

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART OPENS LARGE EXHIBITION OF WORKSBY BRITAIN'S MOST NOTED MODERN SCULPTOR

The first retrospective exhibition in America of the work of Henry Moore, English sculptor, and the largest exhibition of his work ever held in any country opens today (Wednesday, December 18) at the Museum of Modern Art and will be on view through March 16. It will then be sent to the Art Institute of Chicago and to the San Francisco Museum of Art.

The exhibition, which is shown on the Museum's third floor, was selected by James Johnson Sweeney with the aid of the artist and of the Arts Council of Great Britain. Mr. Moore, who has come from England to attend the opening of his exhibition, arrived in time to assist the Museum staff in its installation. Mr. Sweeney has written the book which the Museum will publish in connection with the exhibition.

In addition to 58 pieces of sculpture in stone, wood, lead, bronze, and carved concrete, the exhibition will include approximately forty-eight drawings--half of them from the artist's famous "shelter" series--and two of his "shelter" notebooks. Most of the sculpture and drawings have been sent from England, although four museums and a number of private collectors in this country have contributed examples. Two sculptures and three drawings are from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

In the book on Henry Moore, Mr. Sweeney writes in part:

"The carving approach is the basis of the most characteristic features and qualities of Henry Moore's work. In his art he strives primarily toward an organic condition. His objective is liveliness of form, not life-likeness of form....

"Moore feels that all good art has contained both abstract and surrealist elements just as it has contained both order and surprise, intellect and imagination, the conscious and the unconscious. Each side of the artist's personality must play its part. And the first inception of a painting or a sculpture may begin from either end. Moore's aim is to represent his conception of the forms natural to the material he is working in. By intensive research he discovers these forms. His art consists in effecting a satisfying adjustment between them and the concepts of his imagination."

Seventh child of a family living in Castleford, a small mining town in the West Riding of Yorkshire, Henry Moore was born

July 30, 1898. His grandfather was a Castleford coal miner and for several generations the men on both sides of his family had been either miners or farmers.

From childhood, however, Moore intended to become a sculptor. At the age of 12 he won a scholarship from elementary school to the Castleford Grammar School. He started to train to be a teacher and in September 1916 became a student-teacher in his old elementary school. The following February he joined the British Army as a private and went to France in the early summer of 1917. The following November he was gassed in the Battle of Cambrai. Invalided back to London, he became a corporal and instructor in physical training. He was demobilized in February 1919 and returned to teaching, but in September obtained an educational grant as an ex-serviceman and attended the Leeds School of Art for two years. He then went on to the Royal College of Art in London, and in 1925 won a traveling scholarship which took him abroad for four months to Paris, Rome, Florence, Venice and Ravenna.

Early in his art experience Moore was greatly impressed by African Negro and Mexican sculpture. In Florence, however, he found the artist whose work has given his own its greatest impetus. He went every day to the Chapel of Santa Maria del Carmine to study the monumental forms of Masaccio's frescoes.

In 1928, at the Warren Gallery in London, Moore had his first one-man show, and in the same year was commissioned to execute a decorative stone panel for the exterior of the new headquarters of the London Underground Railway at St. James.

Moore had become a leader in contemporary sculpture by the time war came in 1939. That same year the Tate Gallery in London acquired one of his largest stone sculptures. Moore continued to work in his studio in Kent not far from Dover for several months, as he himself explains:

"Up to the fall of France there were no difficulties in doing sculpture just as before, and except that one was intensely concerned over the war and greatly worried over its course and eventual outcome, it had no new or direct visual experience for me which had any connection with work. But when France fell and a German invasion of England seemed more than probable, I like many others thought that the only thing to do was to try to help directly, and I moved back to London from the country and applied for training in munition tool making which I was told sculptors could more quickly learn than the average person. But the training classes were so few in proportion to the great numbers of applications for them, that several weeks went by and I heard nothing further. As I expected to be called upon each day, I went on working only at drawings, and not at sculpture. Then came the Battle of Britain, followed by the bombing of London, and the war from

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being an awful worry became a real experience. Quite against what I expected I found myself strangely excited by the bombed buildings, but more still by the unbelievable scenes and life of the Underground Shelter. I began filling a notebook with drawings, ideas based on London's shelter life. Kenneth Clark (Director of the National Gallery) saw this notebook and I was commissioned by the War Artists Committee to do a series of shelter drawings and this occupied me through most of 1941 until the shelter life gradually died down as the raids on London got less. Then at Herbert Read's suggestion I undertook to do drawings of miners at work in the coal mines."

After seeing some of Moore's drawings of women taking shelter from air-raids in the London Underground, the Vicar of St. Matthews, Northampton, commissioned him to carve a Madonna and Child for that church, because "the drawings seemed to possess a spiritual quality and a deep humanity as well as being monumental and suggestive of timelessness."

After completing the Madonna and Child Moore began a long series of studies for The Family which he proposes to carve in stone for the Village College at Impington in Cambridgeshire, England. In September, 1946 he completed a memorial figure for Dartington Hall in Devonshire, and during the same period he finished the monumental Reclining Figure in elm wood. Mr. Sweeney writes that

"These two sculptures are perhaps Moore's fullest exemplifications of that quality which he has regarded throughout his career as of fundamental importance: 'truth to material.' For the heavy mass of the Dartington Hall Memorial eloquently emphasizes Moore's statement that 'one of the essential facts about a block of stone is its weight and immovability.' On the other hand, in the fluid lines of Reclining Figure we have that sense of 'movement' and 'growth' which Moore considers proper to wood sculpture. Each part flows, or grows into the next, following the branching structure of a tree. The grain of the wood favors, even underscores, the compositional movements without in any way dictating the forms. And one has the sentiment of caves in a cliff washed by the constant action of the sea, in contrast to the blunt unyielding promontory suggested by the supporting arm and shoulder of the Dartington Hall figure."

In the book Henry Moore*, the sculptor himself has said:

"For me a work must first have a vitality of its own. I do not mean a reflection of the vitality of life, of movement, physical action, frisking, dancing figures and so on, but that a work can have in it a pent-up energy, an intense life of its own, independent of the object it may represent. When a work has this powerful vitality we do not connect the word Beauty with it.

"Beauty, in the later Greek or Renaissance sense, is not the aim in my sculpture.

"Between beauty of expression and power of expression there is a difference of function. The first aims at pleasing the senses, the second has a spiritual vitality which for me is more moving and goes deeper than the senses.

"Because a work does not aim at reproducing natural appearances it is not, therefore, an escape from life--but may be a penetration into reality, not a sedative or drug, not just the exercise of good taste, the provision of pleasant shapes and colours in a pleasing combination, not a decoration to life, but an expression of the significance of life, a stimulation to greater effort in living."

*edited by Herbert Read; London, Percy Lund, Humphries, and New York, Curt Valentin, 1944