



Group of Shelterers

Henry Moore

Not on display

Title/Description: Group of Shelterers

Artist/Maker: Henry Moore

Born: 1940

Object Type: Drawing

Materials: Ink, Paper, Pencil, Wash, Watercolour, Wax crayon

Measurements: Unframed: (h. 250 x w. 440 x d. 1 mm) Framed: (h. 473 x w. 639 x d. 44 mm)

Inscription: signature

Accession Number: 91

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

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Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

If it were not for the title and the context of Moore's other work from the period, one might not recognise that this drawing depicts a shelter in the London Underground during the Blitz. Moore first saw groups of citizens sheltering in the Underground when returning to his Hampstead studio on the fourth night of the Blitz. He tended to drive, but on this occasion opted for public transport and was moved by the scenes that he saw. At Belsize Park he was not allowed to leave the Underground for an hour while there were aircraft overhead. He was so inspired by the mass of bodies using the platforms as their shelter that he began a series of drawings. He would travel to the Underground two or three times a week specifically to witness the scenes, where he took notes or made small sketches away from the crowds.

In his studio he would then create compositions in a sketchbook and develop some of the images into larger drawings. *Group of Shelterers* stems from the central image on a page of his First Shelter Sketchbook. Above the sketch are a group of seated figures wrapped in blankets, and below, two further masses of seated and reclining figures, which have not been delineated into individualised figures. This anonymity is common in Moore's shelter drawings.

John Russell described Moore's Underground crowd scenes as having 'even a foretaste of what Belsen and Buchenwald would look like on the day of liberation'. [1] The figures are reclining but there is tension in their poses. The figure on the left pushes his or her body upwards through pressure on the arm. Two figures just to the right of centre are sitting firmly upright, looking outwards at unseen or imagined activity.

Moore showed his first sketchbook of shelter drawings to his friend Kenneth Clark, who subsequently encouraged him to become an Official War Artist. Clark was Director of the National Gallery and set up the War Artists' Advisory Committee. Moore had written to Clark only a month after the outbreak of the war, to ask whether the government could 'find a way of using most artists in some sort of constructive, specialist way'. [2] Clarke replied, 'I am hoping that the government will be persuaded into taking up some larger scheme for employing artists. I am working hard for this, but of course it may not come off.' [3] Despite this early request, when Clark first asked Moore to become an Official War Artist, he refused. He only agreed after having found the subject that was to become his focus for the coming years: the shelter drawings.

Tania Moore, September 2020

[1] John Russell, *Henry Moore* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1968), pp.81-4.

[2] James Sutton, 'Henry Moore in the 1940s' in Martina Droth and Paul Messier (eds.), *Bill Brandt | Henry Moore* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), p.96.

[3] *Ibid.*

Exhibitions

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

'Bill Brandt / Henry Moore', The Hepworth Wakefield, UK, 7/2/2020 - 1/11/2020

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

Further Reading

Steven Hooper (ed.), Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, volume 1 (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1997)

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

Martina Droth and Paul Messier, Bill Brandt | Henry Moore (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020)

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

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury in 1941 from the Leicester Galleries.

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