

# Auguste Rodin

France, 1840 - 1917

## Eternal Idol

c.1889, bronze (cast 1961), 29.3x21.5x12.5 cm  
Presented by the New Zealand Government from the New Zealand Fund in France for Cultural Development 1964



### About the work

Auguste Rodin became one of the most celebrated sculptors of the 19th century, his work breaking with the rigid formulas and styles of academic sculpture and introducing a new sense of energy, imagination and invention. His figures all display great strength, gentleness and sensuality. *Eternal Idol* in particular emphasises Rodin's joy in the sensuality of the human form. There is a sense of soft fluid forms melting together in their sensuality. There is also a sense of reverence for the female body as the kneeling male figure kisses his lover tenderly over her heart. Rodin himself said, "The main thing is to be moved, to love, to hope, to tremble, to live. Be a man before being an artist!"

Rodin's primary subject was the human body, which he used as an instrument to express emotion and movement, rather than as an object of anatomical study. The two figures in *Eternal Idol* express complete absorption in each other. To Rodin their intimacy had its parallel in an act of worship and he gave this composition an alternative title, 'The Host', suggesting that the physical act of adoration can also ascend to mystical or spiritual planes of meaning and experience.

It has also been suggested that this image, in its sensuality and the engagement of the two figures, may be a continuation of the theme Rodin worked in one of his most well-known works, *The Kiss*.

Rodin realised that to capture the illusion of life in a static sculpture he would have to include the representation of

movement. In his studio he worked on forms which suggested successive positions simultaneously. He relied on the effects of light modelling the form. His technique was to place the model in such a way that it stood out against the background, so the light fell on a profile. He would execute it, then turn both the turntable and that of the model so that he could see another profile. Then turn them again and gradually work his way round the figure.

Rodin made several versions of *Eternal Idol* in varying sizes and materials. This particular work was produced by the Musée Rodin after he had died, using casts from original wax maquettes held at the museum. It was then cast at the foundry of George Rudier in 1959. The foundry of Georges Rudier had handled most of Rodin's bronze castings during his lifetime.

The first casting of this work was undertaken around 1889 by which time Rodin's career as a sculptor was well established and he was receiving public commissions. These included the *Monument to Claude Lorraine* (1884-89) and his *Gate of Hell* (1880) for the École des Arts Decorates, Paris, (unfinished).

*Eternal Idol* was influenced by Camille Claudel's sculpture *Surrender*, however throughout Rodin's career the influence of Donatello and Michelangelo, whose works he studied while in Italy in 1875, also had a lasting effect on his own work.

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## About the artist

Auguste Rodin was born in Paris in 1840. He showed promise in drawing as a child and was taught by LeCocq de Boisbaudran. However Rodin was rejected by the École des Beaux-Arts. He was accepted instead by the Petite École, which trained craftsmen, and started working as a moulder, ornamentor and goldsmith.

In 1864 he took anatomical drawing lessons from the animal sculptor, Barye. He worked in Belgium in 1871 and later in Italy where he studied the work of Donatello and Michelangelo. After touring France he settled in Paris in 1877. By 1880 he had become renowned for his sculptural portraits of famous contemporary figures. Rodin's fame as a sculptor grew and in 1882 a studio was freely placed at his disposal by the state. In the 1900 Paris Exposition Rodin had a pavilion dedicated to his work. He died in 1917.

Towards the end of his career, Rodin employed a large workshop with marble cutters and cast-makers to make replicas of his works which he then finished himself.

Limited edition castings were made in the early 1960s from waxes held by the Musée Rodin in Paris. The New Zealand Government purchased two pieces by Rodin (the other being *Psyche*) and a tapestry by Jean Lucrat through the New Zealand Fund in France for Cultural Development. The three works toured New Zealand galleries between 1962 and 1964 and it was afterwards decided that the Robert McDougall Art Gallery was the most appropriate place for the two Rodin statues.

## Other works by the artist in the Collection

### *Psyche*

c. 1900, bronze  
Presented by the New Zealand Government from the New Zealand Fund in France for Cultural Development 1964

### *Study of a Leg*

date unknown, plaster  
Presented by Mrs A. Sheffield 1974

## Further reading

*Rodin in his lifetime*, M.L. Levkoff, Thames and Hudson, London, 1994.

*Rodin, The Shape of Genius*, R. Butler, Yale University Press 1993.

*Rodin*, S. Story, Phaidon, London, c. 1939

