

From *Picture Post*, May 15th, 1948.

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BRITAIN'S MOST EMINENT SCULPTOR PUTS THE FINISHING TOUCHES TO HIS LATEST WORK

Some don't much like his work. Some take it to be the finest sculpture of our time. Comprehending or not, most feel the importance of Henry Moore's figures, once they see them in the round. Any big new work of his is a major event. Indeed big and indeed new is his latest group of Three Standing Draped Figures, intended for the London County Council's open-air exhibition of sculpture in Battersea Park, which begins this week.

HENRY MOORE PREPARES FOR BATTERSEA

Photographed by FELIX H. MAN

HENRY MOORE is not one of those sheltered artists who have always lived on the margin of life. He is a miner's son, a matter-of-fact fellow, eminently sociable and sensible. So why, some will ask, is his work so difficult to approach, so hard to get on speaking-terms with? In short, what does Mr. Moore mean by it?

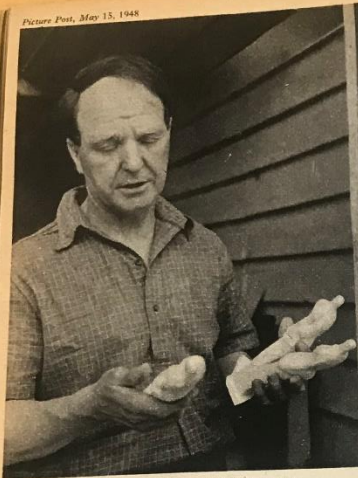
The question is always a hard one for modern artists to answer. Driven into a corner, they are inclined to rattle off a sales-talk about form and colour, which no more explains their work than the spots explain the measles. It may well be that they do not come right out and say what they mean, because they are not quite sure what really is on their minds. Ambiguity is at once the strength and weakness of modern art. What is certain is that a man like Henry Moore, who is well aware of what is going on in the world, is likely to be affected, in his work, by the general stress of the times we live in. He does not set out to produce figures labelled *War*, or *Peace*, or *Hope*, or *Despair*; he would consider it naive and pointless to do so. Yet in some hidden way the everyday shocks of the newspaper front-page do get into his sculpture, and make it not merely a matter of bumps and hollows and form-for-form's sake, but also a thing of tension and human drama. Not the thrust-out drama of a wild gesture, but the undertone drama of an immobile look. You see a poker-faced woman; and at first sight you notice nothing in her. You look again; *Continued overleaf*



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A sculptor can't alter as he goes. He must make up his mind and start carving. Moore develops his ideas through drawings. He says that drawing to him acts like water on a plant. For months he finds himself sketching variations on three standing figures. At last the idea takes final shape: here is a design for sculpture.

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CLAY MODELS SET THE PATTERN

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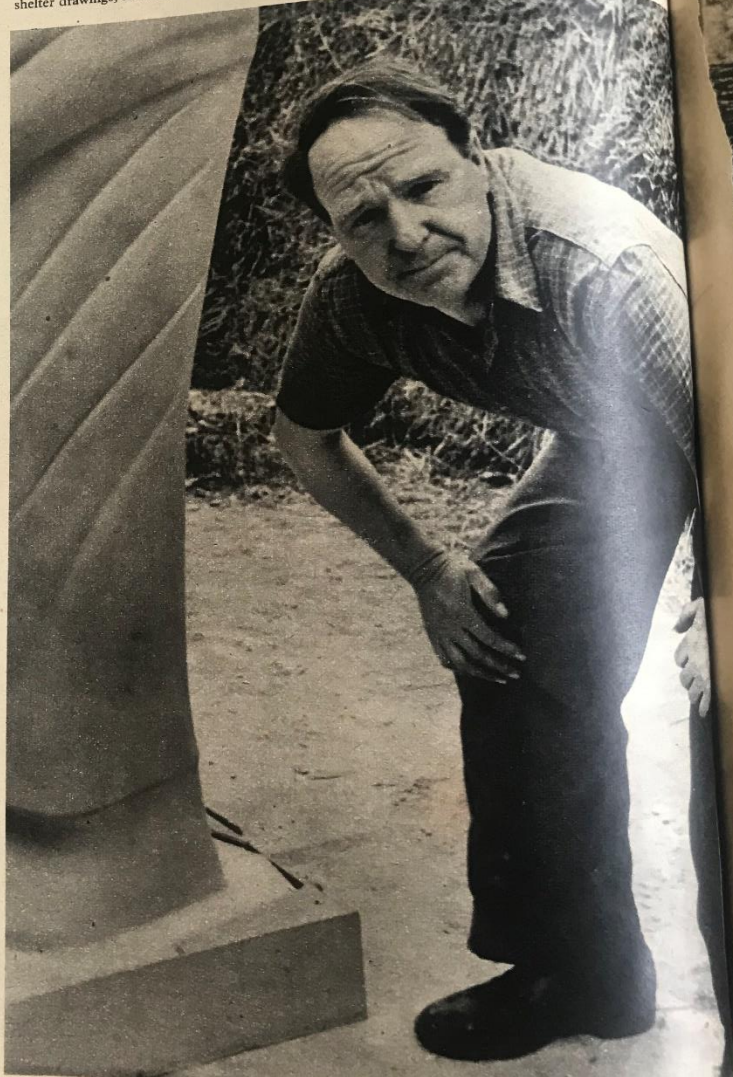


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and you become aware that behind her face is a depth of love or hatred that is ten times more disturbing for not being explicit. That is rather the kind of thing Moore wants to express in his work. Probably he is best known for the drawings he made in air-raided shelters during the war. In those days, he had to concentrate on drawing rather than sculpture, because stone was hard to buy, and harder to get transported. This was no period of marking time for Moore; and what he discovered during those days is beginning to come out in his sculpture now. It shows specially clearly in his latest work, the *Three Standing Draped Figures*. In the first place, an important part of many of his shelter pictures had been the way the figures were dressed. The folds and creases of the drapery (were they classical togas or army blankets?) were arranged in a way that gave a specially decorative and even eerie significance to the sad and patient groups of shelters. Hitherto, most of Moore's sculpture shapes have been arrived at by exploiting the curves and angles of the human body. But now, on the strength of his experiences while making the shelter drawings, he is trying his hand at a problem

which preoccupied many sculptors of Gothic and Romanesque times: the problem of how to make the swathings and swaddlings of a piece of sculpture providing depths and distances which a nude figure does not have. But perhaps even more interesting than the formal influence of the shelter drawings is the dramatic influence. Though Moore's shelter drawings never did anything but stand, sit or lie, they were about them an air of tension, of contained horror, of impending doom. (Fortunately, not all of us were in fact, so passive during those lively times.) In the drama was not a conscious or openly expressed one; it was a secret and implicit thing that showed itself more in the stony poise of a body of stone than in a head was cocked, than in any other expression that could be seen. And so it is with the new group of three over-lifesized (7 feet tall) Dale sandstone figures. At first sight, especially on a sunny day, they have a rather genial and friendly look. Gradually you become aware that there is an unease about their monumentality. You notice that the all-but-featureless faces have a sharp, rigid



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Nine months ago they were three blocks of Darley Dale sandstone worth £35 each. Now they are three figures by Henry Moore of fabulous value. They have something Mediterranean about them, as if they'd be at home on sun-stricken dunes. At first sight they look placid; at second sight, you notice their unease. They look like women who watch for argosies, or bombers, and wonder 'Are they ours?' Whether the artist willed it or not, in their motionless poise is secret drama.

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The *Three Standing Draped Figures* were originally intended for the garden of the Museum of Modern Art, in Manhattan. (Moore selected the iron-hard Darley Dale stone because it would resist the sea-air and bitter frosts of New York.) But then the British Contemporary Art Society made Moore an offer for the work, in order to display it on some public site in England. So, though American prices are usually higher than British, Moore asked the Museum of Modern Art

if they would mind not taking the work after all, because home enthusiasms are not so common, and it is good to encourage them; and it is good, also, to have one's work on permanent public show in one's own country. The group is being shown at the London County Council's big open-air exhibition of sculpture that starts this week in Battersea Park. It will stand among works by most of the best sculptors of our time. And it should show that Moore is the equal of any alive. A. L. LLOYD.

Transcription of main text:

Henry Moore is not one of those sheltered artists who have always lived on the margins of life. He is a miner's son, a matter-of-fact fellow, eminently sociable and sensible. So why, some will ask, is his work so difficult to approach, so hard to get on speaking-terms with? In short, what does Mr. Moore mean by it?

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But perhaps even more interesting than the formal influence of the shelter drawings is their dramatic influence. Though Moore's shelterers never did anything but stand, sit or lie, there was about them an air of tension, of contained horror, of impending doom. (Fortunately, not all of us were, in fact, so passive during those lively times.) But the drama was not a conscious or openly-expressed one; it was a secret and implicit thing that showed itself more in the stony poise of a body or the listening way a head was cocked, than in any actual expression that could be seen. And so it is with the new group of three over-lifesized (7 feet tall) Darley Dale sandstone figures. At first sight, especially on a sunny day, they have a rather genial and cosy look. Gradually you become aware that there is an unease about their monumentality. You notice that the all-but-featureless faces have a sharp, rather tortoise-like inquisitiveness, an almost snaky oddity that seems to bode no comfort. The figures do not make any gesture, for Moore says he always tries to give his pieces a sense of repose; as if they can stay in that position for ever; as, indeed, being in stone, they have to. But somehow their first-sight appearance of peace is deceptive. Whether consciously or not, the artist has caught his figures in the characteristic war-time street-corner pose of women who listen for bombers.

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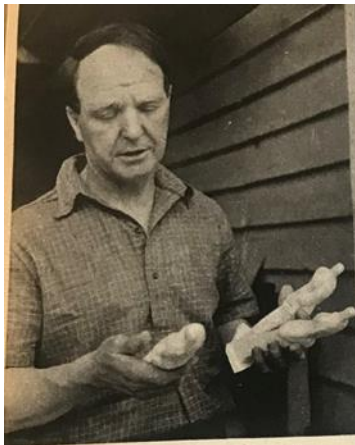
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