

## Henry Moore

**MEDIUM** Sculpture

**NATIONALITY** British

**LIFE DATES** 1898 - 1986

Moore, a draftsman and printmaker, is generally acknowledged as the most important British sculptor of the 20th century. The seventh child of a miner, he was brought up in the small industrial town of Castleford. Moore joined the army in 1917 and was sent to France. He was gassed in the Battle of Cambrai and returned to England to convalesce. In 1919 he began the two-year course at Leeds School of Art. There he read Roger Fry's *Vision and Design* (London, 1920), which introduced him to his most important formative influences: non-Western sculpture, with its three-dimensional realization of form and use of direct carving.

In 1921 Moore was awarded a scholarship to study sculpture at the Royal College of Art in London. Visits to the British Museum were far more influential on his early development than his academic course work. Drawings of sculptures in Moore's early sketchbooks indicate that Palaeolithic fertility goddesses, Cycladic and early Greek art, Sumerian, Egyptian and Etruscan sculpture, African, Oceanic, Peruvian and Pre-Columbian sculpture particularly interested him. Like Constantin Brancusi, Amedeo Modigliani, Jacob Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Moore believed passionately in direct carving and in "truth to materials," respecting the inherent character of stone or wood. Almost all of his works from the 1920s and 1930s were carved sculptures, initially inspired by Pre-Columbian stone carving.

Moore made his first visit to Paris in 1923 and was overwhelmed by the work of Cézanne, which he saw in the private collection of Auguste Pellerin (1852-1929) in Neuilly. In 1924 Moore was appointed sculpture instructor at the Royal College. He spent six months in 1926 visiting museums and churches in France and Italy. In 1928 he had his first one-man exhibition at the Warren Gallery in London, and also received his first public commission, a relief carving of the West Wind in Portland stone for the new headquarters of London Underground railway at St. James's Park.

In 1929 Moore married Irina Radetsky, a student of painting at the Royal College. During the next six years she was the model for a series of life drawings. Moore also began work on his most important carving of the decade, the brown Hornton stone *Reclining Figure* (1929), inspired by the Toltec-Maya basalt reclining figure of the warrior priest Chacmool. The characteristics that Moore admired in the Chacmool - "its stillness and alertness, a sense of readiness, and the whole presence of it, and the legs coming down like columns" - could describe many of his own reclining figures, which echo its pose and massive form.



Moore's sculpture of the 1930s reflects contemporary developments in Paris, particularly the work of Picasso, Hans Arp, and Alberto Giacometti. The subject matter of Moore's work of 1932-6 is, in some cases, no longer readily identifiable, although the human, psychological element informs even the seemingly abstract work of the 1930s. In 1933 Moore joined Unit One, a group of avant-garde painters, sculptors and architects. During the second half of the 1930s he lived and worked in Hampstead, London, in close proximity to members Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson and also Naum Gabo and Piet Mondrian. Although he retained his independence, there was a good deal of cross-fertilization in the work of Moore, Hepworth, and Nicholson.

In 1940, when Moore's London studio was damaged in a bombing raid, he and Irina moved to Perry Green, Much Hadham, 50 km north of London. He was appointed an Official War Artist and began his famous series of shelter drawings of Londoners resting and sleeping on the Underground station platforms. One of the few personal events of Moore's life that directly affected his work was the birth of his only child, Mary, in 1946. His drawings of Irina nursing the baby and his studies of domestic interiors reflect the intimacy of family life. In 1946 Moore had a major retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

After the mid-1950s the sources for many of Moore's sculptures were natural forms such as bones, shells, pebbles and flint stones. During the last 15 years of his life he increasingly devoted his time to drawing as an activity pleasurable in itself and independent of his sculpture. He first made prints in 1931, and he experimented with a process he called collograph. Printmaking did not become a major part of his work until the late 1960s, but by the end of his life he had produced 719 prints.

In the 1970s there were many major exhibitions of Moore's work, the finest being at Forte di Belvedere, overlooking Florence (1972). The Henry Moore Sculpture Centre in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, opened in 1974. It comprises the world's largest public collection of Moore's work, most of it donated by him between 1971 and 1974. In 1977 the Henry Moore Foundation was established at Much Hadham, and Moore presented 36 sculptures to the Tate Gallery in 1978. Moore died in 1986.

