God created the world,” Rodin once remarked, “it is of modeling He must have thought first of all.” [...] Here, Rodin likens the sculptor’s talent to God’s life-giving touch. The large hand holds a rugged, amorphous mass from which the smooth forms of a man and woman materialize. Rodin’s use of the Michelangesque *non finito*, so prevalent in his marble sculptures, [is utilized in this piece in (an equally) meaningful way].

Non finito (literally “unfinished” in Italian) refers to a sculpting technique, frequently associated with Michelangelo, in which the artist brings only part of the sculpted material to a high level of finish. In this piece, Rodin’s figures appear to be emerging from an unrefined block of material.

Monumental Torso of the Walking Man

Modeled ca. 1905, cast 1985

Godard Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of 8, numbered 1/8)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

This over-life-size torso, which was conceived about 1905 to look like a fragment of the finished sculpture *The Walking Man*, is an example of Rodin's extraordinarily expressive modeling in clay. The man's build suggests that the model may have been an athlete, which allowed the sculptor to conjure up the partial figures of ancient Roman athletes that he admired at the Musée du Louvre (and that he also personally collected). Rodin wanted the outside of the body to show what was going on inside – not only the muscles and sinews, but the emotions, strains, and stresses. The juxtaposition of smooth and textured surfaces in his sculptures not only captured light (and thus enlivened the pieces), but also captured the sensuality of the human form.

Large Right Clenched Hand

Modeled ca. 1885, cast 1965

Georges Rudier Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of unknown size)

Bronze

Lent by Iris Cantor

Writing about Rodin's many sculptures of hands, scholar Antoinette Romain explains:

Most of the hands, which can be counted in hundreds, were modeled during the 1880s and 1890s. Even though the earliest ones were mere fragments for *The Gates of Hell*, Rodin invested each one, however small, with such an extraordinary force that they became independent works of art. He was encouraged to explore this path by the ancient fragments he himself collected, and by a longstanding tradition that turned the hand into an individual work in its own right.

Large Right Clenched Hand

Modeled ca. 1885, cast 1965

Georges Rudier Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of unknown size) Bronze Lent by Iris Cantor

Bronze

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Large Clenched Left Hand

Modeled 1885, cast 1966

Georges Rudier Foundry (published by Musée Rodin, edition of 12, numbered 3/12)

Bronze

Lent by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Like most of Rodin's hands, *Large Clenched Left Hand* is stretched to its limits. The sculptor was fascinated by the expressive capabilities of hands and modeled hundreds of them, using them both as independent sculptures and as parts of more complex pieces. By carefully modeling their musculature, proportion, texture, and balance, he demonstrated that hands could convey profound emotion, from anger and despair to compassion and tenderness. When Rodin composed a new figure, he often experimented by attaching to it hands made for earlier pieces in order to explore the possibilities the new combinations might reveal. This working method also encouraged Rodin's interest in the fragment and inspired his exploration of the notion that figurative sculpture did not have to be a whole figure to communicate meaning.