

AUGUSTE RODIN (1840-1917)

Sin

Bronze proof; black patina with blue and green nuances, #2
Sand cast by Alexis Rudier in 1930, marked Alexis RUDIER / Fondeur Paris
Signed: A. Rodin
Inside the work: Rodin's seal
H: 22.8, W: 11.7, D: 11.7 cm

Provenance

- Rodin Museum, Paris
- Dr. Kaufmann (acquired from the museum in February, 1943)
- Private collection, France (reputedly acquired between 1950 and 1960
- By inheritance

Relevant literature

- Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, *Rodin et le bronze, Catalogue des oeuvres conserves au musée Rodin,* RMN / Musée Rodin, 2007, p. 582-583. (*Rodin and the Bronze: Catalogue of the Works Held in the Rodin Museum*)

Discovering Rodin's work in 1955 at an exhibition at the New York Metropolitan Museum, Marilyn Monroe was deeply moved by the intertwined Adam and Eve in *The Hand of God*; several years later, she acquired a copy of the sculpture.[1] Seduced by the erotic audacity and the liberty of Rodin's sensibility, Marilyn Monroe would no doubt have appreciated *Sin*, another of the master's ardent

embraces.

Rodin specialist and former curator at the Rodin Museum, Antoinette Le Normand-Romain discusses *Sin* in her major 2007 publication, *Rodin and the Bronze*: "Called *Victory* by Otto Grautoff in 1908 and often titled *Ascendancy* —which has created confusion with the work of that name[2]—*Sin* was dated around 1888 by Georges Grappe based on a letter of Emile Verhaeren's from October 26, 1889: 'Rodin showed me a piece he'd recently made; it was one of the most alive and vibrant things I've ever seen. It's a passionate embrace and, despite that, by some kind of artistic magic, it's utterly chaste.'[3] According to Grappe, 'he could have been referring either to a work on the *Ascendancy* theme or one that resembles *Sin*. Rodin seems to have shown both works for the first time in 1888, and various columnists of the day, such as Victor Emile-Michelet, who visited Rodin's studio, mentioned these works as being on view along with a number of others that seem to have nothing to do with the Belgian poet's succinct, overly concise description.'[4]

Among the works presented at Georges Petit's gallery in 1886, the journalist Victor Emile-Michelet described, 'a couple of lovers embracing with a desperate, unquenchable passion and an ardor that gets condensed and spent in vain.'[5] In general, the works that Rodin was exhibiting at the time were larger and less blatantly erotic. This work brings together 'the masculine and the feminine elements, but this time in a fierce struggle mixed with passion. (. . .) The woman clings (to the man), slipping a vigorous leg around him, encircling him like ivy.'[6] Despite its small size, this is one of Rodin's most fiercely passionate works. All in all, it seems more reasonable to date it to the years 1895-97, just before it was shown in Vienna in 1898 (#120), in Brussels and the Netherlands in 1899 (#60/59), in Paris in 1900 (#2), and in Prague in 1902 (#43/135).

The female figure has been transformed into a satyress through the addition of a small tail at the base of the spine, which, on some of the plasters, is just a small protuberance, perhaps corresponding to the end of an armature. And yet this mythological detail appears on only a few of the bronzes (including one that belonged to Carrière, who also owned a large *Iris*) and on one marble. Planned in 1899,[7] it was not carved until much later; it is mentioned for the first time in 1911, when Gertrude Whitney acquired it.[8]

Often confused with *Sin*, *Ascendancy*—which is sometimes referred to as *Sin #2* —is closer to *The Eternal Idol*, which is composed of the same male figure on which the woman, a variant of the female nude from *Sorrow #2*, has "swooped down like a bird of prey." In 1889, after the Manet-Rodin exhibition, the sculptor gave a plaster of *Ascendancy* to Gustave Geffroy, who always kept this work, which expressed 'the permanent struggle between man and woman (. . .)

in such a striking fashion' on his desk.[9] A bronze, probably the only one and of rather disappointing quality, was cast by Léon Perzinka in 1889.[10] As with the plaster foundry model, now in the Rodin museum,[11] the woman's right foot is completely detached from the base, which seems to not always have beens the case. This bronze could be the one that Rodin gave to Max Linde in December 1901 after receiving an enthusiastic letter from the collector saying that he had seen a reproduction of the 'small masterpiece.'[12]

There's yet a third sculpture that is similar to *Sin* and also titled *Ascendancy*, which shows two people tightly entwined, with the woman bending backward, caught in the man's arms and the legs, like in the coils of a snake.[13] The reference to *The Laocoön* of antiquity combines with the influence of Symbolism to mark the work with an air of tragedy."[14]

The bronze edition of *Sin* is relatively well-known:

—one proof was cast by an unknown founder and was held in the private collection of Eugène Carrière[15] (1849-1906) (Sold in Paris by the Manzi-Joyant gallery, February 2-3 1920, #184).

—at least six other proofs were sand-cast by Alexis Rudier between 1929 and 1943. One of those proofs belongs to the collection of the Soumaya Museum in Mexico, and the one marked #10 is held in the Rodin Museum.

[1] Les Harding, *They Knew Marilyn Monroe: Famous Persons in the Life of the Hollywood Icon*, McFarland, 2012.

[2] Paris Exhibition, 1900, Alma Pavilion, #1, while *Sin* was #2.

[3] Cf. René Vandevoir to Georges Grappe, undated, c. 1935, Archives of the Rodin Museum. Vandevoir was asked by Madame Verhaeren to find out about the work, cf. Vandervoir, 1937, p. 99. My thanks to Mr. Fabrice Van de Kerckhove, director of the Archives and the Museum of Literature at the Royal Albert I Library in Brussels for the information that he gave me on this subject.

[4] Grappe to Vandervoir, copy of an undated letter, Archives of the Rodin Museum.

[5] Michelet, July 1886, p. 772

[6] Alexandre, 1900, #2.

[7] Cf. the list of works sent to Brussels, March 15, 1899, Archives of the Rodin Museum.

[8] As Gertrude Whitney had agreed to the price of 25,000 francs stated by the intermediary of the Duchess of Choiseul on February 16, the sculpture was taken from the studio on March 20, 1911 by Edward Minazzoli. Was it a different one from the one currently in the Rodin Museum or the same one?

[9] Cf. the photograph of Geffroy by Dornac. Ph. 10047

[10] At the price of 100 francs, invoice dated July 29, 1889, Archives of the Rodin Museum: Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, legacy of Percy Moore Turner, 1951. This bronze has been extensively photographed by Eugène Druet.

[11] S.3363 (H: 17.8, W: 8.9, D: 6.8 cm, cat. Grappe, 1944, #193).

[12] Probably in Albert Mockel's studio in Mirbeau, Merrill, Mauclair *et al.*, 1900, p. 13, where the work is reproduced showing three of its sides. Cf. also Marandel, 1987, p. 49, 51-52.

[13] Plasters: S. 696 (H: 21.5, W: 11.8, D: 10.5 cm; exp. 1981-1982 Washington, #40), S. 3737 and S. 3738.

[14] Antoinette Le Normand Romain, 2007, p. 583.

[15] Antoinette Le Normand Romain, 2007, p. 583.