

Introduction

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) and Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) together summarise the profound change that took place in modern sculpture. The two artists are clearly affiliated. While still very young, Giacometti discovered Rodin's work then acquired a more profound knowledge of it when, starting in 1922, he studied at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière with Rodin's former pupil and assistant Antoine Bourdelle. In 1939 Giacometti attended the inauguration of the *Monument to Balzac* (1898) in Paris and in 1950 he affirmed his admiration for this key artist in the development of modern sculpture by posing for a photograph between the figures of *The Burgbers of Calais* (1889).

This connection is strengthened by the profound affinities between their works, evident in the importance that both gave to modelling, to certain motifs (the "walking man", for example) and to the challenges posed by sculpture in the 20th century. The closeness of the relationship between their two practices is also evident in other aspects presented in this exhibition: the importance conceded to the material in the creative process; serial creation; the use of chance and the unpremeditated; an interest in distortion; a focus on group compositions; the innovative and inventive use of the sculptural base (a key element in the history of modern sculpture); and their relationship with the art of the past.

However, the dialogue established between the two artists extends much further than formal issues. Rodin was one of the first sculptors considered "modern" due to his ability to reflect universal concepts such as anguish, suffering, anxiety, fear and anger, firstly through the expressivity of faces and gestures and in later years through his focus on the essential. This is also a key feature of Giacometti's creative activity: his post-war works with their elongated, fragile and static figures, termed "guardians of the dead" by Jean Genet, are stripped of any incidental elements in order to express all the complexity of human existence.

Groups

The group composition is a fundamental challenge within sculpture and in this sense *The Burghers of Calais* (1889) is a paradigmatic example that helped to establish Rodin's reputation. The six figures, depicted in movement and considerably more than life-size, are imposing in their combination of heroism and humanity. The tension between grandeur and simplicity evident in this work on a historical subject is also apparent in other groups in which the artist experimented with the depiction of movement. Giacometti took up this theme in the post-war period, producing a series of figurative group compositions in which the figures are arranged in order to generate spatial configurations. Examples of this type include *The Square*, *The Clearing*, *Four Figurines on a pedestal* (all of 1950) and *Three walking Men* (1948). The latter, a variation on the motif of a three-part group, can be related to Rodin's works on the same theme, including the sculpture *Three Shadows* (prior to 1886).

Label

Auguste Rodin

Monument des Bourgeois de Calais
Monument to the Burghers of Calais

1889 (modern copy)

Plaster

Musée Rodin, Paris

INV. E.00070

© musée Rodin (photo Christian Baraja)



Commissioned by the City Council of Calais and inaugurated in 1895, this monument depicts the six men who gave themselves up to the English troops during the Hundred Years War in exchange for a guarantee of safety for their fellow citizens. In contrast to the habitual practice in commemorative sculpture, Rodin individualized the faces and gestures of each of the men. In addition, by locating them on a low base the viewer is able to establish a relation with them and walk between them. Despite this differentiation of the figures, *The Burghers* is a work on a collective theme that transcends its historical reference to express a subject of a universal nature: man's path towards an inexorable fate.

Label

Alberto Giacometti

La Place (Composition avec trois figures et une tête)

The Square (Composition with three figures and a head)

1950

Bronze

Fondation Giacometti, Paris

Photo: Fondation Giacometti, Paris

© Alberto Giacometti Estate / VEGAP, 2020



The relationship between figures and space was one of the areas of artistic investigation that most interested Giacometti, not only in his quest for a specific visual effect but also because he considered it essential for capturing the bodies in their totality. In this sense, he used the base in order to balance out the different sizes of the figures and, like Rodin in his *Burgbers of Calais* (1889), offer the viewer the chance to walk among them. Giacometti's interest in creating public sculpture led him to repeatedly focus on groups of this type, for example *The Glade* and *Four Women on a base* (1950).

Chance

The innovative and creative use of chance or accident is one Rodin's principal contributions to modern sculpture. Rather than seeing them as mistakes or failures to be thrown away, he incorporated fragments, deliberate or accepted omissions and chance results into his creative process so that they became part of the finished work, opening the way towards a new understanding of sculpture. From 1890 he returned to earlier works, altering or removing specific parts of them in order to emphasise their expressivity. He also made use of fragments to create assemblages that revolutionised the notion of sculpture. The fact that Giacometti kept broken figures, fragmented elements and separated parts in his studio and his interest in copying damaged and incomplete sculptures indicates his affinity with this idea of sculpture as a process of revelation and knowledge.

Label

Auguste Rodin

Torse masculin penché en avant
Male Torso leaning forward

c. 1890

Terracotta, modelled

Musée Rodin, Paris. Donation, 1916

INV. S.03791

© musée Rodin (photo Christian Baraja)



Given the predominance throughout much of the 19th century of a type of static, decorative sculpture described as “wearisome and anodyne” by Charles Baudelaire, Rodin’s work represented a breath of fresh air in the French art world. The bodies modelled by the sculptor – considered by many the greatest since Michelangelo – can be compared to the mutilated classical Greek *Belvedere Torso* adored by the Italian sculptor and carefully studied by Rodin, as evident in the powerful torsion of this terracotta model of a male torso. “When I saw clay for the first time it was as if I’d ascended to heaven”, Rodin had said, and from that moment his hands modelled the clay, allowing the marks of his fingers to remain visible in most of his works.

Modelling and material

The importance placed on modelling and the handling of material is a particularly distinctive characteristic of the work of both Rodin and Giacometti. Following his return to Paris in 1945 Giacometti's sculptures gradually acquired the appearance of thin, elongated figures with an increasingly uneven surface that would ultimately become a defining trait of his style: a unique expressivity that derives from the vibrant surface. In contrast to the smooth, flat look of his works of the 1920s and 1930s this emphasis on modelling reveals a specific, more dramatic and expressive concept of sculpture that reflects his new vision of Rodin's work. The latter had, in fact, emphasised the "science of modelling", making the physical manipulation of the material – clay, plaster, etc., – the basis of his sculptural activities.

Label

Auguste Rodin

Balzac vêtu, esquisse

Balzac clothed, preliminary model

1891-1895

Terracotta, modelled

Musée Rodin, Paris. Donation, 1916

INV. S.00260

© musée Rodin (photo Christian Baraja)



In 1891, almost half a century after his death, Émile Zola, president of the Société des Gens de Lettres, commissioned Rodin to create a monument to the writer Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850). After detailed documentary research, the artist started working on a sculpture that would take him four years to complete. One of his particular concerns was the clothing. In 1895 he moved on to drapery studies but increasingly simplified the clothes and broadened out the cloth. When the plaster was exhibited at the 1898 Salon it was immediately the subject of criticism; it was compared to “a toad in a sack” and said to resemble a wrapped-up statue, comments that demonstrate the innovative nature of Rodin’s language.

Label

Alberto Giacometti

Buste de Diego

Bust of Diego

1965-1966

Plaster

Fondation Giacometti, Paris

Photo: Fondation Giacometti, Paris

© Alberto Giacometti Estate / VEGAP, 2020



Among the subjects that Giacometti most frequently repeated throughout his career was the portrait of his brother Diego. The figure's eyes, which acquire increasing importance, seem to wish to hold the gaze as if they were the symbol of man's consciousness. Giacometti appears to have been unable to capture that gaze: "I have the feeling that if I manage to copy an eye, even if only a bit, I'll have the head finished. Yes, no doubt about it. The only thing is, that seems completely impossible. Why? I've no idea!", the artist wrote in 1962.

Label

Auguste Rodin

Tête de Marie Fenaille

Head of Marie Fenaille

1898

Terracotta, impressed

Musée Rodin, Paris

INV. S.00255

© agence photographique du musée Rodin-Pauline Hisbacq



An industrialist, historian and art lover, the collector and patron Maurice Fenaille commissioned his friend Rodin to sculpt a bust of his wife in 1898. During the lengthy posing sessions, when the artist produced numerous preliminary studies and drawings, Madame Fenaille occasionally fell asleep, as reflected in Rodin's depiction of her. While the final marble versions of the portrait took the artist nearly nineteen years, he produced the life studies and preliminary models, such as the one on display here, in a relatively short space of time.

Label

Alberto Giacometti

Buste d'Annette (dit Venise)

Bust of Annette (known as Venice)

1962

Bronze

Fondation Giacometti, Paris

Photo: Fondation Giacometti, Paris

© Alberto Giacometti Estate / VEGAP, 2020



A few years before his death Alberto Giacometti produced a series of portraits for which the most important models were his brother Diego, his friend the photographer and filmmaker Éli Lotar, Giacometti's lover Caroline, the Japanese philosophy professor Isaku Yanaihara, and the artist's wife Annette. Between 1962 and 1965 Giacometti created a series of eight sculptures of Annette, their hieratic presence dominated by the gaze. In most of them the chin projects forward and the bronze of which they are made resembles a piece of lava from which the shoulders, neck and bust emerge (if these are present). Although his wife was one of his most frequent models, Giacometti complained that Annette looked different to him in each session.

Distortion

Rodin's quest for expressivity in his figures led him to focus on their facial features, at times almost to the point of caricature. Combined with modelling and assemblage, distortion reveals his search for a more dynamic expressive effect. Giacometti's distortion of his faces reflects the development of his individual style following his period of training at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. In the post-war period his sculptures became increasingly thinner, narrower and more elongated. When asked about this evolution the artist said that rather than arising from a desire to emphasise expressivity, these distortions were the result of his intention to create the figure as he saw it. Alongside this idea, however, we also encounter works such as *The Nose* (1947-50), in which distortion does possess an explicit expressive force.

Label

Alberto Giacometti

Le Nez

The Nose

1947-1950

Plaster

Fondation Giacometti, Paris

Photo: Fondation Giacometti, Paris

© Alberto Giacometti Estate / VEGAP, 2020



Giacometti frequently used plaster as a material without subsequently casting it in bronze. This figure – created in Paris after his return from Switzerland in 1945 where he had spent the end of World War II – is dominated by a prominent central element that can be interpreted as an expression of trauma provoked by the events of the war. Combined with the inclining neck, this nose-protruberance evokes the shape of an open-mouthed revolver that seems to scream at the horror of violence.

Looking at ancient art

In their investigation of new forms both Rodin and Giacometti looked to art's long history. Rodin's relationship with ancient art dates from his years of training at the *École Spéciale de Dessin* and from his visits to the Louvre where he drew works by artists of the past. This interest is also reflected in his collection – which he termed a “museum of the ancients” – in which Greek and Roman sculpture occupied the preeminent place. Throughout his life Giacometti would spend hours copying works of ancient and classical art, either from illustrated books, in the Louvre or on his travels, such as his trip around Italy in 1920 and 1921. These sources of inspiration would ultimately fuse with his own work, as he himself observed: “All the art of the past presented itself to me, of all ages, of all civilisations; everything becomes simultaneous, as if space had taken the place of time” (“Notes on copies”, 1965).

Label

Alberto Giacometti

Femme (plate V)

Woman (flat V)

c. 1929

Bronze

Fondation Giacometti, Paris

Photo: Fondation Giacometti, Paris

© Alberto Giacometti Estate / VEGAP, 2020



After he moved to Paris in 1922 to study with the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Giacometti discovered the Post-Cubist works of Jacques Lipchitz, Henri Laurens, Constantin Brancusi and Pablo Picasso. In addition, the ancient Greek sculpture from the Cyclades which he looked at in the Louvre encouraged him to explore the relationship between sculpture and the plan. Giacometti also regularly visited the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro and all these influences gave rise to a type of work with smooth, flat surfaces and minimal volume close to the language of Cubism.

Label

Auguste Rodin

La Méditation sans bras, petit modèle
Meditation without arms, small model

c. 1894

Plaster

Musée Rodin, Paris

INV. S.02022

© musée Rodin (photo Christian Baraja)



During the first half of the 1880s Rodin established his reputation with the works he exhibited at the Paris Salon. In the mid-decade he also started to exhibit at private galleries where, with a public more open to the new artistic forms, he showed works such as this small *Méditation sans bras*. The figure, which derives from a damned woman on *The Gates of Hell* (1880-1917), is transformed through the torsion of *Méditation* or *Interior Voice* and Rodin would ultimately include it as one of the Muses on the *Monument to Victor Hugo* (1890).

Series

In their tireless and demanding quest for the most satisfactory result, both Rodin and Giacometti focused on the issue of the model through repetition. Rodin multiplied his studies for his portraits of Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo and Paul Claudel. His numerous trials for the depiction of the Japanese dancer and actress Hanako, whom he met in Paris in 1906, reveal his interest in her appearance; impressed by the vitality of her face, he depicted its expression with increasing emphasis. For Giacometti, serial work was also an aspect of portraiture. In 1935 his return to figuration took serial form and the professional model Rita Gueyfier and his brother Diego posed for him daily in his studio. This practice intensified in the post-war period when he produced series of portraits both from life and from memory, sculpting and drawing tirelessly in permanent conflict with his sense of failure.

Label

Auguste Rodin

Masque de Hanako, type D

Mask of Hanako, type D

1907-1911

Terracotta, impressed

Musée Rodin, Paris. Donation, 1916

INV. S.00572

© musée Rodin



Rodin had seen the dancer Hanako give a performance on the theme of sadness at the Colonial Exhibition in Marseille in 1906. Fascinated by her facial features, he produced a series of sculptures of her as well as numerous drawings. Together with the other works in this series, this mask, which the artist called a “mask of anguish and death”, expresses the dancing woman’s different states of mind, ranging from extreme agitation to serenity

Label

Alberto Giacometti

Tête de femme (Rita)

Head of a Woman (Rita)

c. 1936

Bronze

Fondation Giacometti, Paris

Photo: Fondation Giacometti, Paris

© Alberto Giacometti Estate / VEGAP, 2020



In 1935, Giacometti began to distance himself from the Surrealist group and to work with a model from life. At this point he started to explore the different techniques of modelling and gradually abandoned the faceting characteristic of his initial period with the aim of seeking out the expressivity of his figures, marking a prelude to his final phase. His brother Diego, with whom he lived in Paris, and the professional model Rita Gueyfier were among his most regular sitters.

The issue of the base

The integration of the base into a sculpture was a key step towards modernity in this discipline and is present in Rodin, Constantin Brancusi and Giacometti. In the case of Rodin his practice of extracting figures from pre-existing groups led him to consider the issue of the base and to vary the distance between his sculptures and the viewer, among other decisions. In a more systematic manner, for the inauguration of the Pavillon de l'Alma in 1900 he made use of copies of classical columns in order to create different effects of presentation. *Thought* (1893-95) reveals a different use of the base, with the figure encrusted in it in a fragmentary manner and with an allegorical intent. In Giacometti's work the base functions to generate a space around the subject, a virtual "cage" equivalent to the double frames of his canvases and drawings. He isolated the figure and generated a distance between it and the viewer. Furthermore, depending on both the degree to which the base blends with the subject of the sculpture and on its volume, it modifies the perception of the figure.

Label

Auguste Rodin

Sphinge sur colonne
Sphinx on a column

1900 (cast in 1995)

Bronze, lost wax technique

Musée Rodin, Paris. Casting made
for the museum's collection, 1995

INV. S.06667

© musée Rodin (photo Hervé Lewandowski)



Within Rodin's career, assemblages – a procedure that originated in classical art – are considered one of his most original forms of expression. Interested in the presentation of his works, the artist reflected on the relationship between the body and the base of his sculptures. Following his exhibition at the Pavillon de l'Alma in 1900, where he presented many of his works on columns with floral and foliate motifs, Rodin used this type of presentation on various occasions, notably for his exhibitions in Prague in 1902 and Düsseldorf in 1904.

Label

Alberto Giacometti

Buste d'homme sur socle

Bust of a Man on a plinth

c. 1948

Bronze

Fondation Giacometti, Paris

Photo: Fondation Giacometti, Paris

© Alberto Giacometti Estate / VEGAP, 2020



During World War II, which he spent partly in Switzerland, Giacometti produced a series of sculptures that gradually diminished almost to the size of a pin. Works of this type, which he continued to produce in Paris well into the 1950s, only acquire weight and convey the sensation of being anchored to the ground through the double base from which they seem to emerge in some examples. This use of the pedestal, which had already interested Rodin, allowed Giacometti to give his sculptures greater presence. In addition, and like Rodin, it enabled him to work on the spatial relationship between the viewer and the object.

In the studio

Both Rodin and Giacometti often welcomed photographers to their studios, thus integrating these spaces into their work. The studio, a private place for creation, thus also became a public space that forged a collective, public image and dramatised the representation of the artist, his work and the creative act itself. Rodin made use of photography to document his activity from the 1870s to the end of his career. In the late 1920s Giacometti had his works photographed and on occasions arranged them for this purpose. A number of shared themes reveal the importance of photography in the representation of both men's work and creative process: the artist at work, the artist and his model, the work in progress, and the coexistence of works in the studio.

The walking Man

Rodin and Giacometti's large versions of *The walking Man* are iconic works by the two artists and this universal form connects them very directly. In 1907 Rodin decided to enlarge a version of *The walking Man* derived from his *Saint John the Baptist* of 1890. By increasing its size he gave the figure a new monumentality and altered its meaning. Giacometti produced the first version of his *Walking Man* in 1947 and returned to it in the late 1950s as part of a commission for the Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York that was not ultimately carried out. He used the figure to investigate monumentality. As stripped of any inessential detail as Rodin's figure, the motif functions as a universal emblem.

Label

Auguste Rodin

L'Homme qui marche, grand modèle
Walking Man, large model

1907

Plaster

Musée Rodin, Paris

INV. S.05716

© musée Rodin (photo Hervé Lewandowski)



In the final period of his career Rodin seems to affirm himself through a new aesthetic that dismantles the entire history of previous sculpture and questions the academic concept of beauty. Using fragmentation and moving from one model to another, the subject of *The walking Man* allowed the artist to apply all his imaginative powers and embrace the potential of metamorphosis and even the monstrous; derivations of the beauty of this fragmented man that he remade from a study for *Saint John the Baptist* on which he had worked prior to 1887. Considered “a companion to the *Victory of Samothrace*, created by a genius of the 20th century”, the sculpture aroused the enthusiasm of the public when it was presented at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1907.