

Brief glossary for the exhibition

Daruma

The Japanese name for Bodhidharma, also a figurine used to wish good luck.

Geisha

A woman who dedicates her life to practising the traditional arts for the pleasure of men.

Hara-kiri

A ritual and honourable form of suicide by disembowelment (also known as seppuku).

Kabuki

A form of traditional theatre.

Kannon

The Divine Compassion is the most popular Buddhist divinity in Japan.

Katagami

Stencils used to decorate fabrics.

Murakami

A town in Japan renowned for making floats decorated with red Chinese lacquer reliefs, used in Shintoist processions.

Netsuke

A carved object in ivory or wood, used as a toggle on a cord, tucked under a sash, from which objects are suspended.

Nishiki-e

A polychrome wood engraving on paper.

Okimono

A small curio.

Urushi

A tree from which resin is extracted to make lacquer.

«The Japanese are great artists. The similarity between their drawings and the most beautiful works from Greek Antiquity is striking. In them one finds the harmony and simplified lines of the ancient artists. It is because nature is eternally the same, and the artist, having dedicated himself to its study, knew better than the others how to see and understand it.» Auguste Rodin, 1912

Rodin and Japonism

At the end of the 1860s, Japan opened up to the West, which at that time was starting to discover its art and traditions. Paris lived to the rhythm of Universal Exhibitions and important events organised by collectors and art dealers, which served as meeting points for artists in search of the new “classical art”. It was necessary to invent a new term to describe this fascination, and the collector Philippe Burty therefore coined the word “Japonism” in a series of articles published in 1872.

From the 1880s onwards, Rodin frequented all the leading figures of Japonism, including the Goncourt brothers, who showed him their albums of erotic prints, the art dealer Siegfried Bing, the collectors Georges Clemenceau and Albert Kahn, writers such as Octave Mirbeau and Gustave Geffroy, and almost all the artists influenced by Japonism. In 1893, Rodin was seen in the company of Claude Monet and Camille Pissaro at the exhibition entitled *Prints from Utamaro to Hiroshige*, held at the Durand-Ruel gallery. His view of Japan was also stimulated by shows put on in Paris, including hara-kiri scenes performed by the actresses and dancers Sada Yacco and Hanako. Rodin was fascinated by this theatrical and violent Japan, which had been reinvented to appeal to a Western public.

Rodin japonais

Towards 1900, Rodin referred to himself as Japanese. He described his drawings as “snapshots varying between the Greek and the Japanese, and developed an interest in stoneware as he admired the rustic aspect of Japanese ceramics. After acquiring Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities, he started to collect Japanese art. Rodin chose 19th century prints and objects of the 19th century, often produced specifically to suit Western tastes and for export.

After 1900, the sculptor also discovered Japan by receiving numerous Japanese visitors who came to his studio to admire his work. He exerted a profound influence on young Japanese sculptors, such as Morie Ogihara, who subsequently played a key role in disseminating Rodin’s art in Japan, when they returned to their country. These contacts were a rich source of exchanges and helped him to expand his collection. In 1911, the young editors of the art and literature review *Shirakaba* gave him thirty prints. In exchange, Rodin sent three of his bronzes to express his appreciation. And this is how the sculptor came to compose his personal Japan over the course of time. He developed a passion for this art, and his research would eventually reveal itself through fleeting glimpses.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi

Happy Seas and Mountains, I Would Love to be There: Oiea Takanawa Settsu

1852, nishiki-e, Rodin Museum, G.7369.

Rodin discovered Japan during the 1880s when he saw the erotic prints owned by the first Parisian collectors. Half of his personal collection, which is more chaste in nature, is composed of late works by Kunisada (1786–1864), Kuniyoshi (1797–1861) and Hiroshigé (1797–1858). Most of them depict scenes from the theatre or landscapes. Kuniyoshi's art of engraving combines the taste of the sculptor for the image of women, the virtuosity of lines and the expressiveness of colour.



Auguste Rodin

Torture Garden

Circa 1898, graphite and watercolour on paper, Rodin Museum, D. 4258.

This work belongs to a series of preparatory sketches the sculptor made to illustrate the novel by Octave Mirbeau, *Torture Garden* (1902). The model is a very young woman with a body, treated with the stump technique, whose body displays an extreme gentleness that is contradicted by the brutality of the nail thrust into her foot and the crown of thorns surrounding her forehead. Rodin annotated the drawing at the bottom left with the words “jardin des suplices / japonais”.



Vincent Van Gogh

Le Père Tanguy

1887, oil on canvas, Rodin Museum, P. 7302.

Julien Tanguy, known as Le Père Tanguy, was painted on three occasions by Vincent Van Gogh and twice against a background of Japanese prints. Penniless avant-garde painters, such as Georges Seurat, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh, used to frequent the shop in the 9th arrondissement owned by the paint seller, where they would exchange their canvases for pigments. In 1901, on the advice of Octave Mirbeau, Rodin purchased this painting, a symbol of the Japonism of Vincent Van Gogh, at the same time as two of his other masterpieces, exhibited on the first floor of the Hôtel Biron.

A play on expressions: Rodin and Hanako

Auguste Rodin

Hanako, Mask Type D

1907-1908, plaster, Rodin Museum, S. 544.

This mask shows the result Rodin wished to achieve when he began his series of studies based on the agonised expression of Hanako. It was not a portrait, unlike many other works inspired by his Japanese friend. In this case, the sculptor has reacted to the role played by the actress, seeking to convey the emotion she aroused when on stage. The extraordinary finesse of this plaster's surface reveals all the nuances imprinted on the original clay model, of which this cast is the sole surviving evidence.



When Japanese women were allowed to appear on stage, only geishas, accustomed to dancing and singing for their clients, dared to perform. An example was Hanako who went on tour in Europe with a troupe of dancers and acrobats in 1902. She formed a theatre company, supported by the well-known American dancer Loïe Fuller. Being a shrewd businesswoman, Loïe Fuller took Hanako's career in hand and wrote several plays for her, inspired by Kabuki, the Japanese form of theatre. All her plays ended with a hara-kiri scene, a spectacle of violence unprecedented for the Western public, on which Hanako built her success, thanks to her vigorous interpretation of this ritual suicide.

It is precisely the expression of pain and horror that Rodin wanted to seize in the numerous studies of masks and heads that he made of the face of Hanako interpreting a scene of agony.



Auguste Rodin, *Hanako Dancing*

Circa 1907, graphite on buff paper, Rodin Museum, D.1141.

The series of nude studies drawn by Rodin during a posing session by Hanako is unrelated to any sculpture, since Rodin also practised drawing as an independent art. In these sketches, he attempted to capture in few lines the movements of Hanako's dance, which was so different from Western choreography. Rodin was fascinated by the dancer's majestic gestures and her ability to remain still in a pose for several minutes.

Rodin and Japanese stoneware

Paris discovered Japanese ceramics at the Universal Exhibition of 1867. Artists were attracted to their pure forms and materials, as well as their extraordinary expressiveness made possible by the diversity of firings. The sculptor Jean Carriès explored this new path, followed by Paul Jeanneney and Edmond Lachenal. From 1900 onwards, Rodin acquired several Japanese objects in stoneware because he admired their primitive aspect and simplicity, drawn directly from the source of nature, an effect he sought to achieve in his own sculpture. The crackles, fissures caused by firing, and play on colours evoked the passing of time, reminding him of antique objects fresh from excavation and still coated in earth, eroded, and fragmented, just as history handed them down.



Japanese Art
Daruma

19th century, stoneware, Rodin Museum, Co. 142.

Auguste Rodin and Paul Jeanneney
Monumental Head of Balzac

1899 (?), stoneware, Rodin Museum, S. 1934.

«Since it is impossible to imagine modern sculpture without Rodin, we will probably reach a point when it will be impossible to imagine life without Rodin, as in the case of Goethe, Beethoven, Whitman, Nietzsche.»

Saneatsu Mushakôji, member of the *Shirakaba* review, 1910