a monument to

As a sculptor who has captured the imagination of millions across the world, Henry Moore has earned his rightful place alongside Michelangelo, Rodin and Giacometti. His colossal works continue to brighten our public spaces with their engaging themes and soulful curves. James Franklin pays tribute to a master of his craft. Left: Recumbent Figure 1938 Below: Henry Moore in Italy by John Hedgecoe



Some places to see Moore's work

- Reclining Figure, UNESCO headquarters in Paris
- Knife Edge Two Piece, outside the Houses of Parliament, London
- Reclining Figure, Lincoln Center of the Performing Arts, New York City
- The Archer, The City Hall of Toronto, Ontario
- Knife Edge Mirror Two Piece, The East Building of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

here can be little doubt that Anita Feldman Bennet, the curator of Henry Moore collections and exhibitions at the Henry Moore Foundation in Perry Green, is correct when she claims, 'Henry Moore is one of the greatest British artists of the twentieth century.' His prodigious artistic output in sculpture, drawings, print, and even textiles can be viewed all over the world, with prices for the larger sculptures reaching well into the millions. Any survey of modern art cannot help but dwell on his work, and he has created a legacy of brilliant and original work few could hope to challenge. Like the monumental figures Moore has left to enliven our public spaces, his genius stands dominant and inspirational on the artistic landscape. Henry Moore was born into a Yorkshire mining family of eight in 1898. With the mines below, the splendour of the Peak District around him and his devotion to his rheumatic mother, Moore breathed in a vision of the natural world and epic female figures that he would revisit throughout his work right up to his death in 1986.

Nurturing themes

Moore progressed from the Leeds School of Art to the Royal College of Art in London where he was surrounded by great art from around the world. He shied away from the classic Greek and Roman sculptures, finding beauty in the 'primitive' art of the British Museum. 'He would go there and take great inspiration, filling pages of his notebooks with

sketches of the sculptures from the old cultures and civilisations of South America and other areas,' explains Feldman Bennet. Great emphasis was given to the fertility goddesses of South American tradition, as can be seen from his early sculptures. The figures impressed him with their still presence. In going back to 'primitive' art, Moore was seeking not tradition, but the heart of the creative impetus that gave rise to tradition. He was seeking the most natural form of expression in sculpture and found

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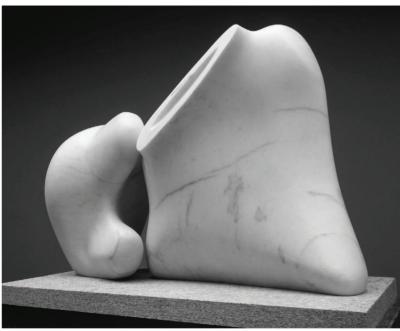
it through the voice of the ancient civilisations. This was reflected in his fidelity to his materials, carving directly into the substance – respecting the inherent character of the stone or wood. Moore began his career as an idealist and a purist.

Initial reviews of Moore's work ranged from lukewarm to hostile, but things began to change as he gathered the support of such figures as Jacob Epstein and Augustus John. In 1929 he married Irina Radetsky who he met at the RCA, and they moved to Hampstead, where he met other influential artists such as Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson. For six years or so Irina was the main model for Moore's life drawings. This bore fruit as he came to try out the poses and formal variations that suited his ideals. Moore could now afford larger pieces of stone and began to produce the reclining figures which are, arguably, the most iconic of his works. As Feldman Bennet notes, 'The reclining female figure was something that he came back to again and again throughout his life – it was an image of limitless inspiration and depth for Moore.'

His initial sculptures leaned heavily on the ancient sculpture he had seen in London's museums and galleries, but soon enough the influences of Picasso, Hans Arp and Alberto Giacometti gained ground and his work took on its distinctive Moore feel. This was most notably seen in the appearance of the hole in Moore's sculpture. 'With the hole,' explains Feldman Bennet, 'Moore was investigating the relationship between the internal and the external.' This was a matter of emphasising the material object nature of the piece by drawing a space into the sculpture. But it was also an investigation of the image's inner and outer realms. Moore's sculptures had always been a matter of representing the inside of the figures depicted, rather than their objective appearance, but with the introduction of the hole this was brought to the fore as the object itself directly manifested his internal/external questioning. What began with the exaggeration of the natural holes in the form – made by the arm and body, or the legs, etc. – grew into absent midriffs and other

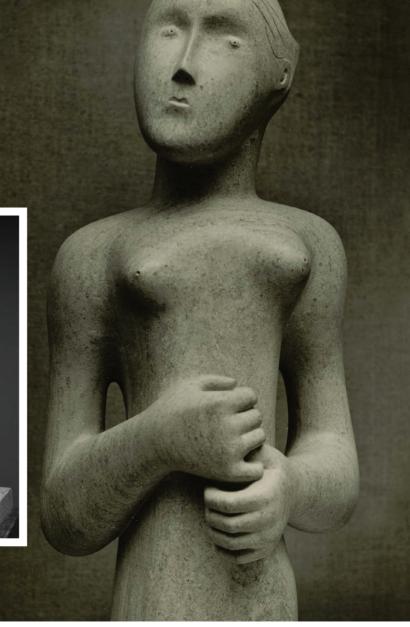
surprising constructions. What is most impressive about this aspect of Moore's sculpture is that he managed what might have seemed alarming in another sculptor's hands; his moulded human figures become natural forms by which the viewer can consider their own natural human bodies.

Moore's renown grew through the 1930s as he experimented with themes and form, with stringed sculptures and thoroughly abstract works. This abstraction led to his being chosen as a member of Unit One, a group of avant-garde artists, in 1933. With his relatively frequent trips into Europe and, importantly, the artistic hotbed of Paris, his ideas and experimentation flourished. He was even included in a Surrealist exhibition in London. However, 'this was not some misidentifaction', Feldman Bennet insists. 'He truly was in step with Surrealism in that period.'



Above: Mother and Child 1967 Right: Girl 1931

'SINCE THE DEATH OF SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL, HENRY MOORE HAS BEEN THE MOST INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED OF ENGLISHMEN, HONOURED BY EVERY CIVILISED COUNTRY IN THE WORLD.' THE DAILY TELEGRAPH



War sketches

International sales began to grow in step with critical acclaim. However, the outbreak of the Second World War forced Moore to give up his home in Kent and the position he had gained as the head of sculpture at the Chelsea School of Art. Later, his Hampstead studio was razed in the Blitz, so he moved out to Perry Green in Hertfordshire, now the site of the Henry Moore Foundation. In these momentous times Moore felt sculpture too removed as a form of response to the war, so he took up his sketchbook with great vigour. He was appointed an official war artist, sketching the scenes in the underground which acted as an airraid shelter during the bombing raids. 'The scenes he found there greatly appealed to him', Feldman Bennet explains. 'Women would lie out wrapped up in sheets exaggerating their bodies, clutching children. These were perfect scenes for Moore'. Moore captured the incredible spirit and instinctive humanity of suffering people.

A return to sculpture

The end of the war was marked by both a vigorous return to sculpture and the birth of his only daughter in 1946. The latter gave him a continual mother and child relationship within his own home that was reflected in the direction of his sculpture. He had effectively given up the practice of sketching his ideas down before starting the sculpture, working instead in small models (maquettes) on which the larger sculptures were based. This was a more conducive method as the sculptures became free and expressive with the release from the constrictions of two-dimensional planning.

Nature and art

It was in the 1950s that Moore's work took a subtle shift towards the natural world. This is reflected in his perfectly preserved studio at Perry Green filled with all manner of skulls, bones, rocks, flints, shells and roots. Indeed, he would even

add plaster to the object itself at times, ready to take a cast from the adulterated object directly. Such work is unmistakeable evidence of an artistic mind at its most creative and agile; one might be tempted to say 'playful'.

He began to cast his works in bronze. This would have been unthinkable in the earlier part of his career when he was adamant about direct carving, but this production method allowed for fewer restrictions on what could be created. So the sculptures took on grander proportions as the demand for works for large public spaces increased.

His inventiveness and insight flourished in this period. His reclining figures had always been reminiscent of the landscape, with knees, breasts and head forming peaks around the valleys of the neck and belly. In later work he would break up the figures into three separate sections. This increased the abstraction, bringing out the ambiguity of the piece and so causing us to see the likeness between the landscapes of the reclining figure and the natural world. Feldman Bennet comments, 'Moore broke up his figures to emphasise the likeness to the natural environment in which he liked to place them, but they also have a greater expressive force by the same formal move. One can't help but feel eerily caught between the harmony of the landscape-like figure and the unsettling aspect of a fractured figure.'

By the time of his death at the age of 88 in 1986 Henry Moore was firmly established as one of the greats. As Rachel Hidderly, head of modern British art at Christie's, London puts it, 'He was prolific in all areas of his work. His works are very accessible in all mediums. The most valuable work is his sculptures which are highly priced objects'. Of course, the larger finished sculptures are going to be harder to find and at a cost, but they are on the market. From his simple drawings to his finest large sculptures, Henry Moore has left a powerful impression. \Box

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