

Tate Liverpool

Henry Moore

Educators' Pack

Moon Head by Henry Moore



Henry Moore, *Moon Head*, 1964

"The small version of this piece was originally called 'Head in Hand', the hand being the piece at the back. When I came to make it full size, about eighteen inches high, I gave it a pale gold patina so that each piece reflected a strange, almost ghostly, light at the other. This happened quite by accident. It was because the whole effect reminded me so strongly of the light and shape of the full moon that I have since called it 'Moon Head'."

Henry Moore

This sculpture by the British sculptor Henry Moore consists of two metal discs placed alongside each other. At first, these appear to be abstract forms, but as with most of Moore's works, the shapes make reference to the human body. He has cut into each form, suggesting a mouth on one disc and fingers on the other. The forefinger and thumb are joined to form a gap, through which the head seems to be peering – perhaps at the moon. The sculpture also plays on the idea of the moon having a face.

This work is unusual for Moore, whose sculptures are more typically bulky and solid. *Moon Head* is shallow in depth with tapered edges. Moore referred to these rims as being knife-edged, as one edge is sharp and the other blunt, like a knife.

"Moon Head is one of several recent "knife edge" sculptures I've made - which have all come about through my interest in bone forms – for example the breast bones of birds – so light, so delicate, and yet so strong."

Henry Moore, 1981

Moore also thought that the "knife edge" works could have been subconsciously influenced by the sharp-edged Cycladic idols in the British Museum which he admired. In 1969, Moore was invited to exhibit one of his works alongside these idols which were produced by the

early artisans of the Cyclades Islands. The piece he chose to display was the original plaster model for *Moon Head*, which is now in the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

"I have gradually changed from using preliminary drawings for my sculptures to working from the beginning in three dimensions. I first make a maquette for any idea I have for a sculpture... I can hold it in my hand, turning it over to look at it from above, underneath, and in fact from every angle." Henry Moore, 1978

Moore often worked in plaster for his maquettes, or models. He preferred this medium to clay as it can be both built up and cut down or sanded. It is easily worked, whereas clay hardens, dries quickly and cracks unless kept wet.

An edition of nine bronzes was made of *Moon Head*, however, there is also a smaller version in white porcelain, which now belongs to the Henry Moore Foundation.

- Make your own models of *Moon Head* in different coloured plasticine or card and discuss the effect colour has on a sculpture
- Discuss why sculptors would choose to cast their works in bronze
- Find out how sculptures are cast in bronze.
- Look at other materials that can be used to make sculptures.
- Discuss the properties that are unique to sculpture.

Henry Moore: Brief Biography

Henry Spencer Moore was born in Castleford, Yorkshire, England in 1898.

He began his career as a teacher in his home town, but following military service in World War I, he studied at Leeds School of Art. In 1921, he won a scholarship to study sculpture at the Royal Academy of Art. He became particularly interested in Mexican, Egyptian and African sculptures, during this period, which he saw at the British Museum.

In the 1930s, he became a member of *Unit One*, a group of artists organised by Paul Nash, which included Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson. He was a member of the English Surrealist movement, and took part in the International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries, London, 1936.

During World War II, he was commissioned by the War Artists Advisory Committee to make drawings of civilians in the underground bomb shelters.

He won the International Prize for Sculpture at the Venice Biennale of 1948, and became in demand for worldwide public commissions.

In 1963, Moore was awarded the British Order of Merit.

He set up the Henry Moore Foundation in 1977 as a registered charity that would aid young artists and also preserve his sculptures. The Foundation now runs his home and studios as a gallery and museum of Moore's work.

Moore died in 1986 and was interred in the Artist's Corner at St Paul's Cathedral.

- Compare images of Hepworth, Nash and Nicholson's art with Moore's work.
- Find out about Surrealism. Is *Moon Head* surreal?
- Look at images of Moore's public sculptures. How are they different to works that you see in the gallery?
- Talk about sculptures that you may have seen around your town. Are they abstract or figurative?

Gallery Activities

- Two groups could be placed on either side of the sculpture and asked to produce a quick line drawing of their view. They could then write down words that describe what they see, inside the drawing. They could then pair up with someone from the opposing group to combine their efforts to produce a composite sketch and poem from the two sets of words.
- Ask the children to imitate the sculpture by looking through the gap between forefinger and thumb. Ask them to look at sculptures through the gap and draw what they see.
- Read the "Moon Poems" and discuss which one could best describe *Moon Head*. Make up your own haiku about the moon or the sculpture.
- Look for other examples of natural forms in the gallery. Children could be given images and asked to find a work that could relate to them, for example, photographs of trees, rocks, bones etc. You could also use images of geographical forms such as wind or sea erosion.
- Compare *Moon Head* with another work that features a double image, Picasso's *Head of a Woman, 1924*, in the International Modern Art Display on the First Floor.
- Book an *Exploring Sculpture Tour* at Tate Liverpool and find out more about the materials that Moore used. (Must be booked two weeks in advance, with a maximum number of ten per group)

Some Moon Poems....

Haiku

The low yellow
Moon above the
Quiet lamplit house
Jack Kerouac

Mrs Moon

Mrs Moon
Sitting up in the sky
Little old lady
Rock-a-bye
With a ball of fading light
And silvery needles
Knitting the night
Roger McGough

Child Moon

The child's wonder
At the old moon
Comes back nightly
She points her finger
To the far silent yellow thing
Shining through the branches

Filtering on the leaves a golden sand,
Crying with her little tongue, "See the moon!"
And in her bed fading to sleep
With babblings of the moon on her little mouth
Carl Sandburg

Sculpture Glossary

Cast:

A form made by pouring liquid material, such as plaster, into a mould

Lost Wax Process:

A flexible mould is made from the original sculpture. A wax cast is made in the mould. Molten bronze is poured into the cast, melting and displacing the wax. The mould is then broken away, leaving the finished work which then may be coloured with a chemical and patina.

Maquette:

A model for a larger piece of sculpture, often exhibited as a work in its own right, conveying the immediacy of the artist's first realisation of an idea.

Patina:

A distinct green or brown surface layer found on bronze sculpture that can be created naturally by the oxidising effect of the atmosphere, or artificially by the application of chemicals.

Plaster of Paris:

Fine white powder which, when mixed with water, forms a white solid. Widely used for moulds, casts and preliminary studies.

Further Reading:

Berthoud, Roger, *The Life of Henry Moore*, Giles de la Mare Publishers, 2003

Harrison, Charles, *English Art and Modernism, 1900-1939*, Yale University Press, 1981

Kosinski, Dorothy, M.(ed), *Henry Moore: Sculpting the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, 2001

Mitchinson, David, *With Henry Moore: the Artist at Work*, Times Books, 1978

Read, Herbert, *Concise History of Modern Sculpture*, Thames and Hudson, 1964

Tucker, William, *The Language of Sculpture*, Thames and Hudson, 1977

Other resources

<http://www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/learning/schools/henrymoore2364.shtm>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary>