

# HENRY MOORE



Doreen Ehrlich



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**Crescent Books**

New York/Avenel, New Jersey



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PAGE 1: *Mask*, 1929,  
stone, h. 5 inches (12.7 cm),  
Private Collection

Photo Malcolm Varon

PAGE 2: *King and Queen*, 1952-53,  
bronze, h. 64 inches (164 cm),  
Courtesy of the Henry Moore  
Foundation

BELOW: Henry and Irina Moore in  
the garden at Much Hadham,  
1966.





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# INTRODUCTION

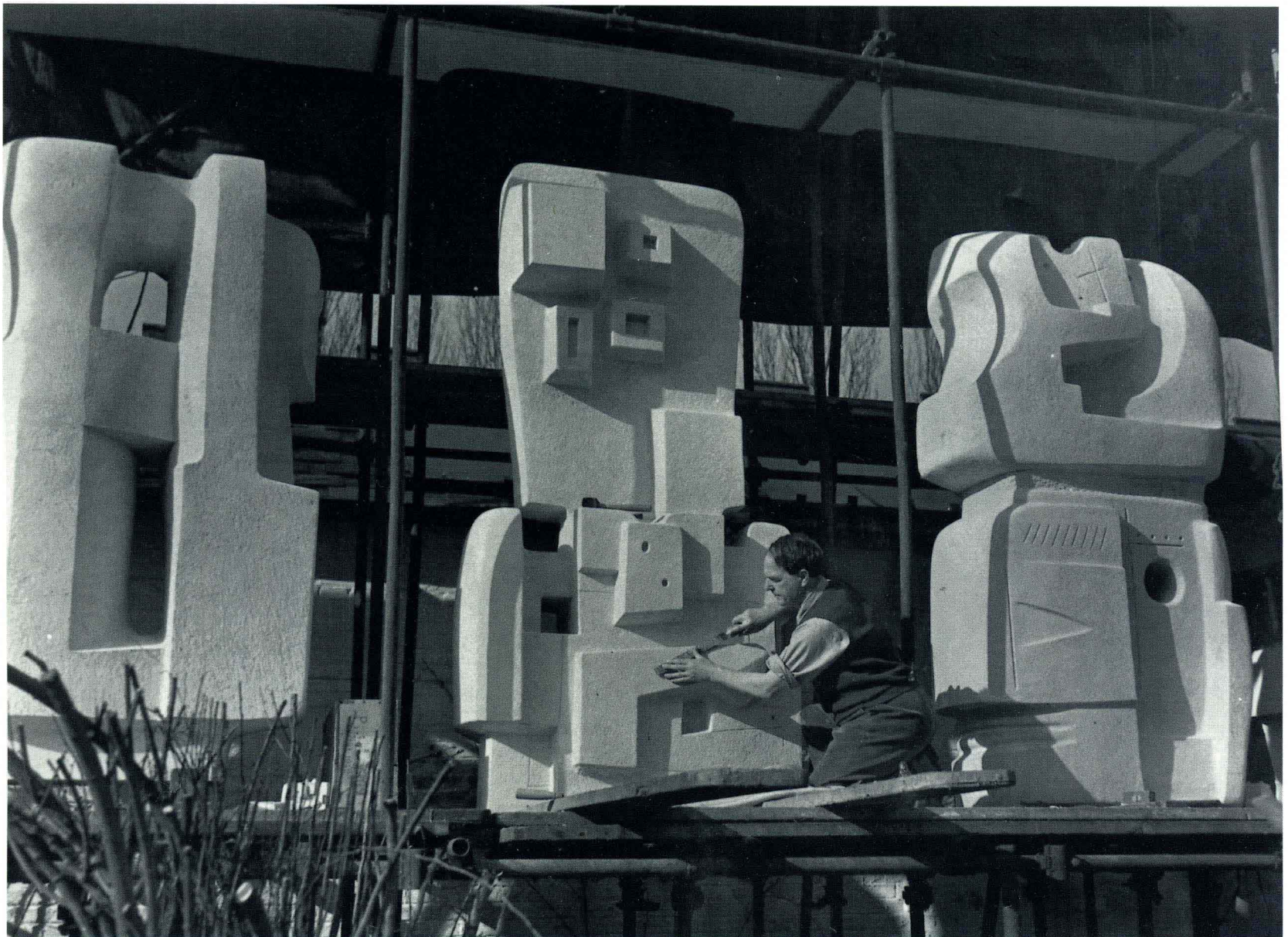
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The most famous British artist of the twentieth century, Henry Moore was born in Castleford, Yorkshire, in 1898, and died, aged 88, in 1986. His long life encompassed two world wars; his huge body of work can be found in prominent sites all over the world, from London to Jerusalem, from New York to Japan. He is one of the very few twentieth-century artists whose work is instantly recognizable to a wide public, playing as it does a central role in the settings of such significant buildings as the Lincoln Center, New York and the UNESCO Building, Paris. The universal popularity of Moore's sculptures suggests that the imagery he uses taps into the collective unconscious, transcending national and cultural boundaries.

The circumstances of Moore's birth were modest. Castleford was at that time a mining town of some twenty thousand residents, and the Moores lived in a typical four-room Victorian terrace house of the period, back-to-back with the houses of the next street. Moore's father, Raymond Spencer Moore, worked

in the mines, and was himself the son of a farm worker from Lincolnshire. Moore senior was tenacious and independent; he had taught himself the skills needed to become a mining engineer, although an industrial injury affecting his sight prevented him from further advancement. He was determined that his eight children should better themselves by hard work through the education system. His ambitions were realized, as none of them followed him into mining and three were to become teachers, a career for which Henry Moore was also trained, at his father's insistence.

Moore's mother, Mary, the subject of one of her son's finest early drawings, was a key figure in his life and work. In later life, Moore attributed the physical strength and stamina so necessary in a sculptor to his mother, who worked as a laundress in addition to raising eight children: 'she had tremendous physical stamina . . . to be a sculptor, you have to have that sort of energy and that sort of stamina.' He remembered that as a boy







LEFT: Moore working on the Portland stone *Time-Life* screen (1952-53) at Much Hadham.

ABOVE: *The Artist's Mother*, 1927, pencil, pen and ink with finger rub

and scraping,  $10\frac{15}{16} \times 7\frac{9}{16}$  inches (27.7 × 19.1 cm).

RIGHT: Henry Moore at Castleford in 1918, recovering from the effects of gassing suffered at Cambrai.



he had to massage her back with liniment, adding significantly: 'I suppose I've got a mother complex . . . I could almost have made [her back] without looking at it. The sense of touch, the boniness across the backbone.'

For the Moore children, as for other working-class children of the period, the way out of a seemingly pre-determined way of life was through education. Moore twice failed his entrance examination to the local secondary (later grammar) school, yet on his father's insistence he sat a third time and was successful. The education he received, until he was called up at the age of 18, was to change his life. He was fortunate enough to be taught by two remarkable educators. The headmaster, Thomas ('Toddy') Dawes, was an enlightened and experienced teacher with broad cultural sympathies, who took working groups of young children to study the medieval churches and abbeys in the Yorkshire countryside. It was on one of these occasions, at Methley church, that Moore remembered drawing the carved stone heads that were his first experience of sculpture. In addition

to such Gothic architectural sculpture, many Yorkshire churches contain finely carved medieval tombs, with recumbent figures which were to have echoes in much of Moore's later work.

The prime influence on the young Moore's artistic education, however, and the determining factor in his choice of career, was his art teacher, Alice Gostick. Herself half French, she maintained a keen interest in the wider world of European art, subscribing to such magazines as *The Studio*, which reported the exciting developments in European Modernism, for example the School of Paris, or the current Art Nouveau style in Vienna and elsewhere in Europe. The enlightened teaching at Castleford ensured that art and its making were central to the children's education. Moore found himself among a number of gifted children who were encouraged to see their futures in art; Miss Gostick was to remain an artistic mentor and friend, and her correspondence with Moore continued for over half a century.





LEFT: Henry Moore in London in the late 1920s, photographed with an early work, *Standing Woman* (1926), since destroyed.

RIGHT: On holiday in Norfolk in 1930; from left to right, Ivon Hitchens, Irina Moore, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and Mary Jenkins (wife of Douglas Jenkins, who took the photograph).

Moore left school aged 16, in the first year of World War I, to become a trainee teacher. He took this practical step on his father's advice, although he found his apprenticeship in local schools a difficult one. When conscription began in 1916, after the terrible slaughter of the volunteer army, Raymond Spencer Moore realized that his youngest son stood a much better chance in a London Regiment, and Henry was soon enlisted in the Civil Service Rifles, the 15th Battalion, the London Regiment.

He received his training near London and was able at the same time to study the sculpture at the British Museum, which was to be of seminal importance in his future work. For what remained of World War I, however, he was to find himself in the thick of the action at the front, as a Lewis gunner. After the tank battle at Cambrai, Moore was invalided out, suffering from the effects of the gas that had been so terrible a feature of the action, and was sent back to hospital in Wales to re-

cuperate. After two years' service, he was promoted to Lance-Corporal, using his teaching skills in a vastly different context as a bayonet drill instructor.

After the Armistice of 1918, Moore was free to leave the army; aged 20, he was ready to take advantage of the educational grants that were being made available to returning servicemen. On demobilization, he returned to Castleford to teach small children, to attend Miss Gostick's pottery class and, in the fall of 1919, to take up a place at the Leeds School of Art, ten miles away. There Moore found himself, along with other mature and determined students marked by their experience of the war, engaged in the traditional disciplines of art school training in England at that time. His long working day was occupied with classes in anatomy, life-drawing, drawing from the antique, and the study of perspective and architecture, while back in Castleford in the evening there were Miss Gostick's pottery classes to complement his drier academic



studies in Leeds, and to compensate for its more uncongenial aspects.

As in other aspects of his life, Moore was fortunate in being in the right place at the right time when he came into the orbit of the Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, Sir Michael Sadler, the collector and connoisseur of the arts. Sadler owned one of the most avant-garde collections in the country, which included works by Picasso and Matisse and a collection of African carvings. He had known Kandinsky before the war and was a friend of Roger Fry, whose theories on art, together with those of other members of the Bloomsbury Group, were so influential in Britain during this period. Fry had been Curator of Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, between 1906 and 1910, and was the first to introduce Post-Impressionist painting to Britain, with the two exhibitions he arranged in London in 1910 and 1912.

Moore himself stressed the influence on his later work of Fry's essay on 'Negro Sculpture' in *Vision and Design* in 1921, which he read as a student in Leeds. Roger Fry in turn commented on Sadler's influence on cultural life in Leeds: 'He showed what can be done – but very rarely is – by education.' Moore himself, writing nearly 50 years later, considered that Sadler 'really knew what was going on in modern art.' Among Moore's contemporaries at Leeds School of Art at this time was a student from nearby Wakefield, Barbara Hepworth, four years younger than Moore, who was later to achieve a national reputation as a sculptor second only to his. Barbara Hepworth left Leeds before Moore on that all-important first step to the Royal College of Art in London, on a major scholarship.

A year later, aged 23, Moore followed her to the Royal College in what he was later to describe as 'a dream of excitement.' Moore's scholarship was a generous one and meant that he could concentrate entirely on his development as a sculptor. Unlimited access to the National Gallery, the British Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum and its reference library meant that he 'could learn about all the sculptures that had ever been made in the world.'

Moore was one of very few students to choose to work in the Sculpture School, and he was able to have an entire studio and a life model to himself. He was also able to concentrate on life drawing in the School of Painting, taught by Leon Underwood, himself a sculptor. According to Moore, Underwood 'set out to teach the science of drawing, of expressing solid form on a flat surface,' a passion that Moore imbibed and that was to remain with him for the rest of his life, becoming a vital part of his sculptural practice. Moore believed strongly in the importance of visual literacy, and saw drawing as a means to that end, a skill that should be taught seriously as a general part of education, 'to get', as he himself later put it, 'people to use their eyes . . . to understand nature and to get nourishment from the visual arts, sculpture and painting.' This belief remained with Moore throughout his life and is carried on today in the work of the Henry Moore Foundation.

Moore's talents and his Yorkshire roots were to ensure him the encouragement of the remarkable Principal of the Royal College, the painter Sir William Rothenstein. Rothenstein, who took up his post in 1920, was determined that the Royal College should develop beyond its then boundaries as a







LEFT: Polystyrene model for *Large Spindle Piece* (1968-74).

BELOW: The *Spindle Piece* model in the process of construction.

RIGHT: Moore in his studio working on a polystyrene model.

specialist teacher training college. Rothenstein's family fortune was based on the Yorkshire wool industry. As a young man he had known Rodin and Degas, and he had a wide and influential circle of friends, into which he introduced his student protégés. As a fellow Yorkshireman, whom Rothenstein described in 1939 as 'the most intelligent and gifted among the sculptors,' Moore was to benefit from such contacts. He was never to forget speaking to the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, at one of the Principal's gatherings: 'Rothenstein gave me the feeling that there was no barrier, no limit to what a young provincial student could get to be or do.'

It could, however, be argued that the major influence on Moore's development as a sculptor at this time was not his more formal studies at the Royal College, but the work that he undertook on his own initiative at the British Museum. He himself considered his time there to be revelatory, and spent two or three hours there at least twice a week. As well as its famed collections of antique classical sculpture, Egyptian antiquities and treasures from Assyria, the British Museum at that time contained what were known as the Ethnographical Galleries, containing sculptures from Mexico, Africa and other non-classical sources, now housed in the Museum of Mankind.

Moore was always ready to acknowledge the lasting foundation his studies of the sculpture in the British Museum gave







him. His work in the 1920s was particularly influenced by his study of Pre-Columbian sculpture. John Rothenstein (son of William Rothenstein, Moore's Principal at the Royal College, and Director of the Tate Gallery) considered that Moore's 'assiduous' study of Mexican and other ancient sculpture resulted in sculptures which, compared with the originals, 'were little more than exercises – powerful and perceptive, but exercises none the less – in various early stages.' These exercises were vital, however, in enabling Moore to find his own style; vital, too, in strengthening his strongly held belief in 'truth to material.' This was a characteristic of African art much stressed by Roger Fry and was, according to Moore, 'one of the first principles of art . . . the artist shows an instinctive understanding of his material, its right use and possibilities.'

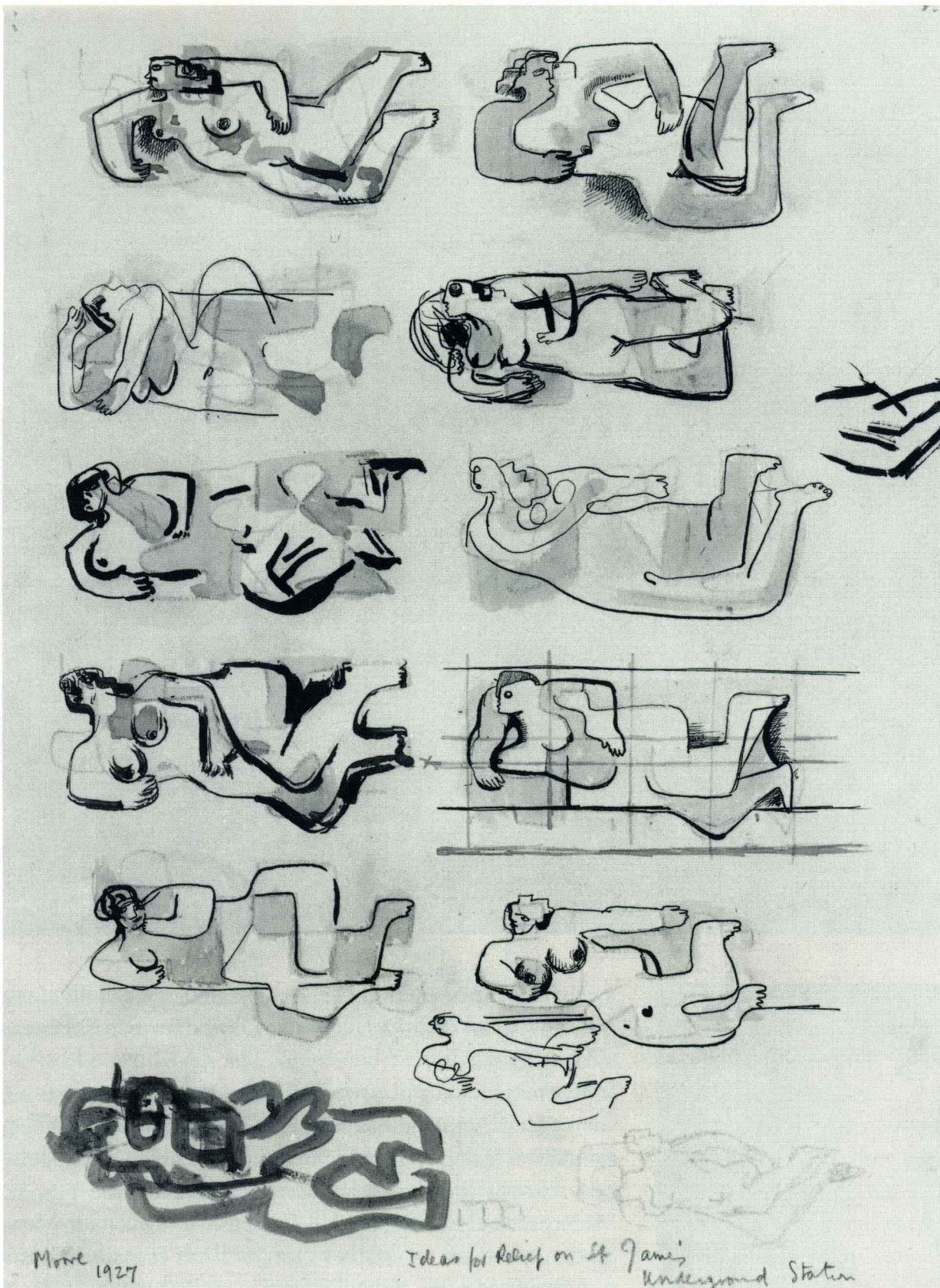
The method by which the British Museum sculptures had been produced, by direct carving, was also a major influence on the young sculptor. This method had been used since ancient times, and during the Renaissance had reached heroic dimensions, for example in the work of Michelangelo. It had gradually fallen out of use since and been replaced by a pointing machine, which could translate the smallest *modello* made by the artist into whatever dimensions were required for the finished result. The majority of monumental stone sculptures in the previous century had either been produced in this

mechanical manner or, in the case of such famous works of the period as Rodin's *The Kiss*, carved under the artist's supervision by another sculptor.

Moore comments that 'when I was a student, direct carving as an occupation, and as a sculptor's natural way of producing things, was simply unheard of in academic circles.' During the early part of the twentieth century, however, the pioneer Modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi, 20 years older than Moore, had made a decisive return to direct carving, and the technique had been used in England by such sculptors as Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (who was killed in World War I at the age of 24), Jacob Epstein, and Eric Gill, whose public carvings had already caused controversy by the time Moore started on his career.

Writing about carving some 40 years later, Moore's comments are revealing: 'I am by nature a stone-carving sculptor, not a modelling sculptor. I like chopping and cutting things rather than building up. I like the resistance of hard material.' When producing the plaster original for a bronze sculpture, he used a process which involved applying the plaster while in a malleable state and then paring it down, once it was hard, with axes, rifflers and graters. This process is still evident on the bronze casts of such works as *Standing Figure: Knife Edge*.





LEFT: Moore's sketch ideas for the relief sculpture *West Wind*, designed for the headquarters of the London Underground Railway, St James's Park, 1928, pen and wash, 14½ × 10½ inches (37.5 × 26.7 cm).

RIGHT: *West Wind* (1928-29), Moore's first public commission and the source of considerable controversy.

As a student, Moore was able to travel to Paris once or twice a year, often with fellow students from Leeds, including his life-long friend Raymond Coxon, Edna Ginesi, who was soon to marry Coxon, and Barbara Hepworth. Rothenstein provided introductions to his own artistic circle in Paris, and the group of friends attended life classes and took up an introduction to visit the Pellerin Collection, which contained the first Cézanne Moore had ever seen. *The Large Bathers* (1898-1905), now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, had 'a tremendous impact on me. For me this was like seeing Chartres Cathedral.' Moore stressed in particular his admiration for the 'nudes in perspective, lying on the ground as if they had been sliced out of mountain rock.'

The rich and various mix of influences on Moore's work, drawn from both painting and sculpture, was enhanced in January 1925, when he took up a travelling scholarship to Italy. He found the experience painful, as he had to learn 'to mix the Mediterranean approach comfortably with my interest in the more elementary concept of archaic and primitive peoples,' and wrote later that he did not resolve the conflict set up by the experience of seeing work by the major artists of the Renaissance until the Shelter drawings series during World War II. In these drawings Moore's re-appraisal of Renaissance work is clear. The influence of such early Renaissance painters as Masaccio (1401-28) can be seen in the weight and massive monumentality of the figures, qualities present also in the





Northampton *Madonna and Child* (1943-44), where the Madonna's hieratic pose and capacious lap are reminiscent of Masaccio's *Madonna and Child* from the Pisa Polyptych (1426), now in the National Gallery, London.

Moore returned in 1924 to teach sculpture part-time at the Royal College on a seven-year contract. The work of an instructor in the Sculpture School occupied only 66 days in the year, and this gave him a secure base from which to pursue his own work for the greater part of the year. He had already exhibited in group shows, but in 1928 came the watershed of his first one-man show at the Warren Gallery. This received a mixed critical response, although Moore was heartened by the support of his fellow artists. Established sculptors such as Jacob Epstein, whose own work continued to attract ferocious criticism, bought several drawings. So virulent was *The Morning*

*Post*'s criticism, however, that Moore's position at the Royal College was put in doubt. Rothenstein's response was to reassure Moore that he knew him to be a good teacher, and that Moore's art was his own affair.

At the early age of 30 Moore became a national figure with his first public commission, *West Wind*, for the new administrative headquarters of London Underground at St James's Park. The architect, Charles Holden, intended sculpture to be an integral part of the design and much controversy attended the sculptural program, the work of seven sculptors. Epstein, who had the major part of the sculptural commission, had recommended Moore for a minor part. The work proved difficult, not least because the reliefs had to be completed *in situ*, some 70 feet up, but the very scale of the commission was vital to Moore's growing confidence as a sculptor. When the carvings



RIGHT: Henry and Irina Moore in the studio at Parkhill Road, Hampstead, in the early 1930s.