



# Half-Figure no. 2

Henry Moore

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## On display

**Title/Description:** Half-Figure no. 2

**Artist/Maker:** Henry Moore

**Born:** 1929

**Measurements:** h 390 x w 215 x d 158 mm

**Inscription:** DOGANA ITALIANA MN 0839

**Accession Number:** 79

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**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

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The pose of *Half-Figure No. 2* stems from ancient figurines made for temples in Sumerian culture (c.4,000-2,270 bc). The sculptures representing standing figures typically have enlarged heads and clasped hands. Often the figures preserved today that we see in museums are fragmented, thus giving the 'half-figure' that Moore has replicated.

Moore wrote an article on Sumerian sculpture in 1935, describing that 'along with the abstract value of form and design, inseparable from it, is a deep human element . . . It is as though the head and the hands were the two equal focal points of the figure - one cannot look at the head without being conscious also of the held hands.' [1]

Though suggesting the pose of a Sumerian figure, Moore has toyed with its dimensions and deconstructed its anatomical relationships. He breaks up the face and torso with incised lines and dots, offering a compelling tension between two and three dimensions. The disjointed composition of body parts suggests the influence of Cubism. The face in particular, which seems to have two profiles, adopts Cubism's system of representing images from different vantage points.

Rather than Picasso, however, Moore said that his source for this was a cartoon by Michelangelo, known as *The Epifania*, in the British Museum. [2] Michelangelo originally drew the Virgin's head in profile, but changed it to a three-quarter view, although the earlier sketch remains visible. Michelangelo was an important figure for Moore, and he credited the Renaissance artist as influencing his decision to become a sculptor. As a child in Sunday School, he heard a moral story about Michelangelo, but for Moore it was the status of the protagonist that was of interest. 'Now this story didn't stick in my mind for its moral, but merely that there was someone - Michelangelo, a

great sculptor.' [3]

Moore did not especially recognise Renaissance sculpture as a guide, but the mythology surrounding Michelangelo's aim to set his figures free from the stone was analogous with Moore advocating direct carving in the 1920s and '30s. Although Moore was regularly espousing the belief in 'truth to materials', *Half-Figure No. 2* is a contradiction. While the sculpture looks like carved stone, it is in fact made from cast concrete. Moore carefully mixed the appropriate texture and coloured it to resemble stone. At this time concrete was an unusual material for sculpture, and was instead associated with modernist architecture. Moore said that he took up working in concrete thinking it might open up possibilities for architectural commissions. [4] It was also a cheaper replacement for stone, which may have been a factor at this early stage in Moore's career. Sometimes he modelled concrete on an armature or he would cast it from a clay original. Faint lines running down the arms of this figure demonstrate that it was cast, as they indicate where the two halves of the mould joined.

Tania Moore, September 2020

[1] Henry Moore in *The Listener*, 5 June 1935, pp.944-6, reprinted in Alan Wilkinson (ed.), *Henry Moore: Writings and Conversations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2002), p.101.

[2] Alan Wilkinson, *The Drawings of Henry Moore* (London and Toronto: Tate and the Art Gallery of Ontario, 1977), pp.59-60.

[3] Interviewed by John Freeman in Hugh Barnett (ed.), *Face to Face*, 1964, p.32; reprinted in Barassi in Hannah Higham (ed.), *Becoming Henry Moore* (Perry Green: Henry Moore Foundation, 2017), p.11.

[4] Interview between Henry Moore and Robert Sainsbury, 30 September 1982. Transcript Sainsbury Centre archive, p.18.

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## Exhibitions

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

'Henry Moore', British Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1948

'Henry Moore Sculpture and Drawings', Wakefield City Art Gallery, UK, 1949

'Henry Moore', Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1950

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

'From Ancient to Modern: Archaeology and Aesthetics', Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York, 12/2/2015 - 7/7/2015

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## **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)

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

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## **Provenance**

Bought by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from the Leicester Galleries on 8 April 1943. Formerly owned by the artist.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.

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