## **RODIN** / **RESPONSE** FIELD family secrets

Large Print Labels

# **RODIN** / **RESPONSE** FIELD family secrets

This exhibition is the culmination of an academic research project by Indian artist Supermrin. Informed by her decolonial bioart practice, titled FIELD, the exhibition develops both as a provocation and an artistic response to a group of bronze statues by Auguste Rodin hosted this year at the museum. This spring, Supermrin collaborated with her undergraduate students at the University of Cincinnati's School of Art, mining art history, art theory, and the museum's collection to cast narratives across time and space that investigate the materiality and hybridity within and beyond Rodin's sculpture.

We encourage you to adopt a student's approach and look at the artworks and ideas in this exhibition from several perspectives. As an assistant in Auguste Rodin's studio might have during the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris, you can look at a moment in time—a subjective and partial view of Europe's effects on the world at the turn of the century. You can also look back across time at Rodin's modernism, the new possibilities for the monument he pioneered, and the impact and afterlife of his art on how artists and the public have conceived sculpture in the 1900s and 2000s. And you can look to the burning present, to contemporary sculpture as inheritances—the "family secrets" embedded within the fragmented legacies of colonialism and modernism.

## **Rodin and the Burghers**

The Burghers of Calais commemorates six leading citizens of Calais who, in the mid-1300s, offered to sacrifice their lives to save their city during France's Hundred Years War with England. Auguste Rodin's first great success reoriented the long tradition of the sculptural monument in Europe in part by shifting focus from triumphant glory toward human suffering—the figures are barefoot and wear sackcloth; their anguished faces and strained bodies express the suffering of war and their stoic bravery. The work forever changed what forms and meanings a public monument could take.

In his first model, Rodin raised the figure group on a high pedestal, which he later removed, positioning the Burghers directly on the ground. In what ways did this gesture transform the Western canon of sculpture? To learn more, visit the exhibition reading room to find Rosalind Krauss's pivotal 1979 essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," which considers the shifting logic of the monument within the emergent modernist movement. Center of gallery Auguste Rodin (French, 1840–1917)

**Pierre de Wissant** modeled 1886–87, cast 1987

bronze Courtesy of Iris Cantor

*Cases* **Auguste Rodin** (French, 1840–1917)

#### The Burghers of Calais, First Maquette

modeled 1884, cast 1987 (Musée Rodin)

bronze North Carolina Museum of Art, Gift of the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation, 2009.1.18

#### Auguste Rodin (French, 1840–1917)

#### Fatigue

circa 1887

plaster Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorothy Schneiderman and Perle Hoffman, 1972.348

## The Image of France

Rodin's monument for Calais was part of an age of resurgent nationalism in France. Photography, a medium that enabled Rodin to reach a global audience, was often enlisted in this nationalistic endeavor.

Part of the "Mission Heliographique," a statesponsored project to glorify French identity, the photograph of a stone quarry in central France distills the challenges of the new medium, showing an artist working between creative subjectivity and politicized documentation. Considering the development of European colonialism at this time, the image also highlights how exploitative relationships to land were central to such imperial endeavors. The Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles holds an extensive collection of archival material that maps out forms of propaganda and racism inherent to the French colonial project. Their recent publication Visualizing Empire, Africa, Europe, and the Politics of Representation is in our reading room.

#### Capital with Riders and Men Felling a Tree

Provence or Rhone Valley, France Late 12th century

limestone Cincinnati Art Museum, Anonymous Gift, 1973.295

Henri Le Secq (French, 1818–1882)

#### **St. Leu (The Quarries of St. Leu d'Esserent)** 1851

salted print from waxed paper negative Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Susan D. Bliss, by exchange, 1982.84 Achille Quinet (French, active 1850s–1860s)

## Château de Fontainebleau, view of the Grand Parterre

circa 1868

albumen silver print Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Alfred Traber Goshorn, 1892 (Library Transfer), 1981.274

## **Bodies**

Through this ancient Egyptian mirror—both a reflective and a mimetic device—we might consider the inheritances and the inevitable distortions within acts of self-representation. In the same years that Rodin was at work on the *Burghers*, Degas made sculptures as study aides, blurring the forms of his wax figures (which were later cast in bronze) to better understand the human form in action. Veering from the figural into abstraction, artists Tucker Wood and Lou Shamblin consider queer bodies mutating within a post-human world. Emily Chapin evokes sculptor Camille Claudel (1864–1943), whose complex relationship with Rodin shaped both of their lives and careers. Emma Hite (American, b. 2004)

## **Your pain is too light for my mind** 2024

bronze Courtesy of the artist

#### Mirror with Papyriform Handle

Abydos, Egypt 2000–1800 BCE

bronze Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of the Egypt Exploration Society, 1926.57a Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917)

**Dancer Fastening the String of her Tights** circa 1885–90

bronze

Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Ethan Emery, Irene Emery Goodale, Melissa Emery Lanier, and Lela Emery Steele in honor of John F. Steele's election as President of the Board of Trustees of the Cincinnati Museum Association, 1992.138

Auguste Rodin (French, 1840–1917)

The Sphinx circa 1886

bronze

Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Douglas Graf and Mr. and Mrs. James S. Harland in memory of Ross W. Sloniker, 1973.32 Emily Chapin (American, b. 2000)

Claudel 2024

wood, chain, fabric, porcelain Courtesy of the artist

Tucker Wood (American, b. 2000)

**Effigy of the Sun** 2024

gold iridescent spandex, wire, fiber fill Courtesy of the artist

Lou Shamblin (American, b. 2001)

**Rip, Peel, Layer, Sew, Pull, Sheath, Stuff** 2024

nylon, steel, fiber fill, wire, ceramic shards, and wood chips Courtesy of the artist I am staying out of my mother's hair. I am 14, at a museum, I sit for hours in the garden. I stare up at your sundrenched masculine bodies cast in metal and stone. Forms and surfaces enchant me—bronze echoing plaster, echoing clay. Comingled matter charged by the relationships between me the viewer, and the artist, the muse, the founder, and within the networked space of the architecture and landscape at the Hôtel Biron.

We moved around a lot those days. I didn't mind it. I was continually engaged. My mother was a researcher, and while she could be strict, it meant that I was often left to my own devices in large institutional spaces, untethered. The bronzes reassured me in their otherness. There were those that could be certain. In anguish, rooted. I loved Rodin—I learned to draw in your garden. Now the sky is cast grey. The thick smog that hangs across New Delhi's horizon has spread. The sun simpers dully, felt through heat waves and this otherworldly light. I have become all of you—a pile of bricks, fly ash, a crow, a cow. Weeds are breaking through the pavement. We could never separate this from that. And I am always homesick. When the museum invited me to do this project, I didn't think my biologic sculptures could ever live there. Sometimes they smell, sometimes they break, sometimes there are bugs. I'm not anybody, I wouldn't dare to try, but you seduced me with these objects and their histories, these diverse ways of being coinciding within strange institutional corridors, categories crashing, sometimes looted, always poetic. So, forgive me if the exhibition is a mimic, a lustful hypnotic suggestion. Maybe she is a reed, watching our stuff fall apart near the end of the world.

## Metal, Leaves and Grasses

How do we consider and represent value? Peoples of the Kuba Kingdom in the central African Congo River Basin used cloth woven from raffia (palm leaf fibers) as currency from at least the 1600s through the 1800s. Beginning in the 1870s, large parts of this region came under the violent control of European states, companies and individuals, who subjugated its peoples and extracted its natural resources. Copper wire was another currency used across the region at that time.

Can historical knowledge of materials and their use shape our understanding of the two large sculptures at the center of this gallery, one conceived in Paris in the 1880s and cast in bronze, the other made of grass—waste lawn clippings this year in Cincinnati? *Center of gallery* **Supermrin** (Indian, b. 1984)

FIELD family secrets [Pink and red skirts sway like sailing ships over soft rounding hips. Shopkeepers roll down noisy shutters of closing trade stores, and the yellow fire from lamps attracts a million singing mosquitoes over sweet-smelling stalls. Our arms are caged in white bracelets like knotted driftwood lined with shrieking gulls.] 2024

fallen maple trees, grass bioplastic, indigo, turmeric Courtesy of the artist

#### Case Wire currency

Unknown maker (likely of the Kuba Kingdom, Congo River Basin) late 19th century

brass Cincinnati Art Museum, Museum Purchase: Steckelmann Collection, gift by special subscription, 1890.1272, .1273

#### **Currency mat**

Unknown maker (likely of the Kuba Kingdom, Congo River Basin) late 19th century

woven raffia (palm leave fibers) Cincinnati Art Museum, Museum Purchase: Steckelmann Collection, gift by special subscription, 1890.2013 This year I collaborated with a group of emerging sculptors, many of whom are represented by work in this exhibition. Together we embarked on a semester-long journey of critique and conversation, to mine perspectives embedded within Auguste Rodin's seminal practice. We engaged with his innovations in the studio, the expressive and hybrid materialisms he brought to his work, and the new forms for public sculpture that he proposed. We studied the burgeoning "modernist" movement across Europe and beyond that his work foretold, its colonial shadows, and the ecological crisis left in its wake. As contemporary sculptors inheriting legacies shaped in part by Rodin's propositions, our artistic responses collectively explore categories across the expanded field and beyond.

Perhaps art lies always outside the confines of the museum. Perhaps nature never was a pristine landscape, but an entangled assemblage that encompassed the human and the non-human, the cultural and the infrastructural.

## Word

The two men evoked here—Rabindranath Tagore (Indian, 1861–1941) and Amadou Hampâté Bâ (Malian, 1900/01–1991) embody distinct moments in the complex cultural hybridity that marked nineteenth and twentieth-century colonialism. In the twentieth century (or today), can words construct a monument, enshrining cultural values at a particular moment in time?

Some of Hampâté Bâ's and Targore's writings are available in the exhibition's reading room, adjacent to this gallery. Jacob Epstein (British, 1880–1959)

#### **Rabindranath Tagore** 1926

bronze Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard R. Minster, 1966.39

#### "Amadou Hampâté Bâ," Un certain regard

Directed by Ange Casta with commentary by Enrico Fulchignoni First aired: Channel 1, France, September 7, 1969

Rights provided by Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Paris Extracts from the record "LES DOGONS" (musical phonogram) OCR Taft Marsh (American, b. 1994)

**Diluted Lineage** 2024

Lonicera maackii (bush honeysuckle), galvanized wire Courtesy of the artist

## Land / Movement

Since the 1960s and 1970s artists have often rejected the formal bounds of sculpture, turning instead to the vast scale and elemental medium of nature to create works that viewers must inhabit or enact to experience fully. In a broader conception of sculpture, materials like honeysuckle roots and mulch become as meaningful as marble and bronze.

Laura Reeder's walking works, usually enacted in the landscape, suggest a reorientation of the sculptural monument. They also represent an intense engagement with the land, its substance, peoples, affects, and contours. A remnant path brings the messy presence of a moving human body into the untouchable space of the museum gallery.

With a real-time panorama broadcast from the industrial lowlands of the Queensgate neighborhood of Cincinnati, Supermrin considers the museum's voyeuristic space as it intersects with the vast layers of infrastructure that keep our cities running. Caroline McKenzie (American, b. 2004)

**05/30/1431** 2024

video installation Courtesy of the artist

Laura K. Reeder (American, b. 1963)

**Cultivator 6.5.2024.128**: Mrin, Peter, Jean, Eustache, Pierre, Jacques, Emily, Emily, Emma, Cameron, Spencer, Taft, Caroline, Lou, Tucker, Steve, Dave, & Auguste 2024

soil, mulch, footsteps Courtesy of the artist

## Unidentified Artist, possibly Bourne & Shepherd

(British, studio est. 1863)

#### **Darjeeling Railway**

circa 1890

albumen silver print Cincinnati Art Museum, Centennial Gift of George W. McClure, 1981.309

Supermrin (Indian, b. 1984)

[untitled] 2024

collaboration with Caroline Anderson, SLiNK love, James McKenna, and others; June-September live streaming video footage, artists responses Courtesy of the artist Elizabeth Murray (American, 1940–2007)

Wild Life 1986

oil on canvas Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Douglas S. Cramer, 2006.108

## Critique

In recent years, the sculptural monument has been the physical and ideological locus of protest movements addressing structural racism and the legacies of injustice in this country and around the world.

Can considering objects like the raw materials displayed here offer a useful perspective on Rodin's *Burghers of Calais*? A businessman and explorer from Indiana acquired the copal and rubber samples in the late 1880s in the central African Congo River Basin. Along with hundreds of cultural artifacts, artworks, household objects and touristtrade crafts, he sold them to this museum in 1890, just months after Rodin first exhibited his bronze monument in its final form.

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's print repurposes an icon of modern art, René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. (This is not a pipe.), to comment on indigenous peoples' rights and stereotypes. Elizabeth Murray's painting breaks the traditional bounds of the picture plane, adding volume to color and composition. How do these challenges to classification and to the canon reflect on the surface of Rodin's bronzes or on the halls that house them?

#### Samples of Gum Copal and Rubber

likely Congo River Basin late 19th century

gum copal, rubber Cincinnati Art Museum, Museum Purchase: Steckelmann Collection, gift by special subscription, 1890.800, .1567

#### Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

(Enrolled Salish member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, b. 1940)

#### **Ceci n'est pas une peace pipe II** 1993

color monotype Cincinnati Art Museum, Irwin and Judith Hanenson Collection, 2009.318 Paul Briol (American, 1890–1969)

### Schmidlapp Wing of Cincinnati Art Museum

(Coy Venus "Through The Bushes") 1939

gelatin silver print Cincinnati Art Museum, Archives Transfer, 1981.344