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“Rodin and the Contemporary Figurative Tradition” Exhibition,
Frederick Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids, MI.

Rodin and the Contemporary Figurative Tradition: Influence/Importance of Auguste Rodin in personal artistic development.

I believe that the history of art has been largely created as a result of one great artist’s dialogue with the work of another. It is the kind of conversation that transcends centuries, continents and linguistic boundaries, resulting in a wellspring of creative energy and building a foundation for the art that is yet to come. It allows for a kind of an artistic genealogy, which Auguste Rodin is known to have readily acknowledged by seeing himself as a legitimate heir to the great tradition of monumental nude sculpture in western art, initiated by ancient Greek and Roman sculptors, revived in the Renaissance, and advanced, through works of Michelangelo, Bernini and Carpeaux, among others, down to modern times. As a contemporary figurative sculptor reflecting on contemporary themes, I am keenly aware of also having a place in this great lineage that, for me, is punctuated by works of Rodin and Michelangelo, as well as by those of sculptors Ivan Meštrović and Gustav Vigeland.

One of my earliest encounters with Rodin was at the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia, when I realized that subtle, undulating reflections in the bronze bust I was looking at were none other than the sculptor’s own fingerprints. I was struck by this surprising discovery of the ephemeral, permanently embedded in the material capable of enduring for up to thirty thousand years. This observation, made as a young teenager, ultimately inspired my artistic endeavor in bronze. I was equally fascinated with Rodin’s surface modeling, in that every part of the body he rendered spoke for the whole by way of naturalism, less concerned with monumental expression than with character and emotion. Rodin’s figurative language, capable of revealing strength, vulnerability, tragedy and suspension of action, deeply in tune with the beauty and pathos of the human condition, was to me a three-dimensional, sensual, passionate answer to the drawings of Michelangelo I was already familiar with at the time. Rodin’s modeling captured precisely the qualities I admired in Michelangelo’s drawings: audacity with respect to anatomy, modeling and composition, explosive emotional tension, humanity that is larger-than-life in powerful expression of physicality.

I am inspired, challenged, moved to my deepest core by the beauty present in ordinary existence. Recurring themes in my work are a kind of a quest for wisdom, a nod to the disappearing old world, an attempt to resuscitate beauty created by our bodies and beings. These narratives resonate with Rodin’s artistic legacy of uncovering and unleashing the physical and intellectual force of the ordinary human subject. He succeeded in freeing sculpture from repetition of traditional patterns and calm, fluid idealism favoured by the French classical academicism. This became the turning point for contemporary figurative tradition that allowed for new expressive realities to be explored by the likes of

Meštrović, Vigeland, Camille Claudel, Antoine Bourdelle, Medardo Rosso, Giacomo Manzu, and others. Meštrović and Vigeland, instrumental to my development as a sculptor, have both benefited from Rodin's enormous artistic influence, having studied with him at one time or another. Coincidentally, one of my most influential teachers is an immediate heir to this illustrious lineage as well. Sculptor Stuart Mark Feldman studied with Russian-born sculptor Boris Blai, who studied with Rodin personally in early 1900s.

It is important to me that my sculpture does its job of communicating ideas, of illuminating a certain kind of truth and of contributing to the world in honest and meaningful ways. As my aesthetic tastes evolve and I continue to explore and question while I strive for a profoundly individual voice in my art, I believe the informing presence of Rodin will remain implicit in my work. Splitting my time between Philadelphia and Paris places me in a very fortunate position of having at my disposal two of the largest collections of Rodin's work worldwide. I return to Rodin often, to sketch or to study his sculptures, to move around them and to examine their profiles in order to understand the nervous condensed energy they possess, to contemplate the complex torsion capable of conveying emotion, or violent movements of the intellect, or states of awareness that sometimes seem to extend beyond the boundaries of human consciousness. Rodin's work transcends social, historical and cultural constraints of his place and time to capture something that is universal to us all: the strife and the triumph of human condition. That, to me, is what characterizes truly great art. Great art is what I aspire to in my sculpture.

2017

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