

The Curious Fixation of the “Rodin Chaser”

Calgary, AB (September 23, 2004) – Beware Calgary! The “Rodin Chaser” will strike in our city in a few weeks. His target will be Glenbow Museum’s fall exhibition, *Rodin: A Magnificent Obsession: Sculpture from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation*, which will be on view from October 30, 2004 to January 30, 2005. This exhibition features nearly 70 sculptures, drawings, and studies by Auguste Rodin, considered by many as one of the greatest sculptors since Michelangelo.

Since 1999, the “Rodin Chaser” has dogged this acclaimed exhibition in different centres across the United States. By now, the pattern is familiar. Shortly before the scheduled opening of the exhibition, local media are bombarded with lengthy and inflammatory e-mails from Florida artist and gallery owner Gary Arseneau that denounce the sculptures in the *Magnificent Obsession* show as fakes. Driven by an obsession of his own, Mr. Arseneau is a self-proclaimed crusader on a mission to expose supposed art fraud. He is the self-published author of several books on art and deception and has been a vocal critic of many different exhibitions over the years. Mr. Arseneau tracks the itinerary of *A Magnificent Obsession* as it travels from place to place and Glenbow Museum is the next venue.

Gary Arseneau constantly repeats his mantra that ‘dead men don’t sculpt’ and his claim that all posthumous Rodin casts are ‘fakes/reproductions’. The resulting controversy is quickly dispelled when the terms of Rodin’s will and the unique situation of the Musée Rodin are explained. Rodin willed his entire estate to France and he authorized the casting of his work after his death. As Glenbow art curator Monique Westra explains, “Dead men don’t sculpt but dead men don’t change their minds either. The two central pillars of Rodin’s legacy were the foundation of a museum, the Musée Rodin, dedicated to his work and the ongoing casting of his sculptures following his death to ensure the broad dissemination of his art.”

Art experts, scholars and museum curators dismiss Arseneau’s accusations as nonsense. Unfortunately Arseneau’s misinformed allegations temporarily divert attention from the true value of the exhibition, which presents the astounding work of a remarkable artist whose images, ideas and working methods were daring and original, setting artistic precedents which had a huge impact on the course of modern art.

Rodin: A Magnificent Obsession, Sculpture from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation is drawn from the largest private collection of Rodin in the world. It was amassed by the late B. Gerald Cantor who was fascinated by the great French artist’s work. This travelling exhibition has already been seen by thousands of people across the United States. On at Glenbow Museum from October 30, 2004 to January 30, 2005, Calgary is the first Canadian venue before the show moves on to Halifax and Vancouver.

-30-

Media contact:
Tanis Booth, Communications Specialist
Glenbow Museum
(403) 268-4246
tbooth@glenbow.org

Backgrounder on the Authenticity of the Bronze Casts in Rodin: A Magnificent Obsession, Sculpture from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation

In the 19th century, a time of rapid industrial growth and prosperity, there was a huge market for sculpture in both public and private sectors. Auguste Rodin was blessed with entrepreneurial gifts as well as sublime artistic talent and he translated his creative brilliance into a lucrative business. Like all successful sculptors at this time, Rodin produced and re-produced his sculptures to meet the increasing demands of his patrons, employing a large staff of studio assistants. His most popular works, such as *The Kiss*, were cast in large numbers and in different sizes for sale.

In 1916, the year before he died, Rodin willed to France his entire estate, including his artistic property and the right to cast his works posthumously. The Musée Rodin is the agency that oversees this bequest for the French government. By granting the right to cast his work after his death and by leaving all of the plasters and moulds in his studio for this purpose, Rodin ensured that multiple bronzes of his entire *oeuvre* would eventually be cast. This includes sculptures which had not been cast in bronze during his lifetime. Rodin was keenly interested in the broad dissemination of his work and Musée Rodin is the legal mechanism by which he continues to fulfill his wishes into posterity.

Today, the number of posthumous casts taken from any given plaster is limited to twelve by French law. It is interesting to note, however, that the concept of the “limited edition” has only been in effect for about the past 50 years. During Rodin’s lifetime, artists did not limit or number bronze casts. Instead, they had as many casts made as could be sold. It is also a myth that sculptors participated in every phase of the casting process. The reality is that Rodin, like most of his contemporaries, did not generally supervise this process but entrusted his work to employees who used certain reputable foundries.

The issues to be addressed with regard to a posthumous cast relate to its legality on the one hand, and its quality on the other. As all Musée Rodin bronze casts conform strictly and scrupulously to the terms outlined in Rodin’s will; there is no doubt about their legality. However, quality can be variable, even in an authentic, original cast. Therefore, each work must be assessed for quality on an individual basis. This is done by a Rodin expert who evaluates the bronze used in the cast, determines its fidelity to the modelling of the plaster model, and considers the technical finishing and the patina (colour). Notably, all the bronzes in the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Collection and Foundation were personally vetted by the world’s leading expert on Rodin, the late Dr. Albert Elsen (d.1995) of Stanford University.

All posthumous casts derived from moulds and plasters in Rodin’s studio under the aegis of the Musée Rodin fulfill Rodin’s express wishes. These posthumous casts are universally considered as authentic and original by scholars, art experts, museums and collectors around the world.

Prepared by: Monique Westra, Art Curator, Glenbow Museum

-30-

Media contact:
Tanis Booth, Communications Specialist
Glenbow Museum
(403) 268-4246
tbooth@glenbow.org