

conversations on *Reclining figure*

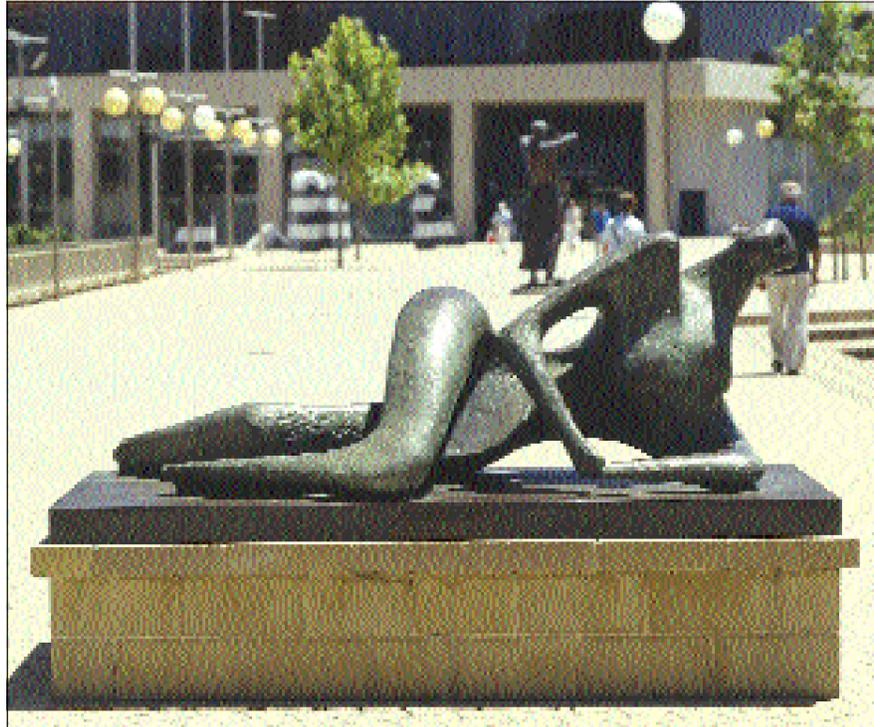
Henry Moore became one of the most influential sculptors of the 20th century, helping to introduce modernism to the art world.

Born into a poor mining family in Leeds, England, Moore became an important part of the British art establishment by the end of the century. His ability to satisfy large-scale commissions led him to become exceptionally wealthy towards the end of his life, although he spent little of his wealth. His signature form is a pierced reclining figure, first influenced by a Toltec-Mayan sculpture known as *Chac Mool*, which he had seen as a plaster cast in Paris in 1925. Early versions are pierced conventionally as a bent arm reconnects with the body. Later more abstract versions are pierced directly through the body, in order to explore the concave and convex shapes. Many interpret the undulating form of his reclining figures with reference to the landscape and hills of Yorkshire where Moore was born.

Sculpture

Moore is best known for his abstract monumental bronzes, which can be seen in many places around the world as public works of art. The subjects are usually abstractions of the human figure, typically mother and child or reclining figures. Interestingly, apart from a flirtation with family groups in the 1950s, the subject is nearly always a female figure.

Moore's early work focused on direct carving in which the form



Henry Moore, *Reclining figure*, 1956, Bronze

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Henry Spencer Moore 1898-1986

Moore is an English sculptor who worked in stone, wood and bronze. His subject matter ranges from characteristic reclining female figures, mother and child motifs and standing figures. His mastery of drawing is reflected in his preparatory sketches as well as his depictions of figures sheltering in the London Underground during World War II.

His works tend towards abstractions, recalling natural organic forms. Moore states, 'Sculpture, for me, must have life in it, vitality. It must have a feeling of organic form, a certain pathos and warmth ... if a work of sculpture has its own life and form, it will be alive and expansive, seeming larger than the stone or wood from which it is carved.'

of the sculpture evolves as the artist repeatedly whittles away at the block.

In the 1930s, Moore's transition into Modernism paralleled that of Barbara Hepworth, with both sculptors bouncing new ideas off each other and several other artists living in Hampstead at the time. Moore made many preparatory sketches and drawings for each sculpture. Most of these sketch books have survived and provide an insight into his development.

By the end of the 1940s Moore increasingly produced sculptures by modelling; working out the shape in clay or plaster before casting the final work in bronze using the lost wax technique.

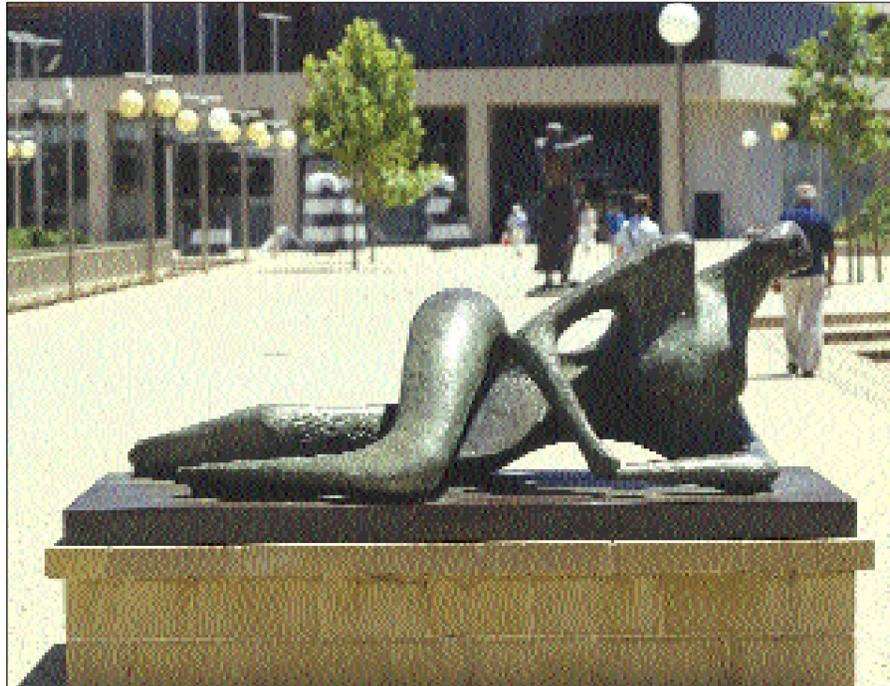
After the Second World War Moore's bronzes took on their monumental scale, particularly suited for the public art commissions he was receiving. As a matter of practicality he largely abandoned direct carving, and took on several assistants to help produce the maquettes. At his home in Much Hadham, Moore built up a collection of natural objects; skulls, driftwood, pebbles and shells, which he would use to provide inspiration for organic forms. For his largest works, he often produced a half scale working model before scaling up for the final moulding and casting at a bronze foundry. Sometimes a full scale plaster model was constructed, allowing Moore to refine the final shape and add surface marks before casting.

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Produced by the Art Gallery of Western Australia with the aim of making art more accessible for visitors

conversation points

Reclining figure in Perth is one of a series of eight bronzes - four copies are in the USA, two in Britain, the other in Germany. The sculpture is of a woman lying on her side, resting on her elbow. This is clearly not a realistic impression of the female form but a series of flowing lines and truncated shapes which suggest the figure. Moore created many figures in this theme, 'A reclining figure can recline on any surface. It is free and stable at the same time. It fits in with my belief that sculpture should be permanent, should last for eternity. Also, it has repose.'



This sculpture is easily identified as a female figure despite the distortions and simplifications. Some parts are exaggerated, others made smaller or eliminated altogether. 'Some people have said why do I make the heads so unimportant. Actually, for me the head is the most important part of a piece of sculpture. It gives to the rest a scale, it gives to the rest a certain human poise and meaning, and it's because I think that the head is so important that I often reduce it in size to make the rest more monumental.'

Moore preferred his works to be exhibited in the open air, interacting with the landscape or urban environment. *Reclining figure* was displayed outdoors in the Cultural Centre for many years. It was open to the elements, touched, climbed on and enjoyed by the passing public. It is now viewed in the Art Gallery, interacting with the built environment and other artworks. How does this current positioning change your view of this sculpture?

Moore developed his sculptures from drawings, small models or maquettes which were often modified before being developed into full scale cast bronzes. 'Sometimes I make ten or twenty maquettes for every one that I use in a large scale - the others may get rejected. If a maquette keeps my interest ..., then I might make a working model of an intermediate size, in which changes are made before going to the real, full size sculpture.'

'You see there is a difference between scale and size. A small sculpture only three or four inches big can have about it a monumental scale ... I can't explain what it is that gives a monumental scale to something. I think it's an innate vision, a mental thing rather than a physical thing. It's in the mind rather than in the material.' How does your perception change as you move around the figure?

This sculpture has an imposing presence, it is over life size, a hollow bronze, 2.4 metres long with walls 2 cm thick, weighing 547.5 kilograms.

'She'll Be Talked About'

'Perth is not taking reclining figure lying down.

Since the massive Henry Moore sculpture was unveiled on Monday, some viewers have liked it, and some have hated it, but none was indifferent' (West Australian, 20/5/64)

In 1956 *Reclining figure* was installed at the Art Gallery amid a huge controversy. Drawing 2,000 visitors in the first two days, debate raged as to the wisdom of the purchase and speculation about the price. Newspaper articles and letters to the editor both attacked and defended the purchase.

Art Gallery Board chairman, Sir Claude Hotchin would not disclose the price but stated that 'The gallery board was certain that it had made a good financial arrangement, and had acquired one of the outstanding sculptures of our day.' (West Australian, 22/5/64).

The Art Gallery director Frank Norton took part in the year long negotiations to purchase this sculpture. 'His affection for it was obvious as he walked indefatigably round and round it pointing out its virtues, caressing its cold surface, peering under its arms, and squinting through its legs. "It affects me not as a female figure, but is a collection of wind-swept, eroded earth forms." he said. "Here is a cliff, and that is like an old cavern. The leg there is a forest log - it doesn't matter that the foot is missing".' (West Australian, 20/5/64).