



Auguste Rodin, **Gates of Hell**. Midsection of the right door panel, showing the couple known as *Fugit Amor*.

Photo Louis-Frédéric.

Rodin Assignment

THE IDEA BEHIND MY WORKS

Auguste Rodin

What is the idea behind my works and what appeals to people about them? It is the pivot on which all art turns -- equilibrium, a counterbalancing of masses which gives rise to movement. That is the crux of art, whether those who conceive art as something different from "crass reality" like it or not. Art is like love. For many people it is a dream, an event of the soul, a palace, a sweet odor, a jewel. But none of these are the real thing. What is essential in love is union. Everything else is detail -- delightful, thrilling maybe, but detail. The same is true of art. If someone comes and praises my symbolism, my power of expression, still I know that the only important thing -- are the surfaces. Respect the surfaces, depict them correctly from every side, and movement will come; shift the masses, and create a new equilibrium. The human body can be compared to a striding temple; and like a temple, it has a center of gravity around which the volumes of the body are distributed and ordered. Once you have realized this, you

know everything. It is simple, but you have to see it. Academic artists don't want to see it. Instead of realizing that this is the key to my method, people call me a poet... They say my sculpture is the sculpture of an enthusiast. I do not deny that it contains much of a violent nature, but this overwrought quality does not come out of me, it is part of nature itself and its motion. The works of God are by their nature exaggerated; I am only true to them. Nor is my temperament overexcited; it is tranquil. Nor am I a dreamer, but a mathematician, and if my work is good, then it is because it's geometric... When you follow nature, you follow everything... It is not a matter of creating "The New"; the words "creating" and "inventing" are superfluous words. Revelation comes only to those who perceive with their eyes and minds. Everything is contained in what surrounds us.



Ugolino Holding a Child on His Lap, c. 1875-80. Pencil, pen and ink, ink wash, and white gouache. Auguste Rodin.



Left: **The Gates of Hell**, c. 1880. Clay, 10" high. Auguste Rodin.
Right: **Sketch for the Gates**, c. 1881. Pen-and-ink and pencil. Auguste Rodin.

Everything is given in nature, which is imbued with eternal, uninterrupted movement. A woman's body, a mountain, a horse are one and the same thing in terms of conception, and they all are built according to the same principles.



Mahomet, c. 1880.
Pen and ink, and ink wash over pencil.
Auguste Rodin.

For this assignment:

1. Please choose a drawing or series of drawings from Rodin's Gates of Hell drawings. Using the same materials he used, usually ink /wash and gouache, try to see the movements of the marks and the wash related to the figures he worked with. Think about the emotional quality of the lights and darks. How does this relate to say, Goya's "Disasters of War" series? Can you explore the use of wash itself as a vehicle to find the forms of writhing or splitting, or circling, or clustering that you looked at in the "Forms of Japan" assignment?

2. Then choose a sculpture by Rodin and do a study of the sculpture working with wash. How do you see the difference in working, when you have to translate form to two-dimensional surface, instead of studying from one of his drawings?

Look at the way Rodin found the composition for the "Gates of Hell" sculpture by pushing his fingers into the clay shown here next to a wash study for the "Gates of Hell".

3. After you have done several studies fulfilling the above assignment, could you: Create your own study for your own "gates of hell". These studies do not have to be large. You might do many small studies from his drawings and sculptures and then do a larger drawing for your own "Gates". Or you might chose to do a larger study from a sculpture and then do a series of smaller studies for your Gates.

This is a fairly open assignment where the goal is to further explore the relationship between the materials you are working with and the different materialities that form what you are observing. This is a two-week assignment, please begin with the studies from Rodin and bring them next week.



Man, Seen in Profile, c. 1881.
Drawing highlighted by gouache on gray paper. Auguste Rodin.