

FRENCH CULTURAL CENTRE OF MILAN

Council of Milan, Culture and Entertainment Dept.

AUGUSTE RODIN
figure d'ombre, disegni/
AUGUSTE RODIN
shadow figures, drawings
Sforza Castle
Visconti Room
Piazza Castello, Milan

The exhibition *I Disegni di Auguste Rodin/Drawings by Auguste Rodin*, promoted by the Council of Milan in co-operation with the French Cultural Centre, presents the series "visto si stampi/cleared for printing", i.e. drafts of 124 incisions, noted and approved by Rodin and sometimes with comments by the printmakers themselves, which constitutes almost the whole collection called 'Album Fenaille', named after the patron who financed it, or 'Album Goupil' after the name of the publishing house that published it in 1897.

We should highlight the fundamental role of Fenaille who alone paid for all the costs of the album, thus allowing the circulation of almost unknown drawings by Rodin. The originality of the drawings in the album, their exceptional nature and the great quality of the technical aspects surprised Rodin's contemporaries as they still do today.

This work represents an essential instrument to know this great artist. The album is presented as a folder in a limited edition of 125 numbered copies. Inside there is a foreword by Octave Mirbeau and 129 tables representing 142 drawings reproduced by colour photogravure (a technique developed in the 1870s by Henry Rousselon, director of the Goupil ateliers). The drawings, selected by Rodin himself, are grouped into three sections: Inferno/Hell (82 tables) - Limbo (31 tables) - Studi/Studies (16 tables).

The drawings are from the 1880s, a period when the sculptor was working at the 'door to Hell', and they are inspired mostly by Dante's Inferno. At that time Rodin drew while reading Dante and for a year he lived absorbed in the 'Divina Commedia': "I have lived with Dante for a whole year, living only of him and for him, and drawing the eight circles of his 'Inferno' (...). After a year I realized that as much as my drawings conveyed my vision of Dante, they weren't close enough to reality. And I started again from scratch, still-life, working with my models". Still in respect of the division into three big groups wanted by the artist, the succession of the tables on display has been slightly modified in order to allow for stylistic and iconographic comparisons, which better suit Dante's poem.

Inferno/Hell

Lasciate ogni speranza o voi che entrate/Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here (Dante, Inferno, Canto III).

In these drawings Rodin allows us to share his visions of Dante's universe where the poet, accompanied by Virgil, meets a multitude of furies, demons and souls of the damned. These drawings, linked to the studies for "*La Porta dell'Inferno/The Door to Hell*" and also called 'black' drawings, completely transform the traditional techniques where lines and colours are the support for the narration.

Limbo e Studi/Limbo and Studies

In Dante's work Limbo represents the first circle of Hell, where are hosted the virtuous spirits who hadn't been christened. Unlike Dante, Rodin makes of them a distinct part, placing Limbo after his Inferno. There are essentially represented souls of women, children and men, all images that remind the viewer of Maternity. They represent the religious worries of Rodin's time that marked him, especially the dispute on the innocence of children who died before being christened, and then condemned for eternity.

Two aspects of the album are especially significant: the first one regards the stylistic innovations, the second one the importance of this publication, the exceptional nature of which is essential to the understanding of the history and development of Rodin's thought and art. The exhibition, made possible by the Goupil Museum of Bordeaux, is curated by Annick Bergeon, with the assistance of Pierre-Lin Renié.

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