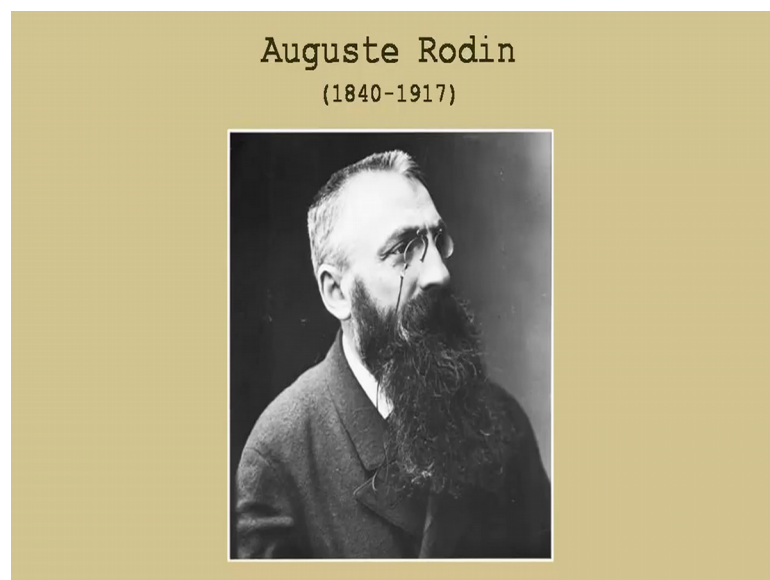


**Introducing Modern Western Art : Movements and Artists**  
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**Lecture - 11**  
**Rodin – the precursor of Modern Sculpture**

Hi viewers. Welcome to MOOCs online course on Introduction to Modern Western Art. Today is the first lecture of the third week. And this third week and all the 5 lectures in this third week are entirely devoted to the study of modern sculpture.

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The first lecture in this week is on Auguste Rodin who is considered to be the precursor of modern western sculpture. Rodin was born in 1840 and he lived till 1970. So, major part of his carrier happen in 20th century, the third and the 4th quarter of 20th century, and when you look at his sculptures, within the beginning his sculptures do not really I mean from today's perspective his sculptures do not really look like very modern. In the sense that when you have a look at his sculptures, he they look like a pretty classical from the point of view of his concerned with anatomical accuracy, proportion his academic dexterity and all that.

But then when you study his sculptures deeply, you gradually realize that he was actually paving way for the later developments in the modern western sculpture. Not only that he was breaking certain norms, but Rodin was also creating new norms of sculpture, in

tandem with more liberal ideas of modernism, and as opposed to the conservative ideas of the traditional sculpture. Rodin's father sent him to petite ecole at the age of 14.

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### Early Age

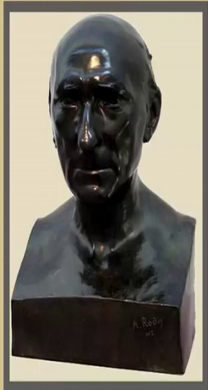
- His father sent him to Petite Ecole, at the age of 14, a school that trained craftsmen and decorative artists.
- At the age of seventeen, Rodin began (1857) earning his living as a studio helper on ornamental detail for other sculptors.
- The earliest known sculpture of Rodin is a bust of his father, Jean-Baptiste Rodin, first modeled in clay in 1860.

A school that trained craftsmen and decorative artists: so you can very well imagine the kind of skill he acquired at a very young age. And at the age of 17, Rodin began earning his living as a studio helper on ornamental detail for other sculptors.

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### Bust of Jean-Baptiste Rodin

- It was his first recorded work (1854-1857)
- It was first modeled in clay and later cast in bronze.
- He made the sculpture keeping in mind the traditional antique style.



The earliest known sculpture of Rodin is a bust of his father, Jean-Baptiste Rodin, first modeled in clay in 1860. Now these random information's give us a clue to the fact that

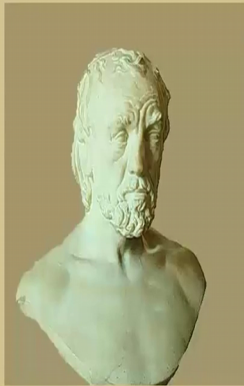
Rodin was right at the outset a sculptor and artist who was academically very well trained. So, the whole story of Rodin tells us how he was trying to transgress or overcome the academic trainings that he received, and how he was trying to develop his own sculptural language.

Now, if you look at this particular example, which is supposed to be the first recorded work by Rodin and apparently it was first modeled in clay and later it was cast in bronze. And this bust of his father clearly reveals that Rodin was very well trained in the traditional classical style of sculpture making, which made it a imperative for him to learn the modeling very well. Modeling in clay and he also learned various other techniques, like stone carving, then bronze casting, plaster casting all kinds of traditional techniques of sculpture. And we shall gradually see where exactly he was trying to break the traditional norm and becoming a modernist.

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### The Man with The Broken Nose

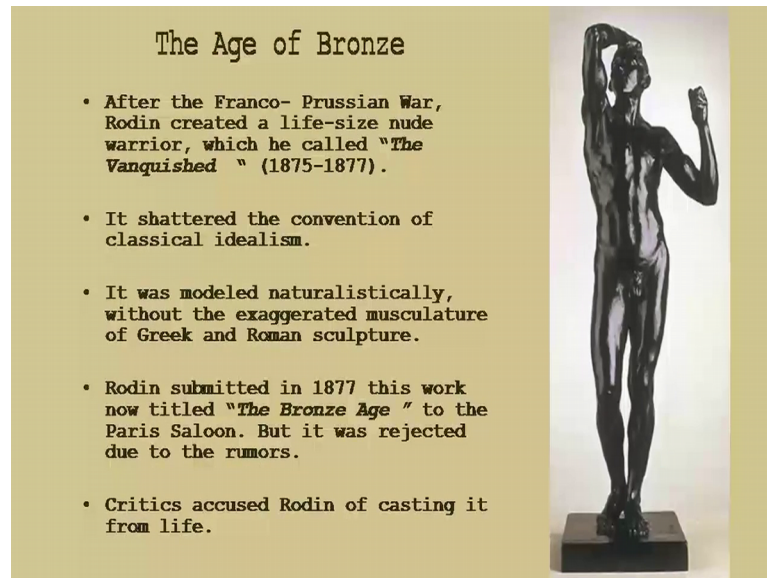
- Rejected at the Paris Salon but later accepted under the title a "Portrait of a Roman".
- As opposed to the idealism of classical sculpture this work suggests expressive naturalism.
- He portrayed his face with features characteristic of Greek sculpture: blank eyes and classically modeled hair but with a 'broken nose'.



Now, look at this sculpture by Rodin which has a very strange title called the man with the broken nose. And no wonder why it was rejected at the Paris salon, but it was later accepted under the title a portrait of a roman. First of all the title itself was not acceptable, I mean you can not have a title of a sculpture which clearly suggests some deformity of a facial feature. So, as a opposed to the idealism of classical sculpture, this sculpture suggests expressive naturalism a and b as far as the facial features are concerned this particular sculpture defines the norm of traditional aesthetic idea.

The ideal beauty or ideal aesthetic norm which usually expects a face to follow certain classical ideas instead Rodin does not hesitate to make a broken nose and therefore, introducing an element of non beauty, a kind of ugliness, and hence in the beginning at least this sculpture was not accepted. He portrayed this face with features characteristic of Greek sculpture, like blank eyes and classically modeled hair, but with a broken nose.

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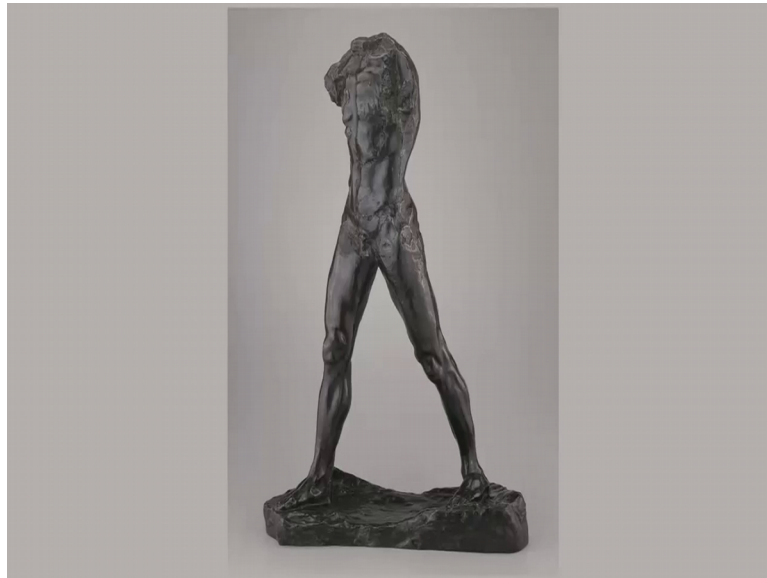
So, this is his first kind of attempt at doing something new outside the norms of the classical traditional western sculpture. Now later he did another wonderful world called the age of bronze once second. The title does not help us to identify either the person or the emotional state of the person or even any social identity nothing, probably it is based on a model real model, but it is not a representation of any one specific person. In fact, it is an experimentation with bronze. And that is one of the reasons why he titled this sculpture as the age of bronze. In fact, as many art historians in our critics have noticed, this sculpture shattered the convention of classical idealism. No doubt it was modeled naturalistically which makes this sculpture look pretty close to the classical ideal beauty or norm of human representation.

Without the exaggerated musculature of Greek and roman sculpture of course, now Rodin submitted in 1877 this work now titled the bronze age to the Paris salon, but it was rejected again due to certain rumors. Critics accuse Rodin of casting it from life, because on the you see the contradiction on the one hand. On the one hand this sculpture looked



pretty nontraditional non classical and in a certain way non academic. On the other hand the realism embedded in this work is so stunning, so convincing that it led or mislead the critics to think or Rodin to accuse Rodin of casting this entire sculpture from real life.

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So, that was very interesting, but then when Rodin comes up with something like this. This is an absolute and clear statement of a modern sculpture. Anybody who is more comfortable with traditional sculpture would find this sculpture first of all incomplete, if not mutilated or broken. Because this figure if you call it a figure it is expected that a figure ideally speaking should be having a head 2 limbs and of course, 2 legs the whole body, but this sculpture is devoid of head it is devoid of 2 hands this figure consists of only the torso shoulders and 2 legs in the posture of walking.

But Rodin conceive this sculpture as not representation, but as a visual idea corresponding to the walking man, because Rodin was not concerned at all with any specific identity of any person, because Rodin was not at all interested in any realistic affirmation of details of the features of the body, because Rodin was only concerned with a particular gesture of walking.

So, he made this very, very bold kind of a attempt by getting rid of the head the entire head from the torso from the figure. Now I do not know whether it is possible for us today to imagine how radical this sculpture was or look in the context of that time, but historically speaking before Rodin did this sculpture nobody in the entire history of

western sculpture had done a single sculpture without limbs or head unless and until that figure represented a beheaded person or something like that.

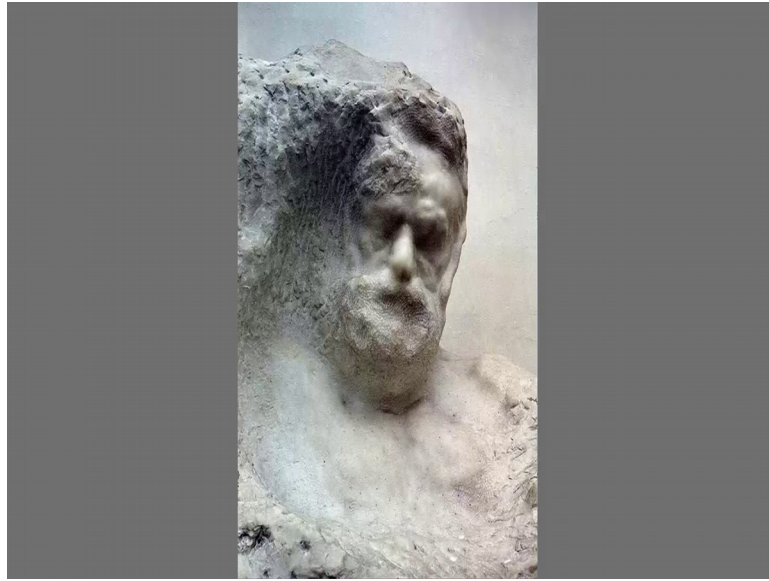
So, of course, Rodin is not suggesting through this sculpture an image of a beheaded figure, not at all. He is not making a mutilated or an incomplete body. He is living the entire image up to our imagination.

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And he has done several such sculptures where Rodin refused to conform to the traditional norm of a complete sculpture. He deliberately keeps the sculptures quote unquote incomplete, because now as a modernist sculptor the Rodin is more concerned with the idea rather than a full representation of a form. Apart from this new idea about form or about a new sense of or a new definition of what a complete sculpture should look like, he is also introducing a new kind of surface treatment. Which looks extremely rough, once again incomplete, and definitely the surface the way he treats the surface of his sculptures they do not look so well finished.

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Now, this very look that his sculptures do not look well finished is one of the chief characteristic features of many Rodin's work. And thirdly as you can see in this sculpture that when Rodin deliberately leave certain portions of the sculptures undone. As if he is yet to tap it out from the stone, that again makes a modern statement. It is again a very bold and a very contemporary way of looking at the whole language of sculpture.

Only once or twice we have seen in the past somebody was doing that and it was Michelangelo either before him or after him nobody has dared to keep the stone the original stone intact on leaving undone beside the form that is emerging out from the stone, but Rodin is doing it, which again suggests that somebody like Rodin is equally interested in the to show to maintain to retain the presence of the original raw material, that is stone along with the form, in this case it is the head of a figure.

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So, whether it is the age of bronze that you see on the right side. Or his famous piece of sculpture called the thinker that you see on the left side. Rodin makes this very, very clear right at the outset after he has done his father's bust or a couple of other sculptures which are direct portraits of living persons.

Otherwise whenever he is doing these sculptures representing human figures. Rodin makes it very, very clear that these figures do not have any specific identity. They do not have any specific names. This anonymity that these figures are anonymous these figures could be anybody, allows the sculptor to probe the psychological aspects, to probe the surface treatment, to probe the gesture and posture without getting bothered with the identity or the social background or the specific character of the figure that he is modeling.

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In fact, this very approach very clearly suggests that Rodin is not representing any person, for him the figure is or a body is a form which is potentially full of ideas full of sculptural possibilities and Rodin explodes that.

Now, this is very much a modernist position, where you are exploring the human body as a site or as an idea full of possibilities. Now look at this image of the thinker once again it was designed in 1880 for the tympanum on the region immediately over the 2 doors of Rodin's gates of hell we shall see images of gates of hell right now. And so, originally this sculpture to thinker was a part of a larger project almost like a monument a huge monument called gates of hell, which Rodin made during this time around 1880s.

Now, highly inspired by the work of Michelangelo and his own work ugolino Rodin made this sculpture. It is possibly a symbolic representation of creativity intellect and above all thought. So, if somebody asks me, what is the meaning that is embedded in this sculpture. I would not be able to tell you any story, because by and large most of the works by Rodin are non narrative. They do not embody any story. They do not fulfill the desire of a story, but they definitely suggest some idea. And in this case it is the power of human being to think the capacity of human being to be thoughtful is the theme of this sculpture.

So, in that sense it is a very intangible and abstract idea that Rodin is trying to encapsulate and capture in a very tangible form made of bronze and originally modeled in clay.

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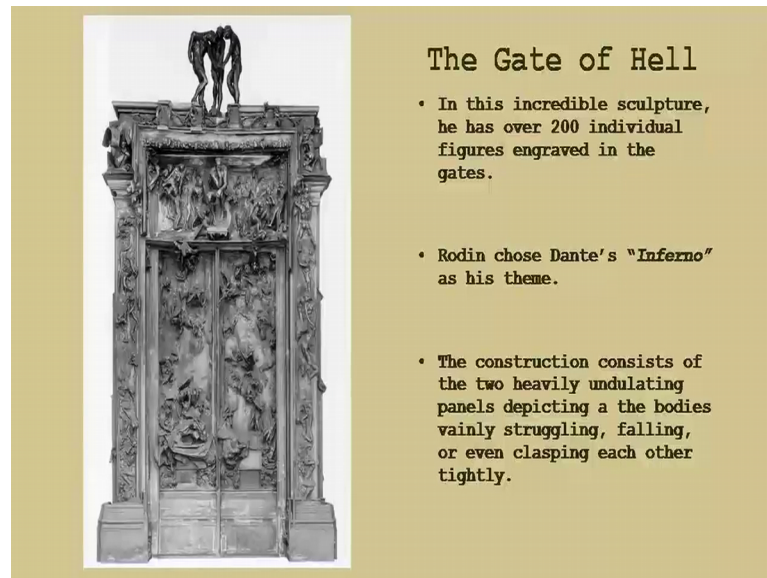


Similarly, when he does this wonderful almost monumental sculpture of Balzac, the famous French thinker philosopher author writer, and he is not making a realistic life size portrait of Balzac, but basically he is glorifying he is trying to capture the glory the he is rather the huge monumental status of Balzac in French culture. So, he decides to get rid of the details. He decides to put more and more emphasize on the huge massive form of Balzac, and thereby elevating the status of Balzac into a monumental presence in the French culture.

So, once again if somebody is trying to find out a realistic correspondence, between this figure of Balzac and how Balzac really looked like in real life one will be utterly disappointed. Because that was not Rodin's idea also Rodin's intention was something different it was an abstract intention, but nevertheless Rodin has been highly successful in capturing the so called abstract idea regarding the monumental presence of Balzac in French sculpture.

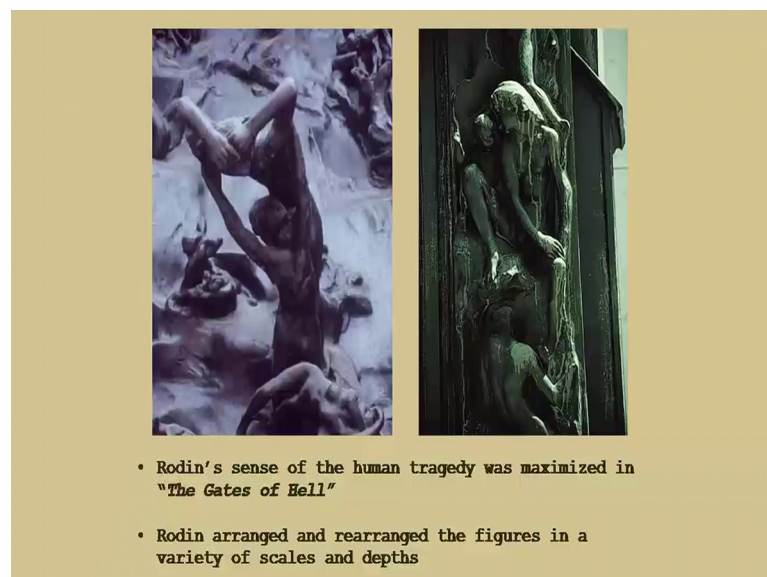


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So, we come to this famous monumental work by Rodin it is called the gate of hell. And in this incredible sculpture he has over 200 individual figures engraved in the gates Rodin chose dantes inferno as his theme. The construction consists of the 2 heavily undulating panels, depicting the bodies vainly struggling falling or even clasping each other tightly.

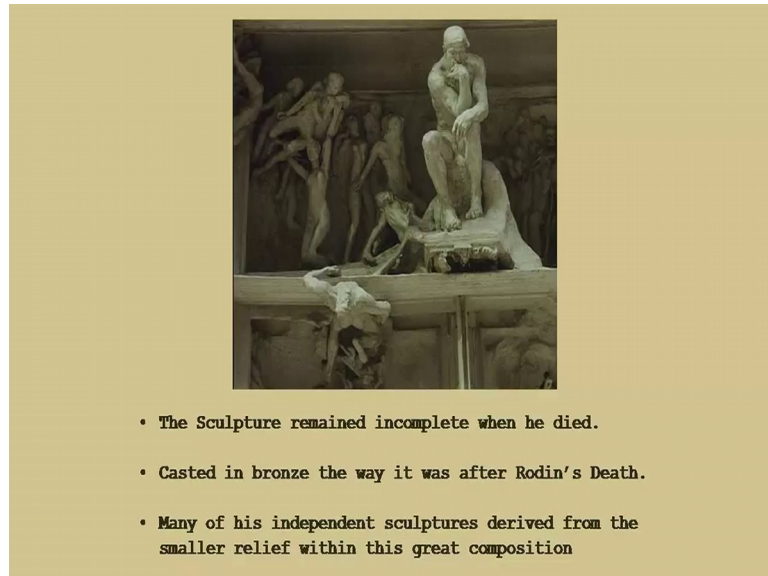
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So, it is a very agonized world a world full of tormented people, and that gives Rodin an opportunity to deal with this idea of torment agony and anguish. And once again as we

have already seen in his earlier sculptures, his very special interest in treating the surface not realistically, but in a very organic manner becomes very useful here. So, Rodin's sense of the human tragedy was maximized in this sculpture called the gate of hell, and Rodin arranged and rearranged the figures in a variety of scales and depths and of course, in a variety of movement's postures.

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So, the thinker this is where the thinker was originally placed, this sculpture remains though this monumental sculpture called the gates of hell remain incomplete when he died it was casted in bronze the way it was after Rodin's death. Many of his independence sculptures derived from the smaller relief within this great composition. So, in the one hand the gates of hell was conceived as one single complete monumental work. And on the other hand from the various details of the gates of hell later Rodin derived a number of ideas for independent and individual sculptures; now when you look at Rodin's drawings and studies and watercolors.

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Once again you can see that you can see 2 things basically number one you can see that, that the presence of an academically trained artist who was brilliant in terms of his academic skill. And secondly, simultaneously and at the same time you can see how he was so powerful, so skillful to overcome the academic restraint, and explore the possibilities of experimenting with the human form human gestures and the power of the body.

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Including the power of the erotic energy of the body not only in his sculptures, but also in his drawings in his watercolors like this one as well.

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Now, here Rodin is even more powerful in his drawing which is not really a depiction, but an impression or translation of an idea of a human being in a particular posture into watercolor and drawing with a light tint. And there are innumerable drawings by Rodin which are testimony to this a highly experimental and skillful part of Rodin's talent.

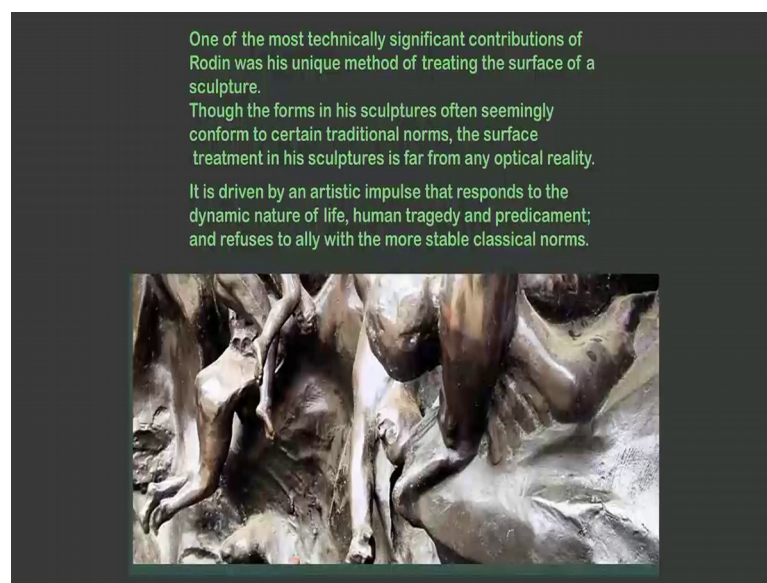
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So, because Rodin right at the beginning could overcome the bindings or the restrictive norms of the idea about a complete sculpture. So, for him it was really then not difficult to come up with sculptures which consisted of nothing but maybe a pair of hands with one single hand or just the face.

So, by creating this kind of sculptures again and again, repeatedly rather was able to kind of establish this idea That you can have a sculpture, which shows one single detail may be of a hand or a pair of hands or just one portion of the face.

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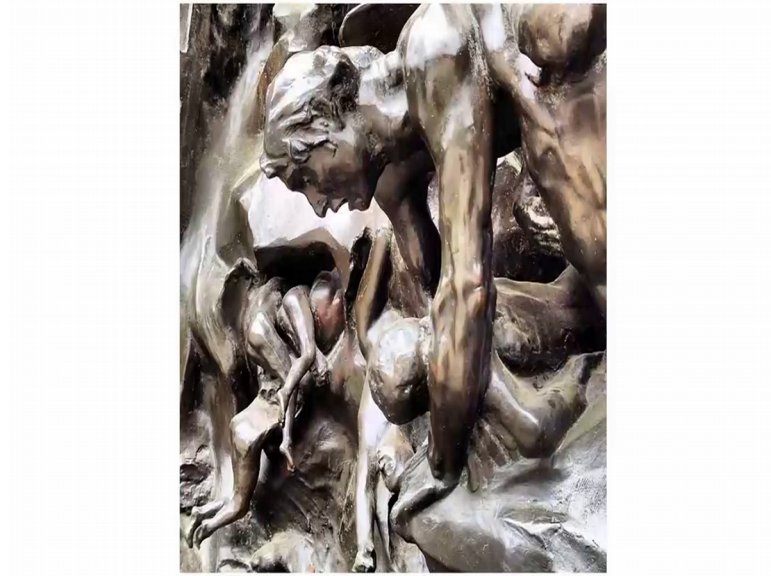


Yet because the emphasis is north on the representation, but the emphasis is on the idea the sculpture or this kind of sculptures would never look incomplete; one of the most significant technical contributions of Rodin as I told you already, was his unique method of treating the surface of the sculpture; though the forms in his sculptures are often close to the real and conforming to the rules of realism like anatomy proportion etcetera.

The surface treatment visible in Rodin's sculptures, is part from the optical reality because he was not concerned with the optical reality. It is driven by an artistic impulse that responds to the dynamic nature of life and refuses to alive with the more stable classical norms.



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So, this lack of stability is in fact one of the main characteristic features of Rodin's works. When you look at this detail from the gates of hell it is evident that Rodin was interested not in realistic representation, but in exploring the more intangible and conceptual ideas like the dynamic quality of life like the energy of life like the a life that is in flux.

And in this case in the context of the gates of hell life was in flux, because of a huge grand tragedy.

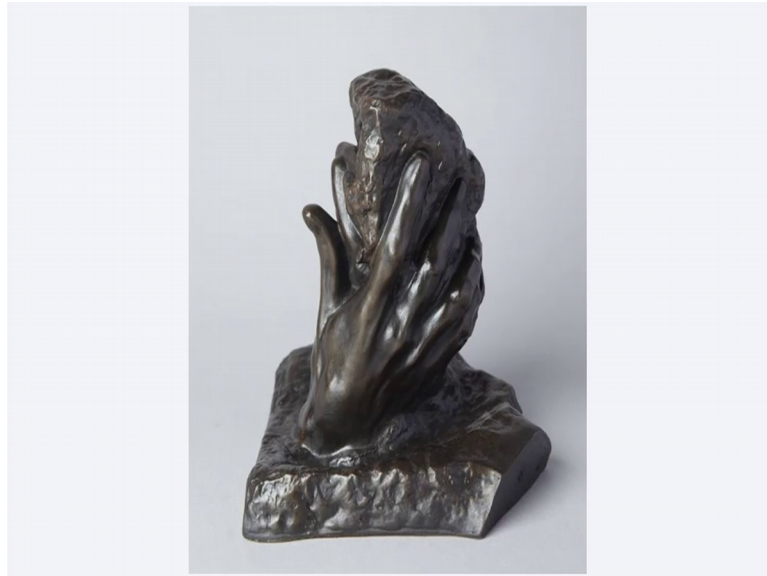
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Again and again you can see that when you look at the details of his sculptures. And this pair of hands very simple sculpture, but extremely intense.

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In terms of not representation, but in terms of the way this sculpture is able to encapsulate a certain idea of intensity.

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In fact, this is what makes Rodin the precursor of modern sculpture. Because modern art in general right from the point impressionist started working or even before that during the time of realism and romanticism, most of the artists were interested in addressing the

idea. Rather than the form for them at least for many of them was a pretext to explode an idea.

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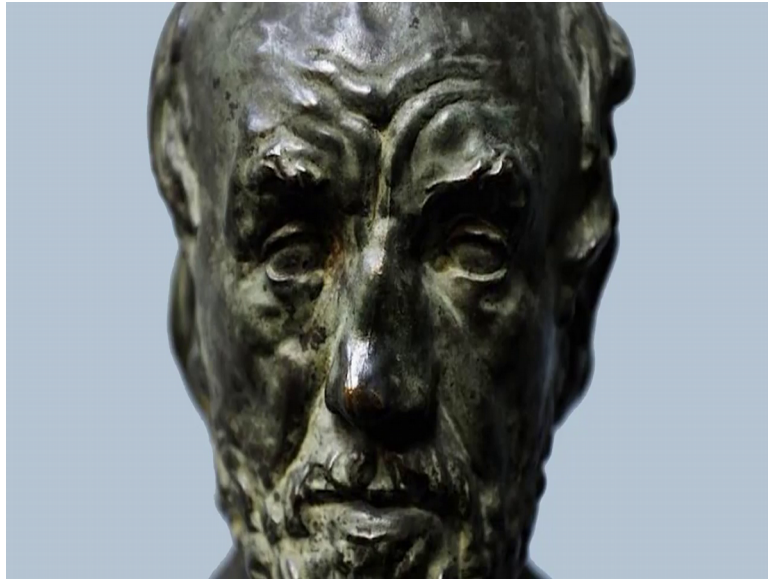


So, this shift from representation to idea, from the form to an intangible feeling was first seen in the sculpture of Rodin.

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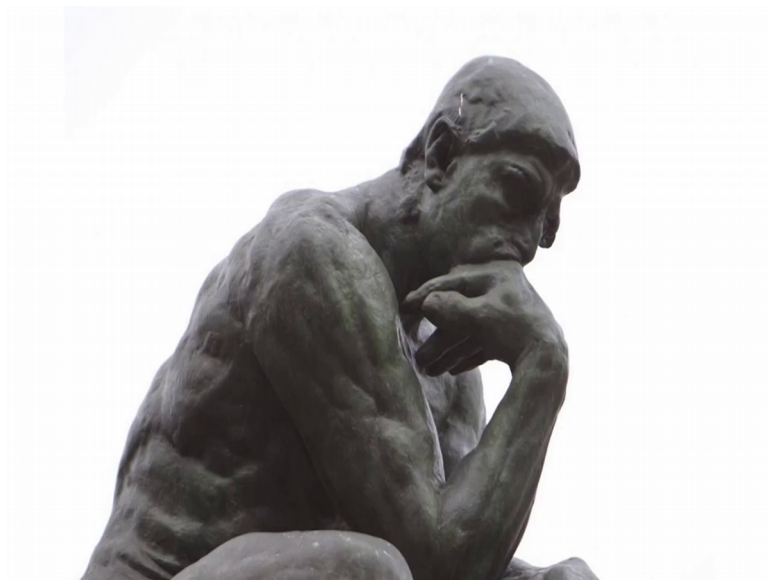


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And that is the reason why Rodin is considered to be the precursor of modern western sculpture.

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The first person to have really challenged the traditional norms of sculpture making and exploring the other possibilities: and therefore, paving the way for the succeeding generation of the modern sculptors to come gradually immediately following Rodin.

Thank you.