

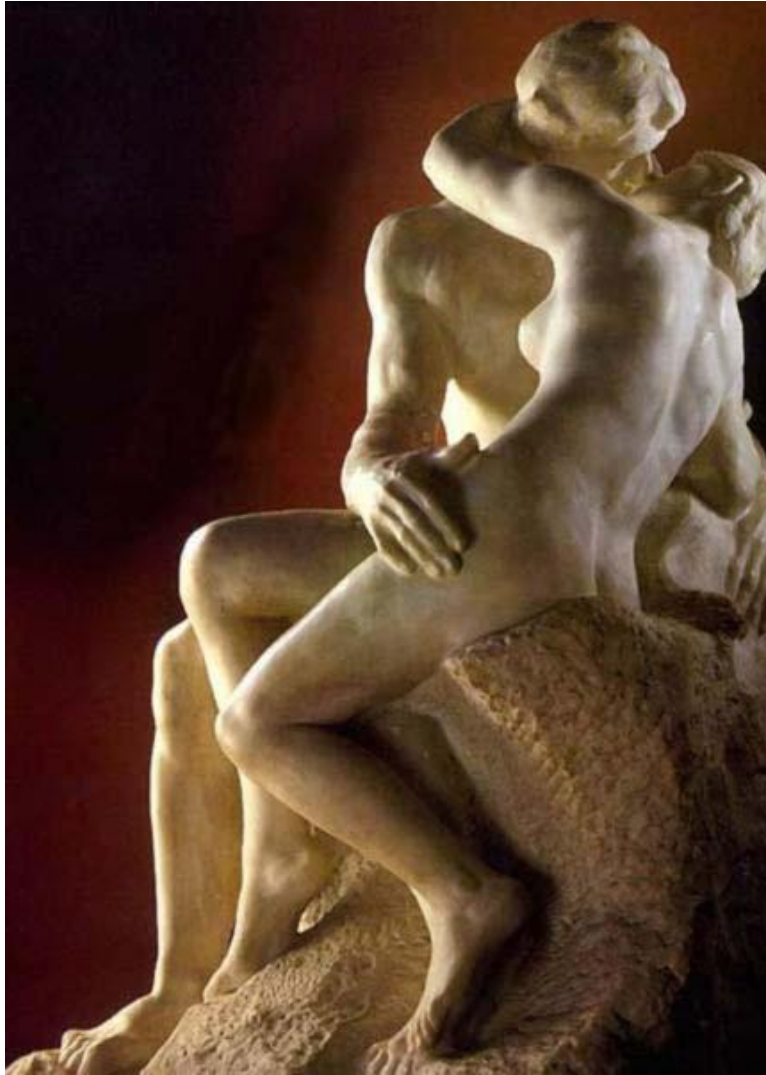


## For the love of Art!

### LILIANNE MILGROM

Sweaty palms, racing heart, my feet rooted to the spot, I stare with longing and admiration, unable to look away. I want to touch, to caress, to follow the contours of that impossibly perfect body. Time stands still. Years go by and my feelings remain undiminished. If that isn't love, I don't know what is. But I am not talking about romantic love, or sexual love. I am referring to the reaction which overwhelms me when I see a work of art which speaks to my very core – in this case, [Auguste Rodin's \*Le Baiser\* \(The Kiss\)](#).

When I first laid eyes on this sculpture at the tender age of eighteen, I was reduced to tears. My family left Paris to settle in Australia when I was a child, and I returned to France for the first time as a young woman of eighteen. One of my most powerful memories was a visit to the Musée Rodin, where I spent hours transfixed in front of *Le Baiser*. Rodin is quoted as proclaiming that “the artist must create a spark before he can make a fire and before art is born”. According to his own definition, Rodin succeeded in creating a true work of art with The Kiss; the exquisite combination of sensuality and power, beauty and eroticism could literally ignite the couple at any moment.



I don't mean to rain on the parade, but the reality of the sculpture's history does not exactly live up to its initial impression of idyllic romance. For starters, the sculpture was ironically part of the original design for Rodin's large-scale work [The Gates of Hell](#)! The couple in fact represents Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta who appear as doomed lovers in Dante's [Inferno](#). The lovers' lips do not actually touch in the sculpture, so they are left in a state of unrequited love and perpetual frustration for eternity. Typically, an artist is always his or her own worst critic, and Rodin did not consider *The Kiss* one of his best works, even describing it as 'flabby'! But being a hopeless romantic, I still find *The Kiss* irresistible – the gesture, the moment of physical and emotional union captured in marble is almost too much to behold.

Rodin's work moves me deeply and was extremely influential in contributing to my lifelong dedication to art. Over the years, on many consequent visits to the Rodin Museum, I learned to

appreciate the breadth of Rodin's oeuvre. His monumental works expose the uglier side of unleashed human emotion, yet he does not seem to judge his fellow man. Rodin also exhibits a complex and multifaceted view of women: beneath our strength, power and eroticism, lies a vulnerability based on the recognition of the fleeting nature of beauty and youth.

Love in its various forms has always played a central role in artistic creation, and not surprisingly, innumerable works of art, literature, theatre and film based on this theme have been created in Paris. If you are lucky enough to find yourself in Paris around Valentine's Day, I would recommend a visit to the [Musée Rodin](#). Its Old World Charm, intimate size, classical grounds and breathtaking sculptures make the perfect stopover before that romantic dinner, with roses and champagne *naturellement*. And don't forget to linger for just a moment longer in front of *The Kiss*...

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