

Burrell Collection

Object Information



Object Title:	<i>Le Penseur (The Thinker)</i>		
ID Number:	7.8	Collection:	Fine Art - European
Gallery:	Burrell and Glasgow	Story:	Exhibition Culture in Glasgow
Maker:	Auguste Rodin		
Place Made	Paris, France		
Date Made:	1880-81		
Materials:	bronze		
Measurements:	710 x 390 x 580 mm, 59000 g		
Description of object:	<p>This bronze sculpture shows a nude male figure, seated on a rock, deep in thought, his body tightly coiled and tense, leaning over, his chin resting on his right hand, his right elbow on his left thigh.</p> <p><i>The Thinker</i> was originally designed to sit towards the top of <i>The Gates of Hell</i>, the artist's 37-year-project for monumental doors to a decorative arts museum, commissioned in 1880. The doors weren't needed in the end, but the project provided inspiration for Rodin: many of his sculptures originate from it, the artist singling them out as individual sculptures, often enlarging or reducing them.</p> <p>Rodin first made <i>The Thinker</i> from clay, and then cast it in plaster around 1880. It was cast in bronze around 1884 and exhibited in 1888. The success of the design resulted in Rodin arranging several enlargements, with one such version used for the sculptor's grave in Meudon, France. From 1902 onwards, about 30 casts of the original size were produced by Rodin's trusted founder Alexis Rudier. This includes the sculpture that was bought by William Burrell in 1922.</p>		
Interesting information:	<p>Rodin declared: 'What makes my Thinker think is that he thinks not only with his brain, with his knitted brow, his distended nostrils and compressed lips, but with every muscle of his arms, back, and legs, with his clenched fist and gripping toes.'</p> <p><i>The Thinker</i> originally had a different title, <i>Le Poète (The Poet)</i>. This was a reference to the 14th-century Italian poet Dante Alighieri, who wrote 'The Inferno', the first part of the epic poem <i>The Divine Comedy</i>, upon which <i>The Gates of Hell</i> was based. Rodin's</p>		

	<p>initial intention was to depict Dante looking down, pondering his literary creation. However, Rodin decided to give the figure a more universal identity – he showed him unclothed, keeping him free from links to a particular time or place. The title <i>The Thinker</i> was apparently given to the sculpture by foundry workers who noted the similarity with Michelangelo’s statue <i>Il Pensieroso</i>.</p> <p><i>The Thinker</i> is heroic in physique, in the tradition of the Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo (1475–1564), who greatly inspired Rodin. The pose is very similar to a sculpture <i>Il Pensieroso (The Thinker)</i>, depicting the Italian ruler Lorenzo de Medici, Duke of Urbino, by Michaelangelo. The French sculptor Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux’s tormented sculpture, <i>Ugolino and his Sons</i>, also features a comparable pose.</p> <p>The Burrell Collection owns 14 works by Rodin, the second largest collection of sculptures by the artist in the UK.</p>		
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Sources for further reading	<p>Alexandra Gerstein (ed), <i>Rodin and Dance: The Essence of Movement</i>, 2016.</p> <p>Rainer Maria Rilke, <i>Auguste Rodin</i>, 2018 (new trans. by Jessie Lemont and Hans Trausil).</p> <p>Pippa Stephenson, <i>Introducing Auguste Rodin</i>, 2022.</p>		
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