



LESSON PLAN: BURIED TREASURES : THE HAND OF GOD

Topic/Theme:

Using sculpture as a means of discovery

Class Level:

Middle School / High School

Duration: 45 minutes

Learning Experience

Brief Description of Unit: This class is about discovery. Most of us are trained to believe that all art of significance is to be found in a museum setting or prominent public location. We are trained to expect that any artwork that is relatively small placed in a civic but not major public building, with little care and acknowledgement would naturally be second tier. We glance at it briefly and move on. Is that always true? This class examines our preconceptions about art in public places. It focuses on the provenance of a single sculpture.

Specific Learning Objectives

- 1. Cultural Context:** Students Learn about what cultural context is and how to read it.
- 2. Artwork:** Students learn about visual perception and how to 'read' an artwork
- 3. Forensic:** Students learn about provenance: what is it, where do you go to find out more about something you see that may not be well known.
- 4. Judging Artworks:** Students learn about how artworks are judged and valued.

Resources

Artwork: *The Hand of God*, Auguste Rodin

Supplemental Materials:

- *The Hand of God*: at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum:
http://risdmuseum.org/art_design/objects/927_the_hand_of_god
- *The Hand of God* at the Musee Rodin :
<http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/hand-god>
- *The Hand of God* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NY:
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/08.210>
- Auguste Rodin
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rodn/hd_rodn.htm



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Brief Description

Background: (some information culled from the content above)

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) has always been a controversial artist, with a reputation that has been very extreme alternately highly criticized then lauded as the father of modern sculpture. He was very prolific, producing over 7000 works of art by the time he died in 1917. He was a poor boy and his career wasn't really launched till he was in his forties. But when it finally took off around the turn of the century, he was hailed as the greatest artist since Michaelangelo. His works were so different and radical from the French salon style of sculpture popular at the time that they had a tremendous impact. Even if the art world did not embrace him, the public did.

He was noted for his naturalist approach to figure modeling and for the passion and emotion he was able to incorporate in his figures.

After 1900 he did a series of works called *The Hand of God* which featured a hunk of rough hewn marble into which he inserts the sculptor's hand and small figures of Adam and Eve embracing. There are at least three marble pieces in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, and the Rodin Museum in Paris. There were also some bronzes cast. One of these is installed at the Centinela Valley Hospital.

Classroom Applications:

- The teacher does not have to be the expert
- The teacher allows the students to "read" the sculpture and its context
- The students tell the class what they see
- The teacher allows the students to begin to understand how to research, what questions to ask, ask questions and how to ascertain whether the answer makes sense

Questions for Teachers:

Suppose you are at the hospital, what would you do if you saw this sculpture in the garden and you saw the name Rodin. Does the name of the artist influence whether you would look more closely at the work itself? Would you think it was the famous artist RODIN? Would you think it was a copy and not the real thing?

How does the setting influence what you think about the sculpture? Most artworks were created to be viewed in public and semipublic locations, not in a museum - does the public location make a difference in how the viewer looks at the sculpture? Does that make a difference in whether you take it seriously? Does the fact that it is in the local hospital in Inglewood make a difference than if



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the same work were placed in a prominent position in the Civic Center Plaza, for instance? Would you think if it was artwork that was relatively small and valuable it should be protected by a guard or some sort of fancy security system?

How would you find out if this work is REALLY by that RODIN? Where would you go to find out. Everybody always starts at the Internet. How would you research the artist? Would you look at his biography and see whether that RODIN would have time to make this work?

What does his other work look like? What is his style? Does this look like other work he made? Could he have made THIS SCULPTURE?

Can you find when the work was completed? Does that make sense? Was he alive, was he working, and was he working in this style. Is that a reasonable date for this work

What does the title tell you? Rodin is a famous artist. Most of his work is documented. Can you find any sculpture with the same or a similar title in his work that was made about the same time as this one was? Can you find a picture of that work? Does it look the same? Does it have the same subject? Where is it?

Look at the work. What is the content? What about the subject? *The Hand of God* has a giant hand and small figurines of Adam and Eve embedded in the mound. What does that tell you about religion, creation? Does the title describe the piece? Is it literal? Why is the hand big? Why are the figures small? The hand has been called the hand of the sculptor who saw himself as God? Do you agree with this depiction?

The sculptor has made other companion pieces that also feature a hand extending from a block of stone: *The Hand of the Devil*, *The Cathedral*, *The Secret*. What do they look like and what kind of story do they tell?

What do you think that this piece is doing here? Why did the Hospital put it in the Garden? Who bought the piece? When did they buy it? Why do you think that they installed it here?

The Hospital was designed by Welton Becket, an architect noted for designing 'complete' buildings interior and exterior from the largest master plan to the interior details? What does it tell you about the design of the Hospital? Is it a more significant building than it appears? What else is there about the building that might indicate that a lot of care was lavished on the design?

Was the garden designed at the same time as the building? Did Welton Becket have anything to do with purchasing this piece and designing the surrounding garden?



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Do the findings hold up? Are they consistent? Could this really be designed by that RODIN and put in this HOSPITAL? Is the piece real? If so, what do you do? How do you authenticate it? Where do you find an expert to confirm the provenance? Do you ask the hospital administrators if they remember purchasing the work ? Do you find an architect still alive who may remember working on the garden? Do you ask Inglewood residents if they remember when the work was bought? Do you call an art historian who is an expert? Do you call the Getty, LACMA, Sotheby's? Who would you call? Do you think that they would return your call?

What if it is real? Do you tell the hospital that they have something valuable? Do you just enjoy the work privately? Is that ethical? Do you call a journalist at *The LA Times*?

Hospitals are often strapped for money. If you tell the hospital, do you think that they will try and sell it to raise funds to pay for the new addition that is under construction? Is it ethical to swap a work of art for socially needed community benefit such as more hospital rooms?

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Location
Centinela Valley Medical Center Garden



RISD Museum



Musee Rodin - Paris