

Matisse and Rodin: Freedom through color verses muscular mobility

by Tatyana Franck

The Rodin Museum has brilliantly juxtaposed the drawings and sculptures of Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) and Henri Matisse (1869-1954). The exposition, which lasts until February 28th, reveals that these two artists are not as different as one might think.



Matisse, *La Serpentine*, Bronze, 1909, coll.musée Matisse de Nice © succession H. Matisse - Photo : F. Fernandez



Rodin, *Mouvement de danse F*, Plâtre brun, Musée Rodin © musée Rodin - Photo : C. Baraja

When the nineteenth and twentieth centuries meet

Even if it "may seem strange at first to compare Rodin and Matisse - the first being a figure sculpture of the nineteenth century and the second an embodiment of the 20th centuries' pictorial language - this exhibition is an opportunity remember that Matisse was a sculptor at the same time as Rodin" says Nadine Lehni, curator of the exhibition.

Separated by a generation ... During the first seventeen years of the twentieth century, when Matisse was Rodin's contemporary, he oriented himself towards decisively revolutionary painting. According to Nadine Lehni "There was contact between the two artists, even more than Henri Matisse wanted to admit. We know for example that he visited Rodin in his studio in 1899. "

When Matisse and Rodin meet for the first time, one is 30, the other 60. Matisse went to show his drawings to the sculptor. From the few quotes found, it's fun to imagine a virtual dialogue between the young and ambitious artist and the revolutionary Rodin, who has become a national monument with a museum entirely dedicated to his work.

Henri Matisse - "What interests me most is neither still life nor landscape, but the figure. It permits me to best express the religious feeling I have regarding life. ? "

Auguste Rodin - "My drawings are the key to my work: my sculpture is only drawing in all dimensions. "

Henri Matisse - "My drawing is the direct and purest translation of my emotion. The simplicity of the process it allows that.. "

Auguste Rodin - "It's comes easy for you, but come back to see me when your designs are

extremely detailed, coveted.. "

Henri Matisse - "Above all, the color is the liberation, perhaps even more so than the drawing."

Auguste Rodin - "There is really no good style or beautiful drawing, nor beautiful color: there is only the beauty that is revealed by the truth. "

Henri Matisse - "Accuracy is not the truth. Details diminish the significance of the lines; they detract from the emotional intensity. "

Auguste Rodin - "When a good sculptor models a human torso, it is not only muscle represented, it's the life that animates it ... better than life ... the power that shaped them, that expresses either grace, or vigor, amorous charm or the untamed fury. "

Henri Matisse - "What matters the most? To put everything into my work to the point that it overtakes my hand and achieves compliance with the greatness and sacredness of all living things. "

However, Matisse, for whom this meeting changed legend into reality, expressed disappointment a propos the sculptor's reaction...

More than dialogues, correspondence

This did not prevent Matisse from continuing to visit the elder's exhibitions and even purchasing his works, including not only photographs of sculptures, but also a bust of Henri Rochefort, from which he made drawings. Like Rodin, Matisse's preferred subject was the female nude, captured in the intimacy of the studio in nonacademic poses. Like Rodin, Matisse as a sculptor, always preferred clay, the highly malleable material, to attacking the stone.



Rodin, *Buste de Rochefort*, Plâtre, 1884, Musée Rodin © musée Rodin - Photo : C. Baraja



Matisse, *Portrait d'Henri Rochefort*, Fusain, vers 1899, coll. musée Matisse de Nice © succession H. Matisse - Photo : Ville de Nice - Service Photographique

Last element of similarity according to the curator of the exhibition: "Matisse and Rodin both produced incomplete figures. They reduced the sculptures to the essentials: removing arms, head, legs, as is the case for example Rodin's *The Walking Man* (without head or arms) and Matisse's *Le Serf* (armless). In search of simplicity and abstract forms, they also create many remarkable "backs". This development is particularly well illustrated by the four backs made by Matisse between 1909 and 1930, which show the artist's desire to gradually refine the curves of his sculptures.

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A confrontational exhibition

Despite all the similarities, Matisse presented his work in opposition to that of Rodin's, revindicating an approach that starts from the whole and goes towards the detail, even though Rodin's work combines the details in order to form a whole. One major aspect of this exhibition is that it is conceived as a dual, or clash of generations.

The exhibition confronts for the first time, almost all of Matisse's sculpted work and a number of his drawings with a selection of works by Rodin. Even though some paintings by Matisse are outside of the proposed route, the exhibition's purpose is to recall the role Matisse consecrated to sculpture and drawing. At the same time the exhibition insists on this mode of self-expression parallel to that of which drawing was to Rodin.

We find notably, on the walls of a long corridor, drawings of naked women facing each other and seeming to correspond. On the right, those of Matisse, and on the left, those of Rodin. Emphasis is placed on the silhouettes, the volume, and the perspective. A touch of watercolor sometimes enhances a feature.

Decidedly, the two artists' passion for drawing is obvious.

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