

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

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PRESS PREVIEW:

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11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

The first large loan exhibition of Rodin's work ever held in an American museum will be on view in the Museum of Modern Art's first floor galleries and Sculpture Garden from May 1 through September 8. The "Father of Modern Sculpture," as Rodin has been called, will be represented by 100 sculptures in bronze, marble, terra cotta and plaster and 45 drawings, watercolors and prints from collections here and abroad.

Peter Selz, Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions, who selected the show, in evaluating Rodin's position in 20th century art says that "By replacing the rigidity of academic sculpture by forms in flux and by endowing his figures with passionate life, Rodin opened the channels for the form and content of modern sculpture."

At his death in 1917 at the age of 77, Rodin was the most famous artist of his time, internationally acclaimed and honored, sought after for commissions, widely exhibited, admired by a wide public and statesmen, and by artists, critics, writers and scholars. In this country his sculpture had been shown for many years and the Metropolitan Museum of Art had established a Rodin collection and made the artist an honorary fellow for life. His position as the greatest sculptor since Bernini seemed assured for all time.

But during the '30s and '40s, except for an occasional nod in the direction of the "originator of modern sculpture," Rodin was ignored by artists and critics and a few people, ~~for example, who~~ visited the Philadelphia Rodin Museum.

"It is a testimony to the soundness of Rodin's art that the present 'revival' (which dates from the late 1940s) is the product of no single country, writer, critic, magazine or museum, nor is it the result of fashion. The renewed interest in Rodin is international in scope," Albert Elsen writes in the monograph accompanying the exhibition.*

And Selz adds in the book's "Postscript: Rodin and America," "There was now a general predisposition in the direction of his freedom of form, his exuberance of content, and even his 'painterly' sculpture where so much depends on the effect of light. And new artists no longer felt that thought and feeling had a destructive effect on form."

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* AUGUSTE RODIN by Albert E. Elsen. Introductory "Homage" by Jacques Lipchitz. "Postscript: Rodin and America" by Peter Selz. 228 pages. 172 illustrations (4 color plates). \$8.50 cloth; \$3.75 paper. Published by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Distributed by Doubleday and Co., Inc. Available late June.

Life-size figures in the exhibition include Rodin's first major work, The Age of Bronze, which was termed a fraud when exhibited in 1876 as the artist was accused of working from the cast of a live model. More startling then and now, however, are two versions of the armless, headless torso, Walking Man, the antithesis of 19th century statuary, Elsen says, for it lacks the old values of identity, assertive ego, moral message rhetorically communicated. "No sculptor before Rodin had made such a basic simple event as walking the exclusive focus of his art and raised it to the level of high drama."

More than 20 pieces in the show, ranging from small terra cotta figures to such famous large bronzes as The Kiss and The Thinker, were created for or derived from Rodin's great unfinished portal, The Gates of Hell. Originally commissioned in 1880 for a projected museum of decorative arts, the building was never completed. Though eventually Rodin/returned his fee, for the rest of his life he used the plaster version of the Gates as a "Noah's Ark" to which he added and subtracted figures. It was not cast in bronze until the 1920s, years after his death, at the expense of the Philadelphia philanthropist Jules E. Mastbaum.

In addition to an 1880 terra cotta maquette for the Gates, the exhibition includes many full-scale figures derived from it: Adam, Eve, The Three Shades, The Prodigal Son, and The Crouching Woman, embodying the despairing desire of The Gates of Hell. "I Am Beautiful" and The Kiss bear an inscription from Baudelaire's poetry which Rodin greatly admired. The great Head of Sorrow, modeled from the actress Eleonora Duse, "epitomizes the meaning of the Gates," Elsen says.

The Burghers of Calais was the first major public commission Rodin completed. The cast in the exhibition has been lent by the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia. Perhaps one of the last great works of public sculpture inspired by a specific historic event, it depicts the heroic sacrifice of six leading citizens of Calais who, in the 14th century during the Hundred Years War, donned sackcloth and rope halters to give themselves to King Edward^{III} of England as hostages in return for the lifting of the siege of the town.

Rodin decided not to place the six life-size figures on a pedestal so as "to allow the public to penetrate to the heart of the subject." But Rodin's depiction of the anguish and suffering of six individual men was not the kind of monument the citizens of Calais had expected. "We did not visualize our glorious fellow citizens proceeding to the camp of the King of England in this way; their dejected attitudes offend our religion," they wrote.

"Rodin," Elsen says, "demanded an identification at once too great and too unfamiliar; it was a shock to see a centuries-old legend share the pulse and heartache of the living. The artist had made the public monument too private, too relevant, too vivid."

Rodin's most controversial monument, the Monument to Balzac, which has been in the Museum of Modern Art Sculpture Garden since 1955 is joined in the exhibition by seven of the 40 surviving studies for the great piece, in terra cotta, wax, plaster and bronze.

The Balzac was commissioned in 1891. "After the final plaster version of the sculpture was exhibited seven years later, it could safely be said that neither the public's image of Balzac, the Société des Gens de Lettres nor Rodin would ever be the same again....Probably no other modern sculpture continues to evoke such indecision and violent feeling as to its success or failure," Elsen says.

The work was attacked savagely, called a penguin, snowman, sack of coal, menhir, phantom and shapeless larva and was refused by the Société. When accepted by the Museum of Modern Art as a memorial to Curt Valentin from 130 friends, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of Museum Collections called it "the unique climax of (Rodin's) mature style. With the bold modeling, dramatic pose and overwhelming power of the Balzac, Rodin may be said to have initiated expressionist tradition in modern sculpture....one of the very great sculptures in the entire history of Western Art." Brancusi called the Balzac "the point of departure of modern sculpture."

The exhibition also includes some of the small sculptures which Rodin called his "snakes." These pieces--acrobats, dancers and bathers modeled in clay--were of a purely private nature and for the most part were cast in bronze only after Rodin's death.

The aspect of Rodin's art that after 1900 exerted the strongest influence on younger advanced sculptors such as Maillol, Matisse, Lehmbruck, Brancusi, Boccioni, Duchamp-Villon, Lipchitz and Archipenko was the partial figure. While the exhibition of these fragments shocked the public, they impressed young sculptors. Twelve of these are in the present exhibition, including several hands, a study for a foot and some torsos.

Rodin believed that in a portrait bust he could create the equivalent of his subject's whole biography, the period in which he lived, his ethnic origins, profession, psychology and personal character. During his lifetime he had an opportunity to model some of his most famous contemporaries: Victor Hugo and George Bernard Shaw, Baudelaire, Puvis de Chavannes, Gustav Mahler, the Japanese dancer Hanako,

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Rodin (continued)

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Clemenceau and Pope Benedict XV. The exhibition also includes the most famous of the early portrait busts, The Man with^a Broken Nose, which was rejected in a Salon of 1864, and the awesome Large Head of Iris, over twice-life size.

The 45 drawings and watercolors on view represent only a fraction of Rodin's output which is largely uncatalogued and unexhibited. A brilliant draftsman, Rodin rarely made a sculpture from a drawing, but frequently made sketches from his own sculptures. Some of the drawings in the exhibition were first brought to this country by Edward Steichen for exhibition at the "291" Gallery by Stieglitz in 1908.

The exhibition has been installed by René d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Museum of Modern Art. The French Government, through the Association Française d'Action Artistique is sponsoring the exhibition which will later be shown in San Francisco with the Museum of Modern Art. at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, a co-sponsor in this country/ In addition to the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, lenders include the Rodin Museum, Philadelphia; Musée Rodin, Paris; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

In Connection with the Exhibition

THURSDAY, MAY 9 8:30 P. M.

RODIN AND 20TH CENTURY SCULPTURE
Illustrated lecture by Albert E. Elsen
Associate Professor of Art History,
Indiana University

Non-members \$2; Members \$1.50; Students 75¢

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York 19, N. Y. CI 5-8900.

TIGHT BINDING

THE PRESIDENT AND TRUSTEES OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

REQUEST THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY AT THE MEMBERS' PREVIEW OF THE EXHIBITION

Rodin

ON TUESDAY EVENING, APRIL THIRTIETH, FROM FIVE TO ELEVEN

PLEASE PRESENT THIS INVITATION AT THE DOOR IT ADMITS TWO