

studies of paintings by colonial subjects themselves. These case studies seem to make up the portion of the book most overtly informed by Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the 'hybrid'. Responding to a tendency of those (mis)applying Said's paradigm to interpret Orientalism as a unidirectional construction of stereotypes of the East by the West for Western consumption, Bhabha has suggested that 'the point of intervention should shift from a ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse'.¹ Says Bhabha: 'If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change in perspective occurs. The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention'.² As Benjamin points out, 'this revised estimate of colonial situations recognizes the possibilities for indigenous agency', something he interprets to varying degrees in these case studies. In addition, Benjamin suggests that 'the recognition needs to be extended from the study of individuals to colonialism as a system' (p. 4).

While his accounts of the institutional manifestations of Orientalism do seem to set the stage for such a systematic reassessment of agency, Benjamin is less explicit on the possibilities for indigenous agency in the systematic elements of the institutional context he addresses. The case for indigenous agency is clearer when Benjamin turns to specific case studies of the 'ambivalence' and 'hybridity' in his analyses of particular colonial artists. These range from a discussion of anonymous subaltern decorative artists practicing 'indigenous' arts in workshops structured and directed by the colonial administration, to individual artists Mohamed Racim and Azouaou Mammeri.

In each case study, the 'native' artist has assimilated a degree of 'modernisation' or 'Frenchness' as a result of the circumstances of colonisation. Each is faced with the question of how to negotiate between local traditions and the Western aesthetic models that were antithetical to them. Benjamin's case studies suggest two different ways indigenous artists were able to 'live their mental life strategically mimicking the Other to retain a space for the self'. While Azouaou Mammeri chose the path of emulation, painting perspectival landscape views in keeping with Western aesthetics, Mohammed Racim created his own form of 'indigenous neotraditionalism', combining Persian and Mughal miniature techniques with Western perspectival views. Benjamin convincingly suggests elements of resistance in the work of these two artists.

Benjamin is also interested in the ways the colonial enterprise inflects the subjectivities of the colonisers. He refers to the necessity of recognising what Nicholas

Thomas describes as the 'endless mutual inflection of participants, even in situations of unequal power' while still maintaining 'a realistic assessment of power in colonial relations'. In the most extreme case, a French artist Etienne Dinet 'went native', learning the language, absorbing the culture and converting to Islam. Benjamin argues that this 're-socialising the self' affected the kind of work he produced and 'made it possible to transform the meanings of Orientalist painting'(p. 4). Yet Benjamin's analyses of Renoir and Matisse suggest that while their experiences of North Africa were preconditioned by their immersion in French Orientalist discourse, the colonial experience posed heretofore unrecognised challenges to their art as well.

Notes

1. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge: London and New York, 1994), p. 112.
2. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994).

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Refiguring Rodin

David J. Getsy

Albert Elsen with Rosalyn Frankel Jamison: Rodin's Art: The Rodin Collection of the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003), 680 pp., hardback ISBN 0-19-513380-3, £74.95, paperback ISBN 0-19-513381-1, £35.00.

Claudine Mitchell (ed.): **Rodin: The Zola of Sculpture** (Ashgate Publishing: Aldershot, 2004), 50 b&w illns, 282 pp., hardback ISBN 0-7546-0904-9, £52.50.

Auguste Rodin's legendary persona has overshadowed critical evaluations of his work since the late nineteenth century. He made it his mission to infuse subjectivity and expressivity into sculpture, and his artistic innovations were closely interwoven with his own aspirations to and conceptions of the artist as genius. Consequently, it has been Rodin himself rather than his work that has more often been the subject of discussion in general narratives of the history of art.¹ His career is often told as a series of scandals: the accusations that the 1876 *Age of Bronze* had been cast from life, the problems with public monuments such as the 1884-1895 *Burghers of Calais* and 1898 *Balzac*, the perpetual incompleteness of the *Gates of Hell* and the *Victor Hugo*, the stories of his sexual exploits with his models and students, and the display of his erotic drawings in 1900. He became,

for some, an emblematic and mythic modern artist, and these public concerns over his work and practice merely confirmed his avant-garde status.

In the twentieth century, however, that status has been frequently questioned. Some saw the *Age of Bronze* as merely one more academic nude, and his subsequent exploration of the expressivity of the human form has been dismissed as little more than pandering to melodrama and sentiment. The numerous and dubious marble works issuing from his studio year after year made it easy, from this perspective, to dismiss Rodin as a maker of kitsch and 'dulcified replicas'.

This phrase comes from an important 1963 essay by Leo Steinberg, which sought to resuscitate Rodin's modernity, arguing that the scores of marble carvings produced in the last decades offered an inaccurate picture of Rodin's art.² Instead, the hundreds of recombined plaster casts in the Musée Rodin evidenced an artist for whom experimentation and contingency were central. Re-opening the case for Rodin's modernity, Steinberg's essay unwittingly set a pattern for subsequent Rodin scholarship in which the heroic narrative of the individualistic, anti-Establishment artist would again become a central theme. Almost defensively, the literature on the sculptor caricatured nineteenth-century sculpture as a wasteland in which Rodin was the solitary oasis, and he was often held up as the only sculptor of any interest comparable to the rapid advances of modern painting. Outside of Rodin scholarship the sculptor's modernity might still be considered dubious, but this skepticism fueled an even more ardent defence of Rodin as modern by his supporters.

Two new major contributions to the literature on Rodin bear the traces of these historiographic trends even as they both concretely and substantively deepen our understanding of the artist. Both Albert Elsen's posthumously published *Rodin's Art* and Claudine Mitchell's *Rodin: The Zola of Sculpture* explore Rodin's works and context rather than replicate the frequent tendency toward biographical narrative, but for both the question of how to understand Rodin's work in relation to modern art lingers.

The ground for Steinberg's pivotal essay on Rodin was prepared by Albert Elsen, who organized a major exhibition for the Museum of Modern Art that same year. Over the course of his long career, Elsen became the driving force behind the revival of Rodin's reputation. His scholarship unquestionably forms the foundation of subsequent research. *Rodin's Art* is the catalogue of the Rodin collection of the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University. It was Elsen's presence at Stanford and his long-time friendship with the Cantors that ultimately resulted in one of the largest Rodin collections on the globe. While documenting this group of objects, *Rodin's Art* is nothing less than Elsen's magnum opus in which he synthesised decades of his research on the sculptor. Elsen is reported to have

completed the manuscript before his death in 1995, and the catalogue was brought to completion under the supervision of Rosalyn Frankel Jamison with the occasional additional contribution (in particular, Margherita Andreotti's essay on the 1878–1879 *Bellona* is a valuable addition). Some entries have been updated and put into accord with recent literature, but Elsen's authorial voice is consistent throughout the text. Jamison should be commended for producing such a coherent book that is truly a testament to Elsen's life-long love of Rodin.

Rodin's Art is a massive book, containing extensive and detailed essays on over two hundred individual works. In the absence of a comprehensive catalogue raisonné, it will provide the single best foundation source on the artist. Readers will welcome the accessible introduction to the key themes and issues of such major works as the *Burghers*, the *Balzac*, and the *Gates* as well as works unfamiliar to many non-specialists. Elsen's analyses are thorough and patient, so much so that some might find the wealth of detail trying at times. He painstakingly moves the reader through the nuances of Rodin's decision-making processes, and it is here that Elsen's encyclopaedic knowledge comes into play most forcefully. Beyond the exhaustive accounts of the genesis of Rodin's works, Elsen's book is perhaps most valuable for being a guide to how to look at figurative sculpture. Rodin, like all sculptors trained in the nineteenth century, employed and adapted a sophisticated and subtle formal language of the sculptural body. Minute transformations in the placement of limbs, the choice of model, and the handling of surface all carried with them different messages, and Rodin's work alternately draws upon and subverts this visual vocabulary. Elsen focuses on the works themselves in detailed analyses of Rodin's figures that cumulatively instruct the reader in what to look for in nineteenth-century figurative sculpture. Elsen's guided looking will no doubt help to focus fresh eyes on Rodin's activated surfaces as well as the wider field of figurative sculpture. That said, Elsen's dual emphasis on Rodin's intentions and formal analysis will leave many readers aware of the relative paucity of attention to any but the most obvious political or social contexts. Most acute is the lack of a sustained registration of feminist critiques of Rodin's work such as those generated through the art-historical studies of Camille Claudel's sculpture. For instance, speaking of the infamous 1891 *Iris*, Elsen argued that 'What Rodin observed and wanted to portray was that part of a complex and erotic movement that would make a good sculpture, and no more', proceeding then to offer a formalist analysis of the fragmentary female nude holding her legs open (pp. 575–7). For Elsen, such audacity was not a site for critical investigation into the representation of gender, scopical power, and sexuality but rather a reaffirmation of Rodin's avant-garde persona: '*Iris* was

still another declaration of artistic independence with respect to form and sexuality' (p. 578).

In *Rodin's Art*, formal analysis only rarely gives way to a reconsideration of other perspectives, or of wider cultural and theoretical or conceptual issues for three-dimensional representation, or of wider larger cultural and artistic contexts and networks.³ Much like Rodin's often discussed liberation of the sculpture from the gravitational pull of the monument and the pedestal, Elsen's analyses of Rodin often float free in space, beautiful and useful on their own, but touching on little outside themselves. I mention this not to indict Elsen and Jamison's entirely praiseworthy achievement but rather to indicate that these careful discussions of Rodin's individual works leave important and pressing avenues for future investigation and analysis. This is what we might expect from such a collection catalogue, but many readers attempting to situate Elsen's research into current modes of art-historical analysis will quickly note the particular methodological perspective of the text.

This is perhaps most problematic with regard to the issue that hangs over Elsen's text: reproduction. The majority of the works in the Cantor collection are posthumous casts. On his death, Rodin bequeathed the rights of reproduction to the French state, and many of the works discussed in *Rodin's Art* were cast a half century after the artist's death. Elsen goes to great lengths to argue for the validity of these casts, and there is a separate introductory essay on this issue. In one sense, he is correct to note that figurative sculpture in Rodin's era was, by definition, caught up with the question of reproducibility and that any nineteenth-century sculpture is not 'original' in the way an easel painting would be. Elsen's discussion of this issue, however, is not exploratory but defensive, stating unequivocally that 'All bronze casts authorized by Rodin and later by his heir, the French government, are authentic and original' (p. 30). It was this question that was the source of Elsen's high-profile dispute with Rosalind Krauss. Her 1981 essay 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde' questioned the casting of the *Gates of Hell*, a work that had been unfinished and disassembled in Rodin's studio at his death. No mention of Krauss's essay, Elsen's reply to her in the pages of *October*, or Krauss's riposte can be found in the bibliography.⁴ Even more troubling is the lack of reference to Krauss's *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, the chapter of which on the *Gates of Hell* is one of the most compelling and sophisticated analyses of Rodin's work to date.⁵ The deliberate omission of Krauss's essays is, regardless of Elsen's differences with her, inexcusable in a volume that aspires to provide a reassessment of Rodin's work. It would have been far more defensible to grapple with the issue, acknowledge the counter-arguments, and raise more fundamental questions about the valuation of 'originality' as a defining assumption of modern art. This was Krauss's point in 1981, yet at that

time Elsen took it to be an attack on Rodin's modernity that this catalogue still struggles to refute.

By contrast, Claudine Mitchell's collaborative volume *Rodin: The Zola of Sculpture* attempts to situate Rodin in a particular context, that of his British reception, and in so doing offers a different assessment of Rodin's modernity. This is a very valuable book that, in sum, complicates the heroic image of Rodin so often put forth by his admirers. It not only makes a major contribution to Rodin scholarship but also to the vexed question of modern art in Britain.

The book's format is a difficult one. The primary author is Claudine Mitchell, but it includes other new essays as well as translations of primary documents. While the progression of essays tends to be more integrated than in most anthologies, there are still distinct and sometimes competing authorial voices and methodological perspectives in its pages. It is on the question of Rodin's relationship to modernity in which these voices begin to sound most dissonant. Many essayists grapple with the fact that Rodin's status and reputation in Britain were not nearly as anti-Establishment as many defenders of Rodin would have it, whereas other writers in the volume uncritically presume Rodin's modernity as secure and unassailable. Rodin found many collectors and supporters in Britain. He contributed a major monument to London (a second version of the *Burghers of Calais*) as well as a major collection of sculptures spanning his career to the Victoria & Albert Museum. The history of Rodin in Britain is particularly compelling because it demonstrates how equivocal his supposed avant-garde status was and how the definition of modern sculpture is more fluid than many traditional accounts would have it.

It is to Mitchell's credit that her essays are some of the most wide-ranging and strongest in the volume. In her introduction and essay on Rodin's critical reception in Britain, Mitchell successfully lays out the problems and issues for the volume. Rodin's career in Britain was determined by the related discourses of national identity and internationalism, and Rodin himself understood works such as the *Burghers* and his V&A gift in that context. While perhaps overplaying the prudery of Victorian art criticism, Mitchell nevertheless gives a complex picture of the competing rejections and embraces of Rodin in the critical literature. Her discussion of the context of Victorian sculpture criticism would have benefited greatly from a wider view of the norms and contentions among writers on sculpture in the 1880s and 1890s, for it was during this time that an active and contentious discourse of sculpture had developed. For instance, Claude Phillips, critic for the *Academy and Magazine of Art*, has a much more complicated set of attitudes toward the modernity and realism of sculpture than Mitchell's justifiably focused discussion allows. That said, her discussion of his advocacy of Rodin is an important contribution to the study of Victorian art criti-

cism. Mitchell's essay on Arthur Symons and Rodin does not match the usefulness of her other essays, but her analysis of the V&A gift is an exemplary case study in the complexities of Rodin's own self-fashioning and international reception. She effectively shows Rodin to be concerned with his own legacy, sensitive to multiple national contexts, and sophisticated in his understanding of how his sculptures function together. There has been much attention to Rodin's installation practices with regard to the 1900 exhibition, and Mitchell here provides a useful complement that demonstrates one of the key themes of Rodin's work: that he was sensitive to the ways in which position and context of individual works affects the interpretation of his sculptural bodies alone and in relation to each other.

Other essays in the volume tackle specific questions for Rodin's reception and activities in Britain. Anna Tahinci focuses on Rodin's British collectors, supplying a useful discussion and collection of facts on this issue. In fact, the volume as a whole is to be commended for including such data, translations of primary documents, and much information from various archival sources. Of note is Joy Newton's explication of the personal relationship with the poet William Ernest Henley, which aids in an understanding of Rodin's commitments as well as of the engineering of his British reputation. Bénédicte Garnier lays out an illuminating history of Rodin's exchanges with Edward Perry Warren and John Marshall that complicates the avant-gardist presumptions that often colour Rodin scholarship. Focusing on Rodin's obsession with an Antique head of a goddess from Chios in Warren's possession, Garnier discusses Rodin's contribution to contemporary debates about Ancient art at the beginning of the twentieth century. Two essays on Ancient art by Rodin are included in translation. Mitchell and Hélène Pinet also provide extensive documentation of the debates about the siting of the London *Burghers of Calais* and Rodin's desire for it to be placed on a high pedestal. Their history, replete with Rodin's letters on the topic, is useful for demystifying Rodin and demonstrating the variability of his intentions. (It also provides a much more even and detailed account of this complex affair than that provided in Elsen's entry on the *Burghers*.) Siân Reynolds's discussion of the little-known sculptor and Rodin pupil Ottilie McLaren is an unexpected and useful contribution to both Rodin literature and the history of women artists. There has been much interest in Rodin's female students and Rodin's erotic advances toward them, but Reynolds argues that McLaren's case offers an alternate and illuminating view about Rodin's teaching practices and women's relationships with him.

Rodin is positioned in relation to his British contemporaries by Benedict Read, who reminds readers that the clichés of the academic versus the avant-garde are neither rigid nor helpful when discussing sculpture in Britain during this time. Read focuses on a rejection of a

Rodin sculpture by the Academy in 1886. Many writers at the time (and some continuing in this volume) rush to cite this event as confirmation of Rodin's avant-garde status. Read outlines the context of British sculpture in this period and indicates that there are many possible explanations for this rejection, not the least of which was the modern initiatives with regard to sculpture being pushed by Frederic Leighton, then the Academy's president. It is such attention to the broader context of sculpture in Britain that illuminates Rodin's reception, for it points to a wider range of competing modern formulae. It should not be forgotten that in the watershed Academy Summer Exhibition of 1884, Rodin's *Age of Bronze* shared pride of place with exemplars of Britain's alternative formulations of sculptural modernity, Hamo Thornycroft's *Mower* and Alfred Gilbert's *Icarus*, or that Leighton was one of Rodin's first collectors in Britain. In his essay, Michael Hatt also explores this context by constructing a binary opposition between Rodin and Leighton in which the classic postulations of Rodin's modernism by Rainer Maria Rilke and Georg Simmel (as well as Steinberg) are reaffirmed.

Antoinette Le Normand-Romain and Penelope Curtis succeed in situating Rodin in the larger history of sculpture. Le Normand-Romain discusses Rodin's understanding of Ancient art and the way it affected his attitudes toward his own work. A deeper understanding of Rodin's engagement with Ancient art is one of the major contributions of this volume, and Le Normand-Romain's essay deftly demonstrates Rodin's complex negotiations of its example. Penelope Curtis's contribution to the volume also succeeds in putting Rodin's work into a wider art-theoretical context, although with less specific reference to Britain. She focuses on the category of the 'statue' as opposed to sculpture, and demonstrates how Rodin provided a transition to a reconceptualization and eventual abandonment of the statue as the sine qua non of sculpture. This can be traced especially to the *Balzac*, which failed as a traditional memorial statue but has, in many counts, been a foreshadowing of modernist sculptural priorities. Curtis provides an ambitious reading of subsequent sculpture as, in part, a response to the 'problem of the statue' represented by Rodin's *Balzac*. As such, it is a welcome addition to the volume that prompts reconsiderations of twentieth-century sculpture both in Britain and elsewhere.

Mitchell's thematic bibliography is selective but very useful. It should be noted that some of the essays would have been vastly improved by an awareness of and engagement with the more recent sources listed in the bibliography. This is especially pressing with regard to the new evaluations of late-Victorian sculpture published in the past five years.

Throughout Mitchell's collaborative book, very different images of Rodin emerge. Some writers rely upon the conventional image of Rodin as the quintessential modern artist, struggling against institutions and conser-

vatism. The unquestioned use of the phrase 'Rodin's Modernism' or the like in some essays seems at odds with the ultimate value of the volume as a whole: to offer a more complex picture of Rodin's work in relation to an open and contentious field of modern positions. The more compelling essays present a picture of Rodin as caught up with the problems of tradition and innovation. Recognising this does not mean that Rodin has no place in modern art, but rather that a different understanding of this category is needed – one that can accommodate the complexities of developing a modern idiom for sculpture in the period in which Rodin worked.

Notes

1. An excellent introduction to this issue can be found in Anne Wagner, 'Rodin's Reputation', in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press; 1993), pp. 191–242. The standard, and also most sophisticated, biography of Rodin is Ruth Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

2. Leo Steinberg, 'Rodin [1963]', in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York, Oxford University Press; 1972), pp. 322–403 (331).

3. Of note is a particularly invective footnote to the essay on the *Gates of Hell* in which Elsen attacks a representative of what he sees as the 'new art history'. [Rainer Crone and David Moos, 'Trauma of the Diving: The Critique of Convention – Fragments in the Work of Auguste Rodin and Friedrich Nietzsche,' in *Rodin: Eros and Creativity*, exh. cat. Kunsthalle Bremen (Prestel-Verlag; Munich, 1992), pp. 9–33]. In an explicit defense of his own mode of analysis, he writes against the use of 'the "author is dead" argument, meaning the artist's intentions do not count, to liberate viewers' responses from constraints, such as knowing these intentions and how and why the work came into being. This theory has been promoted by philosophers and critics, partly in revenge against artists who do not work from theory and whose visual, not verbal, art is invariably more interesting than what they write'. (p. 173, n37). Regardless of the validity of the argument Elsen rejects, his response to interpretative modes that do not unquestionably privilege artistic intention is indicative of his commitments in this volume.

4. Rosalind Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde [1981]', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press; Cambridge, 1985), pp. 151–70; Albert Elsen, "On the Question of Originality: A Letter", *October* 20, 1982, pp. 107–109; Rosalind Krauss, 'Sincerely Yours [1982]', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press; Cambridge, 1985), pp. 175–94.

5. Rosalind Krauss, 'Narrative Time: The Question of the *Gates of Hell*', in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (MIT Press; Cambridge, 1977), pp. 7–38.

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Taking off her Chemise in Public: New York Dada, Irrational Modernism, and the Baroness Elsa von Freitag-Loringhoven

Irene Gammel

Amelia Jones: *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2004), 71 b&w illns, 334 pp., hardback ISBN 0–262–10102–5, £25.95.

'Baroness Elsa von Freitag-Loringhoven', as the New York author Djuna Barnes recalled her legendary friend, 'was one of the "terrors" of the district which cuts below Minetta Lane and above eighteenth street to the west. Wearing the lip of a burnished coal scuttle for a helmet strapped to her head with a scarlet belt which buckled under the chin, Christmas tree balls of yellow and red as ear rings, a tea strainer about her neck, a short yellow skirt barely covering her legs, and over the precision of her breasts a single length of black lace she would walk the city' (p. 208). As if that were not enough to startle unflappable New Yorkers during the wild decade of the early century, she assembled street detritus into sexually provocative sculptures and wore them clinking and swishing on her body as she paraded down Fifth Avenue. *Limbswish*, a fabulous contraption made of a curtain tassel and metal spiral, was attached to her hip; as she walked, she would swish her sculpture back and forth. Or, as Djuna Barnes recalled another episode: the Baroness 'made a great plaster cast of a penis once, & showed it to all the "old maids" she came in contact with' (p. 208). Thus adorned, the Baroness's body became 'a kind of "readymade" in action' (p. 143).

Sculptor, poet and performance artist, the three times married, androgynous Baroness Elsa not only frames the book, but threads through each and every chapter of Amelia Jones's history of New York Dada. A photo of her sculpture *God*, a twist of gleaming plumbing fixtures mounted on wooden mitre box, looms large on the forest green cover of this beautifully illustrated book, highlighting the importance of this work in the chronicles of Dada. The Baroness's detachable phallus sculpture and excremental aesthetics are central to Jones's new picture of the city and the avant-garde. Constantin Brancusi's sculpture *Princess X*, a bronze penis exhibited at New York's Society of Independent Artists in 1917, laboured to veil its sexuality through aesthetic formalist abstraction, and Man Ray's 1920 *Priapus Paperweight* with its steely erect penis reasserted the 'impenetrability of the phallus' (p. 119). In contrast, the Baroness's phallus and swishy limbs spilled over the boundaries of all conventions. From