

# Auguste Rodin's Burghers of Calais and Modernism

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The French sculptor Auguste Rodin created the masterpiece, Burghers of Calais was first displayed in eighteen eighty-nine. It took him five years to complete the bronze statue of the six men who save the city of Calais by offering their lives during the Hundred Year War. Even though the subject of the Burghers of Calais is Medieval in its subject, it is an example of Modernism.

Since a sculpture is three dimensional it is definitely different than other art works yet the elements of Modernism can still be employed. Modernism is an artistic movement where artists deliberately left behind the forms used by artist in the past.

With Burghers of Calais, Rodin expressed the realistic elements of the human body rather than the idealistic ones of the past. Instead of adhering to the ornate items that could distract the viewer from the intended subject, he portrayed the simple, rustic garments worn by the men of that time. He also diverted from the past masters by concentrating on the raw emotion in the expressions of the subjects as they knew they were facing execution. Despair, fear, sadness, and anger are realistic on the faces and in the eyes of the subjects. Displaying the emotions was a departure from the heroic light that subjects had been shown in the past.

Another enormous element of Modernism is that the viewer be allowed to take an active part in the analysis of the art. Rodin did this with Burghers of Calais by having the pedestal removed from the base of the statue. This allowed the viewer to see eye to eye with the subjects. He/she could better feel the emotion that is displayed by each of the men. The viewer could become one with the subject and allow the raw feelings to pervade their

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References Delahunt, M. (1996-2008). Artlex. Retrieved April 9, 2008 from <http://www.artlex.com> Rodin, A. (1889). Burghers of Calais.