

The Museum of Modern Art

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HENRY MOORE'S "ELEPHANT SKULL"

Henry Moore's "Elephant Skull," a series of 32 etchings inspired by an elephant skull given to the artist by his good friends Julian and Juliette Huxley, will be on view in the third floor Sachs Galleries from October 26 to February 7. Directed by Riva Castleman, Associate Curator in charge of Prints and Illustrated Books, this exhibition will also include a fiber glass sculpture based on the skull and a group of natural objects from the renowned British sculptor's studio.

Moore often uses bones, rocks, shells, fossils and pieces of driftwood as maquettes or studies for his sculpture. Fossils and bones found in the vicinity of his old farmhouse in Hertfordshire, England, have long been part of the sculptor's large inventory of natural forms that serve to trigger his plastic imagination.

"Nature's sense of strength and structure is one of the marvelous things that you discover in studying such bones," Moore told art critic Henry J. Seldis during the time he was working on the etchings in 1970. "I was delighted to be given an elephant's skull, and my excitement grew as I found more complexity and variety in it than there is even in a human skull -- much more. This is what gradually fascinated me and led me to do the etchings," he said.

In his introduction to the book published in 1970 by Gérald Cramer containing the "Elephant Skull" series, Seldis quotes Moore further about his approach to the etching medium and his use of reality as a starting point:

It was a real discovery for me to draw directly on the copper plates, first considering the entire skull, then to concentrate on different areas in it. Etchings I had done in the past were realizations of pictorial and sculptural ideas previously formulated through drawings. I now find that it is possible to get more delicate, sensitive and the inner lines using the etching needle on a copper plate than one can ever get with any pen on paper. Therefore, the gradations from light to dark, of depth and shadows and projections of form, can be more exactly stated. In some of the etchings I have used this fineness of line to express space and distance as well as mysterious depths of shadow which I could find in the elephant's skull.

Additional information and photographs available from Diana Goldin, Coordinator of Press Services, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7297, -7501