

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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Release No. 105  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
October 7, 1963

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RODIN, by Albert E. Elsen. Introductory "Homage" by Jacques Lipchitz; "Post-script: Rodin and America," by Peter Selz. 228 pp. 163 plates (4 in color); cloth, \$8.50. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Distributed by Doubleday and Company, Inc.

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The first thorough analysis in English of the work of Auguste Rodin, written by Albert E. Elsen, has been published by The Museum of Modern Art. In Rodin, Professor Elsen sets into historical perspective the prodigious achievement of the late-nineteenth century French sculptor who revolutionized sculpture and deeply influenced modern artists. His authoritative text draws liberally upon quotations from Rodin himself and from critics who violently attacked or staunchly defended him. The work is illustrated with four color plates and over 160 black-and-white reproductions in gravure. These illustrations, including a number made from photographs taken especially for this publication, show sculptures and drawings from public and private collections in the United States and abroad, other works important for an understanding of Rodin's art, and photographs of the artist himself.

The many aspects of Rodin's art are here presented and analyzed: the early decorative works; the first independent figure studies; the epic Gates of Hell and its derivatives, which continued to engross the artist from 1880 until his death in 1917; the dramatic Burghers of Calais and the controversial Monument to Balzac, which invested monumental sculpture with new expressive power; the portraits, the works in marble; the drawings, and finally, the little-known improvisations, the torsos and other fragmented figures, once either disregarded or termed "obscene" and "sadistic," but now regarded with special esteem.

Professor Elsen contrasts Rodin the conservative, steadfastly adhering to naturalism, with Rodin the insurgent, "father of modern sculpture," who toppled the conventions of academic art and opened new possibilities for sculptors of our own century. He states in the introduction:

"By the excellence of his own art, Rodin was able to persuade a previously apathetic society what sculpture could and should be. When he found it necessary to rethink sculpture down to 'the hollow and the mound,' he forced artists, critics and the public to take stock of their own definitions and beliefs about art. Since Rodin, this inventory and self-searching has continued and now seems limitless. When we search for the origins of modern sculpture, it is to Rodin's art that we must inevitably go. Every sculptor who came to maturity before 1914 was affected by him and had to take a stand for or against his sculpture. His was an art that could not be ignored."

In following the development of Rodin's career, the reader confronts afresh such significant problems as the relation between modern art and that of earlier periods; the interaction between artistic form and expressive content; and the

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perennial struggle which the innovating artist must undergo before winning acceptance.

In his introductory "Homage," the renowned sculptor Jacques Lipchitz pays tribute not only to Rodin but to Curt Valentin, who, by presenting a series of distinguished exhibitions in his New York gallery during the late 1940's and early 1950's, did much to further the re-evaluation of Rodin in the United States. This theme is further elaborated in the chapter contributed by Peter Selz, Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art. His "Postscript: Rodin and America" surveys the changes of taste from 1876 to the present day which have accounted for Rodin's works being first disregarded in this country, then criticized as "degraded examples of the decadence of French art," then eagerly sought after by museums and private collectors, then declining in favor and finally being recognized again, both for their pioneering qualities and their intrinsic merit as great sculpture. To facilitate its usefulness the book has been provided with a detailed biographical outline, a selected bibliography and an index.

Professor Elsen began his studies on Rodin more than a dozen years ago and has already published a monograph on Rodin's Gates of Hell (University of Minnesota Press, 1960). The present work was undertaken at the invitation of The Museum of Modern Art for publication concurrently with the major exhibition of Rodin's work presented jointly by the Museum and the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. Important additional research for the book was undertaken with the aid of a grant by the Clark Foundation to the Indiana University Foundation, enabling Professor Elsen to study again many of the best of Rodin's sculpture in Paris. Long associated with Indiana University as Professor of Art History, Professor Elsen in September, 1963 joined the faculty of the Art Department of Stanford University. He is also the author of Purposes of Art (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962) as well as of numerous articles.

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