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VISUAL ARTS & ARCHITECTURE

Rodin's brilliant forms grace Oglethorpe

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By the turn of the 20th century, Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) was considered Europe's most important sculptor since Michelangelo. At times a conventional artist and at others a maverick, his hyper-realistic representations of human figures clashed with contemporary artistic standards, which favored an idealized human form. In fact, so lifelike were some of his bronzes, Rodin was once accused of pouring wax over a living model to create his casting.

In a rare opportunity for Atlanta, 35 of Rodin's small and medium-size bronzes from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation are on view at Oglethorpe University's Museum of Art. "Rodin: In His Own Words" offers sculptures and writings illuminating the artist's achievements, process and something of the man himself.



Courtesy Iris and B. Gerald Cantor
Foundation

(ENLARGE)

Deliberately incomplete, 'Torso of the Walking Man' captures the vitality of the human spirit.

REVIEW

"Rodin: In His Own Words"

Through Nov. 17. Noon–5 p.m.

Tuesdays-Sundays.

Oglethorpe University Museum
of Art, 4484 Peachtree Road

N.E. 404-364-8555;

www.oglethorpe.edu. **Bottom**

line: Masterful works in an
intimate setting.

"The Thinker" is the most famous sculpture in the exhibit, immediately recognizable with its bowed head poised on a clenched fist. Light reflects off the figure's contours. Fine, taut musculature runs along the forearms, thighs and calves, heightening the quiet drama of the pose. Even the curled toes grip the surface on which they rest, showing every part of the human body as engaged and expressive.

"The Spirit of War" is a larger, more imposing work — a winged female raises her arms in an expansive motion. Her gesture and facial expression are both graceful and frightening. "The Burghers of Calais, First Maquette" is an early model for a striking and controversial monument that was ultimately another departure from accepted artistic practice of the era.

"Torso of the Walking Man" is particularly exquisite. Originally modeled in 1878-79, it is decidedly modernist, with a roughened, energized surface that is sensual and powerful. Even in this fragment, we sense that Rodin sought to bring movement to a static medium, liberating man's vitality rather than containing it.

Rodin further shows his daring not only through surface texture, but by deliberately isolating a single element of form, and treating it as sufficient to convey both spirit and emotion.

Also on display are details and illustration of the lost-wax casting method used by Rodin. In addition, you may watch a DVD recounting the story of Rodin's "Gates of Hell," doors to a Parisian museum that was never built, but for which the sculptor created many small-scale figures and models.

Part of the pleasure of this exhibition is the pairing of sculptures with quotes from Rodin, enriching our understanding of his determination, intentions and approach. In a citation excerpted from Paul Gsell's book, "Art by Auguste Rodin," the sculptor says it all:

"Instead of imagining the different parts of a body as more or less flat, I represented them as projectures of interior volumes. I forced myself to express in each swelling of the torso or of the limbs the efflorescences of a muscle or of a bone which lay deep beneath the skin. And so the truth of my figures, instead of being merely superficial, seems to blossom from within to the outside, like life itself."