Part 1:
1776–1815

SCULPTURE

Introduction

Since Johann Winckelmann, whose Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works (1755) sets the tone for the period that concerns us here, art historians have been taught to assume that the arts march through history in a kind of lockstep: architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, music at a given time or place all express the “genius,” the basic qualities, of the civilization that produced them and therefore must necessarily exhibit the same style. When he contrasted the “noble simplicity and calm grandeur” of Greek art with that of his own time, Winckelmann took this as evidence of the superiority of ancient Greece as a whole. Later art historians, no longer mesmerized by the unique greatness of Greek art, would apply his method to other phases of the past, postulating some central Zeitgeist (spirit of the times) as the glue that holds period styles together, but today Zeitgeist is rarely invoked. Indeed, our faith in the very existence of period styles has been severely shaken, even though we keep referring to them as a convenient shorthand in discussing the past. Yet we cannot deny that works of art created at the same time and in the same place do have something in common. What they share is not a vague Zeitgeist but the social and cultural environment, which must have affected artist and patron alike to some degree. We have also come to realize, however, that artistic developments cannot be fully understood as direct responses to such factors. Insofar as “art comes from art,” its history is directed by the force of its own traditions, which tend to resist the pressure of external events or circumstances. These traditions, moreover, although inter-dependent, are not the same in all the arts. Thus Winckelmann’s simple lockstep has given way to a far more differentiated view that might be likened to an ever-varying counterpart pattern.

We must not expect, then, to see the history of sculpture simply following that of painting. The phenomenon of Neoclassicism, which in painting is often hard to distinguish from Romanticism, stands out far more clearly in sculpture.

To understand how this came about, we must first acquaint ourselves with the typical working procedure of the nineteenth-century sculptor. The preliminary forms are defined in a small model of clay or wax, the three-dimensional counterpart of drawings. There is no specific term for such models in English. We refer to them either by the Italian word bozzetto or the French maquette, which implies not only small scale but also spontaneity and sketchiness of execution. (To preserve clay maquettes, they can be fired in the kiln, converting them into more durable terracotta.) The sculptor next produces a full-scale clay model, which is expected to correspond in every detail to the final work. This model, however, is destroyed in the process of making a plaster cast of it, the so-called “original plaster.”

Having replaced the clay model with its “ghost,” the sculptor has a choice: he can have the original plaster copied in marble by professional carvers (usually called by the French term praticien) with the aid of a mechanical device, the “pointing machine,” adding the finishing touches himself if he cares to and has the necessary skill; or he can turn the plaster over to a foundry for casting, often through the lost-wax (cire-perdue) process, resulting in a hollow bronze duplicate of the original model. The sculptor may be involved only in choosing the kind of patina he prefers. (“Patina” refers to the color of bronze if the surface has been modified, usually by applying various chemicals.) The advances in mining and smelting that came with the Industrial Revolution finally brought bronze sculpture within the economic range of a larger public. By 1800 it had, for the first time in history, become cheaper than marble sculpture. Soon new techniques, such as electro-plating and zinc casting, began to compete with the lost-wax process, further lowering the cost.

The original plaster can yield any desired number of marble or bronze replicas, which can be enlarged or
tracted some of the most distinguished minds of the time, such as Diderot. It is in these Salons that we first encounter the original plaster. Until the Revolution, Salons were held in a large room on the second floor of the Louvre, an arrangement that made it impossible to show large-scale sculpture in marble or bronze because of its weight. Sculptors could exhibit only maquettes or works in plaster. The original plaster, then, was an established working method that helped prepare for the "modern classic."

Thus during the second half of the eighteenth century, original plasters became aesthetically acceptable, and it was standard procedure to exhibit them. Nineteenth-century sculptors, from Canova to Rodin, treasured their original plasters and often bequeathed them to posterity (Canova's Gipsoteca in his birthplace, Possagno, was the first of many such memorials). Moreover, the neutral quality of the plaster encouraged one to view modern and ancient classics as equivalents. After all, many of the surviving masterpieces of classical sculpture were themselves copies of lost originals, often as marble copies after bronzes, and because of their fame these copies, in turn, were constantly reproduced as plaster casts for the benefit of students and connoisseurs.

The only difference between a modern original plaster and a cast from an ancient statue was that the latter transmitted the essence of a work that was not directly accessible to the viewer, while the former offered a "preview" of a marble or bronze statue that did not yet exist. In either case, the sculptural classic, whether ancient or modern, came to be viewed as something akin to a Platonic idea; what mattered was the conception, the design, irrespective of the material in which it happened to be presented. The original plaster thus unites practical, mundane considerations with a revolutionary new definition of the sculptor's role. Neoclassical sculpture enjoyed a prestige that made the style a far more significant and persistent phenomenon in sculpture than in painting. Napoleon is said to have remarked, "If I weren't a conqueror, I would wish to be a sculptor."

If Paris remained the artistic capital of the Western world, Rome during the second half of the eighteenth century became the birthplace and the spiritual home of Neoclassicism. Until the advent of Canova at the end of 1779, however, it was the resident foreigners from north of the Alps, rather than Italians, who pioneered the new style. That Rome should have been an even stronger magnet for sculptors than for painters is hardly surprising: after all, it was in ancient sculpture that the "noble simplicity and calm grandeur" praised by Winckelmann were most strikingly evident, and Rome offered an abundance of sculptural monuments but only a meager choice of ancient painting. In the shadow of these monuments, Northern sculptors trained in the Baroque tradition awakened to a new conception of what sculpture ought to be and thus
paved the way for Canova, whose success as the creator of "modern classics" was the ultimate fulfillment of their aspirations.

England

The leading role of the Anglo-Roman artists before 1780 in the formulation of Neoclassicism is no surprise if we consider England's enthusiasm for classical antiquity since the early years of the century. This precocious appreciation was political, philosophic, and literary, with a new nationalism as its common denominator; but this soon turned into a demand that England become "the principal seat of the arts" as well. The primary needs were improved facilities for training and a wider and more informed patronage. The first culminated in the establishment of the Royal Academy in 1768. As for the second requirement, it was met largely through the increased appetite for travel on the Continent; the Grand Tour, as it came to be called, became an indispensable part of the gentleman's education, and with it went a fashion for collecting while abroad and for more lavish expenditures on art at home. For sculpture, this created opportunities that attracted a succession of foreigners who brought the full repertory of Baroque sculpture to England and left a profound imprint on the next generation.

The two chief tasks the foreigners faced—monumental tombs and portrait sculpture—were familiar enough, but increasingly there were new, specifically English projects, such as monuments to men of genius, the heroes of culture—a privilege hitherto reserved to sovereigns. The idea of such monuments was nourished by Lord Burlington and William Kent, his favorite architect, who in about 1735 designed a Temple of British Worthies, containing busts of distinguished English thinkers, for the landscape garden at Stowe, in Buckinghamshire. Three years later François Roubillac, the most talented of the immigrant sculptors, carved a marble statue of George Frederick Handel for the owner of Vauxhall Gardens, in London, a pleasure park where Handel's music was often performed. The first monument to a culture hero made within his lifetime, it cannily served two purposes, homage and advertising.

Hints of dawning Neoclassicism first appear among the English sculptors who began their careers in the 1750s and 1760s, among whom was Joseph Nollekens (1737–1823), the most sought-after English portrait sculptor of his day. Nollekens spent the entire decade of the 1760s in Rome, restoring antiques and supplying them to British collectors while he established his reputation as a portraitist. The busts of those years, such as that of Laurence Sterne, are far more austereley Roman than those of the following decades. Besides Nollekens's remarkable grasp of individual character, which accounts for his success (at the time of his death, his fortune amounted to two hundred thousand pounds), he had an instinct for what his sitters preferred. As a rule, the more elevated the sitter's rank, the stronger the Baroque elements. The bust of the Second Marquess of Rockingham (fig. 75) is characteristic in its use of a toga-like drapery which hides the truncation and allows for the discreet display of an order pinned to the sitter's chest. Similarly, the hair is curled above the ears so as to suggest a wig without actually being one. Throughout, there is a concern with surface texture that echoes the Baroque tradition. Only after 1800, when the Neoclassical wave reached its crest, did Nollekens revert to the type of bust represented by his Sterne. Aside from portraits, Nollekens also did some statues of classical subjects and sculptured tombs, but none of these would justify his claim to being a major artist.

It was another member of Nollekens's generation, Thomas Banks (1735–1805), who came closest to establishing the creation of "modern classics" as the sculptor's true goal. Little is known of Banks's career before he went to Rome in 1772 for seven years. The Death of Germanicus

Fig. 75 Joseph Nollekens, The Second Marquess of Rockingham, 1784. Marble, life-size. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.
Canova’s friends included Jacques-Louis David (see pages 26–40) and the influential critic and theorist of Neoclassicism Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, who helped to spread the sculptor’s fame in France. In 1802, Canova was invited to Paris by Napoleon, who wanted his portrait done by this luminary. His attitude toward Napoleon was strangely ambiguous: he resented the conquest of Italy and especially the abduction of classical masterpieces to Paris, yet he also admired Napoleon for having unified Italy and for modernizing its institutions. In 1806, with Napoleon’s approval, Canova made a colossal nude figure in marble showing the conqueror as a victorious and peace-giving Mars (fig. 99). The head is an idealized but thoroughly recognizable version of Canova’s earlier bust, but the figure is based on statues of ancient rulers in the guise of nude classical deities. As Napoleon’s favorite sculptor, Canova produced many portraits of the emperor’s family, including the famous semi-nude reclining figure of his sister, Pauline Borghese, with the apple of the victorious Venus. Canova’s statue of Napoleon himself, however, had an ironic fate: by the time it reached Paris in 1811, the emperor was embarrassed by its nudity, and the catastrophic Russian campaign of the following year rendered the godlike image even less fit for public display. It was hidden away in the Louvre until it emerged in 1815 as a souvenir for the Duke of Wellington.

The Early Thorvaldsen

The Napoleonic era was thus not a propitious one for sculptors who wanted to emulate Canova in being independent, beholden to no single patron, free to create “modern classics.” The only one who succeeded, and on whom Canova’s mantle ultimately descended, was a young Dane, Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844), who arrived in Rome in 1797 on a fellowship from the Royal Academy in Copenhagen. When his money ran out in 1802 and he was on the point of returning home, a lucky chance made it possible for him to stay on: for a few months that year, there was peace between France and England, so British artists and collectors could travel on the Continent. An important art patron from London, Thomas Hope, visited Thorvaldsen, who had just finished the plaster model of a statue of Jason, his first monumental work. Hope paid the artist a generous advance for a marble version (not finished until 1828). Canova himself praised Jason as a novel and daring achievement, and the statue (fig. 100) does indeed challenge Canova on his own ground; instead of absorbing the Hellenistic style, as Canova did, it reflects the far more severe Greek style of the mid-fifth century B.C. Thorvaldsen thus became the first Neoclassical sculptor to revive the most heroic phase of Athenian art. Compared with the
Jason, any work by Canova has a sensuous softness that Thorvaldsen was at pains to avoid.

In his third version of Ganymede and the Eagle, begun in 1815 (fig. 101), Thorvaldsen chose to show the shepherd king kneeling, a pose taken from a Roman gem in his own collection of antiquities. Thorvaldsen returned to the theme in the 1830s and in 1831 he presented a copy to the Academy of St. Luke in Rome, where he had been elected president in 1827.

Demand for Thorvaldsen’s work remained consistently high, so he produced numerous copies of his sculptures. Like Canova, he would create a life-size clay model (rather than a small sketch), from which his assistants then made marble versions, the surfaces of which Thorvaldsen finished himself. Visitors flocked to Thorvaldsen’s studio to see the master overseeing all phases of production. He stayed on in Rome until 1838, so the greater part of his career belongs to the post-Napoleonic era, when he attracted patrons from all over Europe.

Austria and Germany

The gospel of Winckelmann spread the quest for “new classics” among many younger German and Austrian artists. Franz Anton Zacher (1746–1822), after five years in Rome on a fellowship from the Vienna Academy, returned in 1781 to Austria with a personal style heavily dependent on antique models. His most ambitious product, the bronze
Part 2:  

1815–1848

SCULPTURE

Introduction

We do not by any means wish to suggest that the history of sculpture between 1815 and 1848 was dominated by its social environment. Yet, to the extent that it was a public art, sculpture responded to the pressure of these forces, directly and indirectly, far more than did painting, and was shaped by them in varying degrees, depending on local circumstances. It seems appropriate, then, to begin our survey with the areas where the impact of political change on sculpture was least pronounced, and to conclude it with those where it was greatest.

The Mature Thorvaldsen

For all of Europe except France and the Iberian Peninsula, Bertel Thorvaldsen remained the model of sculptural perfection, more "truly Greek" than Canova, until the 1850s. After some lean early years (see page 113), Thorvaldsen quickly became Rome's most admired artist, and his studio, with its display of original plasters, was a pilgrimage goal for countless prominent visitors as well as aspiring artists. The Napoleonic wars in no way impeded Thorvaldsen's career. His only contact with the emperor was an indirect one: in preparation for Napoleon's visit to Rome, he was commissioned to model a huge relief frieze in plaster, The Triumph of Alexander, for the Palazzo Quirinale. When the visit was canceled, Napoleon ordered a marble version, but his fall prevented its delivery; it was acquired by an Italian collector, Count Sommariva, who installed it in his villa near Como. A painted view of Thorvaldsen's studio occasioned by the visit of Pope Leo XII on St. Luke's Day, October 18, 1826 (fig. 187), not only commemorates a unique honor but conveys the artist's role as the "reigning monarch of sculpture." The large enthroned figure next to the central doorway is Pope Pius VII, whose tomb in St. Peter's had been commissioned from the staunchly Protestant Thorvaldsen in 1823. The sculptor himself, standing next to Leo XII in front of the papal monument, points to a colossal series of statues, the Blessing Christ and the Twelve Apostles, for the Protestant Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen. In the center is Mercury about to Kill Argus (1818), while another "modern classic," The Three Graces, appears in the right foreground behind a section of the Alexander frieze clearly inspired by the horsemen of the Parthenon frieze, which Thorvaldsen knew from reproductions, both casts and engravings (he never visited England, so did not see the originals in the British Museum). A longer portion of the Alexander frieze is dimly visible along the left-hand wall of the studio. The most conspicuous work in the picture is the huge equestrian statue of Prince Joseph Poniatowski, a commander of Polish troops in Napoleon's army, destined for Warsaw; the bronze cast, completed in 1832, could not be installed as a public monument because of Russian objections and remained in Russian exile until 1922. It is a "timeless" variant of the Marcus Aurelius in Rome, except for the portrait head and the extended right arm with its sword.

The sculptures in the painting do not include any hint of Thorvaldsen's most demanding project of the preceding decade, the restoration of the tympanum figures from the Temple of Aphaia at Aegina, which had been acquired, against Goethe's advice, by Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria in 1812. For a sculptor whose ideal was the classic Greek style from Phidias to Praxiteles, these Late Archaic fragments must have posed a special challenge; Thorvaldsen was justly proud of having matched them. His restorations, once a significant aspect of display at the Glyptotech in Munich, were removed when the sculptures were reinstalled in the 1960s.

In 1818, the Mayor of Lucerne approached Thorvaldsen with a proposal for a monument in the shape of a colossal dying lion to commemorate the members of the Royal
Fig. 187  H. D. C. Martens, Pope Leo XII Visiting Thorvaldsen’s Studio on St. Luke’s Day, 1826, 1830. Oil on canvas, 39½ × 54⅛”. Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen (on loan from Statens Museum for Kunst).

Fig. 188  Bertel Thorvaldsen, The Lion of Lucerne (Monument to the Royal Swiss Guards of Louis XVI), 1819–21. Limestone (carved by Lukas Ahorn), length c. 30'. Lucerne.
Swiss Guard, who had died trying to protect Louis XVI in 1792 during the storming of the Tuileries in Paris. The idea, including the dying lion and the site, a sheer wall of rock rising from a small pond just beyond the city limits of Lucerne, had been conceived and effectively promoted by Karl Pfyffer von Altishofen, former lieutenant in the Swiss Guards. Thorvaldsen consented, and within a year delivered the model, clearly based on Canova’s mourning lion on the tomb of Maria Christina (see fig. 95); a local sculptor carved the monument itself (fig. 188). What attracted Thorvaldsen, surely, was the Romantic idea of a monument hewn into the living rock, rather than its political implications, which became the subject of a sharp public debate in Switzerland. Pfyffer von Altishofen, a Lucerne patrician of decidedly conservative, indeed reactionary, convictions, wanted the lion to honor not merely his dead comrades but, as the inscription proclaims, “The Loyalty and Virtue of the Swiss.” He thought of it as a national monument, in a characteristically Swiss natural setting not far from the very spot

where, according to patriotic legend, the Swiss Confederation had originated more than five hundred years before. His opponents objected to the lion as a royalist symbol, saw no reason to honor (by implication) Louis XVI, and took little pride in the long Swiss tradition of military service as mercenaries in foreign lands. Thorvaldsen, unfamiliar with these arguments, thought of The Lion of Lucerne simply as an opportunity to project a sense of heroic pathos.

Thorvaldsen’s indebtedness to Flaxman (see pages 97–98) is most clearly seen in his funerary reliefs for private patrons, which included many English admirers. One of them, Sir John Hobhouse, arranged the commission for the monument to Lord Byron, whom Thorvaldsen had portrayed from life in a bust in 1817. The committee expressed a preference for a seated statue, because of the “contemplative nature of poetry” and the poet’s misshapen right foot. Thorvaldsen, who idolized famous literary figures despite his reputation of “never reading a book,” relished the opportunity. His plaster model of 1831 (fig. 189) shows Byron perched on ancient ruins, with his right foot on the fragment of a Doric column, alluding to the poet’s death in the Greek War of Independence. There is, however, nothing classically timeless about the monument: in modern dress, the poet looks like a secularized Evangelist receiving inspiration from on high, and the half-open mouth reinforces the impression that he has been caught at a moment when he is communicating with his muse. Because of Byron’s “immoral character,” it was banned from all public sites in London, and not until 1845 did it come to rest in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge.

England

Among the sculptors who came into prominence during the heyday of memorials to war heroes in St. Paul’s between 1800 and 1815 (see pages 95–96 and 98–99), Francis Chantrey (1781–1841), who had executed a relief commemorating General Bowes, proved the most original. Unlike Westmacott, Chantrey was both too young and too poor to have gone to Italy before the onset of hostilities. The son of a tenant farmer, he served an apprenticeship with a woodcarver in Sheffield but was otherwise largely self-taught. Soon after 1805, he settled in London and married his cousin, whose sizable dowry helped him to launch a remarkably successful career. With the support of Nollekens (see page 94), Chantrey became a member of the Royal Academy in 1816, an unprecedented honor for a man of no formal artistic training.

Chantrey’s greatest gift was for portraiture. His busts, the foundation of his fame, make few concessions to Neoclassical restraints; Chantrey always professed his admiration for François Roubiliac (see page 94), and work such as the
BAUDELAIRE AND THE CHALLENGE FOR SCULPTURE IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the course of 1846, poet and critic Charles Baudelaire began to feel that the difficulty with sculpture lay in the nature of the medium—it was an art that had primitive origins and which lacked the sophistication of painting. Although effective at simulating physical reality, its three-dimensionality made it vague and vulnerable and it lacked a grounded, fixed viewpoint.

For Baudelaire, sculpture should be considered subservient to other forms of aesthetics and it was the mediocre display at the Salon in 1846 that lay behind this analysis. In his view, the works were inconsistent and lacked scale because they were divorced from their proper role as architectural embellishment. For him the result was debasement and triviality:

As soon as sculpture consents to be seen from close at hand, the sculptor will risk all manner of trivial details and puerilities that triumphantly outstrip any pipes or fetishes. When sculpture has become a drawing-room or bedroom art, the Caribs of lace, like M. Gaynard, and the Caribs of the wrinkle, the hair and the wart, like M. David [d'Angers], at once appear. ... But it would be wrong to think that these artists lack knowledge of their art. They are as erudite as writers of vaudevilles and academicians; they plunder every period and art form; they scrape the barrel of every school. They would willingly make the tombs of Saint-Denis into cabinets for cigars or boxes for cashmere shawls, and all the Florentine bronzes into penny pieces. ... The best proof of the pitiful state sculpture is in today lies in the fact that M. Pradier [see fig. 208] is its acknowledged master.

At least he knows how to render flesh, and he has a peculiar delicacy of touch with his chisel, but he has neither the required imagination for large compositions nor the draughtsman's imagination. He is a cold academic talent. He has spent his life fattening up a few specimen torsos from antiquity, and adorning them with the hairstyles of kept women.39

By 1859 Baudelaire was seeing things differently and more poetically. He felt that in public places sculpture could shine, and could therefore trump painting in terms of its power. He argued that for sculpture to succeed it needed to reject the aims of painting. But he cautioned that as sculpture was becoming more modern, there was a temptation to overuse the previously rarified medium of marble. Advanced fabrication techniques made producing sculpture easier and more cost-effective, but removed its production from the creator's hand. As a consequence, he warned, the increased accessibility of sculpture for purchase by the middle classes would result in a dilution of quality, due to the purchasers' suspect tastes.40

Just as lyric poetry makes everything noble—even passion; so sculpture, true sculpture, makes everything solemn—even movement. Upon everything which is human it bestows something of eternity, which partakes of the hardness of the substance used. Anger becomes calm, tenderness severe, and the flickering and faceted dream of painting is transformed into a solid and stubborn meditation.41

Despite this promise of transcendence, the tone of much of Baudelaire's criticism is ironic and arch, and certainly the works do not measure up to his aspirations for the medium. He concludes his essay by arguing that sculpture continues to fall short of his ideals:

...the most ingenious and the most patient of talents can in no wise do duty for a taste for grandeur and the sacred frenzy of the imagination. ... whatever the skill that is annually displayed by our sculptors, nevertheless, since the death of David [d'Angers, in 1856], I look around me in vain for the ethereal pleasures which I have so often had from the tumultuous, even if fragmentary, dreams of Auguste Préault.42

Eighteen years would pass before a sculptor showed at the Salon who might have met Baudelaire's prescription for a grandly imaginative three-dimensional art—it was not until August 1877 that Auguste Rodin exhibited his Age of Brass (see fig. 481). Baudelaire had died on the final day of August 1867.

Many of Pradier's statues were offered to private collectors in bronze reductions. The artist also modeled a number of statuettes for the same market, and these reveal his diverse abilities. He pioneered in subjects taken from everyday life, such as The Ironer or Woman Putting on Her Stocking; at the same time he anticipated the Rococo revival of the 1860s with daringly risqué bacchantes and satyrs.

François Rude (1784–1855) won the Prix de Rome in 1812, but was prevented from taking up the award by a shortage of funds. Disappointed, he returned to Dijon, his native city, where he zealously took Napoleon's side after the emperor's return from Elba. He thus had reasons to fear for his safety under Bourbon rule and sought refuge in Brussels, as had Jacques-Louis David. During his years in Belgium, Rude was far from idle as a sculptor, but when he returned to Paris, he struck out in new directions, evident in Mercury Attaching His Winged Sandals, shown at the Salon of 1827. Like Houdon's Diana, Rude's Mercury borrowed the movement of the Flying Mercury of
temporarily in 1889 for a provisional inauguration. The unveiling of the bronze a decade later became a huge popular festival, with many thousands of Parisians taking part.

Dalou, however, did not have to wait until 1889 for public success; the Salon of 1883 had already brought him the long-coveted medal of honor. Despite the honors and acclaim that descended upon him, Dalou never became a member of the establishment. He declined a professorship at the École des Beaux-Arts, and would accept commissions for monuments honoring distinguished individuals only if he felt a personal sympathy or admiration for them. As a passionate defender of Alfred Dreyfus, Dalou expressed his convictions in the powerful figure he called Truth Denied (fig. 480), a nude woman sitting on a rock in an attitude of utter dejection. The massive body, compressed as though within an invisible cube, belies the modest scale of this statuette, of which many replicas were sold for the benefit of the cause. Dalou may well have adapted an older composition for this particular purpose; studies of the female nude, in a great variety of poses, had been a favorite subject of his ever since the 1870s, and large numbers of them were found in his studio after his death. The finest of them have a boldness and freedom of handling equaled only by Degas.

Even more impressive were the many terracotta sketches Dalou produced during the 1890s for a monument of his own invention that was destined never to be realized: a "Monument to Workers." The glorification of labor had been a growing concern of artists during the last two decades of the century (see pages 500 and 502–03), and Dalou began his project by studying manual laborers at work, in brilliantly observed sketches carried out with an exemplary economy of means.

According to Rodin, it will be recalled (see page 334), had established himself in Brussels. There he readily found employment, in association with the Belgian Antoine-Joseph van Rasbourg, doing decorative sculpture for various building projects. Yet during his six years there, he kept a careful eye on the Paris scene, waiting to return at an appropriate moment. He was working on a life-size nude warrior with a spear in his left hand, which he called Le Vaincu (The Defeated One), a memorial to the catastrophic year 1871. Before he sent it to the Salon of 1877, however, he removed the spear and renamed it The Age of Brass (fig. 481), substituting a general reference to "a time of sorrow"—as against the happiness of the Golden Age—for the more specific original one. It was this statue that finally brought Rodin public attention and praise. In the winter of
1875–76 he had made a trip to Italy, out of admiration for Michelangelo and Italian Renaissance sculpture as a whole. The slender proportions of The Age of Brass recall Donatello’s bronze David, while the gesture of the right arm and the facial expression suggest Michelangelo’s Dying Slave in the Louvre. If this neo-Florentine flavor was familiar to the Paris public, the anatomical realism of the figure, closely echoing the appearance of the specific model who had posed for it, was not, and an objectionable feature to many. Some critics claimed that the statue had been cast from life. Rodin vehemently denied this, providing photographs of his model, and a public letter signed by many of the most respected sculptors of the time supported him. The controversy not only failed to damage Rodin, it helped to establish him in the public’s mind as an artist of importance. As for the accusation itself, however, it was neither unprecedented nor absurd. The practice of making plaster casts of parts of the human body and keeping them around the studio as guides to anatomical accuracy is documented from the late eighteenth century on and may even go back to ancient Greece. What infuriated Rodin was that he had been charged with a traditional procedure which went against everything he held sacred in art. His own studio in Meudon near Paris contains hundreds of plaster casts of parts of the human body, much like the piles of casts from life in the studios of older sculptors—except that all of them were freely shaped by his own hands.

At the Salon of 1880, Rodin showed The Age of Brass in bronze and the plaster of a second monumental male nude which he had finished two years earlier, St. John the Baptist Preaching (fig. 482). The two make an instructive contrast. The Age of Brass is static, passive, and without a precise
meaning, while St. John is all action and movement with an unmistakable subject. A radical by-product of his work on the St. John is a Torso (fig. 483) without a left leg and the right leg terminated just above the knee. As the first of what was to become a long series of such "self-contained fragments," this Torso, left in a very rough state of becoming, corresponds to The Man with the Broken Nose as an act of liberation.

The 1880s were the most intensely creative decade of Rodin’s career. Having established himself at the Salon, he continued his success there with a series of portrait busts representing well-known artistic or literary figures whom he befriended or admired. Later on, he would do commissioned portraits, but those of the early 1880s were done on his own initiative and have a decidedly honorific quality, indicated by his preference for the "timeless" bare chest, as in that of Jules Dalou.

In Rodin’s mind there existed a sharp distinction between male and female portraits. His sure grasp of character, of the "passions that surge in them," as he put it, was confined to his male sitters. Of women he said, "their nature is not ours"; he felt that presence of a "tender and delicate mystery" which he hesitated to penetrate. These observations, dating from the artist’s old age, may sound strange when we recall his passionate early portrait of Rose Beuret (see fig. 320). Even here, however, what strikes us most is the force of Rodin’s desire rather than the presence of a clearly defined personality. In the cases of Rose and of Camille Claudel, his very gifted student and mistress for close to fifteen years, he treated them not as sitters but as models whom he transformed at will into the carriers of other identities. Whether or not he was emotionally involved with the sitters, his other female portraits are almost invariably routine records of surface appearances. An exceptional instance that falls halfway between these two extremes is Rodin’s portrait of Luisa Lynch de Monu Vicuña (fig. 484), which he made, without a commission, in 1884. She and her husband, the Chilean ambassador, were close friends of Rodin, who was indebted to them for introducing him to Paris society. He thus knew Mme. Vicuña well, and this is surely a recognizable likeness, yet there is a hint of melancholy in the features that contrasts strangely with Rodin’s alternative title for the work, Youth. Rodin conveys the excitement of her presence by leaving her off-shoulder gown unfinished. The soft skin is emphasized by the rough, barely defined dress, from which the
Fig. 485 Auguste Rodin, *The Gates of Hell*, 1880–1900. Lost-wax bronze cast, 21 × 13'. Kunsthaus, Zurich.
sitter seems to emerge as if about to expose her exquisite nudity. The idea obviously derives from the unfinished works of Michelangelo, but with one crucial difference: Michelangelo never planned to leave his sculpture unfinished, while with Rodin, to do so became a conscious aesthetic and dramatic device.

By far the most important single event in Rodin’s career occurred in 1880: it was the commission by the state for a sculptured portal, later known as The Gates of Hell, for the proposed Museum of Decorative Arts. Rodin set to work immediately; by mid-1884, he had reached a stage near enough to completion to request an estimate of the cost of casting The Gates in bronze. Yet he continued to modify and add to his model for another four years. There was another brief spurt of activity in 1899 in preparation for the first public display of the plaster Gates in 1900. After that, Rodin never touched The Gates again, and there was no question any longer of casting them, since the Museum of Decorative Arts had meanwhile been housed in the Louvre. The existing casts were all made after the artist’s death (fig. 485).

When he received the commission, Rodin chose Dante’s Inferno as his theme and visualized The Gates as an actual portal such as Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise, which he had seen during his Italian trip, with the reliefs on the doors forming a succession of rectangular panels. For a lintel relief, Rodin began with a central figure of Dante, who was to evolve into The Thinker. A few subjects drawn from Dante’s poem, notably Ugolino and His Sons and Paolo and Francesca, derive from this first state of the Gates, but Rodin never worked out a program of episodes from the Inferno and soon abandoned the framed rectangles, creating in their stead two cavernous panels with a turbulent, uneven background that could absorb as well as extrude a multitude of figures. He further increased their number by animating the architectural framework with sculpture of varied scale and degrees of relief, from the large free-standing Three Shades at the top to the tiny figures nesting among the thorny vine just below them and the low reliefs on the pilasters, which appear to continue the program of the main panels. The theme, insofar as it has anything to do with literature, owes more to Baudelaire’s Fleurs du Mal (Flowers of Evil) than to Dante. Its common denominator is a tragic view of the human condition: guilty passions; desire for ever unfulfilled, whether here or in the beyond; the vain hope of happiness. The critic Gustave Geffroy, writing of The Gates in 1889, defined their subject as the endless re-enactment of the sufferings of Adam and Eve; in 1881, Rodin had indeed tried to persuade the government to let him flank The Gates with statues of the two. He transformed the Adam into the Three Shades (essentially the same figure seen from different angles), while Eve became an independent work. She is among the numerous progeny of The Gates, which for Rodin during the 1880s functioned as a tremendous seedbed of invention. They made it possible for him to explore the expressive potential of the human body as no other artist had dared to before him (critics have observed that the only figure in The Gates whose pose reflects earlier models is The Thinker). It is their very prodigality that constitutes both the strength and the weakness of The Gates. They are an awe-inspiring whole, yet the endless streams and concatenations of small figures present great difficulties to the beholder who attempts to experience them individually; imprisoned in a structure more than twenty-four feet tall, they tend to dissolve into ornament, into accents of light and dark. Only The Thinker and the Three Shades stand out clearly. Perhaps Rodin himself sensed how much of what he had put into The Gates was likely to be lost on the viewer; that could be why he extracted and enlarged (one is tempted to say, “liberated”) so many motifs and presented them as independent works.

The Thinker had the misfortune to become a visual cliché. In the context of The Gates, the figure was originally conceived as a generalized image of Dante, the poet who in his mind’s eye sees what goes on all around him. Once Rodin decided to detach him from The Gates, he became The Poet-Thinker, and finally just The Thinker. But what kind of thinker? The low brow, the heavy-muscled body with its powerful hands and feet suggested a primitive man to some, a worker to others. Some art historians, aware of how much The Thinker owes to Carpeaux’s Ugolino (see fig. 313), tend to believe that the fame of Rodin’s work is rather undeserved.

The Helmet Maker’s Beautiful Wife (or, more fully, “She Who Used to Be the Helmet Maker’s Beautiful Wife,” a line from a lament by the fifteenth-century poet François Villon) is less directly linked with its counterpart on The Gates. Rodin’s starting point here was the shocking sight of a nude old woman posing for one of his assistants. Fascinated with the aesthetic challenge implicit in such a model, he asked her to pose for him, too, and positioned her in a way expressive of the pitiful frailty of old age (fig. 486). No other work of his demonstrates as forcefully that the beauty of a work of art does not depend on the beauty of the subject. (For Bartolini’s hunchback, which had made the same claim half a century before, see page 206.) The poetic title was an afterthought; later on, the figure would also be exhibited as The Old Courtesan. It was the statue that suggested the old crone in the lower half of the left-hand pilaster of The Gates.

The bronze version of The Kiss (fig. 487), which was originally envisaged as Dante’s Paolo and Francesca, survives in The Gates in very different form. The Kiss shows the ill-fated pair succumbing to their illicit desire for each other here on earth, not as tortured souls in hell. Passion is reined in by hesitancy. The embrace is not yet complete, and the man’s right hand caresses rather than grips the
woman's thigh. This cast, with its extraordinarily fine patina,
was retained by Rodin for himself. Instead of being uniform in
color, as is usually the case, its basic greenish tone modulates
to brown, with occasional glints of the metal itself. The over life-size marble version of The Kiss, carved in 1898, exploits the sensuous softness of the woman's body as against the firmer flesh of the man, both accentuated by the rough surfaces of the block of marble.

In 1884, Rodin learned of the desire of the city government of Calais to erect a monument to Eustache de St.-Pierre, who had delivered himself, along with five other prominent citizens, into the hands of King Edward III as hostages to lift the siege of Calais by the English in 1347 (see page 21). According to the chronicler Jean Froissart, who described the event some decades later, Edward's conditions were harsh indeed: the hostages had to be barefoot and in sackcloth, with ropes around their necks bearing the keys to the city and the fortress, and the king was free to do

with them as he pleased, implying a threat of death. The memory of these civic heroes had been rekindled by the recent war, which had resulted in the loss of so many cities in eastern France to the Germans. What attracted Rodin, however, was the unusual task of a monument honoring a group rather than a single individual. Moreover, by basing his design on Froissart's account, he could be historically accurate, stress the sacrificial spirit of these patriotic martyrs, and avoid the awkward problem of period costume. Rodin's first maquette, which won the competition, shows the hostages moving forward defiantly on top of a tall base suggesting a triumphal arch.

This design, however, soon struck him as too conventionally heroic and psychologically implausible. He abandoned it, along with the tall base, and concentrated on the individual response of each member of the group. He made numerous studies of every figure, every face. In the final form of the monument (fig. 488) the six Burghers of Calais no longer present themselves as a phalanx; they seem, in fact, hardly aware of each other's presence. What unites them is only their common condition and the low rectangle of ground on which they stand. The beholder, confronting them almost at his own level, is urged to focus on the self-absorbed quality of the figures—unheroic, complex human beings like ourselves. Little wonder that the city fathers of Calais, who had wanted a civic-patriotic public monument, thought the Burghers a failure. They would have been far happier with Rodin's first design. What the sculptor gave them, after years of argument and struggle right up to the official unveiling in 1895, no longer shows a specific event writ large enough to be recognized as an exemplary act of sacrifice. It is a monument to human crisis and six varieties of response, deeply moving in its emotional complexity, but for that very reason a private rather than a public monument.

When the Society of Men of Letters decided to sponsor a monument to Honoré de Balzac in 1890, the great novelist had been dead for forty years. The original commission went to Chapu, who produced only a sketch of a seated Balzac before dying in 1891. Émile Zola, the president of the society, asked Rodin to take over the task, which he agreed to finish by January 1893. It took him five additional years to complete what was to be his last, as well as his most daring and controversial, monument. He declared it to be "the sum of my whole life. ... From the day of its conception, I was a changed man." What, then, did Rodin conceive that cost him such extraordinary effort? Balzac's appearance was well known to all; it had been recorded in sculpture by David d'Angers, in photographs, paintings, even caricatures. Outward resemblance, then, did not pose a problem. But Rodin wanted far more than that—he was searching for a way to cast Balzac's whole personality into visible form, and to do so without the addition of allegorical figures, the habitual props of monuments to genius. The
Fig. 487 Auguste Rodin, *The Kiss*, 1886. Bronze, height 33 3/4". Private collection.
final version (fig. 489) gives no hint of the many alternative solutions (more than forty have survived) that preceded it. The one element common to them all is that Balzac is standing. A seated Balzac—as Chapu had visualized him and as Falguière was to show him when the society transferred the commission to him after rejecting Rodin’s statue—must have struck Rodin as incompatible with the virile energy he saw in his subject. A standing figure then, but in what pose? Clothed or nude? Rodin had a suit made by Balzac’s old tailor, who had kept the measurements; he engaged models whose physical stature resembled Balzac’s, only to conclude that modern costume would not do. If “timeless” nudity was to be the solution, and nudity displaying Balzac’s stocky, short-legged frame, what attitude would do justice to him? Rodin tried every variety he could think of before he chose to clothe Balzac in the long dressing gown, described by his contemporaries as a “monk’s robe,” which he liked to wear while working at night. Here was a “timeless” costume that permitted Rodin to concentrate the viewer’s attention on the massive head. Rodin returned to the nude standing figure in contrapposto pose, with the right leg forward, and enveloped it in the robe which Balzac has hastily thrown over his shoulders. Whether he knew it or not, Rodin here revived an idea invented by Neoclassic French sculptors so as to avoid the dilemma of nudity versus modern costume: the artist awakes in the middle of the night, seized by a sudden creative impulse, and throws on a covering of some sort before he settles down to put his thoughts on paper. But he looms before us with the frightening insistence of a specter, utterly unaware of his surroundings—the entire figure leans backward to stress its isolation from the beholder. The wide, powerful neck supports a head, proud and agonized at the same time, that is framed by a leonine shock of hair.
Bococa, the most celebrated artist of the early 19th century, was revered for his innovative techniques and his ability to create lifelike sculptures. His work was often criticized for its realism, which was considered a departure from the traditional idealism of the classical period. However, Bococa's influence on the development of modern art cannot be overstated.

The reception of Bococa's works was mixed, with some critics applauding his innovations and others denouncing his realism. Despite this, his sculptures continue to be admired for their technical skill and emotional depth.

The following text discusses the life and art of Bococa, focusing on his contributions to the development of modern art.

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Fig. 480. Auguste Roman, Portrait de Bococa, 1891-92.

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Fig. 490 Auguste Rodin, *Iris, Messenger of the Gods*, c. 1890. Bronze, height 37½". Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
reused it for another figure). What remains is a great leaping form that justifies the title as the study did not. From now on, the incomplete figure was to become part of the modern sculptural tradition.

At the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, Rodin presented a vast retrospective exhibition of his work, in a pavilion built at his own expense. He was by now world famous—more so, indeed, than any other artist in whatever medium. He died seventeen years later, after having made arrangements with the state for the Rodin Museum in Paris, to perpetuate his achievements. Some of his late production, before ill health forced him to stop, is of a very high order, but viewed as a whole Rodin added no fundamentally new ideas to his oeuvre after 1900.

Italy

The growing divergence of public and private sculpture—that is, sculpture acceptable to the academy and the official bodies that decided competitions on the one hand, and sculpture seeking new paths and accepted only by a minority of critics and collectors on the other—had made itself felt in Italy even earlier than in France. If we recall the work of Adriano Cecioni (see fig. 324). His small pieces include such challenges to Realism as Dog Defecating (fig. 491) and alternatives to it such as a charmingly simplified Lady Putting on a Glove. Bohemian in his habits and of a pessimistic temper, Cecioni had a hard time making a living; since he was a gifted caricaturist, drawings were often his livelihood until, a few months before his death, he received a teaching appointment in Florence. He also painted, and was a member of the Macchialoli (see pages 316–19).

Vincenzo Vela, since 1867 once more a resident of Ligornetto, continued to do public monuments, tomb sculpture, and portraits in the verismo tradition. The opening of the St. Gotthard railway tunnel in 1882, close to ten miles long, was an event of great economic importance since it permitted uninterrupted rail traffic between northwestern Europe and the industrial centers of Turin and Milan. It had been a heroic engineering feat that took close to a decade of blasting and digging. The hero of the day was Alfred Escher, the director of the project, soon to be honored by a monument in front of the main railway station in Zurich. Vela, however, had a very different point of view: most of the workmen were from his part of Switzerland, and he knew how many had lost their lives. On his own initiative, he did a monumental high relief with the title The Victims of Labor (fig. 492), in the hope that a bronze cast would be placed at the southern exit of the tunnel. It shows, realistically yet with an impressive air of solemnity, a dead worker being carried out of the tunnel. Like the tunnel itself, The Victims of Labor was a pioneer achievement; unlike the occasion that inspired it, however, it met with little enthusiasm. Not until 1932, more than forty years after his death, was Vela's wish fulfilled. Vela was among the adherents of verismo who shared a desire to monumentalize the manual worker that anticipates both Dalou and Meunier (see pages 486–89 and 502–03).

Internationally, the best-known Neapolitan sculptor of the late nineteenth century was Vincenzo Gemito (1852–1929). A precocious talent who owed little to formal instruction, Gemito established his reputation before he reached the age of eighteen with a series of sensitively modeled heads of children, distinguished by their serious, troubled expressions. From 1877 to 1880, Gemito showed in the Paris Salon, where his Fisherboy (fig. 493), a life-size bronze, caused a mixture of shock and admiration because of its uncompromising Naturalism. Critics must have measured the distance that separates Gemito's nude urchin desperately struggling to hold on to his catch from the now familiar subject's debut half a century earlier (compare fig. 209). In 1887, the artist's career was cut short by mental illness, which incapacitated him for more than two decades. He never recaptured the brilliance of his early years.

After the political unification of the country, many Italian artists and intellectuals succumbed to a mood of disillusionment, a "morning after" emptiness following the high excitement of the Risorgimento. The emotional letdown was most pronounced in Milan, which had lost its role of intellectual, artistic, and political leadership when Rome became the capital of the country in 1870. Against this background, Milan saw the birth of Italy's earliest avant-garde movement, known as the Scapigliatura. The term literally means "dishevelment" but in Milanese dialect had come to be applied to a nonconformist, bohemian life style. Perhaps "movement" is too strong a term for the members of the Scapigliatura, who were linked by personal

Fig. 491 Adriano Cecioni, Dog Defecating. c. 1880. Plaster, height 3 1/4". Collection Aldo Gonelli, Florence.