

Artist	Rodin
Title	Monument to Balzac
Date	1892-97
Medium	Plaster
Scale	282cm high
Scope	Commemorative sculpture
Style	-
Patron	Société des Gens de Lettres



Influence from cultural/social factors: Balzac was a leading French writer of the 19thC. This work was commissioned to honour his achievements. Rodin was given the commission but set a specific brief. He had to depict Balzac wearing a dressing gown. Balzac was known for wearing a dressing gown while he wrote.

Stylistic comment and artistic influence: Rodin was clearly influenced by the work of Michelangelo which he had seen in Rome years earlier. Michelangelo's *David* is a standing male figure who looks into the distance, focusing on a challenge. *Monument to Balzac* is also a standing male figure and he has been depicted with a far-away gaze, as if lost in thought and thinking about his writing. Rodin has tried to give Balzac a heroic stance similar to Michelangelo's *David*. Both artists focus on human emotion and how this is expressed through the pose/gesture or physique of the subject.

Formal features	
Composition	Elongated standing figure, simplified in form.
Colour or texture	White plaster with a rough finish which challenges the conventions of Academic sculpture of the period.
Space & depth or relief	Sunken hollows for eyes but the overall form is vague with little definition to the physique of the figure.

Use or development of materials, techniques & processes: Rodin worked in an avant-garde way. He began by modelling male nude figures in clay. These were initially realistic but became more stylised as Rodin progressed. He modelled in the face in a simplistic way in clay, scratching lines into the clay to represent Balzac's hair and pressing deep holes into the head to suggest Balzac's eyes. A dressing gown was soaked in liquid plaster and draped over the nude figure. The whole form was further stylised before being cast again in plaster. This plaster maquette was rejected by the commissioners as too stylised and not an accurate enough depiction of Balzac. The work would only be cast in bronze in the 20th Century, after Rodin had died.

Critical text quotes:

Rodin: 'It is Michelangelo who has freed me from academic sculpture'.

Rodin: (On Michelangelo) 'I copied him in my mind, in some of my works, before understanding him'.

Rodin on *Monument to Balzac*: 'Balzac is the pivotal work of my aesthetics'.

Rodin on *Monument to Balzac*: (Balzac) needs to be pictured with a halo of ideas that explain the character'.

Rodin on *Monument to Balzac*: "I had to show Balzac in his study....hair in disorder...eyes lost in a dream...a genius...who never rests".

Quote from other sources:

Kenneth Clark (art historian) commenting on *Monument to Balzac*: Rodin makes no concessions to the classical ideal.

Rainer Rilke (poet and writer) on *Monument to Balzac*: 'Creativity itself...displayed in Balzac's form- haughty creativity'.