

EXPLORING RODIN

DISCOVER: ENGAGING ACTIVITIES FOR CLASSROOM OR HOME



WHO WAS AUGUSTE RODIN?

Regarded as the Father of Modern Sculpture, Auguste Rodin was born November 12, 1840 to a working-class family in Paris. Although he was an unenthusiastic student, Rodin showed great artistic talent at an early age. His parents sent him to art school, the École Impériale Spéciale de Dessin et de Mathématique (Petite École). Here the young student learned to sculpt and draw. While he was determined to enter the noted French art school, the École des Beaux-Arts, he applied and was rejected three times.

Rodin began working for commercial decorators and sculptors making decorative objects. In 1862, after the death of his sister, Maria, he gave up sculpture and briefly entered the religious order, The Fathers of the Holy Sacrament. His compulsion to sculpt resumed and Rodin entered the established studio of sculptor Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse.

In 1870, Rodin traveled to Belgium with Carrier-Belleuse to complete a commission to decorate the Brussels Stock Exchange. He remained in Belgium for six years, during which time he traveled to Italy to study the work of Michelangelo. The emotion he found in the twisting forms of the Italian master inspired him to depart from the academic style of sculpture. Like Michelangelo, he turned his attention to investigating the human form as a vehicle to express human emotion by studying Greek sculpture intensely. He even purposely removed parts of his own sculpture to resemble ancient Greek sculpture which was typically found in fragments. He believed this heightened the viewers' emotive experience.

Rodin's rejection of the tenets of French academic sculpture was greeted with public controversy. He was both severely criticized and openly championed for his innovations. In 1900, at the age of sixty, Rodin had his first major retrospective exhibition, the Exposition Rodin, which was held just outside the famed Universal Exposition in Paris.

Even after his death on November 17, 1917, Rodin continues to influence artists and engage viewers.

ENTRY INTO RODIN: LOOKING CLOSELY

GOAL:

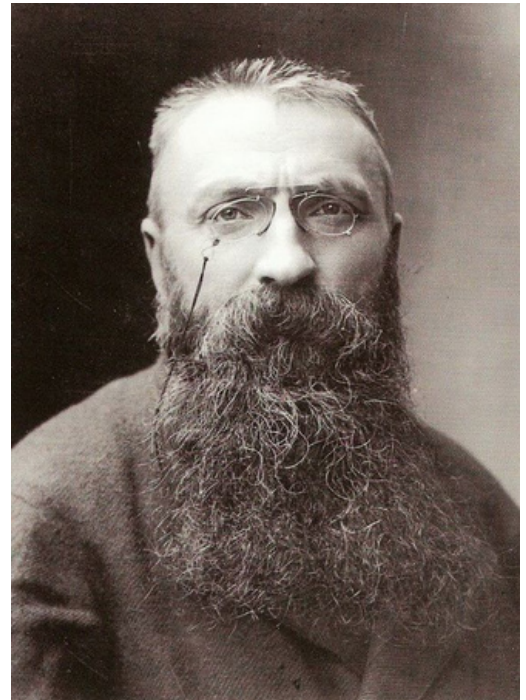
Looking closely at Rodin sculpture using the images attached, find meaning in the sculpture and understand the role Rodin's innovations played in creating a "modern," emotive experience.

OBJECTIVES:

- Observe the pose Rodin placed the body of the subject including head, arms, legs, back, torso, hands, and feet
- Describe the expression on the face of the subject
- Describe the connections between the pose and expression
- Observe the surface of the sculpture and describe what you see
- Describe the role surface has in the narrative

NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS:

DISCOVER activities align with National Visual Arts Standards. To view a list of exact standards met in this DISCOVER activity, visit www.maryhillmuseum.org/activities



VOCABULARY

Balance
Dimension
Drama
Emotion
Form
Fragment
Gesture
Line
Movement
Narrative
Symmetry
Texture

Use the Definitions and Visual Arts Vocabulary List on the DISCOVER page at maryhillmuseum.org/activities

LOOKING TO UNDERSTAND

Because Rodin's early training took place in commercial studios rather than the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, he developed an approach to sculpture that was free from establishment rules. Additionally, his years in the workshop of Albert Ernst Carriere-Beleuse allowed him to develop his master clay modeling skills.

Rodin was a prodigious draftsman. He began his process by drawing large numbers of sketches from multiple angles. From his sketches, he would use clay to make a model in 3-dimensions. These would become the basis for plaster casts, allowing him to make multiple sculptures, and even vary them slightly. The plaster casts were prized possessions of Rodin, often given to friends as gifts.

The surface was important to Rodin. As seen in *Eve*, the rough texture is evidence of the artist's process. Occasionally, Rodin would leave traces of seams from the casting of bronzes as a reference to the process. Treatment of surfaces also added to the emotive experience for the viewer. Smooth, perfect, often emotionless busts were traded for rough textures, and sometimes roughed out features.

ACTIVITY

Observing Rodin's use of pose, expression, and surface treatment, make a rough sketch of one of the sculptures in the images provided.

Notice the pose

- Describe what you see
- What is the subject experiencing through that pose?

Notice the placement or removal of hands, feet, legs, arms, or head

- How does this affect the viewer?

Notice details of your own sketch

- Cut your sketch along the outside line and carefully cut feet, hands, arms, legs, and/or head
- Like a puzzle, add back pieces experimenting with the outcome
 - How does removing a piece change the outcome of your sketch?

SCULPTURE ISN'T QUICK...But sometimes it is!

While Rodin's sculptures may sometimes appear to have been quickly modelled, they were the result of many hours of work. Once he studied his drawings, he would create several versions in clay that he would work on until he achieved his goal. These were then made into plaster casts with which he would engage in further exploration until he had the final casts made.

GOAL:

Choose one or more sculptures and re-create it using aluminum foil. Explore the use of pose, line, and texture to capture the sense of drama and emotion.

OBJECTIVES:

Observe various sculptures by Auguste Rodin

- Discuss ways the pose creates a sense of drama
- Describe ways line is used to create a sense of movement

Observe the expression of the subject

- Discuss the details
- Describe how it contributes to the narrative

Observe the treatment of the surface of the sculpture

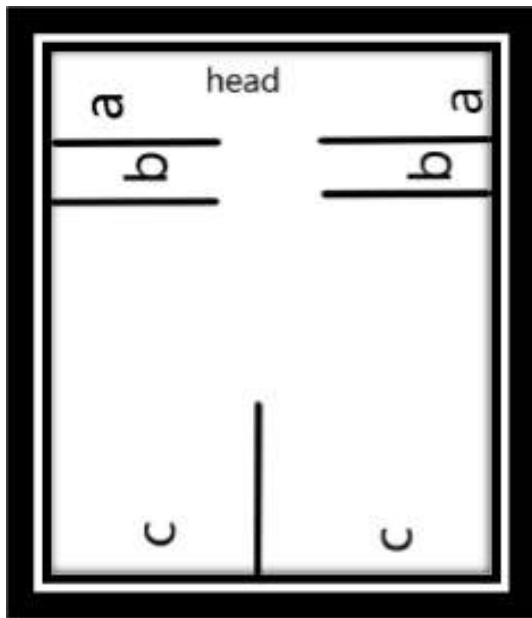
- Compare the use of rough and smooth surface
- Discuss the impact the surface has on the narrative

Create a sculpture by manipulating and shaping aluminum foil and incorporating your observations

ACTIVITY

Create a three-dimensional aluminum foil sculpture

- Working with foil, students will use their observations to create an abstract action figure
- By bending the foil, students will explore gesture, movement, balance, and line
- Using pose, students will create a sense of drama, emotion, and narrative



SUPPLIES

Heavy-duty foil (15 x 18 inches)
 Additional sheet of foil, if needed
 Scissor
 Pencil
 Stapler
 3 x 5 card or heavy stock

INSTRUCTIONS

- Make five cuts into the sides of the rectangle of heavy foil as diagrammed above.
- Leave the foil flat on the table.
- Crumple the sides **A** toward the center to form the **head**.
- Crumple and squeeze each section **B** to form **arms**.
- Crumple and squeeze **C** along the side to form the **body** and right **leg**. Repeat on the left side to form the body and left **leg**.
- Continue squeezing and manipulating the foil until you have formed a rather firm and solid figure.
- Add foil to any thin areas or to repair tears.
- Bend the knees, elbows, waist, and neck to show pose and movement.
- Add texture or smooth the foil.
- Staple sculpture onto a large-sized note card.
- Sign and label the work.

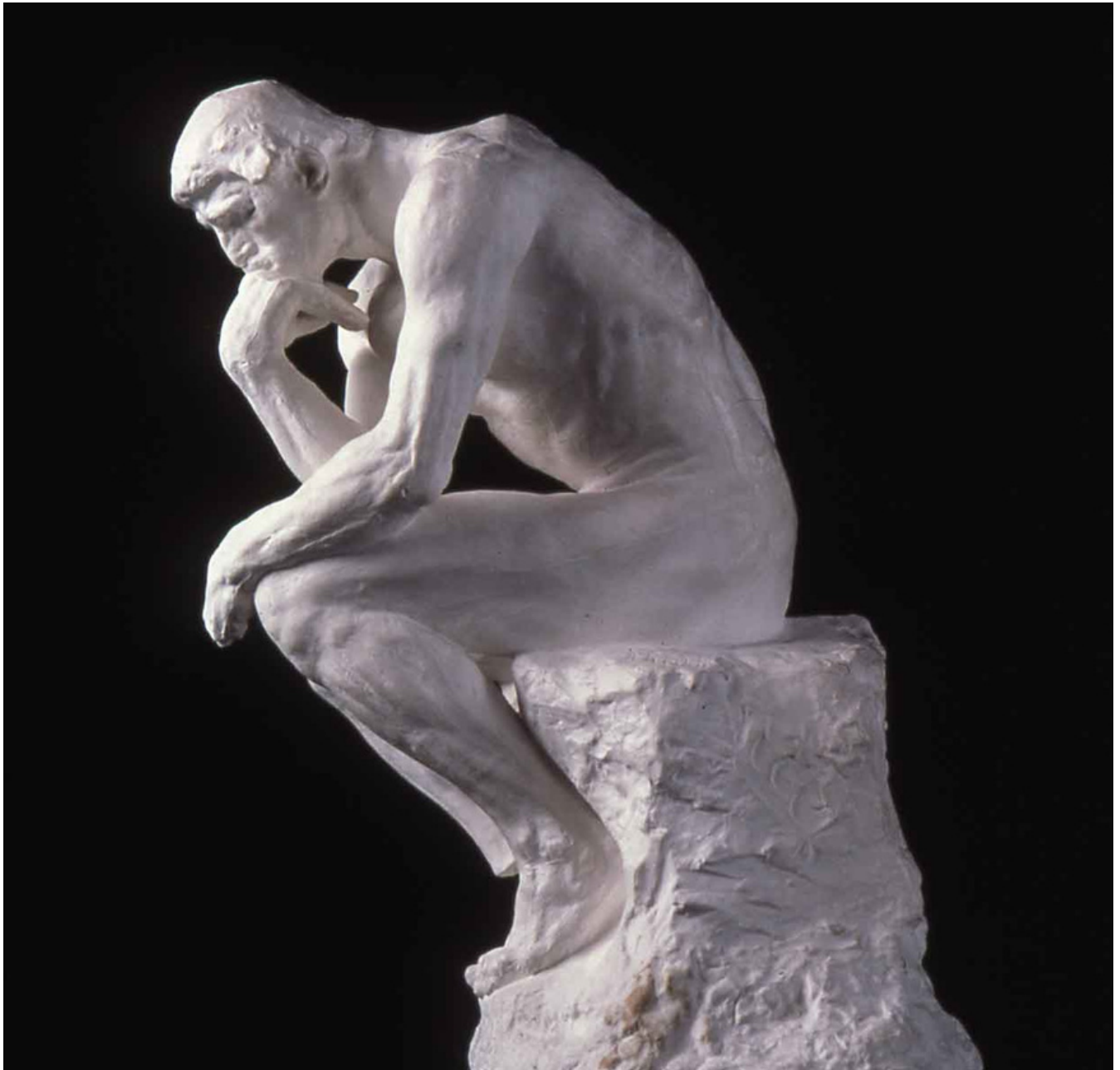
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

www.maryhillmuseum.org

www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/gates-hell

www.michelangelo.net/dying-slave/

www.britannica.com/art/sculpture/pointing



1



2



3

1

Auguste Rodin (French, 1840–1928)

The Thinker, 1880

Plaster, 15" x 7½" x 12"

Gift of Samuel Hill

Collection of Maryhill Museum of Art

The Thinker was first modeled as a small figure to be placed on the *Gates of Hell*, a large-scale sculpture that contained over 180 individual figures. This image of a man lost in thought, but whose powerful body suggests a great capacity for action, quickly became one of the most celebrated sculptures ever known. Numerous casts exist worldwide. In the Maryhill plaster, the right foot was purposely removed to enhance the sense of drama and to make connections to fragmented ancient Greek sculpture. *The Thinker* was enlarged in 1904 and its colossal version proved to be extremely popular. It can be found in museums, gardens, and collections worldwide.

2

Auguste Rodin (French, 1840–1917)

Age of Bronze, 1875–76

Bronze, 25 ¾" x 9" x 7"

Gift of Samuel Hill

Collection of Maryhill Museum of Art

Rodin used a Belgian soldier as a model. It was originally exhibited as a life-sized sculpture and critics believed it was cast directly from a living model, which was untrue. The allegation, however, made people curious and sent them to view the sculpture in person. It was proven that this was an example of the artist's skill and, in 1880, helped earn the commission for the *Gates of Hell*, a large-scale sculpture for which the sculptures *Eve* and *The Thinker* were made.

The POSE used was inspired by Michelangelo's sculpture, *Dying Slave*, in the Louvre Museum. The figure once had a spear in the left hand, but that was discarded allowing the hand to be free of any attribute.

3

Auguste Rodin (French, 1840–1917)

Eve, 1881

Plaster, 69" x 20" x 18"

Gift of Loïe Fuller

Collection of Maryhill Museum of Art

The sculpture of *Eve* was originally planned for his commission for the *Gates of Hell*, a large-scale sculpture that was not cast until after the artist's death in 1917. Adam was supposed to be on the opposite side of the door. When Rodin discovered the model was pregnant and could no longer pose for him, he stopped working on it.

He did not exhibit the unfinished sculpture, which some consider a fragment, until 1899. He left the skin surface rough so it would retain its unfinished state. This sculpture was met with praise for its emotive narrative and was produced in marble, bronze, and terracotta. The *Eve* in Maryhill's collection is the original working plaster. The small series of 'x's on the surface were used for a system called "pointing" which allows sculpture to be reproduced exactly in smaller or larger sizes, and in other materials, such as marble.



Age of Aluminum

Visit our website for more educational resources, including lesson plans, videos and online exhibitions. Contact our Education Department at

education@maryhillmuseum.org

for information on school field trips and tailored art experiences!



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