

# Free essay on rodins the walking man

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“ The Walking Man” (bronze, 7-1/2 x 2-1/2 x 5-1/4 feet) is part of a period of sculpture that arose after his completion of The Burghers of Calais and Monument to Honore de Balzac. This period focused on incomplete figures and focused on anatomical detailing specific to the parts of the body being sculpted. Modern in its almost impressionistic provision of a glimpse at a part of a person, instead of a realistic rendering of a whole identity, “ The Walking Man” not only comments on the restlessness of man in the twentieth century (if not throughout all time), it also derives power from the sheer energy of this headless, anonymous being frozen in time while in the process of dynamic movement.

One of the first of Rodin’s partial-figure pieces, “ The Walking Man” owes much in inspiration to his earlier piece “ St. John the Baptist Preaching.” Now, without clothing or the identifying features that would go with a head or face, Rodin has reduced the piece to the expression of a single motion. As Leo Steinberg described the pose, “[t]he stance is profoundly unclassical, especially in the digging-in conveyed by the pigeon-toed stride and the rotation of the upper torso”(Steinberg). Classical sculpture had as its aim the idealistic depiction of the human form. Body figures were smooth-skinned; musculature, while present, was not excessive, and was certainly not in the middle of labor. Defined muscles were considered a sign of strength, but all of the elements of the sculpture would remain in balance. With “ The Walking Man,” there is no such order. Instead, there is twisting that expresses restlessness in motion – instead of standing before us, in a calm, rational stance, much like Michelangelo’s “ David,” this sculpture is of a person clearly in motion. Note the powerful muscles captured in mid-twitch:

the figure's left calf is contracting as it pushes off, and the right calf is just about to begin its own motion, and the left (rear) leg is slightly longer than the right. The effect of this mismatch is to show the beginning of the shift in weight from back to front as the subject continues to walk (Davis 114). As Steinberg further states, "Rodin uses the kind of step that brings all power to bear on the moment's work." An additional detail worth noting is the alignment between leg and shoulder; this parallelism adds to the sense that the figure is actually moving forward. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke described the place of Rodin's statue as "the antithesis of the nineteenth-century statue, for it lacks the old values of identity, assertive ego, moral message rhetorically communicated, completeness of parts and of finish, and stability"(12). In other words, Rodin's statue takes everything out of the walking except for that which for him was the most important act: the motion of walking. In that time period, Rodin's work was savaged by critics, because they found it guilty of "dismemberment (Rilke 12). Along with many of Rodin's other works, "The Walking Man" was found to have distorted crucial parts of human anatomy; here, it has wrenched the head off, leaving only a walking corpse.

## Works Cited

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