



Art History

English Lessons



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Rodin and Claudel

Auguste Rodin was a French sculptor born on November 12, 1840, in Paris, France. He is widely regarded as the father of modern sculpture and is best known for his realistic and expressive works. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Rodin did not focus on the idealized forms that were popular in traditional art. Instead, he sought to capture the raw emotion and human experience in his sculptures, which often portrayed figures in dynamic and naturalistic poses.



Rodin's early life was marked by challenges. He struggled academically and was rejected three times by the *École des Beaux-Arts*, a prestigious art school in Paris. However, these setbacks did not deter him. Rodin continued to develop his skills by working in decorative arts and learning from various sculptors. His persistence paid off when, in 1877, he achieved his first major success with the sculpture *The Age of Bronze*. This work was so lifelike that it was initially accused of being a cast of a live model rather than a sculpture.

Rodin's career flourished in the following years, and he created some of his most famous works, including *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, and *The Gates of Hell*. *The Thinker* is perhaps his most iconic piece, representing a man deep in thought, often seen as a symbol of philosophy and contemplation. It was part of a monumental project called *The Gates of Hell*, inspired by Dante's *Inferno*, which features over 200 figures and took decades to complete.

During his lifetime his talent was acknowledged and was considered the Michelangelo of his time. Despite his success, Rodin faced criticism for his unconventional methods and his focus on unfinished surfaces and fragmented forms. However, his influence on modern sculpture is undeniable. Rodin's ability to convey emotion and movement in his work set him apart, and today, his sculptures are celebrated worldwide as masterpieces of art.



How did Rodin's approach to sculpture differ from that of his contemporaries?



Rodin and Camille Claudel

In 1864 Rodin met a young seamstress named Rose Beuret, this was going to be the relationship he kept until the end of his life, although they only got married during the last year of their lives. In 1883, however, Rodin met a young and very talented sculptor, **Camille Claudel**. They instantly formed a passionate but stormy relationship and influenced each other artistically for the next 15 years. Claudel suffered a nervous breakdown sometime after their break-up and was committed to a mental institution where she stayed for the next 30 years until her death. She never produced a work of art after her hospitalization.



Read the online article from BBC about Rodin and Camille and answer the questions that follow:

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20170509-the-tragic-lover-who-never-escaped-rodins-shadow>

1. **Camille Claudel lived and created in the shadow of her mentor and lover, Rodin. As it is mentioned in the article, she never received a commission although she regularly exhibited her work during the years she was active and her remarkable talent was frequently praised by critics. Express your opinion on that taking into consideration the place of women in society during those years. How do you feel about this? Do you think Camille would have had a more fair treatment if she were an artist in the 21st century?**
2. **“It is terrible to be so abandoned,” Camille wrote to the asylum doctor in 1915, two years after her incarceration. “I can’t help but succumb to the grief that overwhelms me.” What are your thoughts about this? Do you think that patients of mental clinics nowadays face a different approach?**
3. **Visit the museum that has recently opened with her works of art and write a few words about your impression of them: <http://www.museecamilleclaudel.fr/en/>**





Here on the left you can see “The Kiss” by Rodin and on the right there is “La Valse” by Claudel. Taking into consideration everything you read about these artists, write a paragraph comparing the two sculptures and expressing your ideas and feelings towards them:



How did Rodin's approach to sculpture differ from that of his contemporaries?

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For more ideas on how to use masterpieces of Art to teach critical thinking, you can read my blog post here:

<https://www.ruthlessteacher.com/how-to-use-works-of-arts-to-teach-critical-thinking/>

And about the use of images in the language classroom, another of my blog posts here:

<https://www.ruthlessteacher.com/the-use-of-images-in-language-learning/>

I have made a pdf with a set of questions that I use a lot with my students when we study all types of images, you can download it here:

<https://www.ruthlessteacher.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Questions-about-images-in-class.pdf>





Sculptor

[François Auguste René Rodin](#) (12 November 1840 – 17 November 1917), was a French sculptor. Although Rodin is generally considered the progenitor of modern sculpture, he did not set out to rebel against the past. (information from Wikiart).

[Camille Claudel](#) (8 December 1864 – 19 October 1943) was a French sculptor. Although she died in relative obscurity, Claudel has gained recognition for the originality and quality of her work. She was the elder sister of the poet and diplomat Paul Claudel and the co-worker and lover of sculptor [Auguste Rodin](#). (information from Wikiart).

Sculptures

You can see Rodin's work online here:

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/auguste-rodin/all-works#!#filterName:all-paintings-chronologically,resultType:masonry>

You can see Claudel's work of Art here:

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/camille-claudel/all-works#!#filterName:all-paintings-chronologically,resultType:masonry>

The first sculpture by Rodin is called "*The Kiss*" (1901-1904) and it is in a private collection

The second sculpture by Claudel is called "*La Valse*" (1905) and it is in the *Museum of Camille Claudel*:

<https://www.museecamilleclaudel.fr/en/collections/la-valse>



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For any questions you may have you can message me at info@ruthlessteacher.com

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