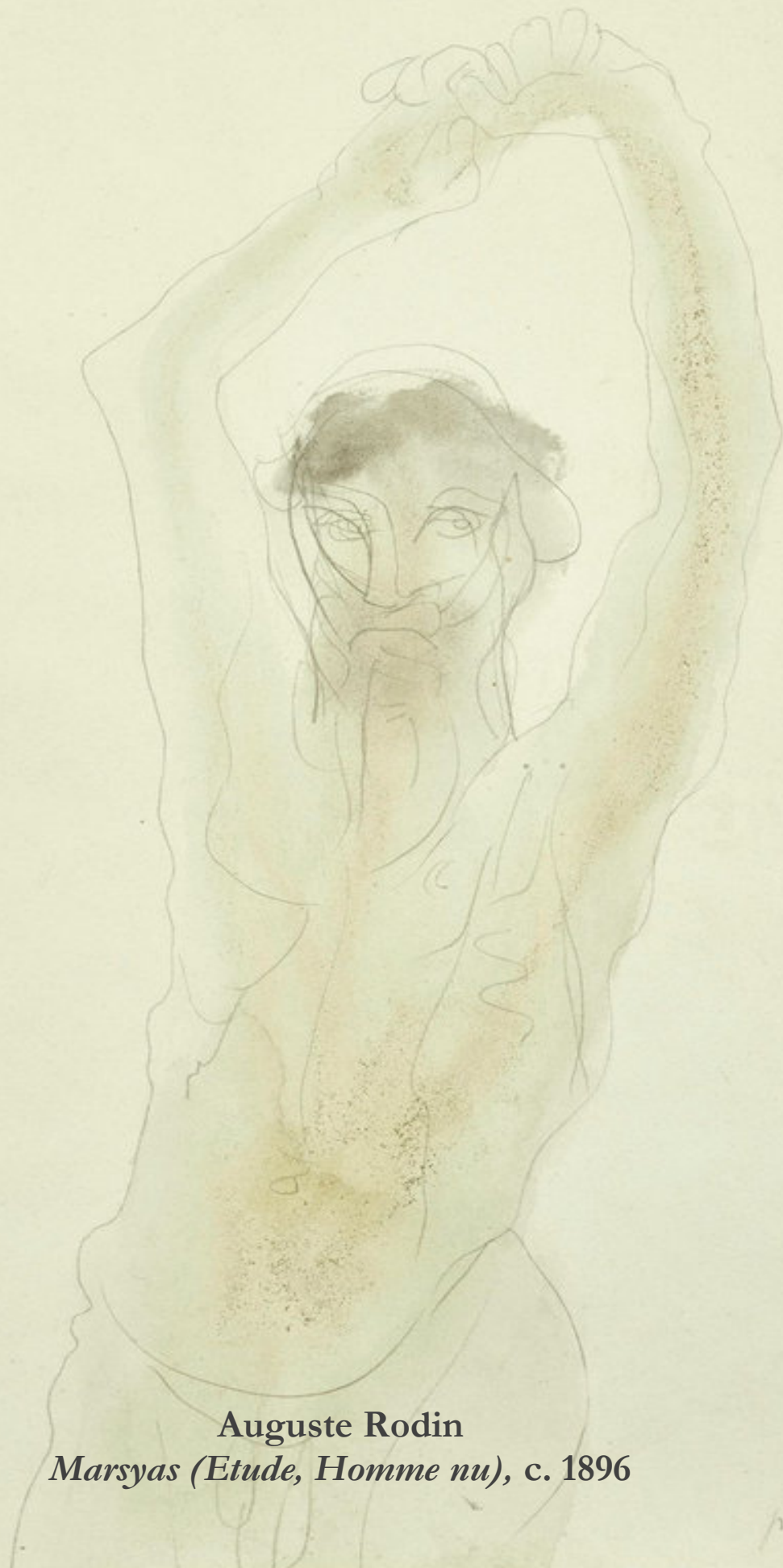


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Auguste Rodin
Marsyas (Etude, Homme nu), c. 1896

From a series of
poets Louis M.
A. B.

AUGUSTE RODIN

(Paris, 1840 - 1917)

MARSYAS (*Etude, Homme nu*), c. 1896

Watercolour and pencil on paper.

32.4 x 26 cm.; 12 3/4 x 10 1/4 in.

Tiled, signed and dedicated lower right: *Marsyas hommage au charmant poète / Louis Mullem / Rodin*

Provenance

Louis Mullem, Paris (gift from the artist, circa 1896-1908);

Probably Roger Marx, Paris;

Anonymous sale, New York, Christie's, *Impressionist and Modern Art*, 10 September 2008, lot 144;

Private collection, London.

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Christina Buley-Urbe will include this work in the *Catalogue raisonné des dessins et peintures d'Auguste Rodin* under the number 80701.

The inscription to Louis Mullem (1836-1908) places the work within Rodin's broader intellectual and literary circle. A journalist associated with *La Justice*, Mullem moved within a network of writers and critics closely aligned with avant-garde artistic circles. His presence alongside Claude Monet and Gustave Geffroy during the 1889 visit to the Creuse Valley, where they joined the poet Maurice Rollinat, illustrates his proximity to Symbolist and Naturalist literary culture.¹ That Rodin also dedicated another work, *Femme ailée soutenant une autre* (fig. 1), to Mullem suggests a sustained personal or intellectual connection.



Fig. 1. Auguste Rodin, *Femme ailée accroupie, soutenant une autre femme sur son épaule*, 1900, pencil and watercolour on paper, 32.3 x 30.5 cm, private collection.

Rodin's treatment of Marsyas belongs to his broader practice of recontextualizing male nude studies through mythological frameworks. Around 1900, the artist produced a substantial group of male nude drawings inspired by antiquity, frequently assigning titles such as Ulysses, Icarus, or Prometheus to pre-existing figure studies. As Christina Buley-Urbe has noted, such works do not illustrate specific literary episodes but instead reinterpret live-model studies "in light of ancient texts or inspired by Greco-Roman mythology."²

¹ Gloria Groom, "Cat. 25. *The Petite Creuse River*, 1889," curatorial entry, in *Monet Paintings and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago*, Art Institute of Chicago, accessed April 20, 2026.

² Stephen Ongpin Fine Art, *Triton*, object sheet for Auguste Rodin, pencil and watercolour, drawn around 1900, accessed April 20, 2026.

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In this context, Marsyas, flayed alive by Apollo, offered a potent symbolic register, through which Rodin could explore the expressive and vulnerable body. This interest finds sculptural precedent in his *Marsyas Torso* (fig. 2), modeled circa 1882-1889 and derived from “*The Falling Man*” figure originally conceived for *The Gates of Hell*. Rooted in *Inferno*, these fragmented male forms convey intense physical and psychological anguish. Scholars have further characterized Rodin’s figuration as marked by “man’s tragic struggle with destiny,” for which Marsyas provides an analogue.³



Fig. 2. Auguste Rodin, *Marsyas* (Torso of 'The Falling Man'), bronze, 102.24 x 73.66 x 45.72 cm, first modelled circa 1882-1889, this cast 1970. Paris, Musée Rodin.

Formally, the subject also aligns with Rodin’s consistent treatment of the body as a vehicle for conveying inner states. Fragmentation, gesture, and the expressive surface take precedence over anatomical precision. Contemporary accounts likewise describe his process as one of cutting, gouging, and reworking material, actions that echo, albeit metaphorically, the violence of the Marsyas myth itself.

³ John-Paul Stonard, “Kenneth Clark’s *The Nude. A Study of Ideal Art*, 1956,” *The Burlington Magazine* 152, no. 1286 (2010), 319.

COLNAGHI

COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com