



Reclining Figure

Henry Moore

On display

Title/Description: Reclining Figure

Artist/Maker: Henry Moore

Born: 1930

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Ironstone

Measurements: h. 130 x w. 163 x d. 58 mm With mount: (h. 140 x w. 185 x d. 55 mm)

Accession Number: 80

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

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Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Moore's biographer, Roger Berthoud, described 'the union of hole and human figure' as 'Moore's first major stylistic contribution to sculpture'. [1] Moore first pierced his sculpture in *Woman with Upraised Arms* (1924-5). This hole, and those in the works that closely followed, was a literal description of the space between limbs. However, in the early 1930s the negative space became completely abstract for Moore. The hole thus became formally integrated into the sculpture, which, as Berthoud asserts, is widely considered a crucial breakthrough for Moore.

Reclining Figure demonstrates Moore's transition between these two stages. Although the void is the result of a raised arm, it is often cited as the first example of Moore using this aspect for its compositional properties. Graham Beal thought it 'appears to be the first work in which Moore experimented with the "hole" as a sculptural device'. [2] Moreover, John Russell writes that it is 'the first of the eloquent holes in his Reclining Figure series', as it 'rhymes with the other ovals in the composition'. [3] Although Moore had already introduced holes in his work in a figurative sense, Barbara Hepworth believed it was seeing her *Pierced Form* (1931) in her studio that caused him to experiment with the void as abstraction. [4]

Moore believed that by carving entirely through the stone, he introduced space and three-dimensionality. [5] As he explained, 'To understand space I have to begin to think about actual penetrations into the stone.' [6] The nature of the ironstone from which *Reclining Figure* is carved means that it is much flatter than many of Moore's other sculptures. It is almost two-dimensional, like a drawing, with incised lines marking the details of the face, nipples and hands on the smooth stone. The nature of the stone, which began as a flat, oval pebble, as opposed to the blocks of many of Moore's larger carvings, gives it a lightness, as it barely touches its base.

The stone was probably found on the beach at Happisburgh in Norfolk, where Moore went on holiday with John Skeaping, Barbara Hepworth and Ivon Hitchens, the sculptors sourcing pebbles to carve. The artists remembered carving while on holiday, but they also returned to the studio with crates of the stones. Leon Underwood, Moore's tutor at the Royal College of Art and then in evening classes, set the example of using found stones rather than those bought from quarries.

Tania Moore, September 2020

[1] Roger Berthoud, *The Life of Henry Moore*, 2nd edn (London: Giles de la Mare Publishers, 2003), p.152.

[2] Graham Beal in Steven Hooper, *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection*, vol. I (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with University of East Anglia, 1997), p.15.

[3] John Russell, *Henry Moore* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1968), p.34.

[4] J. P. Hodin, *Barbara Hepworth* (Neuchâtel: Editions du Griffon, 1961), p.12.

[5] John Hedgecoe and Henry Moore, *Henry Spencer Moore* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1968), p.67.

[6] Beal in Hooper, 1997, p.16

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Carved from a pebble found on a beach, *Reclining Figure* takes on the natural shape of the stone. Using found materials and organic shapes relates Moore's work to biomorphic surrealism. This is one of the earliest occasions that Moore created a hole in a sculpture, which he believed emphasised its three-dimensionality. The properties of this stone, however, mean it is almost two-dimensional and the incised details suggest a drawing as much as sculpture.

Exhibitions

'Bill Brandt | Henry Moore', Sainsbury Centre, UK, 3/12/2020 - 11/4/2021

'Masterpieces: Art and East Anglia', Sainsbury Centre, UK, 14/9/2013 - 23/2/2014

'Moore, Hepworth, Nicholson: A Nest of Gentle Artists', Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield, 3/1/2009 - 29/8/2009

'Henry Moore at Dulwich Picture Gallery', Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, 12/5/2004 - 12/9/2004

'Henry Moore: Exhibition of Sculpture and Drawings', Leicester Galleries, London, 1931

Further Reading

John Russell, *Henry Moore* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1968)

Ann Garrould, Anita Feldman Bennett and Ian Dejardin, *Henry Moore at Dulwich Picture Gallery* (London: Scala Publishers, 2004)

Tania Moore, *Henry Moore: Friendships and Legacies* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2020)

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury in 1935 from Zwemmer's Gallery.

Donated to the University of East Anglia in 1973 (Sainsbury Centre).
