

VAN | SMITH
EVERY | GALLERIES
AT DAVIDSON COLLEGE

Auguste Rodin: Truth Form Life
Selections from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Collections

Gallery Guideⁱ



Front room, clockwise beginning on left:

Despairing Adolescent

Modeled 1882; Musée Rodin cast 3 in 1975

Bronze; Godard Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

Rodin's mastery of expressive contours is apparent in *Despairing Adolescent*. The figure's arms stretch upward in a reverse S curve—from the bent left arm, down the body, and the backward lean of the head. Rodin's exploration of expression through form emphasizes an aura of desperation and yearning in the subject. The young man seems to be reaching up, muscles contorted, in a physical outcry for redemption.

Monumental Head of Jean d'Aire

modeled about 1908-09, enlarged 1909-10; Musée Rodin cast 5, perhaps 1978

Bronze; Georges Rudier Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

The history of the 1347 siege of Calais by King Edward III of England was well known in Rodin's time. French court historian Jean Froissart's (1335-1400) first-hand history of the Hundred Years War between England and France, *Chroniques*, immortalized the story of the burghers of Calais: King Edward III offered to end the siege if six of the town's "burghers" (a Medieval class of city officials and bourgeoisie) surrendered their lives and the keys to the city. Froissart described the moment when the mayor of Calais publicly announced King Edward III's conditions:

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."

In the process of completing his *Monument to The Burghers of Calais* Rodin made many studies of the models. He sculpted both nude and clothed figures, isolating body parts such as hands and heads, sometimes making enlarged or reduced copies. Two such works, *Final Head of Eustache de St. Pierre* and *Jean d'Aire, Second Maquette* are included this exhibition.

Davidson College owns a full-body nude study of *Jean d'Aire*, on view nearby in the atrium of the Katherine and Tom Belk Visual Art Center. The sculpture was a gift to the College by the Pepper family on the occasion of the dedication of the Visual Art Center in 1993. Visible here in the monumental head, as well as in the full-figure study in the atrium, Jean d'Aire appears gaunt and mournful, yet his jaw and forward gaze depict his determination and commitment to his actions – and his impending death—for the sake of Calais.

Monumental Torso of the Walking Man

modeled about 1905; Musée Rodin cast 1/8 in 1985

Bronze; Godard Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

This torso is a testament of Rodin's interest in ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, which is often excavated as fragments, with mineral accretions sometimes obscuring the sculpted form. *Monumental Torso* as well as *Narcisse*, also on view in this exhibition, confirm the artist's insistence that partial figures or fragments can convey emotional meaning and aesthetic pleasure. The rough surface texture on these torsos contrasts the smooth surface preferred in classically-inspired statues of Rodin's time.

Unlike the final sculpture of *The Walking Man* (not on view in this exhibition), in which the figure's legs are in an open stride, *Monumental Torso of the Walking Man* implies walking movement even though the legs are not fully formed.

Largest room, clockwise beginning from the left doorway:

Bust of Jean Baptiste Rodin

Modeled 1860; Musée Rodin cast 2 in 1980

Bronze; Godard Foundry

On loan from the 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 later as a police inspector. Rodin was the second child of Jean Baptiste and Marie Cheffer.

Jean Baptiste Rodin was noted to be a quiet, ordinary man. For his time and background, however, he was remarkable in one respect – his support of his son's aspirations to be an artist. He recognized his young son's talent, even when others

did not. In an undated letter in the archives of the Musée Rodin, Jean imparted fatherly advice:

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.

In 1860 Auguste made two portraits of his father, one painting, the other, this bust. The painting shows him in profile and as he appeared: with a bushy beard and moustache, balding, with black hair on the back of his head. In comparison, the sculpture conveys little of the father's real appearance except perhaps for his long nose and receding chin. Instead it presents Rodin's response to his father's support. Here, Jean Baptiste has the intelligence and resolve of a Roman emperor.

This bust is one of Auguste Rodin's earliest sculptures; he made it when he was just twenty years old. Based on ancient Roman sculpture Rodin would likely have seen at the Louvre, this bust speaks to his interest, at this stage of his career, in following tradition. He was building the "solid, durable foundation" of which his father wrote.

Jean d'Aire, Second Maquette

modeled 1885-86; Musée Rodin cast 1/12 in 1970

Bronze; Susse Foundry

On loan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

This version of Jean d'Aire (one of the burghers featured in the *Monument to the Burghers of Calais*) is a result of Rodin's working method in which figures were first modeled nude. Only when Rodin was sure of the expressiveness of the nude would he create a clothed version. The emaciated body of Jean d'Aire conveys the deprivation of his city of Calais, besieged and starved under England's King Edward III during the Hundred Year War. Despite the emaciation, Jean d'Aire is stolid and determined, expressing courage and resolve in the face of death. Many of these traits can also be seen on the larger-scale version in the college's permanent art collection, on view in the atrium of the Katherine and Tom Belk Visual Art Center.

In this version, Jean d'Aire holds a cushion on which lie the keys to the city, visualizing Edward III's demand that the burghers surrender the city to the King. In *The Burghers of Calais*, Rodin removed the pillow; Jean d'Aire grips the oversized key in his hands.

Heroic Bust of Victor Hugo

Modeled 1890-97 or 1901-02; Musée Rodin cast 7 in 1981

Bronze; Coubertin Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

Victor Hugo was a national hero in nineteenth-century France. Born in 1802, by the time he was thirty years old he was the most famous French writer of his time, renowned for his poetry, plays, and novels. He transformed these literary forms into romantic chronicles of the emotional, political, and social issues of the day, using vernacular language of the people rather than the formal language of past writers. His first best seller, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), was translated into English as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. It created such tourist interest in what was then Paris' decrepit Cathedral of Notre Dame that the French were shamed into restoring it. The tower added in the nineteenth-century restoration was the one destroyed by the recent fire in April 2019.

Thirty years after releasing *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Hugo penned another best seller; his 1861 novel, *Les Misérables*, chronicled the social injustices that led to the Revolutions of 1848. In 1889, four years after Hugo's death, Rodin won a public commission to create a monument to the great writer for Paris' Pantheon. This large bust shows a mature Rodin focusing on the emotions and creativity of the man he described as "[s]omething of a tiger, or an old lion. He had an immense animal nature. His eyes were especially beautiful..." Rodin's portrait of Hugo was extremely popular. Many casts were made in bronze and plaster that were both sold and strategically given to collectors, journalists, and institutions. Replicas of the bust were also made in marble.

Bust of Young Balzac

modeled 1893; Musée Rodin cast 1/8 in 1983

Bronze; Godard Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

When Rodin received a major commission, he typically made numerous studies to refine the form of the final sculpture. Thus, many studies exist for large works such as *Monument to Victor Hugo*, and *The Burghers of Calais*, among others. These studies typically were examinations of parts of the body, such as the hands, head, or even the entire figure, unclothed or clothed. If they resulted in works that were popular with critics and the public, the studies were then cast in bronze and offered for sale in various sizes. To duplicate sculptures, Rodin relied on skilled studio assistants. The newly invented Collas machineⁱⁱ enabled Rodin and his studio to enlarge or reduce his sculptures.

This bust of Balzac was modeled in preparation for Rodin's *Monument to Honoré de Balzac*. Balzac died forty years before Rodin began his *Monument*, leaving behind only a few portrait photographs, drawings, paintings, and written descriptions of his resemblance. Using these documents, Rodin traveled to Balzac's hometown in search of a man who resembled Balzac to pose for the bust.

Balzac in Dominican Robe

modeled 1893; Musée Rodin cast 9 in 1981

Bronze; Georges Rudier Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) was a critically acclaimed French novelist and playwright. He was best known for his stories and novels that told of French life after the fall of Napoleon. His complicated and often ambiguous characters were new to European literature. His realism has been said to have influenced writers like Zola, Dickens, Proust, Dostoyevsky, and Poe, as well as more contemporary writers including Faulkner, Kerouac, and Calvino.

In 1891, the Committee of the Société des Gens de Lettres de France (Society of Men of Letters of France) commissioned Rodin to create a monument to Balzac. Pursuant to the creation of the monument—which was to be sited conspicuously in the middle of the Place du Palais Royal—Rodin made more than 50 studies for the piece over a seven-year period. Rodin commented on the sculpture, “Never has a statue caused me more worry, put my patience more to the test.” *Balzac in a Dominican Robe* presents some of the realities of the writer's life including the monk's robe (his favored apparel when writing) as well as a pile of books and papers at his feet.

Final Head of Eustache de St. Pierre

modeled about 1886; Musée Rodin cast II/IV in 1995

Bronze; Godard Foundry

On loan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Rodin may have used his friend and painter Jean-Charles Cazin, a descendant of Eustache de St. Pierre, as the model for this work. Learn more about St. Pierre in the text above for *Monumental Head of Jean d'Aire*.

Saint John the Baptist Preaching

modeled about 1880; Musée Rodin cast in 1925, cast number unknown

Bronze; Alexis Rudier Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

In 1875 Rodin began work on a life-size male nude, ultimately entitled *The Age of Bronze*, intending to submit it to the Salon. Critics were suspicious of the exquisite modeling and accused him of making it by casting a live body. Partly to exonerate himself from the allegations surrounding *The Age of Bronze*, Rodin made his next figures larger or smaller than life-size. Even so, *Saint John the Baptist Preaching* was controversial because it did not include the Saint's more common attributes such as his hair-shirt, leather belt, cross and scroll. Instead, Rodin presented an unidealized, awkward, nude. Contemporaries found Rodin's *Saint John* improper, ugly, and shocking.

Rodin was clearly interested in representing movement with this work. The legs were added to the torso after the torso was modeled. Find the nearby *Monumental Torso of the Walking Man* or *Study for Torso of the Walking Man* to see other efforts to depict movement, which according to Rodin was solely based on the model's actions:

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.

Study for Torso of the Walking Man

modeled 1878-79; Musée Rodin cast 10 in 1979

Bronze; Coubertin Foundry

On loan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Both *Study for the Torso of the Walking Man* and *Monumental Torso of the Walking Man* began as studies of a model's torso in preparation for *Saint John the Baptist Preaching*. By isolating the torso from arms and legs, Rodin studied how to convey movement in every part of the body. The *Torsos* were also used as studies for his much admired and influential *Walking Man*.

In the case, from left to right:

Large Hand of a Pianist

modeled 1885; Musée Rodin cast 9 in 1969

Bronze; Georges Rudier Foundry

On loan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Rodin was fascinated by the expressive capabilities of hands. He 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 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 need not depend on a whole figure to communicate meaning.

One of the characteristics of modern art is that it makes visible things that are not tangible, like energy, sound and rhythm—all of which are implied by Rodin in his *Large Hand of a Pianist*. It is not known whose hand this is; what is apparent is that the sculptor elongated the fingers to make visible the music being played so effortlessly.

Large Clenched Left Hand

modeled about 1885; Musée Rodin cast 3 in 1966

Bronze; Georges Rudier Foundry

On loan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Large Clenched Left Hand and the adjacent *Large Clenched Right Hand* are examples of Rodin's interest in hands afflicted with paralyzing diseases such as arthritis, which he modeled to express pain or anger. Rodin intensified the emotion of the hand by enlarging it and placing it upright in a threatening pose, like an angry cobra ready to strike.

Large Right Clenched Hand

modeled about 1885; Musée Rodin cast in 1965, cast number unknown

Bronze; Georges Rudier Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

Hand of God

modeled 1898; cast number and date unknown

Bronze; Alexis Rudier Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

Hand of God was born of inspiration. As Professor Albert Elsen wrote:

'When God created the world' Rodin once remarked, 'it is of modeling He must have thought first of all.' This idea, first documented in an article in the May 1898 issue of the Gazette des beaux-arts, was given tangible form in Hand of God, also known as Creation. 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, achieves its most meaningful embodiment here. The roughly hewn stone symbolizes the sculptor's medium as well as primal matter.

Non finito is a sculpting technique literally meaning that the work is unfinished. *Non finito* sculptures appear unfinished because the artist sculpts only part of the block, leaving the object or figure to appear as if emerging from an unrefined block of material.

Metamorphoses of Ovid

Modeled about 1885-89; cast 10, perhaps 1897

Bronze; Perzinka Foundry

On loan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Metamorphosis of Ovid was inspired by the Roman poet Ovid's epic story, *Metamorphoses*. To create this work, Rodin drew inspiration specifically from Glaucus, a sea-god turned mortal, and his love for Scylla, a nymph. Interested in the idea of transformation, Rodin depicted Glaucus as female. As noted in a 1914 exhibition catalogue, "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."

Take a closer look at the entwined figures. Does the "conquest" truly portray "passive abandonment," or does the nymph, armed raised and crossed, seem to be fighting or blocking the advances of Glaucus?

Both the bronze and marble versions of *The Metamorphosis of Ovid* were popular. The works were exhibited under a variety of titles, including *The Satyresses*, until 1899 when the current title was bestowed. *Satyresses*, an invention of post-Roman

artists, are female versions of Greek satyrs. Similarly, they feature a human head and torso, often with bare breasts and the body of a goat from waist down.

Mask of the Man with the Broken Nose

modeled 1863-64; Musée Rodin cast 12 in 1979

Bronze; Coubertin Foundry

On loan from Iris Cantor

Rodin considered *The Man with the Broken Nose* to be his first major work. He began the portrait in 1863, intending to submit it to the Paris Salon as his debut. He hired Bibi, a neighborhood handyman, to model for him. He was drawn to Bibi's rough features and wanted to depict him as he was—broken nose and all. He combined these 'unbeautiful' features with some of the conventions of Greek sculpture: blank eyes and Classically modeled hair. Despite the combination, in the end the piece's expressive naturalism outshines the idealism of Classical sculpture.

The Man with the Broken Nose became *The Mask of the Man with the Broken Nose* when the cold temperature in Rodin's poor studio caused the back of the wet clay head he was modeling to freeze and break off. Rodin, favoring accident and chance, wanted to exhibit the portrait as it was, and for over a year he continued to work on it before finally submitting it to the Salon. The Salon jury rejected the work, twice (1864 and 1865). Nevertheless, Rodin drew inspiration from *The Mask of the Man with the Broken Nose*. He created several versions of this work, including the full head, another for *The Gates of Hell*, and in other subsequent works.

William Tucker's bronze sculpture, *Homage to Rodin*, part of the Permanent Art Collection at Davidson College (on view in Richardson Plaza), was inspired by Rodin's *Head of the Man with a Broken Nose*.

Back room, clockwise from left:

Ixelles Idyll

modeled in plaster about 1876, first cast in bronze in 1885; Musée Rodin cast 4 in 1981

Bronze; Coubertin Foundry

On loan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Early in Rodin's career, from 1871 until 1877, the artist lived in Brussels. He initially went there to work on architectural sculpture for buildings such as the Bourse (stock exchange), the music conservatory, and the Palais-Royal at the Palais des Académies. He and another sculptor established a partnership and studio in the

village of Ixelles, a pleasant suburb of Brussels. The sculptures they made were for revival-style buildings and were largely Rococo in inspiration and allegorical in meaning.

Idyll of Ixelles, whose name commemorates where it was made, is composed of two chubby infants. The standing figure, a female, has wings, while the second figure is male. The contrast between the smooth surfaces of the infants' bodies and the minute details of their hair and playthings attest to Rodin's interest in expressive surfaces. The female is directly related to another figure, *Science*, made for Brussels' Palais des Académies in 1874. In addition to the bronze version, Rodin also made a marble version of *Idyll of Ixelles*.

Narcisse

modeled about 1882, enlarged and retitled 1890; Musée Rodin cast 8/8 in 1985
Bronze; Godard Foundry

On loan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

This piece is a good example of the issues that complicate the study of Rodin sculpture. It was not included in *The Gates of Hell* when the models for the doors were first shown, but it was included in a later model. Rodin also showed it as an independent figure, in versions both enlarged and reduced in size (sometimes it was 10 inches, sometimes 17). Some variations of *Narcisse* combine it with other figures, and versions may or may not have arms. Rodin even used a reduced version of the figure as the handles on a ceramic vase.

Rodin exhibited the 32-inch enlargement of this work as *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 leave and soon died.

Nude Study of Balzac (Type C)

modeled about 1892; Musée Rodin cast 12 in 1976
Bronze; Georges Rudier Foundry

On loan Iris Cantor

Balzac was renowned for his corpulence, his appetite, and his short stature. Rodin scholar Albert Elsen points out that in fulfilling his commission of Balzac, 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 preparatory study, Rodin gives Balzac more physical strength and vigor than he may have had, perhaps suggesting the writer's intellect could inform his physique.

Monumental Head of the Shade

modeled about 1880; Musée Rodin cast II/IV in 1995

bronze; Godard Foundry

On loan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

There are many variations of the numerous figures that Rodin detached from *The Gates of Hell* when the commission for the mammoth piece was canceled. Removed from atop the doors were three muscular figures, turning to each other, pointing and looking downward into the morass of Hell, which they are about to enter and of which they warn: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here." These are *The Three Shades*. As was typical of how Rodin worked, eventually the individual shades became fodder for his imagination, fueling his creative use and reuse of parts.

Their poses, their muscles, and their expressions all speak to Rodin's interest in Michelangelo. After an 1875 visit to Michelangelo's work in Italy, Rodin began a piece of sculpture that was greatly influenced by Michelangelo's painting of the *Creation of Adam* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Rodin altered the pose of Michelangelo's reclining figure, making his own *Adam* upright with his hand gesturing downward instead of outward. Eventually, Rodin's *Shade* emerged as a variation of his *Adam*.

Head of Shade with Two Hands

modeled about 1910; cast 2 in an edition of unknown size, date unknown

Bronze; Alexis Rudier Foundry

On loan Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

Similar to *Monumental Head of the Shade*, *Head of the Shade with Two Hands* is derived from *The Three Shades* at the very top of *The Gates of Hell*. The three identical figures in *The Three Shades* gesture downward, with heads lowered and arms extended, appearing despondent and weary. Perhaps to symbolize their powerlessness, Rodin also deprived the shades of their right hands and represented their left hands as simply modeled fists. Curiously, in *Head of Shade with Two Hands*, there are two disembodied left hands caressing the shade's face.

End notes:

ⁱ This gallery guide is adapted from text by the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation, with permission.

ⁱⁱ “Invented in 1836 by French engineer Achille Collas, this machine uses a pantograph system to make proportionately larger or smaller duplications of a sculpture. The concept can be traced to ancient Greek and Roman artists, who wanted to reproduce the perfect proportions of the human figure in their sculpture. Collas machines often look like lathes. On one turntable sits the first piece, the one to be re-created in a new size. On a second turntable, connected to the first, sits a clay or plaster “blank” that has been roughly shaped to resemble the model but on a larger or smaller scale. The machine keeps the model and the blank in the same orientation while the technician uses a tracing needle linked to a sharp cutting instrument (or stylus) to transfer a succession of profiles from the model onto the blank. Gradually the blank is worked so that it becomes a larger or smaller duplicate of the model.” Source: Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation. “Reductions and Enlargements.” <https://cantorfoundation.org/resources/reductions-and-enlargements/>

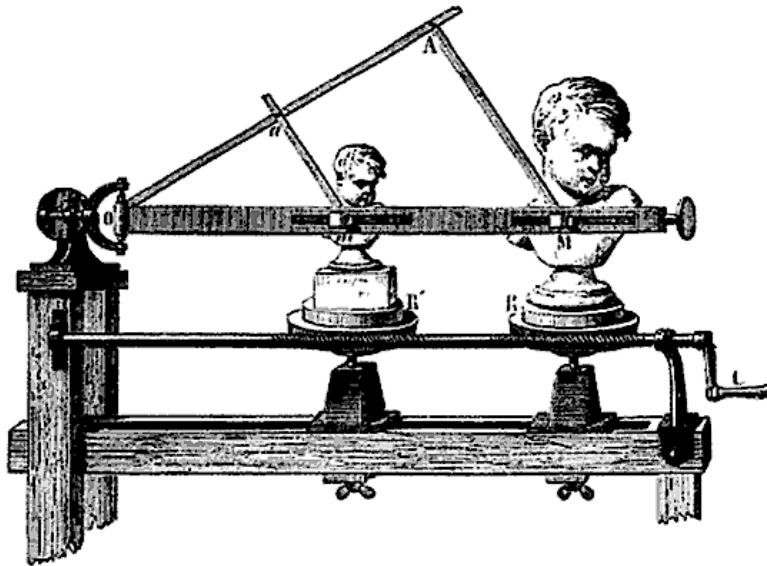


Image source: Reinis, J. G. *The Founders and Editors of the Barye Bronzes*. Polymath Press, New York, 2007, p. 43.