

## ROOM 6: CAMILLE CLAUDEL (1864 – 1943)

*“Here we are in the presence of something unique, a revolt of nature: a woman of genius?” Octave Mirbeau referring to Camille Claudel, 1895*

# Sculptures by Camille Claudel at the Museum

Portrait of Camille Claudel, photo by César, around 1884



The idea of devoting a room in the Museum to the sculpture of Camille Claudel was suggested to Rodin by the journalist and art critic, Mathias Morhardt, a fervent admirer of the artist. This room was not inaugurated until 1952, when Paul Claudel donated to the Museum four major works by his sister: *Vertumnus and Pomona*, the two versions of *The Age of Maturity*, and *Clotho*. The initial collection was gradually expanded thanks to other donations and to acquisitions by the Museum.



Camille Claudel wearing a Cocked Hat, photo by G. Schmidt

## In Rodin's studio (1882-1892)

*“All those who spent time in the studio at the rue de l'Université (Rodin's studio) remember her. Silent and diligent, she remains seated on her small chair. Totally taken up by her work, she kneads the clay and models the foot or hand of a figure placed before her.” Mathias Morhardt*

Camille Claudel, *The Young Girl with a Sheaf*, terracotta



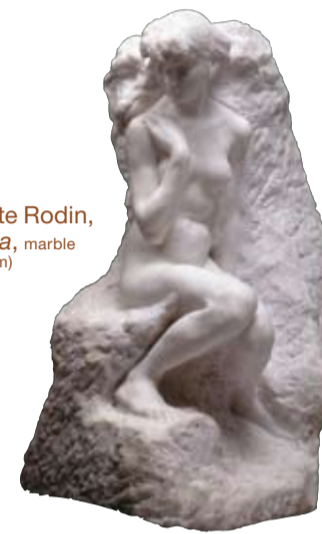
Originally from the region of Aisne, the Claudel family settled in Paris in order to give their children, Camille, Louise and Paul, the best possible education. Fascinated by sculpture from a very early age, Camille Claudel first trained at the Colarossi Academy and in the studio of Alfred Boucher, where women artists were accepted. In 1882, Boucher entrusted his talented student to Rodin. She soon became his assistant and mistress.

*The Young Girl with a Sheaf* is seated on a mound, one forearm folded over her breast, with a hand resting on her shoulder. This particular position is comparable to the one used for *Galatea* by Rodin, and is an illustration of the shared inspiration that prevailed in the studio.

For her first really ambitious work, Camille Claudel turned to an unusual source of inspiration: a Hindu legend relating the story of the hapless love between a prince and a simple young girl\*.

In this group, Sakountala, standing, abandons herself in the arms of her kneeling spouse, whose embrace is a tribute to fidelity. The work later changed its title when it was transposed into marble and became known as *Vertumnus and Pomona*, in reference to Ovid. The perfectly polished aspect of the marble is one of the characteristic features of Camille Claudel's work; she personally carved her marbles and loved to play with colours, as demonstrated by the stand in red marble.

Auguste Rodin, *Galatea*, marble (next room)



Camille Claudel working on Sakountala in her studio, photo by William Elborn, 1887

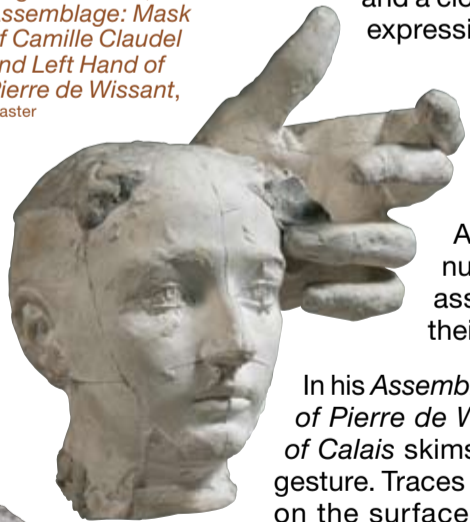
\* The story of Sakountala is taken from a drama written by the Hindu poet Kalidasa in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. After being put under a spell, Prince Douchanta forgets that he has married a young girl named Sakountala. When he finds her again, he kneels at her feet and begs for her forgiveness.

## Camille Claudel as seen by Rodin



Auguste Rodin, *Camille Claudel Wearing a Bonnet*, terracotta

Auguste Rodin, *Assemblage: Mask of Camille Claudel and Left Hand of Pierre de Wissant*, plaster



Shortly after they met, Rodin modelled the face of Camille Claudel. This first portrait, described as “with Short Hair”, discloses a face that is almost childish, with wide-open eyes and a closed mouth, giving it a vague and detached expression.

Using this head as a basic model, Rodin produced a series of variations, such as *Camille Claudel Wearing a Bonnet*, with only a change in the rendering of her hair.

After they separated in 1893, Rodin continued to use this mask\* of Camille Claudel in assemblages that express the complexity of their relationship.

In his *Assemblage: Mask of Camille Claudel and Left Hand of Pierre de Wissant*, the hand of one of *The Burglers of Calais* skims lightly over her, in an almost threatening gesture. Traces of the techniques used by Rodin are visible on the surface of the face. Irregularities in the texture around the eyes and nose are due to the spontaneous act of modelling clay, executed without any concern to smooth out the surface. Furthermore, the protruding lines framing the face are the traces of a plaster mould, cast from the clay model.

A symbolic female figure, *The Farewell*, is a head without a neck, emerging from a block. Rodin again used the mask of Camille Claudel, this time assembling it with two hands joined together in front of the mouth. The ensemble is given coherence by drapery, and is set on a wide rectangular base. The ambiguous gesture of the hands contributes to giving this portrait a profound feeling of helplessness.



Auguste Rodin, left hand of Pierre de Wissant, *The Burglers of Calais*, bronze (in the garden)

*“A superb forehead dominating magnificent eyes, of a dark blue that is rare to find except in novels, a big mouth even more proud than sensual, a powerful mass of hair cascading down to her hips. An impressive air of courage, frankness, superiority, gaiety.” Paul Claudel*

\* *Mask*, noun: the front part of the head. In this particular case, the mask is made thanks to a plaster cast produced from a terracotta study.



Auguste Rodin, *The Farewell*, plaster

## SALLE 6: CAMILLE CLAUDEL (1864 – 1943)

"I now work for myself." Camille Claudel, 1892

### Self-assertion

"You see, it is no longer Rodin at all." Camille Claudel to Paul Claudel, 1893



Camille Claudel, *The Little Lady*, marble



In the years 1888 and 1889, Camille Claudel decided to use Rodin as a model, in the literal sense of the term, by sculpting his portrait. *Auguste Rodin* is portrayed as a young man, with a thin face and bushy beard concealing his mouth and falling down to form a stand. With this portrait, Camille Claudel asserted herself and won the admiration of Rodin.

At this point, Camille Claudel wanted to break away from Rodin's influence and give her works a more personal character. She went to Touraine alone, moving into the Château de L'Islette, and became totally absorbed in modelling the bust of the owner's granddaughter. *The Little Lady*, with her raised eyes, has an attentive and curious expression on her face. Camille Claudel produced four versions of this work in marble, with variations in the treatment of the hair.

*The Waltz* portrays a dancing couple, almost on the point of losing their balance, as if carried away by a whirlwind. In the first version, Camille Claudel represented the dancers naked but their sensuality was considered to be unacceptable. The sculptress therefore covered her figures with a more modest drapery so that the State could acquire the group.

"From whichever side you look, the profiles are always accurate, without any fault, correction or hesitation." Mathias Monhardt describing the bust of Auguste Rodin by Camille Claudel



Portrait of Rodin, photo by Emile Bergerat, 1886

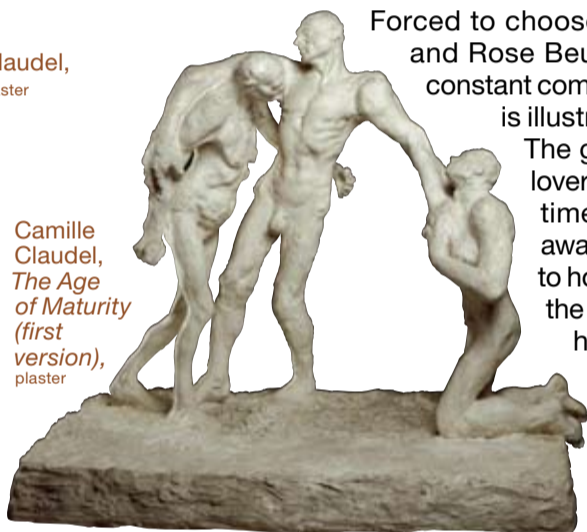
Camille Claudel, *Auguste Rodin*, bronze



### A stormy period (1892-1899)



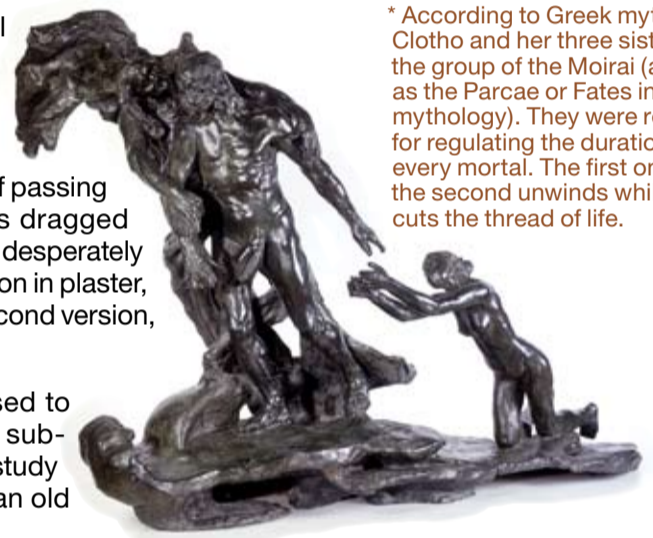
Camille Claudel, *Clotho*, plaster



Camille Claudel, *The Age of Maturity (first version)*, plaster

Forced to choose between Camille Claudel and Rose Beuret, Rodin returned to his constant companion. This painful episode is illustrated in *The Age of Maturity*. The group represents the trio of lovers in the form of an allegory of passing time: a man of mature years is dragged away by old age while youth tries desperately to hold him back. In the first version in plaster, the man is hesitant, but in the second version, he affirms his choice.

*Clotho*\*, which is supposed to illustrate a mythological subject, is in fact an accurate study of the emaciated body of an old woman.



Camille Claudel, *The Age of Maturity (second version)*, bronze

\* According to Greek mythology, Clotho and her three sisters formed the group of the Moirai (also known as the Parcae or Fates in Roman mythology). They were responsible for regulating the duration of life of every mortal. The first one weaves, the second unwinds while the third cuts the thread of life.

### "Sketches after life" (1895-1905)



Camille Claudel, *The Chatterers*, marble onyx and bronze

Camille Claudel successfully freed herself from Rodin's influence and concentrated on sculptures that she described as "sketches after life". Using the everyday world as her source of inspiration, these small-scale sculptures were often made of different materials.

The group entitled *The Chatterers*, for instance, was inspired by a scene Camille Claudel had observed of four women gossiping among themselves in a train carriage. Although carving onyx is particularly difficult, the artist handled it skilfully and succeeded in rendering the attitude of the nude bodies, busy talking and listening to each other.

*The Wave* portrays three women dancing in a circle without showing the slightest concern for the mass of water threatening them. Camille Claudel was inspired by the Japanese style that was currently in vogue at the time, in particular, a print by the Japanese artist Hokusai, known as *The Wave off Kanagawa*, which she discovered at the Universal Exhibition of 1889.



Hokusai, *The Wave off Kanagawa* (Musée Guimet, Paris)



Camille Claudel, *The Wave*, marble onyx and bronze

### Her brother as a model

Camille Claudel, *Paul Claudel aged Thirty-Seven*, bronze



The bust of *Paul Claudel aged Thirty-Seven* is the last major work by Camille Claudel that has reached us. Using a smooth and sober modelling, she portrayed the fine and determined features of her younger brother, of whom she had already sculpted a bust when he was 16 years old.

In 1913, in view of Camille Claudel's deteriorating mental health, her brother and mother arranged for her to be confined in the asylum of Ville-Evrard, and later in the psychiatric hospital of Montdevergues (Vaucluse), where she remained until she died in 1943. She never sculpted again.

*Paul Claudel* (1868-1955): a French poet and playwright whose brilliant diplomatic career took him from the United States to China, and from Japan to Brazil. He was moved by a mystical revelation on Christmas Day in 1886, and as a result, his Catholic faith permeated his work. *The tidings brought to Mary*, *Break of noon*, and *The satin Slipper* are among his major works.