French sculptor, one of the greatest European artists of his time. Rodin's first major work, *The Age of Bronze* (1878), caused a scandal because the naked figure was so naturalistic. His next great project was *The Gates of Hell*, unfinished studies for a bronze door for the Musée des arts décoratifs. It provided him with the subjects for further great sculptures, including *The Thinker* (1880), *The Kiss* (1886), and *Fugit Amor* (1897). Perhaps his most extraordinary work is the full-length bronze of Balzac, completed in 1897.

French sculptor. He is considered by many the greatest of his day. Rodin freed sculpture from the idealizing conventions of the time by his realistic treatment of the human form and his emphasis on style and expression over subject. Many of his figures are characterized by an unfinished look, emerging from a block of marble. His works show extraordinary technical ability and a deep understanding of human anatomy. Examples are *Le Penseur/The Thinker* (1904; Musée Rodin, Paris), *Le Baiser/The Kiss* (1886; marble version in the Louvre, Paris), and *The Burghers of Calais* (1884–86; copy in Embankment Gardens, Westminster, London).

Rodin failed the entrance examination for the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and so was largely self-taught. He started as a mason, began to study in museums, and in 1875 visited Italy, where he was inspired by the work of Michelangelo. Rodin was initially criticized for breaking the classic romantic tradition of human sculpture; his early statue *The Age of Bronze* (1877; Musée Rodin, Paris) was criticized for its total naturalism and accuracy. Although his representations of the human figure were realistic, he focused on expression and emotion rather than literal interpretations of the subject. In 1880 he began the monumental bronze *Gates of Hell* for the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs in Paris (inspired by Ghiberti's bronze doors in Florence), a project that occupied him for many years and was unfinished at his death. Many of the figures designed for the gate became independent sculptures. During the 1890s he received two notable commissions, for statues of the writers *Balzac* (1893–97) and *Victor Hugo* (1886–90), both now in the Musée Rodin, Paris. He also produced many drawings.

Rodin was born in Paris, and entered a free school for artisans at the age of 13. Later he worked with the sculptor Carrier-Belleuse chiselling stone decorations, most notably for public monuments in Brussels. When *L'Age d'Airain/The Age of Bronze*, his first original work, was exhibited in Paris, France, it appeared so realistic that he was accused of using a live person as a mould for the sculpture. However his prestige grew, and in the 1880s he was granted a studio in Paris by the French government; public recognition became world-wide after an exhibition of his work in 1900.
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