

Auguste Rodin (1840 – 1917)

***The Kiss* 1901-4**

(4 October 2011 – 2 September 2012)

Voted the nation's favourite work of art in a 2003 poll.

Auguste Rodin had a profound influence on the development of twentieth century sculpture. His work *The Kiss* is recognised today as an iconic sign of youthful love.

The embracing couple come from a true thirteenth century story of forbidden love. The adulterous lovers are Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini, who were slain by Francesca's outraged husband – Paolo's older brother Gianciotto Malatesta, who had asked his younger brother to entertain Francesca. As they sat reading stories of the love and romance between Lancelot and Guinevere, their love for each other emerged. A book can be seen here still clutched in Paolo's hand. This narrative was immortalised in Dante's *Inferno*:

*One day we reading were for our delight
Of Launcelot, how Love did him enthrall.
Alone we were and without any fear.*

The couple first emerged in Rodin's work in 1882 as a smaller-scale portrayal intended for use within Rodin's first state commission 'The Gates of Hell': a large bronze doorway for a museum of decorative arts in Paris.

By 1885 Rodin decided that the gentle embrace of the entwined couple did not suit the gates' overall mood of tortured guilty love, their spiralling form more suited to a separate sculpture. He began to display plaster and bronze versions of the idealised couple in galleries in 1887. Upon seeing the figures, one critic commented it "should simply be called The Kiss". Rodin adopted this new universal name for the work.

Two larger than life size marble versions were commissioned by the French government in 1888 and a third by American art collector Edward Perry Warren for his private collection in Lewes, East Sussex, in 1900. Too large to fit inside his house, Warren stored the sculpture in a stable block and later Lewes Town Hall. The perceived eroticism of Rodin's sculpture remained controversial and the sculpture was virtually unwanted for many years until it was purchased by the Tate in 1953.

Technique :

Rodin worked rapidly, making many sketches directly from life. These were followed by clay models and plaster casts to form the basis for his carved sculpture. Like many other sculptors of this period, Rodin approached the making of a sculpture as a collaborative process; carvers and studio assistants would turn his original models into finished



Auguste Rodin *The Kiss*, 1901 – 4 Credit Tate London
2011 (Installation at Turner Contemporary)

works. Assistants would use a mechanical pointing device to enlarge the model and transfer dimensions to a block of marble. Unlike other sculptors, Rodin and his carvers deliberately left visible the evidence of modelling and areas of unfinished, roughly chiselled marble. The presence of the artist's process was his way to link manual energy with creative thought.

Key words to use in discussion:

LOVE MAN WOMAN ROMANCE TEXTURE COLOUR
 HEAVY SMOOTH SCALE TOUCH REFLECTIONS
SHAPE FORBIDDEN HARD CLASSICAL LIGHT

Questions and themes to consider:

- How does it make you feel? Why do you think you feel this way?
- What story is the artist telling us? How does he do this?
- What is the sculpture made from?
- How do you think it was made? What tools would you use?
- Would the work have a different impact if it was a different scale or made from another material?
- What else is surrounding the artwork? Can you make any connections between these elements?
- Look at the view through the window. What is the weather like today? Does this affect what you think about the artwork?

Suggested activities:

Looking, Thinking, Feeling

Look at the sculpture whilst standing in the Sunley Gallery. How do you feel in this space? Consider your different senses. Put forward one word each to describe your first response to this artwork in this space.

Travelling Eyes

Start by looking at one point of the sculpture, for example a foot. Move your eyes around and across the surface, describing what you see as you go. You could also try working in pairs, taking turns to describe in detail what you see to your partner who stands with their back to the artwork.

Sketching

This is an 'in the round' type of sculpture. This means the artist intended the viewer to walk around the artwork and view it from different angles. Sketch the sculpture from several different viewpoints and compare the shapes and outlines created. Which angle tells us most about the story of these two figures?

Modelling

Back at school, use plasticine to create your own small sculpture experiments. Try modelling in a variety of ways – large or small scale, detailed or plain, smooth or textured. You may take photos during your visit to work from when back at school.

Creative Writing

Write down four words to describe this artwork on separate pieces of paper. These words can be observations or feelings, e.g. woman, rocky, passionate. Consider not only the

sculpture, but also the surroundings and experience. In groups use these words to create a poem or your own narrative for this couple.

Rodin and other exhibitions at Turner Contemporary:

Exhibiting *The Kiss* in the Sunley Gallery alongside the installation *Borrowing and Multiplying the Landscape* by Daniel Buren provides an opportunity to bridge the gap between historic and contemporary art; in this instance, works by two French artists. Over the period of this loan from Tate, three exhibitions will be held at Turner Contemporary, providing further opportunities to compare and contrast the work of Auguste Rodin with other artists from past and present.

- *Nothing in the World But Youth* (17 September 2011 - 8 January 2012)
Rodin's depiction of youthful lovers and awakening sexuality directly relates to some of the main themes explored in this exhibition, including *Boys, Girls, Sexuality and Growing Up*.
- *Turner and the Elements* (28 January 2012 - 13 May 2012)
Like JMW Turner, Rodin was a hugely successful artist in his own lifetime, with an international career and numerous public commissions.
- *Tracey Emin: She Lay Down Deep Beneath the Sea* (26 May 2012 - 23 September 2012)
Emin's work explores themes of love, sensuality and romanticism. A display of paintings, sketches and watercolours will bring together works by Emin, Turner and Rodin.