



Reclining Figure

Henry Moore

Not on display

Title/Description: Reclining Figure

Artist/Maker: Henry Moore

Born: 1945

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Bronze

Measurements: w. 178 mm

Inscription: Moore

Accession Number: 440

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

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Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Moore described two sides of his personality – the ‘tough’ and the ‘tender’ – that were conveyed through different styles in his work. [1] He believed the former was epitomised in his Surrealist tendencies with a spiky aesthetic, and the latter by his classically inspired rounded figures. After the Second World War the ‘tough’ seems to have had a resurgence in works such as the 1945 *Reclining Figure*, although he was simultaneously making such classical works as the *Madonna and Child* and carved draped reclining figures.

The antithetical reclining figures that Moore was making almost concurrently demonstrate how he was able to rejuvenate the theme throughout his career in endless variations. In fact the majority of his figurative sculptures are reclining. The reclining figure had obvious antecedents in classical art and throughout art history, and had undergone a recent resurgence in the bathing scenes of Cézanne and Picasso, whom Moore vocally admired. Moore is typically connected to these artists through his more classical works depicting women with rounded bodies. [2] However, the more fragmented reclining figure, represented here, has its precedent in a more Cubist Picasso, as well as in Giacometti’s skeletal figures.

Reclining Figure may foreshadow the generation of British sculptures that followed Moore who became known as the Geometry of Fear artists, including Reg Butler (1913–1981), Lynn Chadwick (1914–2003), Geoffrey Clarke (1924–2014) and Bernard Meadows (1915–2005). Their work was characterised by a slender anatomy with angular geometric forms. The contrast of the wiry arms in the present sculpture with the sloping block of metal suggests in particular Lynn Chadwick’s cloaked figures, in which the cloak acted as an additional support for the figure, which otherwise stood on two spindly legs.

The ‘tough’ side of Moore, which perhaps demonstrates a darker tendency, is not acknowledged as frequently as Moore’s classical works. A 2010 Tate exhibition and publication set out to subvert this, when Chris Stephens proposed that Moore ‘presented the body as abject, erotic, vulnerable, violated and visceral’. [3] The skeletal form with pointy breasts and exposed ribcage and the ambiguous lower body of this figure offer the potential for danger and vulnerability. Although reclining, the figure seems active, with tense arms and muscular or bony shoulders.

Tania Moore, September 2020

[1] David Sylvester, *Henry Moore*, (ex cat) (London: Tate, 1968), p.109.

[2] Christopher Green, ‘Henry Moore and Picasso’, in James Beechey and Chris Stephens (eds), *Picasso and Modern British Art* (London: Tate, 2012), p.131.

[3] Chris Stephens (ed.), *Henry Moore* (London: Tate, 2010), p.12.

Exhibitions

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

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)

Provenance

Bought by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from William Ohly at the Berkeley Galleries in 1947.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia.
