



Rainer Maria Rilke & Auguste Rodin, Paris c. 1905

RODIN – RILKE – BEUYS
The Quest for the Essence

OPENING: Friday, September 18, 2015 – 6 to 9 p.m.
EXHIBITION RUN: September 18 to December 12, 2015
LOCATION: Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet, Potsdamerstraße 81b, Berlin

15 works by Auguste Rodin, including 5 bronze sculptures, 2 of which from the Musée Rodin, as well as a rare group of 8 drawings and 2 rare books from private collections

in conversation with

16 works by Joseph Beuys, including 5 very rare ‘bon à tirer’ (good to go) proofs, annotated by the artist, of prints represented in major international private and institutional collections

with chosen quotes by

Rainer Maria Rilke

Welcome to our 12th gallery exhibition, the second presentation by **Rodin the Alma Project**, a public – private partnership between the Musée Rodin, Paris, and Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet, Berlin. This exhibition focuses on the philosophical and artistic relationships and

convergences among three great masters: Auguste Rodin, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Joseph Beuys.

In the *Allegory of the Cave* presented by Plato in Book VII of *The Republic* (514a-520a), Socrates tells us that most men live their entire lives chained in the cave of their minds, looking at shadows on a wall projected by Things passing in front of a fire behind them which they cannot see. These men never grasp the Reality, the Idea, or the Truth behind the shadows which makes them flicker. The shadows are the closest approximation to Reality they will ever know.

Rodin, Rilke and Beuys – these Titans devoted their entire lives to the philosophical quest to understand what makes Things flicker, what gives them Life, what makes them True, and what makes them Real. In this endeavor they sought to free themselves from the prison of preconceived ideas, literal observations, and subjective impressions. They tried to see instead into a space and time where the Essence of a Thing resides and then expressed that Essence in art.

RODIN:

Rodin sought the Essence of Things in *le modelé*, the unique form of an object or the individual character of a person. His quest brought about the transition from Impressionism to Expressionism.

“An artist worthy of the name should express all the truth of nature, not only the exterior truth, but also, and above all, the inner truth. When a good sculptor models a torso, he not only represents the muscles, but the life which animates them — more than the life, the force that fashioned them and communicated to them [...] Does not the sculptor perform his act of adoration when he perceives the majestic character of the forms that he studies? —when, from the midst of fleeting lines, he knows how to extricate the eternal type of each being? —when he seems to discern in the very breast of the divinity the immutable models on which all living creatures are molded? [...] Every artist who has the gift of generalizing forms, that is to say, of accenting their logic without depriving them of their living reality, provokes the same religious emotion; for he communicates to us the thrill he himself felt before the immortal verities.”

p. 178-180 Auguste Rodin and Paul Gsell. *Art*, Publisher Boston, Small, Maynard & Co, 1912. Translated by Mrs. Romilly Fedden.

“In art a thing is beautiful whenever it has character. Character — this is the intense truth of any natural spectacle, whether beautiful or ugly. You may even call it a double truth. For it is the inner essence expressed by the outer appearance. It is the soul, the sentiment, the idea that shines out through the features of a face, the pose and action of a human body, the tones of a sky, the line of a horizon. Now to the great artist, everything in nature has character.”

Paul Gsell. (translated from *La Revenue*), "Rodin on realism. He interprets the beauty of ugliness" in: *Boston Evening*, March 15, 1910.

RILKE:

Rilke sought the Essence of Things through work: the patient and conscious observation of the Thing before him, a technique he developed during his time as Rodin's secretary. His quest is written in his *Dinggedichte*, or Thing Poems, in which Rilke turned away from mystical, ethereal musings to focus on the concrete, natural world and the existential meaning it conveys to us.

“Je weiter ich lebe, desto nötiger scheint es mir, auszuhalten, das ganze Diktat des Daseins bis zum Schluss nachzuschreiben; denn es möchte sein, dass erst der letzte Satz jenes kleine, vielleicht unscheinbare Wort enthält, durch welches alles mühsam Erlernte und Unbegriffene sich gegen einen herrlichen Sinn hinüberkehrt.”

“The longer I live, the more urgent it seems to me to endure and transcribe the whole dictation of existence up to its end, for it might just be the case that only the very last sentence contains that small and possibly inconspicuous word through which everything we had struggled to learn and everything we had failed to understand will be transformed suddenly into magnificent sense. “

Letter to Ilse Erdmann, 21 December 1913, in *Letters on Life*, U. Baer, trans. (2007).

BEUYS:

Beuys sought the Essence of Things in what might be called his unified field theory of art: Whether animal, plant, or mineral, we are all made up of the same protons and electrons, the same elemental matter, and we are all siblings within the same beautiful cosmos. Art is therefore everywhere, in every Thing, and every man is an artist. Beuys's quest for the Essence that lies in a vast, seamless creative whole led him to Fluxus and Social Sculpture, each important additions to Conceptual art.

“I don't know what they call mysticism. It is in truth perhaps the interest of the spirit; that the work expresses the spirit, and not the formal aspect.”

Interview with Louwrien Wijers, 22nd November 1979 - in Beuys' studio in Düsseldorf, Germany; as quoted in: Joseph Beuys, Carin Kuoni, *Joseph Beuys in America: Energy Plan for the Western Man*. New York, 1993.

“I want to get to the origin of matter, to the thought behind it.”

In: Willoughby Sharp, "An interview with Joseph Beuys," *Artforum*, November 1969; Cited in: Lucy R. Lippard. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. University of California Press, 1973, p. 121.

Each of these Masters, in order to escape from the cave of the mind and unleash the archetypal spirit that makes Life flicker, embarked upon his own personal quest to find and then express the fundamental behind the superficial – the Essence of Things. Each dug deep for the Idea, for the Truth, and for the Real, and in the process, each found Beauty through a willingness—indeed, a compulsion—to change the way he saw the world around him. In short, each had to change his life in order to understand the Essence of Things.

The last line of this poem by Rilke, which appears at the beginning of the second volume of *New Poems*, dedicated to Auguste Rodin and completed in 1908, explicitly articulates this conclusion:

Archaischer Torso Apollos

*Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,*

*sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.*

*Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle*

*und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern.*

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Neue Gedichte*, 1908

Apollo's Archaic Torso

*We cannot know his incredible head,
where the eyes ripened like apples,
yet his torso still glows like a candelabrum,
from which his gaze, however dimmed,*

*still persists and gleams. If this were not so,
the bow of his breast could not blind you,
nor could a smile, steered by the gentle curve
of his loins, glide to the center of procreation.*

*And this stone would seem disfigured and stunted,
the shoulders descending into nothing,
unable to glisten like a predator's pelt,*

*or burst out from the confines and radiate
like a star: for there is no angle from which
it cannot see you. You have to change your life.*

Rainer Maria Rilke, *New Poems*, 1908
Translated by Sarah Stutt

About the Musée Rodin

The Musée Rodin contains the largest collection of the sculptor's works at two sites, in Paris, at the Hôtel Biron, and in Meudon, site of his former home, atelier, and reserve collection. Created in 1916, thanks to Auguste Rodin's donation of his works and his collections to the French State, it opened in 1919.

About Rodin the Alma Project

Rodin the Alma Project is a public – private partnership between the Musée Rodin, Paris, and Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet, Berlin. Its mission is to illustrate the art historical connection between Rodin and the main proponents of Modernism, and to foster a relationship with creators of contemporary art through exhibitions and symposia at Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet, Berlin and at galleries and museums around the world.

About Side By Side Gallery Akim Monet

Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet GmbH opened in the Fall of 2011 in Berlin. The gallery holds three exhibitions a year curated by Akim Monet, focusing on themes that juxtapose artists from different periods in order to explore and re-contextualize works of art. By revealing thematic correlations, Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet moves beyond a singular chronological presentation to reveal converging currents and lasting influences.

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for their unfailing support to Madame Catherine Chevillot, director of the Musée Rodin, Paris; to Mr. Jérôme Le Blay of the Comité Rodin; and last but not least, to the private collectors who have generously lent their works for this exhibition.

