

# The Images of Time

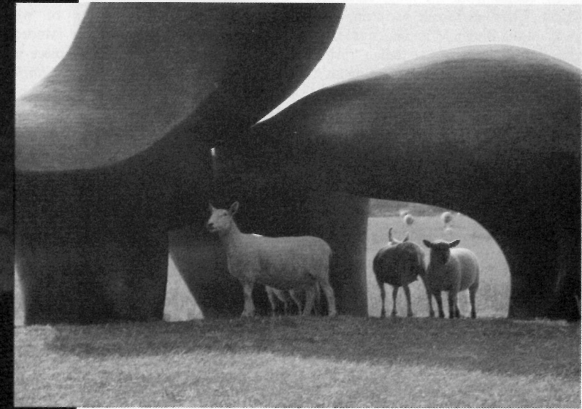
Henry Moore merges ancient and modern forms in timeless sculpture. By April Kingsley

*Left: Henry Moore says of his art, "sculpture is a never-ending discovery. I think about sculpture all the time. I work at it in my studio for ten to twelve hours a day. I even dream about it." Below: "There is one big sculpture of mine that I call Sheep Piece [1972] because the sheep enjoyed it and the lambs played around it."*

© Ian Berry/Magnum Photos, Inc.

A nuclear-age artist spending a lifetime creating primordial images of Mother Earth might seem anachronistic. Henry Moore, the eighty-five-year-old English sculptor who is currently the subject of an enormous retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, not only does so, his doing so is the reason for his greatness.

Moore "discovered" Michelangelo, and was himself discovered as artistically talented, even before he was a teenager. Early encouragement and a good grounding in the fundamentals at nearby Leeds School of Art were followed (after a stint at the front in World War I) by a scholarship to the prestigious Royal College of Art in London. He began teaching in 1924 before he graduated from art school, began ex-





Once called the only true surrealist, he implies an underlying meaning in his images.

hibiting sculpture by 1926, and was exciting critical attention by 1931, barely in his thirties. Irina Radetsky, the woman he married in 1929, bore their only child, Mary, in 1946, the year he had a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. Irina has spent most of her free time transforming the grounds of their home in Much Hadham, Hertfordshire, into a landscaped sculpture park for his work.

Henry Moore seems to have modeled his lifestyle after his early hero, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, who wrote: "The sculpture I admire is the work of master craftsmen. Every inch of surface is won at the point of the chisel—every stroke of the hammer is a physical and mental effort." In his workmanlike way, Moore does his own carving—of wood and stone and also of the plasters to be cast in bronze. Until almost middle age, he maintained an exacting credo of truth to materials that precluded bronze casting, but once he discovered that he could carve the hardened plaster with chisel and rasp, he was converted. These days he has numerous apprentices to assist with the rough and heavy work.

Despite some resemblances between Moore's early work and certain pieces by modern artists like Picasso (the *Dinard Bathers* and "Bone" paintings), Giacometti (*The Woman with Her Throat Cut*, 1932), Archipenko (the "holes" through solid forms), and Gaudier-Brzeska, for the most part Moore's work seems new and uninfluenced by current styles. It almost seems to have come from nowhere, but that's because it mostly comes from his long, close study of African, Egyptian, Greek, Mexican, and Etruscan art at the British Museum, coupled with the profound influence of the Italian "primitives" (Masaccio and Giotto) he saw during his student travels on the continent and, of course, Michelangelo. The single most important influence was the reclining statues of the Mayan god Chac Mool, used for burning sacrifices during rain rituals. Young Henry Moore leaped back centuries and millenniums to find the inspiration he needed and the examples of sculptural form he could adapt for his own use. That his work didn't become merely a pastiche of borrowed images is testimony to the depth of his commitment to their underlying meanings. Tapping into these ancient sources, he mined a substratum of mythic content that lies deeply buried in all of our subconscious memories.

Moore's sculptures have been dense, compact, heavy, concerned with mass and volume, with a sense of pressing down into the earth



Photographs by David Finn, unless otherwise indicated

rather than of soaring, Brancusi-like, up into the air. Even totemic works like the *Upright Motives* have the density of stacked boulders. Seated or reclining female figures best convey this sense of weight; a standing male would be top-heavy (chest). Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà*, Rodin's *Burghers of Calais*, and Cézanne's *Bathers* (one of which Moore himself owns) lie behind Moore's sense of weighty form. When the piece is abstract—*Locking Piece*, *Atom Piece*, *Knife Edge Two Piece*, for example—a sense of bone pushing out against flesh creates a similar conviction of solidity and heaviness. In fact, he often gets his ideas for sculptures by studying actual stones and bones.

Whether they have smoothly rounded shapes or are rasp-roughened masses, the surfaces of Moore's sculptures tend to have a weatherworn look that makes them seem ages old and inevitable, like Stonehenge or a picturesque ruin in an eighteenth-century English garden. Within a few miles of the town in which he grew up are ancient earthworks and the ruins of a medieval castle, which might have offered specific inspiration for his idea of the physically aged. The English, long concerned with studying the ties with their Celtic heritage, recently confirmed

Above: The Harlow Family Group (1954-1955).

"Sculpture has some disadvantages compared with painting, but it can have one great advantage over paintings, that it can be looked at from all round," Moore says, "and if this attribute is used and fully exploited it can give to sculpture a continual, changing, never-ending surprise and interest." Right: A rear view of King and Queen, bronze (1952-1953). "Bronze is a most responsive and unbelievably varied material."





## Poets and artists like Moore are saying that sex is inseparable from conflict.

the existence of female goddess worship on English soil—an ancient rite manifested in Moore's work.

When Moore transforms the male Chac Mool reclining figure into a powerful female nursing her child, he is not only fusing male and female, ancient and modern, but the religions of two hemispheres and the concepts of sacrifice and fertility, life and death. The

## More Moore

The best way to look at the totality of an artist's lifework is the retrospective exhibition, and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where sensitive installations are the rule, Henry Moore is being viewed under optimal conditions. However, monumental sculptures are made to be seen outdoors, at full scale, in the shadow-creating glare of the sun, and subject to the elements. We are fortunate to have a large number of Moore's important pieces in situ around the country. *Nuclear Energy*, commemorating the spot where the first atom was split on the campus of the University of Chicago, is one of his most inventive images; and Columbus, Indiana, boasts the twenty-foot-high bronze *Arch* in front of the public library. Moore's organic forms mediate successfully between the randomness of nature and the predictably rectangular forms of architecture on numerous university campuses—Yale, Brown, U.C.L.A., Stanford, Columbia, and the State University of New York at Purchase among them—and in museum gardens—the Museum of Modern Art, of course, the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas.

Fewer of his works are on public view in his home country. A version of *Knife Edge Two Piece* looks strong against its backdrop of the Houses of Parliament, and *Three Standing Figures* is wonderfully evocative in London's Battersea Park. But if the wise sculpture buff wants to see Moore at his best, in the open air where Moore himself prefers to be seen, then a trip to Glenkiln, Scotland, where a number of works are set out on the moors of Sir Anthony Kewick's estate, is a must. And in Dublin's Saint Stephen's Green Park, one can see *Standing Figure: Knife Edge*, Moore's primordial tribute to William Butler Yeats, who also listened to "earth's old and weary cry." □



James Walsh Ertler

*Above: Henry Moore makes a maquette before constructing a large sculpture.*

*Right: Thin Reclining Figure (1978-1980). The reclining figure is a motif that appears again and again in Henry Moore's sculpture.*

tions; the erect penis that comprises the lower half of the *Two Piece Reclining Figure* in Glenkiln, Scotland; and the nudging, interpenetrating shapes of *Large Two Forms* on the SUNY campus in Purchase, New York. But every successful Moore sculpture seems to exist at the exact point where the maximum thrust of vital forces from inside meets maximum counterthrust from outside forces. Such a work as *Large Two Forms* (1966-1969) compounds this balance of pressure with a push-pull of tensions inherent in its male-female opposing form. *Reclining Figure: Arch Leg* (1969) is also a double or compounded balance of forces, inside-out, male-female, played out between the torso and the legs, as many of Moore's reclining figures have been.

We are now nearing the end of our century, a century with an identity—we call it "modern." Henry Moore's holistic, synthesizing vision may not have seemed to reflect our present-day schizophrenic lives, but it may well be the vision that will best represent us to future cultures. □

**The World of Henry Moore** can be seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art May 14-September 25, sponsored by Gould, Inc., Foundation.

*April Kingsley last wrote for HORIZON on Camille Pissarro in the May 1981 issue.*