Introduction

Henry Moore (1898–1986) is seen today as one of the most important English sculptors of the 20th century. His early work from the 1920s and 1930s was initially controversial, as the distortions and simplifications of the human figure were seen as an attack on traditional forms of representation. Moore continued his liberation of the figure from the classical tradition. His engagement with so-called “primitive” art as well as with contemporary sculptural forms of expression were of great importance to Moore’s development. He regularly visited the British Museum in London, where he devoted intense study to non-European art. In Paris he also made contact with the avant-garde – with Constantin Brancusi and Pablo Picasso, among others. In the 1930s Moore increasingly developed abstract biomorphic forms. He based these on his collection of bones, shells and stones, in which he was able to study natural metamorphosis – growth, wear, change. His artistic goal was to create living forms as nature does. For that reason the direct treatment of the material – stone or wood – occupied the foreground. Only later did he also have his sculptures cast in metal. Moore became one of the protagonists of the London art scene. He expressed himself in several essays about his own work, and assumed an autonomous position. At the same time, he refused to allow himself to be entirely co-opted by contemporary art movements, either Surrealism or by geometrical abstraction.
During the Second World War Moore fled the air raids on London for the country, where he lived until his death. During that time he produced only a few sculptures, but captured the situation of people seeking refuge in the London Underground in numerous drawings. In the post-war era Moore increasingly had the opportunity to show his works abroad. He also carried out large numbers of commissions for art in the public space. His sculptural work was concentrated, as it had been before the war, on the depiction of the human figure. Now he was criticised by younger artists, because clinging to figuration was considered too traditionalist. Whether Moore was making abstract or figurative sculptures, he was always concerned with developing a universal pictorial language out of elemental forms.

In his late work above all he produced an extensive body of over 700 lithographs. This shift in his work from sculpture to printed work may also have had something to do with the ageing artist’s declining manpower. With his printed works Moore created a new artistic space for himself far from his sculptural works. While in his early work he had developed new sculptures with sketches, in the 1960s and 1970s he treated ideas for sculptures graphically, their actual realisation remaining secondary. He experimented only with their graphic effect, and avoided suggestions of a spatial situation.
1 Mother and Child
Moore considered the theme of the mother and child to be eternally contemporary and particularly attractive, since it offered an infinite number of potential sculptural executions. The subject had preoccupied him from the start, but over the decades it underwent minor changes. In the sculptures of the 1920s the subject was seen primarily as an allegory for the primordial, the womb and fertility. During the 1930s he held on to the theme, but depicted mother and child in an abstract form, flowing into one another.
In 1943 he was commissioned to make a sculpture for the Church of St. Matthew in Northampton. He decided to transform the mother-and-child theme into a religious depiction of Madonna with child. He wanted to achieve this by giving it “an austerity and nobility, and some touch of grandeur (even hieratic aloofness)”. Some small models for this work have been preserved. While in his early works Moore developed new formal ideas in drawings, modelled sketches – called “maquettes” – became the starting-point for the development of an idea.
Unlike earlier depictions, the mother-and-child sculpture from 1953 looks curiously menacing. With its bird-like beak, the child seeks the mother’s breast, even though it cannot drink but only do injury. Conversely, the jagged ridge of the mother’s profile seems deadly, not human, let alone maternal. The two creatures seem, like birds of prey, to be fighting rather than loving one another.
2 Masks and Heads

Moore’s intense study of the sculptures of non-European peoples in the British Museum is reflected in the masks and heads of the 1920s. In the pre-Columbian masks the artist discovered an enlivening asymmetry that he sought to adapt in his own works. He associated asymmetry with organic and living material, while he saw symmetry as something rigid and geometrical. As a reaction to the romanticism of the previous century, Moore quite deliberately avoided any emotional expression in the face. From 1950 the idea of the helmet recurs increasingly in Moore’s work. He was particularly interested in the ambivalence of the helmet, at once giving protection and provoking aggression. He often presents it as a bowl, with an internal form lying in it like a child in its mother’s womb. In this way he was extending the theme of protection, whose origin lies in the motif of the mother and child. But the helmet also has a warlike, forbidding quality. The development of the helm motif in this direction leads to Atom Piece. The University of Chicago commissioned Moore to make a sculpture commemorating the first controlled nuclear chain reaction, which had taken place in Chicago in 1942. The original title was Atom Piece, but under pressure from the university Moore changed the title of the public work to avoid the critical wordplay association of piece/peace. Moore, who supported the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, was conflicted about the commission to make a monument to nuclear research. The sculpture combines
the perfect form of the atomic mushroom cloud with the suggestion of a helmet on a skull, and recalls the incredible astonishment and horror provoked by the dropping of the atom bomb.

3 War Artist
During the Second World War Moore escaped the air raids for the countryside, where he stayed until the end of his life. During this time his sculptural work was interrupted by the altered situation. Yet Moore went on looking for themes and forms to comment appropriately on the war situation. On his way home from London on 19 September 1940, when he was unable to leave his underground station because of an air raid, he studied the people seeking shelter from the bombs. Overwhelmed by the sight of the frightened people lying on the ground, he addressed the subject intensely over the next few months. In the studio he worked over his impressions in sketchbooks. After Kenneth Clark, the Director of the National Gallery, saw these Shelter Drawings, Moore enlarged some of them to the format of exhibition pieces. The War Artists’ Advisory Committee, run by Clark, which supported artists during the war with purchases and commissions, bought some works from the series. Moore thus became an official “war artist”. His drawings were also more popular with the public than all his earlier works. They were shown in museums and were the subject of the film Out of Chaos directed by Jill Craigie.
Moore returned to the subject of war in his warrior sculptures. Perhaps also looking back to his own experience as a soldier in the First World War, in which he was wounded in battle, he depicts his warriors as victims. They are mutilated, they do not carry weapons, only the shield behind which they try to protect what remains of their pitiful existence. His work clearly reveals that Moore was opposed to the war, and always argued for peaceful conflict resolutions.

4 Figures
The standing female figure from 1924 impressively shows Moore’s attempts to work out of material, which he pursued until 1939. He was convinced that it was only by working directly with stone or wood that the material could play a part in the finding of the form. So stone was not to imitate flesh, but to present itself as worked, hewn stone. In the two half-length figures of 1929 and 1930 Moore’s engagement with non-European sculptures becomes apparent once again. As well as visits to the British Museum, the reading of Roger Fry’s Vision and Design was of great importance for Moore. In it the author praises African artists because they “really conceive form in three dimensions”. His friend, the art historian Herbert Read, was also of the conviction that “from a study of the Negro and the Bushman, we are led to an understanding of art in its most elementary form”. And “the elementary is always the most vital”.
As in the other subjects, in the depiction of figures of the 1930s we may discern a development towards more abstract biomorphic forms. From 1950 onwards selected lithographs by Moore demonstrate his interest in forms that he developed from his collection of bones, stones and shells.

5 Abstractions
In the 1930s Moore began to engage with the possibilities of abstraction, but without becoming a purely abstract sculptor. He considered the discussion and confrontation occurring at the time between the Surrealists and the Constructivists to be superfluous, because he was convinced that both aspects were important in artistic work – the unconscious and the intuitive as well as the conscious and logical. Moore’s works from these years can be linked to biomorphic Surrealism.

If he abstracted outward appearance in nature, it does not indicate a withdrawal from reality, but more a penetration of reality. He always wanted to express life in his sculptures. For that reason even his most abstract works have organic forms. He thought that with abstraction he could “present the human psychological content of my work with the greatest directness and intensity”. In this way, for example, in 1939–40 he visualised the emotion of the threat from the imminent Second World War in the sharpness of the three convergent points in Three Points. In the Stringed Figures he connects wood and lead with threads. These
sculptures recall mathematical models that Moore had seen in the Science Museum in South Kensington. He used the threads, like other contemporary artists, primarily to define surfaces and spaces.

6 Reclining Figures
Moore maintained an interest in the ‘reclining figure’ throughout the whole of his life. He saw the motif as a framing theme that offered the most compositional and spatial freedoms. Then, in the 1930s, Moore began to break down the reclining figure into its body parts. The hollowed-out forms with their interruptions recall rock formations washed out with water. The human body becomes a landscape, but without abandoning the figure. In 1937 Moore first spoke about the hole in sculpture as a way of connecting one side with the other, and thus making the depth of a form visible to the viewer, and to make the three-dimensionality of a sculpture more consciously available to the viewer’s experience.
Moore’s interest in natural forms like bones is reflected once again in the later sculptures and lithographs. They interested him particularly because they form the internal structure that determines the external form. He wanted the inner strength to push its way outwards in his sculptures, avoiding the feeling that they are simply designed from outside and display a surface. In the reclining figures in several parts, for example, Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 9 (1968), he paid particular attention to the force of pronounced joints.
7 Biography

1898  Born on 30 July in Castleford, Yorkshire, the seventh of eight children. His father worked in a colliery.

1915  Trains as an art teacher in Castleford, graduates with distinction in art. Teaches in Castleford as a trainee teacher. Volunteers for military service in London and visits the British Museum and the National Gallery for the first time.

1917/18 Military service with the regiment Civil Service Rifles. Moore is injured in a gas attack in the battle of Cambrai [late 1917]. He recovers quickly, but is relieved of combat duties.

1919  Attends Leeds School of Art, focusing on sculpture, and meets Michael Sadler, the vice chancellor of the school and a collector of contemporary and African art.

1921  Receives a grant to study at the Royal College of Art in London. Devotes himself to the study of Mexican and African sculpture, draws regularly in the British Museum and visits Stonehenge.

1922  Begins to collect objects from nature such as shells, bones and stones.

1923  The first of many stays in Paris. Moore admires Cézanne and contemporary artists like Constantin Brancusi and Pablo Picasso.

1924  Completes his studies, teaches as a substitute at the Royal College of Art, and then becomes assistant to Ernest Cole. Makes his first Mask.

1925  With a travel grant, six-month tour of Italy including Rome, Florence, Pisa, Siena, Assisi, Padua, Ravenna and Venice.

1926  Moves to Grove Studios, London. Produces his first reclining figure.


1929  Marries and moves to Hampstead, London, where many avant-garde artists already live. Meets the art critic Herbert Read, who is considerably involved in the
dissemination of Klee’s work in England, and who will publish a great deal about Moore. Makes his first work with abstract forms.

1930 Exhibition in the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Begins increasingly making sculptures on the basis of sketches and drawings.

1931 Stops teaching at the Royal College of Art. Appointed head of the sculpture department at Chelsea School of Art. Moore has his first exhibition in Switzerland when he takes part in the exhibition *Plastik* (sculpture) in Kunsthalle Zurich.

1932 Becomes senior lecturer in the sculpture class at Chelsea School of Art (until 1939).

1933 Founds the art group *Unit One* with Paul Nash, Herbert Read and Barbara Hepworth. Takes part in the exhibition *Art Now* at the Mayor Gallery, London, with works by the group *Unit One* and by Klee, Kandinsky, Picasso, Braque and Miró.

1934 Publication of Herbert Read’s first monograph on Moore.

1935 Participation in the exhibition *Artists against Fascism and War*, organised by a group of left-wing artists and writers.

1936 Signs a letter of protest by the British Surrealists against the non-involvement of the British government in the Spanish Civil War. Participation in the exhibitions *Cubism and Abstract Art* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, as well as *Abstract and Concrete* and *The International Surrealist Exhibition* in London. 15 works by Klee are also shown in the Surrealist exhibition.


1940 The outbreak of war interrupts an extremely productive phase in Moore’s work. During trips on the London Underground he observes people seeking shelter from air raids, and captures these scenes in drawings. He is appointed an “Official War Artist”. After the bombing of his home studio he moves to a farmhouse called “Hoglands” in the rural area of Perry Green north of London. Moore
stays there until the end of his life.

1943 First solo exhibition abroad, at the Buchholz Gallery, New York, which also holds exhibitions of Klee.

1944 Installation of *Madonna and Child* in St Matthew’s Church, Northampton.

1946 Birth of Moore’s daughter Mary. He goes on to produce many mother-and-child and family compositions. First stay in New York to coincide with his first retrospective in the Museum of Modern Art, which is then shown in the Art Institute of Chicago and San Francisco Museum of Art.

1948 Wins first prize for sculpture at the Venice Biennale.

1949 Touring exhibition through Europe organised by the British Council. In the late 1940s Moore begins increasingly making models in clay or plaster and casting them in bronze.

1950 Exhibition in Kunsthalle Bern. Because of his many commissions, from the 1950s Moore employs assistants.

1951 First trip to Greece to coincide with an exhibition in Athens. He is impressed by antique sculptures and architecture. Retrospective in the Tate Gallery, London. Rejects the offer of a knighthood.

1953 Trip to Brazil and Mexico. Takes part in the 2nd São Paulo Bienal in Brazil and is awarded the International Sculpture Prize.


1958 Becomes chair of the Ausschwitz Memorial Committee. He supports the British anti-nuclear campaign (CND – Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). The sculpture *Reclining Figure* is installed on the square in front of the UNESCO building in Paris.

1960 Exhibitions in Kunsthaus Zürich and in the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.

1964 After a six-year break he returns to sculpture in stone. One new aspect of the work is the external execution based on models by the Henraux company. Participates in documenta III, Kassel.

1967 An important acquisition by the Tate as well as a planned
donation by Moore are officially criticised. 51 artists protest in a published letter against an individual artist being sponsored on this scale. Trip to the USA, to be present at the inauguration of his sculpture *Nuclear Energy* at the campus of the University of Chicago.

1968 Exhibition in the Tate Gallery to celebrate Moore’s 70th birthday. In the same year he also produces a larger number of graphic works, with over 260 lithographs.

1974 Opening of the Henry Moore Sculpture Center at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, after he gave the museum 200 sculptures and drawings as well as his complete graphic works.


1978 Exhibitions in the Tate Gallery and the Serpentine Gallery, London, to coincide with Moore’s 80th birthday. Large gift of over 30 major works and several prints to the Tate.


1983 Concentrates on drawings, as he can no longer leave the house for health reasons. Retrospective in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

1986 Dies on 31 August in Much Hadham.
CATALOGUE
An exhibition catalogue (German/English) is published by Snoeck Verlag.

TALK
SO | 19/04/15 | 11:00 (time tbc)
HENRY MOORE TALKS
With Mary Moore (Daughter of Henry Moore) and Richard Calvocoressi (Director of the Henry Moore Foundation)

AUDIOGUIDE
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