

BY LISA KOSAN, CONNECTIONS EDITOR

THE THINKER IS ONE OF THE MOST CELEBRATED SCULPTURES, AS IT SHOULD BE. But Auguste Rodin's biggest contribution to the world of art is not this chiseled man in a meditative state, but his vigorous embrace of experimentation in the studio. Rodin took risks. He assembled and re-assembled. He studied the human body to understand how emotions revealed themselves through gesture. He was radical for his time.

"Rodin used his mastery and awareness of the grand traditions to create something genuinely new," says Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, The James B. and Mary Lou Hawkes Deputy Director and coordinating curator of *Rodin: Transforming Sculpture*. "His relentless experimentation with form, scale and composition reveal a searching, probing, problem-solving mind."

The exhibition features more than 160 finished and in-progress works in bronze, marble, plaster and stoneware, many from the Musée Rodin, Paris, that have seldom, if ever, been seen in the United States. They provide rich context and insight into the artist's practice and creative process. Presented in grand spaces envisioned as a studio of the mind, there are also details of body parts — hands, feet, legs — that reorient our thinking toward our own bodies and what they are capable of.

"Rodin (1840–1917) was going after how to express humanity in three-dimensional hard form," Hartigan says. "You do that by creating a strong sense of gesture and texture so that you look carefully at the

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Radical **RODIN**

Beyond Thinking and Kissing

Auguste Rodin, *Assemblage: Female Torso with Head with a Bun and Head of Pierre de Wissant* reduction (detail), about 1900–1910. Plaster. Musée Rodin, Paris, S.404. © Musée Rodin, Paris. Photo by Christian Baraja.

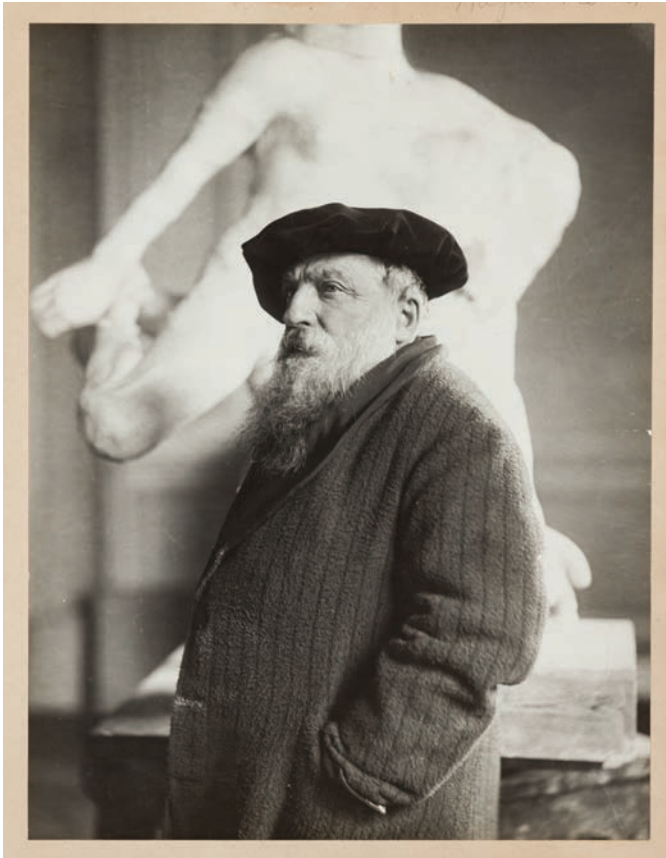


human figure. It's sculpture as an expression of emotion, of human psychology and the human condition."

In the galleries, live performers will create "movement encounters," a series of spontaneous emotional gestures and poses to provide opportunities for consideration of one's own body in space, the grace of a joint in motion or a flexing muscle.

A contemporary video installation by Canadian artists Adad Hannah and Denys Arcand, *The Burghers of Vancouver*, deconstructs and reassembles the anguished figures in Rodin's iconic *Burghers of Calais*, a commission in 1885 of six councilmen banished from the French city. The players — an anonymous poet, an old lady, a smuggler, an athlete, a laid-off worker and a former junkie — meet every day, dress up, pose for the whole day in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery and then go home.

"The contemporary Burghers," Hartigan says, "is potent evidence of Rodin's continuing influence and significance."



Rodin's groundbreaking approach to ideal beauty led to his constant reimagining of the concepts of perfection and completion. To him, no sculpture was ever finished. He would break up his own work, create new pieces of sculpture to look like body fragments or add to ancient vessels he avidly collected.

"Recombining and assemblage was a very, very contemporary kind of concept," Hartigan says, "and what it takes to be radical and break with tradition is part of what fascinates me about what this man achieved."

But Rodin also found inspiration for ideas and practice in his foundations. Like Leonardo and Michelangelo, he surrounded himself with "a constellation of highly talented artists, specialists in his studio who helped create this whole body of work," Hartigan says.

Rodin sketched and meticulously planned his sculptures but worked with only some of the materials, mainly clay and the plaster normally reserved as the study medium. Unlike most sculptors, he considered plaster a compelling medium in itself that didn't need to be set aside for a more valuable work carved in marble or cast in bronze. He saw new and unexpected uses for existing, some might say mundane, materials.

"Rodin also relentlessly experimented with form, scale and composition," Hartigan says. "For him to propose and live out this whole notion that something doesn't have to be finished to be expressive and powerful and communicative was radical for the time."

MEMBERS' PREVIEW

Friday, May 13

Open House | 10 am–5 pm

Evening Reception | 6:30–9 pm

Reservations required for evening reception.

Watch the mail for your invitation!

Unknown photographer. *Auguste Rodin*, about 1915–17. Gelatin silver print mounted on cardboard. Saint Honoré Art Consulting, Paris, France.

Auguste Rodin, *The Kiss*, before 1916. Cast by Barbedienne Foundry, about 1916. Bronze. MacKenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina Collection, Gift of Mr. Norman MacKenzie, 1916–005.

Originally titled *Metamorphosis: In Rodin's Studio*, the exhibition is organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in collaboration with the Musée Rodin, Paris. The AMG Foundation sponsored *Rodin: Transforming Sculpture* at the Peabody Essex Museum. Carolyn and Peter S. Lynch and The Lynch Foundation provided generous support. The East India Marine Associates of the Peabody Essex Museum also provided support.



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