

# 6

## The Origins of Modern Sculpture

**I**n the twentieth century, sculpture as an expressive and experimental art form enjoyed something of a renaissance. Its modern development has been even more remarkable than that of painting. The painting revolution was achieved against the background of an unbroken great tradition extending back to the fourteenth century. In the nineteenth century, despite the prevalence of lesser academicians, painting was the principal visual art, producing during the first seventy-five years such artists as Goya, Blake, Friedrich, David, Ingres, Géricault, Delacroix, Constable, Turner, Corot, Courbet, and Manet. The leading names in sculpture during this same period were Bertel Thorvaldsen, François Rude, Pierre-Jean David d'Angers, Antoine-Louis Barye, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, Jules Dalou, Alexandre Falguière, and Constantin Meunier, none of whom, despite their accomplishments, have the world reputations of the leading painters.

The eighteenth century also was an age of painting rather than sculpture. During that century, only the French Neoclassical sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon and the Italian Antonio Canova may be compared with the most important painters. Thus, the seventeenth century was the last great age of sculpture before the twentieth century and then principally in the person of the Baroque sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini. In the United States, with the exception of one or two artists of originality, such as Augustus Saint-Gaudens (see fig. 2.54), sculptors were secondary figures until well into the twentieth century.

When we consider the dominant place that sculpture has held in the history of art from ancient Egypt until the seventeenth century of our era, this decline appears all the more remarkable. It was not for want of patronage. Although the eighteenth century provided fewer large public commissions than the Renaissance or the Baroque periods, during the nineteenth century mountains of sculptural monuments crowded the parks and public squares, and adorned architecture. By this time, however, academic classicism had achieved such a rigid grip on the sculptural tradition that it was virtually impossible for a sculptor to gain a commission

or even to survive without conforming. The experimental painter could usually find a small group of enlightened private patrons, but for the sculptor the very nature of the medium and the tradition of nineteenth-century sculpture as a monumental and public art made this difficult. After the eighteenth century, the center for sculpture in western Europe shifted from Italy to Paris, due in part to technological innovations and new sources for patronage, and the French Romantic period produced several sculptors of note, such as Carpeaux and Barye. (Paris was to remain Europe's major center of art from around 1720 to 1920, when other centers emerged in the more pluralistic adventures of modernism.) This geographical shift was accompanied by a tendency of artists to turn away from the preferred Neoclassical technique of carving marble to the practice of modeling plaster and wax. These materials could carry the inflection of the artist's hand and serve as a means to make the work reveal the process of its own creation. The models could then be cast in permanent form, in bronze.

The basic subject for sculpture from the beginning of time until the twentieth century had been the human figure. It is in terms of the figure, presented in isolation or in combination, in action or in repose, that sculptors have explored the elements of sculpture—space, mass, volume, line, texture, light, and movement. Among these elements, volume and space and their interaction have traditionally been a primary concern. Within the development of classical, medieval, or Renaissance and Baroque sculpture we may observe progressions from static frontality to later solutions in which the figure is stated as a complex mass revolving in surrounding space, and interpenetrated by it. The sense of activated space in Hellenistic, Late Gothic, and Baroque sculpture was often created through increased movement, expressed in a twisting pose, extended gesture, or by a broken, variegated surface texture whose light and shadow accentuated the feeling of transition or change. The Baroque propensity for space, movement, and spontaneity was part of the nineteenth-century sculptural tradition.

One of the most conclusive symptoms of the revival of sculpture at the turn of the century was the large number of important painters who practiced sculpture—Gauguin, Degas, Renoir, and Bonnard among them. These were followed a little later by Picasso, Matisse, Amadeo Modigliani, André Derain, Umberto Boccioni, and others.

## The Painter-Sculptors: Daumier, Degas, and Gauguin

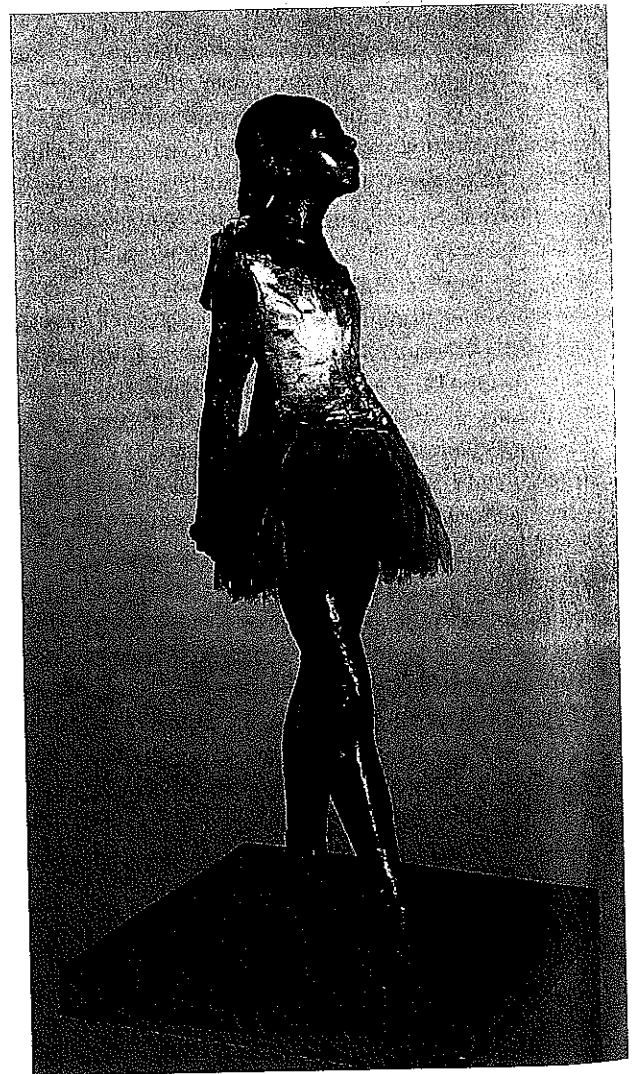
The pioneer painter-sculptor of the nineteenth century was Honoré Daumier (see chapter 2). His small caricatural busts were created between 1830 and 1832 to lampoon the eminent politicians of Louis Philippe's regime. Daumier could not resist mocking the apelike features of the Comte de Kératry (fig. 6.1), for he was not only a government official, but an art critic as well. These satirical sculptures anticipate the late works of Auguste Rodin in their expressive power and the directness of their deeply modeled surfaces. Daumier's *Ratapoil* ("hairy rat") of 1851 is not based on an actual person but is a personification of all the unscrupulous agents of Louis-Napoléon (later Napoléon III). Their arrogance and tawdry elegance are subtly communicated through the figure's twisting pose and the fluttering flow of clothing, counterpoised by the bony armature of the figure itself. Out of fear that it would be destroyed by the very forces it satirized, the clay figurine was kept hidden until after Daumier's death, when, like the earlier busts, it was cast in bronze.



**6.1** Honoré Daumier, *Comte de Kératry (The Obsequious One)*, c. 1833. Bronze,  $4\frac{7}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{3}{8}$ " (12.4 × 13.3 × 8.9 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

The sculpture of Daumier, now much admired, was a private art, little known or appreciated until its relatively recent "discovery."

Like Daumier's, the sculpture of Edgar Degas (see chapter 2) was little known to the sculptors of the first modern generation, for most of it was never publicly exhibited during his lifetime. Degas was concerned primarily with the traditional formal problems of sculpture, such as the continual experiments in space and movement represented by his dancers and horses. His posthumous bronze casts retain the immediacy of his original modeling material, a pigmented wax, which he built up over an armature, layer by layer, to a richly articulated surface in which the touch of his hand is directly recorded. While most of his sculptures have the quality of sketches, *Little Dancer Fourteen Years Old* (fig. 6.2) was a fully realized work that was exhibited at the 1881 Impressionist exhibition, the only time the artist showed one of his sculptures. By combining an actual tutu, satin slippers, and real hair with more



**6.2** Edgar Degas, *Little Dancer Fourteen Years Old*, 1878–81. Wax, hair, linen bodice, satin ribbon and shoes, muslin tutu, wood base, height 39" (99.1 cm) without base. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia.

traditional media, Degas created an astonishingly modern object that foreshadowed developments in twentieth-century sculpture (see fig. 24.76).

Like Degas, Paul Gauguin (see chapter 3) was a painter with an often unorthodox approach to materials. Throughout his career he worked in a diverse range of media. In addition to making paintings, drawings, woodcuts, etchings, and monotypes, he carved in marble and wood and was one of the most innovative ceramic artists of the nineteenth century. His largest work in this medium, *Oviri* (fig. 6.3), was executed during a visit to Paris between two Tahitian sojourns. The title means “savage” in Tahitian, a term with which Gauguin personally identified, for he later inscribed “Oviri” on a self-portrait. The mysterious, bug-eyed woman crushes a wolf beneath her feet and



**6.3** Paul Gauguin, *Oviri*, 1894. Partially glazed stoneware, 29½ × 7½ × 10¾" [74.9 × 19.1 × 27 cm]. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

clutches a wolf cub to her side. Whether she embraces the cub or suffocates it is unclear, though Gauguin did refer to her as a “murderess” and a “cruel enigma.” The head was perhaps inspired by the mummified skulls of Marquesan chiefs, while the torso derives from the voluptuous figures, symbols of fecundity, on the ancient Javanese reliefs at Borobudur, in Southeast Asia, of which Gauguin owned photographs. In his turning to non-Western sources and his determination to create an image of raw, primitive power, Gauguin anticipated some of the abiding concerns of European and American artists in the twentieth century (the influence of African art on Matisse and his contemporaries is discussed in chapter 7). When it was exhibited in Paris after his death in 1906, *Oviri* made a significant impact on, among others, the young Pablo Picasso.

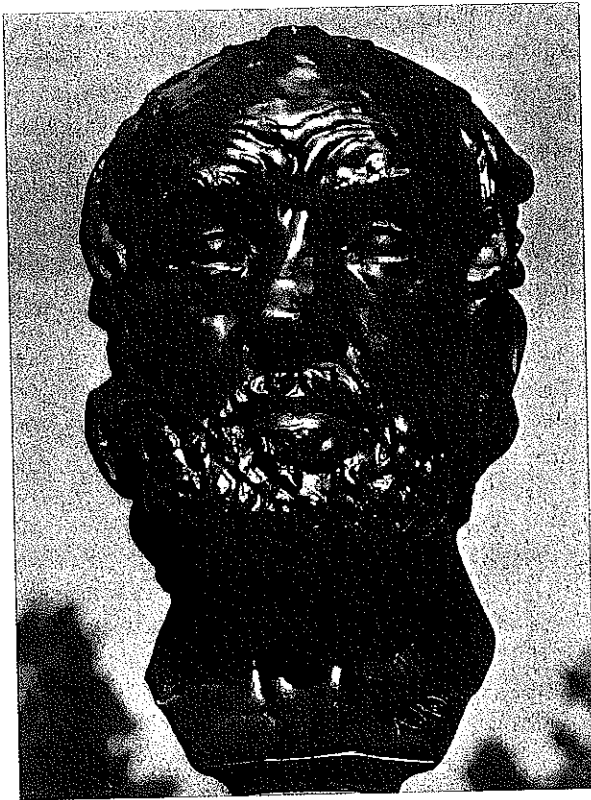
## An Art Reborn: Auguste Rodin

It was the achievement of the French sculptor **Auguste Rodin** (1840–1917) to rechart the course of sculpture almost singlehandedly and to give the art an impetus that led to a major renaissance. There is no one painter who occupies quite the place in modern painting that Rodin can claim in modern sculpture. He introduced modern ideas into the tradition-bound form of figural public sculpture. Unlike avant-garde painters such as Gauguin or Van Gogh, however, Rodin became an admired and respected public figure, thus helping to draw modern art into the cultural mainstream.

### Early Career and *The Gates of Hell*

Rodin began his revolution, as had Courbet in painting (see chapter 2), with a reaction against the sentimental idealism of the academicians. His *Man with the Broken Nose* (fig. 6.4) was rejected by the official Salon as being offensively realistic on the one hand and, on the other, as an unfinished fragment, a head with its rear portion broken away. Rodin sought the likeness rather than the character of his model, a poor old man who frequented his neighborhood. This early work was already mature and accomplished, suggesting the intensity of the artist's approach to his subject as well as his uncanny ability to exploit simultaneously the malleable properties of the original clay and the light-saturated tensile strength of the final bronze material.

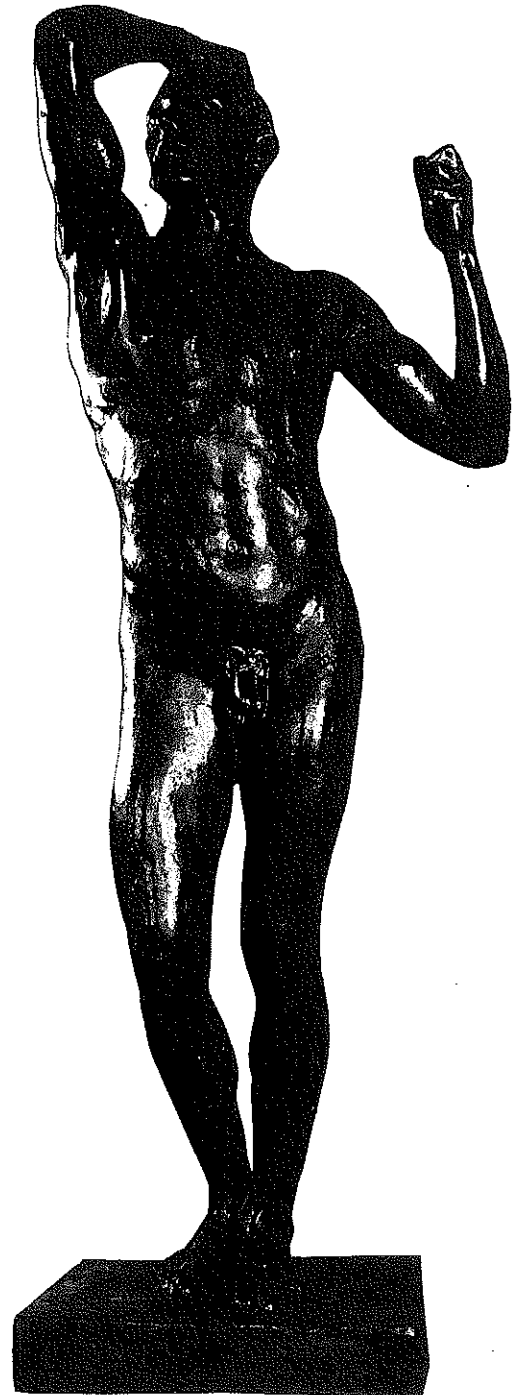
Rodin's examination of nature was coupled with a re-examination of the art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance—most specifically, of Donatello and Michelangelo. Although much academic sculpture paid lip service to the High Renaissance, it was viewed through centuries of imitative accretions that tended to obscure the unique expression of the old masters. Rodin was in possession of the full range of historical sculptural forms and techniques by the time he returned in 1875 from a brief but formative visit to Italy, where he studied firsthand the work of Michelangelo, who, he said, “liberated me from academicism.”



6.4 Auguste Rodin, *Man with the Broken Nose*, 1864. Bronze,  $12\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ " (31.1 × 19 × 16.5 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

*The Age of Bronze* (fig. 6.5), Rodin's first major signed work, was accepted in the Salon of 1877, but its seeming scrupulous realism led to the suspicion that it might have been in part cast from the living model—which became a legitimate technique for making sculpture only in the sixties (see fig. 21.23). Although Rodin had unquestionably observed the model closely from all angles and was concerned with capturing and unifying the essential quality of the living form, he was also concerned with the expression of a tragic theme, inspired perhaps by his reaction to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, so disastrous for the French. The figure, which once held a spear, was originally titled *Le Vaincu* (the vanquished one) and was based firmly on the *Dying Slave* of Michelangelo. By removing the spear, Rodin created a more ambivalent and ultimately more daring sculpture. The suggestion of action, frequently violent and varied, had been an essential part of the repertory of academic sculpture since the Late Renaissance, but its expression in nineteenth-century sculpture normally took the form of a sort of tableau of frozen movement. Rodin, however, studied his models in constant motion, in shifting positions and attitudes, so that every gesture and transitory change of pose became part of his vocabulary. As he passed from this concentrated study of nature to the later Expressionist works, even his most melodramatic subjects and most violently distorted poses were given credibility by their secure basis in observed nature.

In 1880 Rodin received a commission, the most important one of his career, for a portal to the proposed Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris. He conceived the idea of a free interpretation of scenes from Dante's *Inferno*, within a design scheme based on Lorenzo Ghiberti's great fifteenth-century gilded-bronze portals for the Florence Baptistry, popularly known as the Gates of Paradise. Out of his ideas emerged *The Gates of Hell* (fig. 6.6), which remains one of the masterpieces of nineteenth- and twentieth-century



6.5 Auguste Rodin, *The Age of Bronze*, 1876. Bronze,  $71 \times 28$ " (180.3 × 71.1 cm). The Minneapolis Institute of Art.



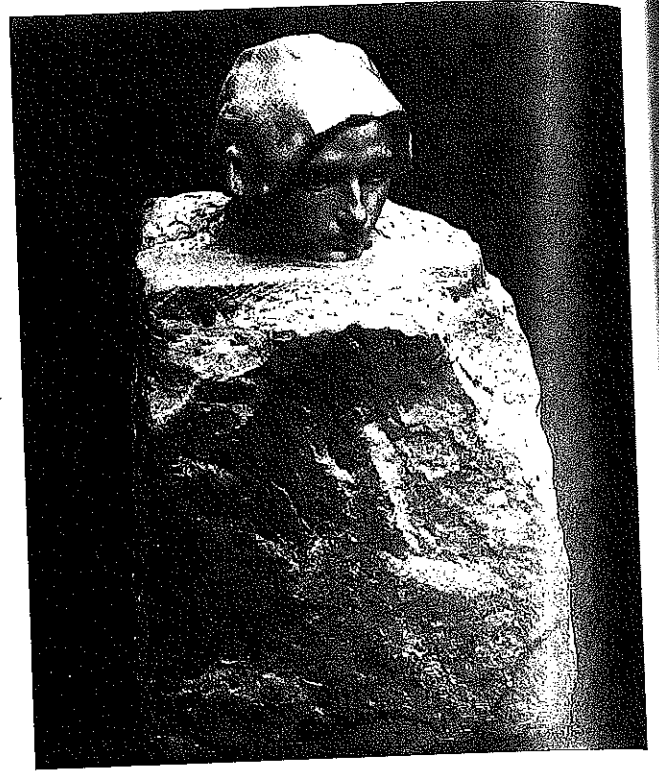
6.6 Auguste Rodin, *The Gates of Hell*, 1880–1917. Bronze, 20'10" × 13'1" × 2'9"½" (6.4 m × 4 × 0.85 m). Musée Rodin, Paris.

sculpture. It is not clear whether the original plaster sculpture of *The Gates* that Rodin exhibited at the Exposition Universelle in 1900 was complete, though it is clear that the idea of academic "finish" was abhorrent to the artist. *The Gates* were never installed in the Museum of Decorative Arts, and the five bronze casts that exist today were all made posthumously. Basing his ideas loosely on individual themes from Dante but also utilizing ideas from the poems of Baudelaire, which he greatly admired, Rodin created isolated figures, groups, or episodes, experimenting with different configurations over more than thirty years.

*The Gates* contain a vast repertory of forms and images that the sculptor developed in this context and then adapted to other uses, and sometimes vice versa. For example, he executed the central figure of Dante, a brooding nude seated in the upper panel with his right elbow perched on his left knee, as an independent sculpture and exhibited it with the title *The Thinker; The Poet; Fragment of the Gate*. It became the artist's best-known work, in part because of the many casts that exist of it in several sizes. *The Gates* are crammed with a dizzying variety of forms on many different scales, above and across the lintel, throughout the architectural frieze and framework, and rising and falling restlessly within the turmoil of the main panels. To convey the turbulence of his subjects, Rodin depicted the human figure bent and twisted to the limits of endurance, although with remarkably little actual distortion of anatomy. Imprisoned within the drama of their agitated and anguished state, the teeming figures—coupled, clustered, or isolated—seem a vast and melancholy meditation on the tragedy of the human condition, on the plight of souls trapped in eternal longing, and on the torment of guilt and frustration. Like *The Thinker*, many of the figures made for *The Gates of Hell* are famous as individual sculptures, including *The Three Shades*, who stand hunched atop the gates. The tragedy and despair of the work are perhaps best summarized in *The Crouching Woman*, whose contorted figure, a compact, twisted mass, attains a beauty that is rooted in intense suffering.

The violent play on the human figure seen here was a forerunner of the Expressionist distortions of the figure developed in the twentieth century. An even more suggestive and modern phenomenon is to be found in the basic concept of the *Gates*—that of flux or metamorphosis, in which the figures emerge from or sink into the matrix of the bronze itself, are in the process of birth from, or death and decay into, a quagmire that both liberates and threatens to engulf them. Essential to the suggestion of change in the *Gates* and in most of the mature works of Rodin is the exploitation of light. A play of light and shadow moves over the peaks and crevasses of bronze or marble, becoming analogous to color in its evocation of movement, of growth and dissolution.

Although Rodin, in the sculptural tradition that had persisted since the Renaissance, was first of all a modeler, starting with clay and then casting the clay model in



6.7 Auguste Rodin, *Thought* (Camille Claudel), 1886. Marble, 29½ × 17 × 18" (74.9 × 43.2 × 45.7 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

plaster and bronze, many of his most admired works are in marble. These also were normally based on clay and plaster originals, with much of the carving, as was customary, done by assistants. Rodin closely supervised the work and finished the marbles with his own hand. The marbles were handled with none of the expressive roughness of the bronzes (except in deliberately unfinished areas) and without deep undercutting. He paid close attention to the delicate, translucent, sensuous qualities of the marble, which in his later works he increasingly emphasized—inspired by unfinished works of Michelangelo—by contrasting highly polished flesh areas with masses of rough, unfinished stone. In his utilization of the raw material of stone for expressive ends, as in his use of the partial figure (the latter suggested no doubt by fragments of ancient sculptures), Rodin was initiating the movement away from the human figure as the prime medium of sculptural expression. The remarkable portrait of his lover and fellow sculptor, Camille Claudel (fig. 6.7), does away with the torso altogether to personify meditation through the abrupt juxtaposition of a smoothly polished, disembodied head with a coarsely hewn block of marble.

### The Burghers of Calais and Later Career

As a somewhat indirect memorial to French losses in the Franco-Prussian War, the city of Calais began formulating plans in 1884 for a public monument in memory of Eustache de Saint-Pierre, who in 1347, during the

Hundred Years' War, had offered himself, along with five other prominent citizens, as hostage to the English in the hope of raising the long siege of the city. The commission held particular appeal for Rodin. In the old account of the event, the medieval historian Froissart describes the hostages as delivered barefoot and clad in sackcloth, with ropes around their necks, bearing the keys to the city and fortress; this tale permitted the artist to be historically accurate and yet avoid the problem of period costumes without resorting to nudity. After winning the competition with a relatively conventional heroic design set on a tall base, Rodin created a group of greater psychological complexity, in which individual figures, bound together by common sacrifice, respond to it in varied ways (fig. 6.8). So he studied each figure separately and then assembled them all on a low rectangular platform, a nonheroic arrangement that allows the viewer to approach the figures directly. It took some doing for Rodin to persuade Calais to accept the work, for rather than an image of a readily recognizable historical event, he presented six particularized variations on the theme of human courage, deeply moving in their

emotional range and thus very much a private monument as well as a public one.

The debt of *The Burglers of Calais* to the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sculptures of Claus Sluter and Claus de Werve is immediately apparent, but this influence has been combined with an assertion of the dignity of common humanity analogous to the nineteenth-century sculptures of the Belgian artist Constantin Meunier. The rough-hewn faces, powerful bodies, and the enormous hands and feet transform these burghers into laborers and peasants and at the same time enhance their physical presence, as do the outsize keys. Rodin's tendency to dramatic gesture is apparent here, and the theatrical element is emphasized by the unorthodox organization, with the figures scattered about the base like a group of stragglers wandering across a stage. The informal, open arrangement of the figures, none of whom touch, is one of the most daring and original aspects of the sculpture. It is a direct attack on the classical tradition of closed, balanced groupings for monumental sculpture. The detached placing of the masses gives the intervening spaces an importance that, for almost



6.8 Auguste Rodin, *The Burglers of Calais*, 1886. Six figures, bronze, 6'10½" × 7'11" × 6'6" at base (2.1 × 2.4 × 2 m). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

the first time in modern sculpture, reverses the traditional roles of solid and void, of mass and space. Space not only surrounds the figures but interpenetrates the group, creating a dynamic, asymmetrical sense of balance. Rodin's wish that the work be placed not on a pedestal but at street level, situating it directly in the viewer's space, anticipated some of the most revolutionary innovations of twentieth-century sculpture.

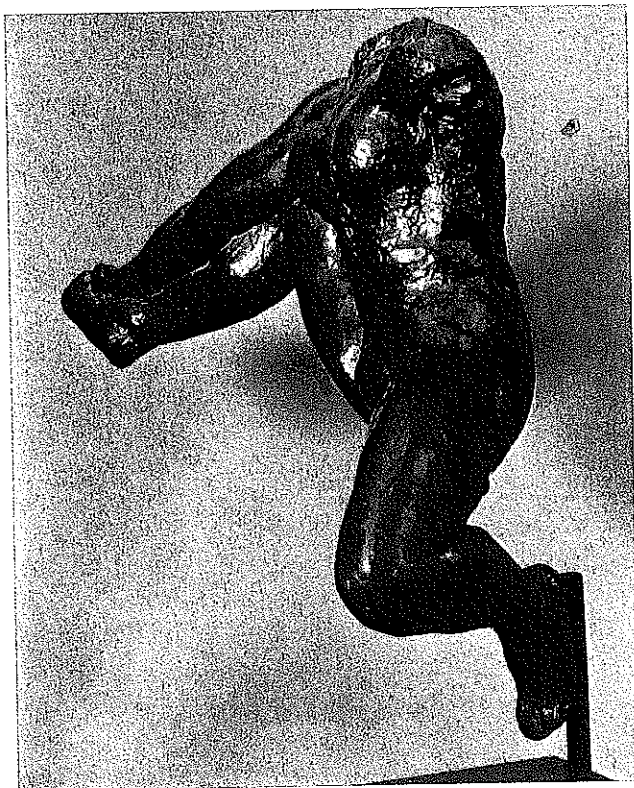
Many of Rodin's later figures are characterized by extreme and highly sensual poses. In *Iris, Messenger of the Gods* (fig. 6.9) the maimed, truncated form and contorted pose of the headless, one-armed torso, embodies tremendous vitality and displays a sexual boldness that far exceeds the thinly veiled, clichéd eroticism of academic sculptures of the female nude. Though the partial figure seems the sculptural equivalent of a sketch, it is a fragment that reaches an expressive completeness.

Rodin's *Monument to Balzac*, a work he called "the sum of my whole life," was commissioned in 1891 by the French Writers' Association, at the urging of the novelist Émile Zola. Here the artist plunged so deeply into the privacy of individual psychology—his own perhaps even more than the subject's—that he failed to gain acceptance by the patrons. What these and the public perceived was a tall, shapeless mass crowned by a shaggy head so full of Rodin's "lumps and hollows" that it seemed more a desecrating caricature than a tribute to the great novelist Honoré

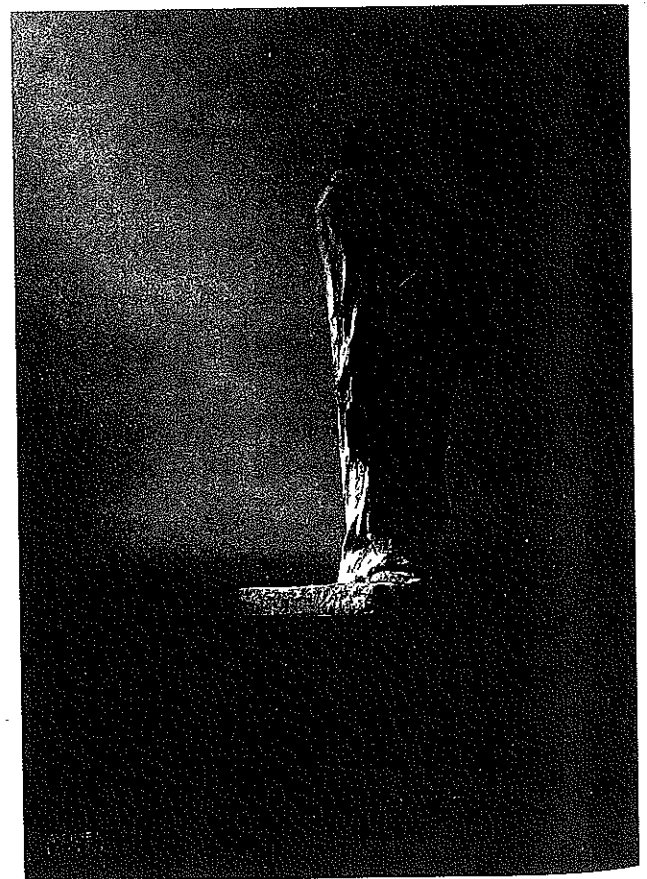
de Balzac, who had died in 1850. Little were they prepared to appreciate what even the artist characterized as a symbolism of a kind "yet unknown." The work provoked a critical uproar, with some proclaiming it a masterpiece and others reviling it as a monstrosity, whereupon it was withdrawn from the Paris Salon in 1898.

Rodin struggled to realize a portrait that would transcend any mere likeness and be a sculptural equivalent of a famously volcanic creative force. He made many different studies over a period of seven years, some of an almost academic exactness, others more emblematic. In the end, Rodin cloaked Balzac in the voluminous "monk's robe" he had habitually worn during his all-night writing sessions. The anatomy has virtually disappeared beneath the draperies, which are gathered up as if to muster and concentrate the whole of some prodigious inspiration, all reflected like a tragic imprint on the deep-set features of the colossal head. The figure leans back dramatically beneath the robe, a nearly abstract icon of generative power.

This symbolism of a kind "yet unknown" may have had its greatest impact in the photographs that Rodin commissioned Edward Steichen (1879–1973) to make of the original plaster cast of *Balzac* (fig. 6.10). With a typical sureness of aesthetic instinct, Rodin proposed that Steichen try working by moonlight. Not only did this technique



6.9 Auguste Rodin, *Iris, Messenger of the Gods*, 1890–91. Bronze, 32 × 36 × 24" (81.3 × 91.4 × 61 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



6.10 Edward Steichen, *Balzac—The Open Sky*, 1908. Photogravure from *Camera Work*, no. 34–35, 1911, 8 × 6½" (20.3 × 15.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.





**6.11** Auguste Rodin, *Study of Isadora Duncan*, Pencil and watercolor on paper, 12¼ × 9" (31.1 × 22.9 cm).

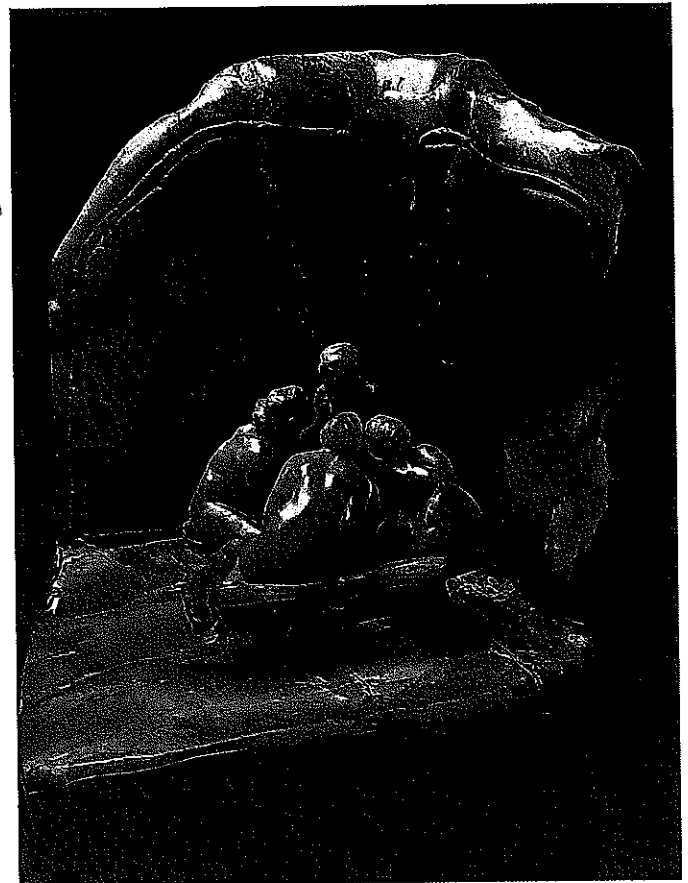
avoid the flattening effect that direct sunlight would have had on the white material, but the long exposure that the dim light required invested the pictures with a sense of timelessness totally unlike the stop-action instantaneity normally associated with the camera. Rodin detested such imagery as a treacherous distortion of reality. "It is the artist," he insisted, "who is truthful, and it is photography that lies, for in reality time does not stop, and if the artist succeeds in producing the impression of a movement which takes several moments for accomplishment, his work is certainly less conventional than the scientific image, where time is abruptly suspended." Rodin spent most of his creative life studying motion and improvising ways to express its drama and emotive effect in sculptural form. Often he did this in drawings made from a moving model, as in a famous series based on the dancer Isadora Duncan (fig. 6.11), but always for the purpose of capturing in line the impression of a flowing, continuous process, not an arrested action.

### Exploring New Possibilities: Claudel, Maillol, Bourdelle, and Rosso

Until the eighties, when long overdue retrospectives of her work were held, **Camille Claudel** (1864–1943) was known largely as Rodin's assistant and mistress. Tragically, she never recovered from her failed relationship with the

sculptor and was confined to mental hospitals for the last thirty years of her life. Claudel's work shares many formal characteristics with that of her mentor; nevertheless, hers was a highly original talent in a century that produced relatively few women sculptors of note, and at a time when it was still extremely difficult for women artists to have their work taken seriously. By the time she entered Rodin's studio at age twenty, she was already exhibiting at the Salon. Though she was an accomplished portraitist—she produced one of the most memorable images of Rodin—Claudel's particular strength lay with inventive solutions to multifigure compositions. An unusual and decidedly unheroic subject for sculpture, *Chatting Women* (fig. 6.12) presents four seated figures, rapt in discussion, who form a tightly knit group in the corner of a room. An immediacy of expression and the quotidian nature of the subject seem at odds with the inexplicable nudity of the figures and the use of strongly veined and colored onyx, which serves to underscore the abstract nature of the representation.

French artists who chose to work in a more traditional mode—**Aristide Maillol** (1861–1944) and **Antoine Bourdelle** (1861–1929)—represent opposition to Rodin in their attempts to preserve but also modernize the classical ideal. Maillol focused his attention on this restatement of classicism, stripped of all the academic accretions of sentimental or erotic idealism. Concentrating almost exclusively



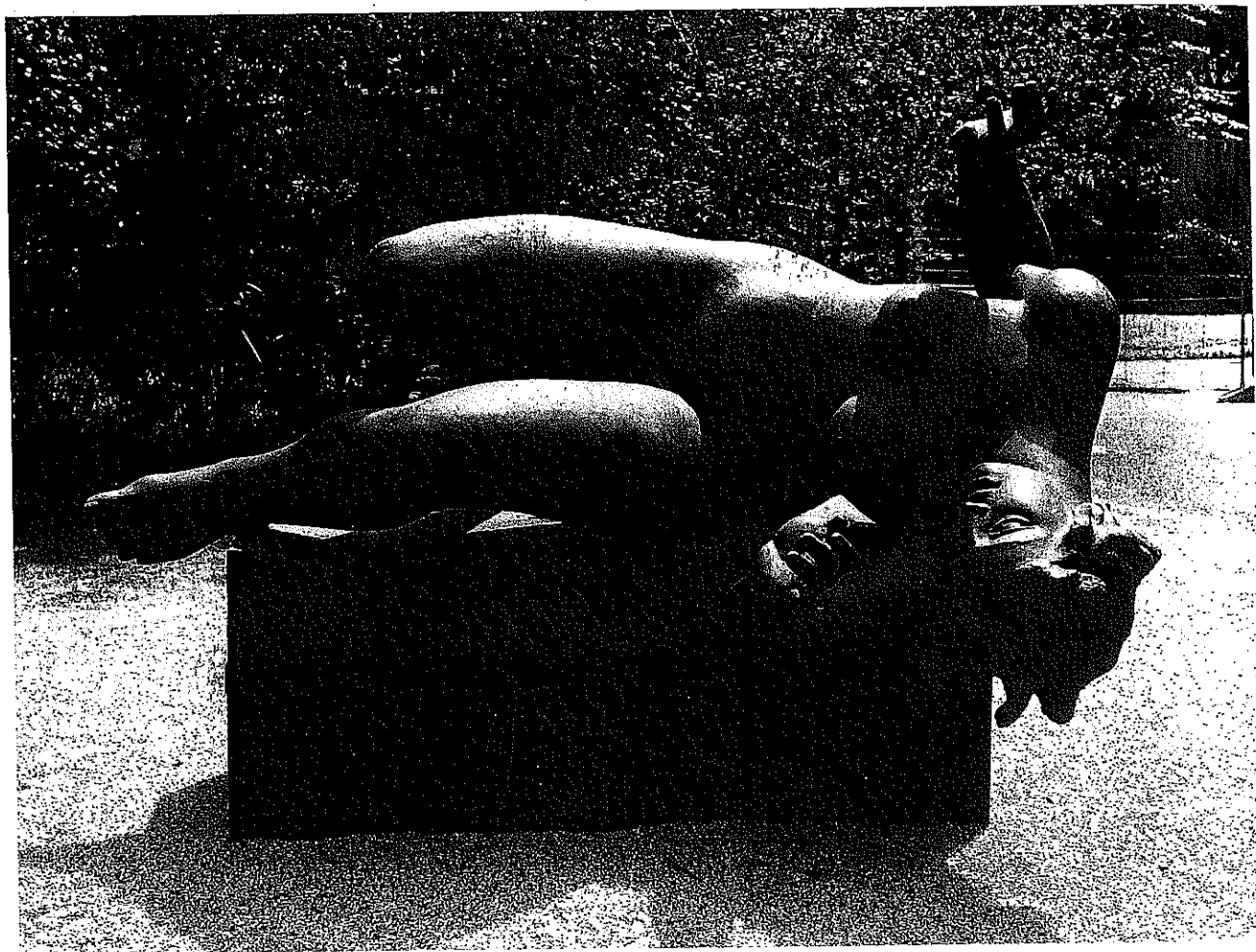
**6.12** Camille Claudel, *Chatting Women*, 1897. Onyx and bronze, 17¼ × 16¼ × 15¾" (45 × 42.2 × 39 cm). Musée Rodin, Paris.

on the single nude female figure, standing, sitting, or reclining, and usually in repose, he repeatedly restated the fundamental nature of sculpture as integrated volume, as mass surrounded by tangible space.

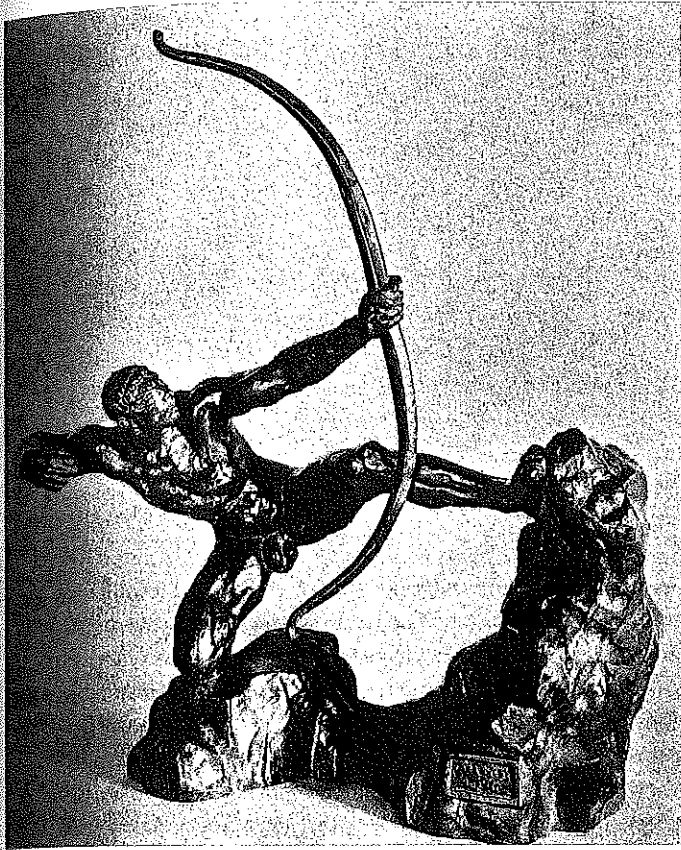
Maillol began as a painter and tapestry designer; he was almost forty when the onset of a dangerous eye disease made the meticulous practice of weaving difficult, and he decided to change to sculpture. He began with wood carvings that had a definite relation to his paintings and to the Nabis and the Art Nouveau environment in which he had been working at the turn of the century (see chapters 3 and 5). However, he soon moved to clay modeling and developed a mature style that changed little throughout his life. That style is summarized in one of his very first sculptures, *The Mediterranean*, a massive, seated female nude, integrated as a set of curving volumes in space. He developed a personal brand of classicism that simplified the body into idealized, geometric forms and imparted a quality of psychological withdrawal and composed reserve. Maillol could also achieve an art of dynamic movement, as in *The River* (fig. 6.13), a work that may have been affected by the late paintings and the sculptures of Renoir.

Antoine Bourdelle was a student and assistant of Rodin. Like Maillol, he sought to revitalize the classical tradition. His eclectic, somewhat archaeological approach drew on archaic and early fifth-century B.C.E. Greek sculpture, as well as the Gothic. *Hercules the Archer* (fig. 6.14) discloses Bourdelle's indebtedness to Rodin; its scarred modeling is an echo of Rodin's *Thinker* translated into violent action. The figure, braced against the rocks in a pose of fantastic effort, is essentially a profile, two-dimensional alternation of large areas of solid and void, possibly inspired by the famous Roman sculpture of the *Discobolus*, itself based on a Greek original.

Medardo Rosso (1858–1928) was born in Turin, Italy, in 1858, and worked as a painter until 1880. After being dismissed from the Accademia di Brera in Milan in 1883, he lived in Paris for two years, worked in Dalou's atelier, and met Rodin. After 1889 Rosso spent most of his active career in Paris, until his death in 1928, and thus was associated more with French sculpture than with Italian. In a sense, he always remained a painter. Rosso extended the formal experiments of Rodin, deliberately dissolving sculptural forms until only an impression remained. His favorite



**6.13** Aristide Maillol, *The River*, Begun 1938–39; completed 1943. Lead (cast 1948), 4'5½" × 7'6" × 5'6" (1.37 × 2.3 × 1.68 m), on lead base designed by the artist, 9¾ × 67 × 27¾" (24.3 × 170.1 × 70.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



**6.14** Antoine Bourdelle, *Hercules the Archer*, 1909. Bronze, 25 × 24 × 10¼" (63.5 × 61 × 26 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago.

medium, wax, allowed the most imperceptible transitions, so that it becomes difficult to tell at exactly what point a face or figure emerges from an amorphous shape and many-textured surface. "Nothing is material in space," Rosso said. The primacy he gave to the play of light and shadow is evident in the soft *sfumato* that envelops the portrait of his old doorkeeper (fig. 6.15), a work once owned



**6.15** Medardo Rosso, *The Concierge (La Portinaia)*, 1883. Wax over plaster, 14½ × 12¾" (36.8 × 32 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

by Émile Zola. This quality has sometimes led critics to call him an "Impressionist" sculptor. In his freshness of vision and his ability to catch and record the significant moment, Rosso added a new dimension to sculpture, in works that are invariably *intimiste*, small-scale, and antiheroic, and anticipated the search for immediacy that characterizes so much of the sculpture that followed.

