

FONDATION BEYELER

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**RODIN/ARP**

## RODIN / ARP

13 December 2020 – 16 May 2021

### Cover:

Auguste Rodin, *The Thinker*, original version, 1881/82 (detail)

Bronze (Auguste Griffoul, 1896)

72 × 34 × 53 cm

MAH Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva

© MAH, Geneva, Photo: Flora Bevilacqua

Hans Arp, *Torso-Sheaf*, 1958 (detail)

Marble (Santelli / Malakoff, 1959)

79.5 × 37 × 28.5 cm

Private collection

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## INTRODUCTION

For the first time, a museum exhibition brings into dialogue Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) and Hans Arp (1886–1966), pairing the ground-breaking work of modern sculpture's great precursor with the influential work of a major protagonist of abstract sculpture. Both artists displayed exceptional artistic inventiveness and enthusiasm for experimentation. Their works left a deep imprint on their times and retain their full relevance to this day. The sculptural milestones created by Rodin and Arp provide vivid and remarkable illustrations of fundamental aspects in the development of sculpture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rodin introduced transformational ideas and new artistic possibilities, which Arp later took up, updating, reinterpreting or contrasting them with new means in his biomorphic shapes. Even though to this day we cannot be certain that Rodin and Arp ever met in person, their works display numerous artistic affinities and shared references, which turns the confrontation of their distinctive formal idioms into a particularly rich and revealing visual experience.

The exhibition was curated by Dr Raphaël Bouvier, Curator at the Fondation Beyeler.

## FOYER

### **1 Auguste Rodin The Thinker, large version, 1903**

As a prelude to the exhibition, the museum foyer features a joint presentation of Rodin's iconic *Thinker* and Arp's imposing *Ptolemy III*. In open dialogue with each other, the two works illustrate the shift from figuration to abstraction in sculpture.

*The Thinker* was conceived in 1880 as part of the monumental *Gates of Hell*, on which he originally represented the poet Dante Alighieri, author of the *Divine Comedy*. In this context, the poet was to observe and ponder the circles of Hell. The *Thinker* sits motionless, resting his head on his hand, underlining the notion of thinking as action and process. Last but not least, the figure embodies Rodin himself, now descended from his pedestal and sitting on a rock, thereby calling into question the traditional form of the monument. In its reduced original size, *The Thinker* features anew in the second room of the exhibition.

## FOYER

### **2 Hans Arp Ptolemy III, 1961**

In his late abstract work *Ptolemy III*, Arp references Greek mathematician and astronomer Claudius Ptolemy, who in Antiquity established the geocentric worldview that would remain authoritative for centuries to come. For Ptolemy, Earth was a stationary celestial body at the centre of the universe, orbited by the sun and the planets on concentric trajectories.

In this work, Arp takes up the idea of the spheres and inverts Ptolemy's conception: the centre of the work is hollow and yet the structure retains its stability. Since the 1930s, Arp had been attempting to breach the compactness of his sculptures by introducing an additional dimension – the void. Between 1953 and 1961, he created three versions of *Ptolemy*. They all manifest a strong gesture of penetrating the sculpture's material: positive and negative shapes interlock, matter enfolds empty space, turning the void into an integral and constituent part of the structure.

## ROOM 1

### 3 Hans Arp

#### Automatic Sculpture (Homage to Rodin), 1938

The first manifestation of Arp's artistic engagement with Rodin is his 1938 small-format *Automatic Sculpture (Homage to Rodin)*, executed in plaster and granite. With the name "automatic sculpture", Arp references the surrealist notion of creativity as guided by the unconscious and by chance. The artist thus suggests that spontaneous creation has led him to a shape reminiscent of Rodin's work. By way of a comparative example, one can refer to Rodin's *Crouching Woman*, also executed in various materials and sizes (see no. 4). In the compactness of her posture and the delineation of her limbs, she bears a resemblance to Arp's figure. A connection appears between Arp's biomorphic shapes and Rodin's visual language, which already prefigures certain aspects of organic abstraction.

## ROOM 1

### 4 Auguste Rodin

#### Crouching Woman, large version, 1906–1908

In 1880, Rodin began to work on his complex and ambitious project *The Gates of Hell*, which was to occupy him over several decades and yet remained unfinished. Over the years, Rodin isolated many of the figures featured in this monumental portal from their original context and transformed them into independent works. One of these figures was *Crouching Woman*, conceived at an early stage and positioned in the upper section of the *Gates of Hell*, in close proximity to the *Thinker*. The female figure is shown in an unusual position. She crouches on an uneven, rocky piece of ground. Her right hand clasps her left foot, her torso and her limbs are pressed tightly together, giving her a block-like appearance.

## ROOM 2

### 5 Auguste Rodin

#### Paolo and Francesca in the Clouds, 1903/04

In 1275, Francesca, daughter of the rulers of Ravenna, was married to Gianciotto, son of the ruling family of Rimini. However, her heart belonged to her brother-in-law Paolo, who reciprocated her feelings. When Gianciotto caught the lovers, he killed them. This is how, in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, Dante chronicled the tragic love story in his *Divine Comedy*. Since then, many artists have engaged with Dante's masterpiece. It thus provided Rodin with material for his *Gates of Hell*. Paolo and Francesca, whom Rodin staged as a fervently embracing couple under the title *The Kiss* in 1886, also have their origin in this literary source. In 1903/04, he varied this representation: the lovers are now surrounded by a sea of clouds, and the sculpture is called *Paolo and Francesca in the Clouds*.

## ROOM 2

### 6 Hans Arp

#### Paolo and Francesca, 1918

Arp can be seen to engage with the same literary figures. Between 1918 and 1926, influenced by Dadaism, which he co-founded in Zurich in 1916, he created four reliefs all entitled *Paolo and Francesca*. Unlike Rodin, Arp reduced the figures to forms of almost ironic simplicity, marking a break with tradition. The relief can therefore be read as an avant-gardist reinterpretation of the theme.

## ROOM 2

### **7 Auguste Rodin**

#### **The Kiss, original size, ca. 1882**

*“He created bodies that touch all over and cling together like animals devouring one another, falling into the depth as one.” (Rainer Maria Rilke)*

Rainer Maria Rilke, Rodin's private secretary and confidant between 1905 and 1906, provides a wonderful description of the intensity and intimacy of the lovers' embrace. Rodin was a virtuoso at imbuing sculpted bodies with presence; in this sculpture, he manages to give full expression to the emotional ardour and sensuality of a passionate relationship.

Originally, the lovers were to figure in *The Gates of Hell* as Paolo and Francesca, two characters borrowed from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. But Rodin recognised that this depiction of bliss jarred with the sombre mood of *The Gates of Hell* and therefore turned *The Kiss* into an autonomous work.

A larger version of the sculpture stands in the park of the Fondation Beyeler.

## ROOM 3

### **8 Hans Arp**

#### **Bucolic Landscape, 1963**

The shapes that compose this sculpture are reminiscent of body fragments – disjointed arms, shoulders, torsos and legs appear assembled and intertwined in a complex composition. This work illustrates one of Arp's essential creative principles, which already played a role in Rodin's work: beginning in the late 1920s, Arp engaged with chance as a design principle in several reliefs. As can be gathered from some of the works' titles, the reliefs' elements were “arranged according to the laws of chance”. Following this leitmotiv, Arp also created sculptural assemblages.

In sculptures such as *Bucolic Landscape*, whose title conjures the ideal of a harmonious landscape depiction, fragmentary figure parts suggest a random interplay of organic shapes in a many-layered composition. Arp was one of the first to elevate landscape to the status of autonomous sculptural subject matter.

## ROOM 3

### 9 Auguste Rodin

#### **The Burghers of Calais, Assemblage of Heads and Hands after Reduction, Surmounted by a Winged Figure, after 1899**

This assemblage consists of severed heads, hands, and even fragments of a winged figure spreading its arms in protection over the rest of the enigmatic group. The gathering of these fragments is a vivid example of the significance of chance as a guiding principle in Rodin's work. Like Arp after him, who continuously reworked his plaster sculptures, in his pioneering assemblages Rodin used pre-existing sculptural fragments for his compositions, thus breaking with the academic conventions of his time.

Rodin composed this sculpture using existing plaster forms originally created as reductions (small versions) of his monument *The Burghers of Calais* (1889). They were sawed up in the artist's studio and then intuitively combined into new autonomous works.

## ROOM 4a

### 10 Auguste Rodin

#### **Iris, Messenger of the Gods, 1894/95**

Seemingly weightless, Rodin's messenger of the gods balances on her left foot – almost like a dancer. The artist represents the “celestial” figure as a fragment in order to draw our attention fully to her body and her lower belly and genitalia. Her body is charged with tremendous tension, as though life really were pulsating below the bronze skin.

The sculpture was originally conceived for the monument to the poet Victor Hugo – as a hovering muse, she was to provide him with inspiration. Rodin later developed the figure further as an independent work.

From today's perspective, representations of female nudes in modern art can also be read in terms of gender relations: in the process of artistic creation, the models were exposed to the artist's gaze. The example of sculptress Camille Claudel, Rodin's long-time lover, further shows that the models' relationship with the artist was tainted by personal conflicts and artistic dependencies.

## ROOM 4a

### **11 Hans Arp Daphne, 1955**

Notwithstanding its great formal reduction, in its elongated verticality Arp's *Daphne* remains reminiscent of a standing body. In three places – top, bottom and centre – it presents distinctive truncations, as though something had been severed to prevent further growth. Arp created *Daphne*, one of the most famous examples of his fragmentation approach, by halving his sculpture *Ptolemy I*, on view right next to it. Less than a paring back to the essence of a body, *Daphne* is to be read as the extraction of a new figure from an existing shape. Arp was particularly interested in the notion of transformation.

The sculpture's theme draws upon the retelling of a Greek myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: pursued against her wishes by Apollo, with the help of her father the nymph was transformed into a laurel tree.

## ROOM 4b

### **12 Auguste Rodin Torso of Adèle, 1882**

Many of Rodin's sculptures are based on female models, among them Italian sitter Adèle Abruzzesi, who gave her name to and most likely posed for this work. Rodin modelled the figure's supple, muscular body in clay directly in front of the model. He then had the sculpture cast in plaster as well as executed in terracotta. In a slightly modified version, with a head, the sculpture was also used for the female figure in *Eternal Spring*, also on view in the exhibition.

*Torso of Adèle* captivates with its compact corporeality and striking sensuality, which imbues it with an erotic charge. The artist follows in a sculptural tradition dating back to the Renaissance, which considers fragments as fully realised forms despite their incompleteness and apparent disjointedness. In works such as these, Rodin redefined the torso by elevating it to an autonomous genre, a decisive step in the development of modern sculpture.

## ROOM 4b

### **13 Hans Arp Torso-Sheaf, 1958**

The motif of the torso appears in Arp's work in 1931, in a marble sculpture titled *Torso*, one of his earliest fully sculptural works. For Arp as for Rodin, the torso plays a central role as a design principle. The early sculpture has no legs and Arp lends the torso a "snake-like" sinuous shape, expressive more of inner feeling than external action. Over the next decades, the artist honed this technique and worked on other silhouettes conceived from the start without limbs.

*Torso-Sheaf* displays Arp's unique treatment of a subtly flowing body caught in dance-like twisting movement, fusing human and vegetal elements. Over the course of Arp's artistic development, the torso acquired the status of an autonomous form.

## ROOM 5

### **14 Auguste Rodin The Age of Bronze, 1875/76**

*The Age of Bronze* was the first life-size independent sculpture Rodin exhibited in public. Initially, it was denied the status of art on account of its striking naturalism, Rodin standing accused of having used a life cast of his sitter. Today, it is considered a masterpiece of modern sculpture. It remains open to interpretation: is the young man wounded or is he just awakening?

In his essay on Rodin, Rilke provides a poetic description of the sculpture: "It was the silhouette of a tree still awaiting the storms of March [...]. The figure is significant in yet another sense. In Rodin's work, it indicates the birth of the gesture. [...] One could say of this gesture that it rests as enclosed in a hard bud." Indeed, several of Rodin's sculptures feature an interplay of human and vegetal elements, anticipating a key theme of Arp's work.

## ROOM 5

### **15 Hans Arp Torso with Buds, 1961**

The conjunction of human and vegetal bodies and their transformation are among the fundamental design principles in Arp's work. In *Torso with Buds*, buds seem to sprout from the fragment of a naked body, turning the human figure into an elegantly curved tree trunk growing upward. Arp's conception of nature and art is inextricably linked to notions of growth and emergence. This sculpture brings to light one of his major artistic achievements, namely the transposition of natural vegetal elements into sculpture, which until then was dominated by the human figure. Rilke's interpretation of Rodin's *Age of Bronze* (see no. 14) also echoes when looking at Arp's *Torso with Buds*, which is of practically the same height.

## ROOM 6

### **16 Hans Arp Nude, 1911**

When Arp was studying in Weimar between 1904 and 1908, Rodin was already a highly considered artist. In 1906, Rodin's nude drawings were exhibited in Weimar and caused a scandal. It is likely that on this occasion Arp would have seen these works, which exerted an influence on his own early drawings. In 1911, he produced a work on paper entitled *Nude*. The naked figure, viewed from the front, was first drawn with a pencil, then cut out and glued to a piece of paper. Its technical execution is reminiscent of Rodin's so-called "découpages" – a term derived from the French word "découper", i.e. "cut out".

## ROOM 6

### **17 Auguste Rodin Female Nude Standing with Legs Crossed and Hands on her Head, undated**

In a multistep process, Rodin first drew or water-coloured the figure – most often a female nude in a distinctive pose – on paper, then cut it out and sometimes glued it onto another piece of paper. Such is the case for *Female Nude Standing with Legs Crossed and Hands on her Head*, a *découpage* reminiscent of Arp's *Nude* (see no. 16) in terms of both technical execution and motif. In the 1950s, Arp turned to this technique again to produce a number of highly abstracted, cut out figures known as *Poupées*.

## ROOM 7

### **18 Auguste Rodin Psyche with a Lamp, 1899**

Rodin has captured the mythological figure of Psyche, Cupid's lover, at the very moment in which she steals a furtive look at the sleeping god of love. Psyche, leaning forward at a slant, is clad in a long draped sheet. Her hand can be seen in profile, gathering the fabric over her left shoulder. Rodin designed the sculpture in such a way that ever new perspectives open up to the viewer from different angles. This multiplicity of perspectives imbues the work with a transformative quality: walking around the sculpture, one discovers a successive sequence of varied forms and silhouettes, giving rise to a fleeting and abstract general impression. In particular, the back of the draped figure is evocative of a flowing natural phenomenon.

## ROOM 7

### **19 Hans Arp Human Lunar Spectral, 1950**

Depending on the viewer's position, Arp's plaster sculpture *Human Lunar Spectral* reveals a different potential image. Circling the sculpture, the viewer experiences the metamorphoses of its organic form – the shift ranges from figurative to spherical to spectral, i.e. from a graspable entity to an evanescent, vanishing material. The white, polished smooth surface underscores the sculpture's dynamic character and ambiguity. One of Arp's favoured materials was plaster, whose plasticity allowed him to confer upon his works an appearance of roundness and smoothness. As can be seen in many of his works, Arp's sculptural thinking gives pride of place among other things to the fleeting and the unfinished. His biomorphic shapes flow seamlessly into one another and open our eyes to a new, imaginative way of seeing.

## ROOM 8

### **20 Hans Arp Landscape or Woman, 1962**

Over the course of his work, Arp developed a unique formal language. This idiom is characterised by a particular vibrancy, derived not directly from nature but rather self-generated, and taking form in natural-organic configurations. *Landscape or Woman* attests to Arp's quest for forms inspired by nature. It interweaves vegetal and anthropomorphic elements, and gives them novel expression. The sculpture shows a seamless transmutation from female figure to landscape, opening out onto a plurality of meanings. Arp's "human" landscapes also recall Rodin's words: "I will not say that woman is like a landscape, [...] but the comparison is almost right." Like Rodin before him, Arp saw in the female figure a symbol of artistic creation, which he strove to give expression to in his biomorphic sculpture.

## ROOM 9

### **21 Auguste Rodin**

#### **Assemblage: Seated Female Nude in Globular Antique Vase, ca. 1895–1910**

Rodin, who was also a collector, owned many ancient vessels: small Boeotian and Etruscan cups as well as Roman terracotta amphorae. Between 1890 and 1910, he incorporated them into his own work, using them as receptacles for figurative plaster sculptures and creating wholly unexpected assemblages.

The fusion of sculpture and everyday object is surprising, even though this specific vessel holds special status as an antique archaeological find. What gives the artwork value is not its material, as would for example be the case with marble, but rather its anchoring in art history. Rodin's round vase operates like a precursor of the ready-made: a recycled object, whose original use and message are erased, is given wholly new meaning by being transposed into an artistic context.

## ROOM 9

### **22 Hans Arp**

#### **Vase, Pregnant Amphora, 1953**

A “pregnant amphora” is an impossible object – except in the case of a surrealist artwork. Arp joined the Surrealists and found inspiration in their interest in metamorphosis and the transformation of all forms of life and objects. The association between female body and receptacle, already found in Rodin's work, is one such example. Viewed in this light, an amphora can indeed be “pregnant” like a woman. Visually, the amphora's swollen shape is reminiscent of a pregnant woman's belly. This work illustrates the principle of biomorphism, a key element of Arp's work, which manifests in the reproduction of organic, i.e. human, vegetal or animal shapes. Just as the amphora is personified and animated, the relief also comes alive – the longer one looks at it, the more three-dimensional it becomes, the forms lifting from the ground and gaining increasing sculptural corporeality.

## INFORMATION

The exhibition was conceived by the Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, in cooperation with the Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, Remagen, and organised in collaboration with the Musée Rodin, Paris.

The exhibition is generously supported by:  
Beyeler-Stiftung  
Hansjörg Wyss, Wyss Foundation  
Dr Christoph M. Müller and Sibylla M. Müller

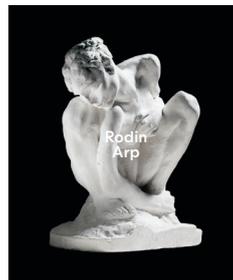
Don Quixote II Foundation  
Fondation Coromandel  
Martin and Marianne Haefner-Jeltsch  
Sulger-Stiftung  
as well as a foundation and patrons  
who wish to remain unnamed

The room guide has been produced with the friendly support of



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Copy editing and translation: Maud Capelle  
Graphic design: Heinz Hiltbrunner

## CATALOGUE



### RODIN / ARP

Edited by Raphaël Bouvier for the Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel  
Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2020, 200 pages, 195 ill., CHF 62.50

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Upcoming exhibition:  
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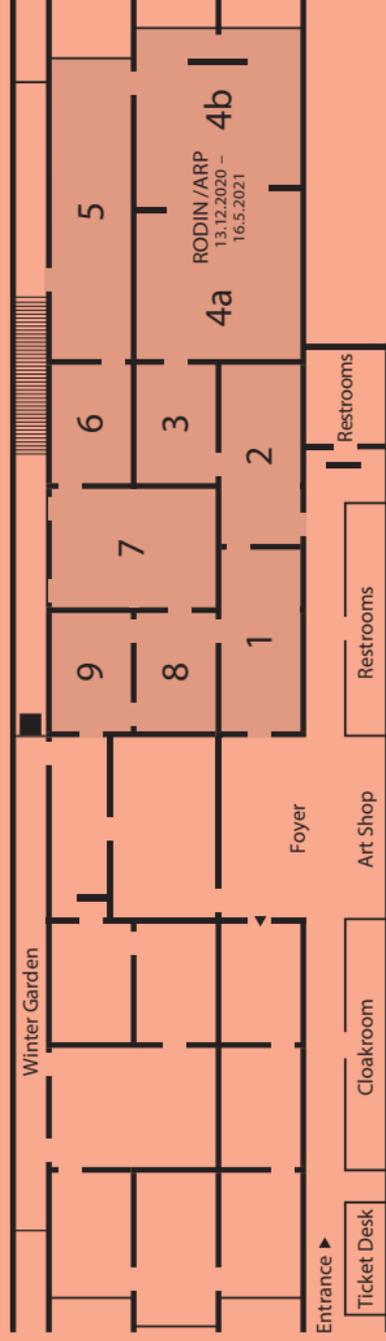
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Caution: please do not touch the artworks!