



17 Henry Moore

CH FBA OM 1898 – 1986 British

Family Group

bronze sculpture with green patina,
signed and dated 1944
5 3/8 x 2 3/8 x 4 1/8 in, 13.7 x 6.7 x 10.5 cm

PROVENANCE

Dominion Gallery, Montreal
Acquired from the above by an Important Collection,
Montreal, circa 1953
By descent to the present Private Collection,
Vancouver

LITERATURE

Will Grohmann, *The Art of Henry Moore*, 1960, page 8,
another cast reproduced plate 120
Herbert Read, *Henry Moore: A Study of His Life and Work*,
1965, the terra cotta sketch-model reproduced page 157,
plate 135 and listed page 274
John Hedgecoe, editor, *Henry Moore*, 1968, pages 162 – 163,
another cast reproduced
David Sylvester, editor, *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings*,
Volume 1, 1921 – 48, 1969, the terra cotta sketch-model
reproduced page 143, plate 227 and listed page 14
Robert Melville, *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings*,
1921 – 1969, 1970, the stone version reproduced
page 148, plate 316

HENRY MOORE WAS one of the most important British artists of the twentieth century, internationally renowned for his semi-abstract monumental sculpture in public and private collections around the world. Conversely, Moore's smaller-scale works, the preparatory carvings and maquettes that were closest to his hand, are particularly prized by collectors, revealing the inner workings of his creative process as he experimented with variations in three-dimensional form and space. Moore integrated maquettes into his practice beginning around 1935, first molding multiple variations in clay and later having them cast in bronze foundries. He explained that "by making a maquette he could study the form in his hand, have a complete grasp of its shape from all round and visualise what it would be like in full size."¹

Like many of his generation, Moore's life was shaped by the world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. He nearly did not become an artist at all: the son of a Yorkshire coal miner, one of eight siblings, Moore exhibited early artistic promise but was pressured by his practically minded father to become a school-teacher. Then, at the age of 18, he enlisted in the British Army and was sent to fight in France, where he was gassed at the Battle of Cambrai. After the war, his military service made him eligible for an education grant, and with that he enrolled at Yorkshire's major art school, in Leeds, in 1919. Interestingly, while a sculpture department did not yet exist at the school, Moore was adamant that he wished to study sculpture and a tutor was found specifically for him; he was soon joined at the school by a young Barbara



HENRY MOORE

Family Groups: Ideas for Sculpture

graphite, wax crayon, coloured crayon and watercolour wash on paper, 1944
22 1/4 x 15 3/4 in, 56.5 x 39.9 cm

Photo: Henry Moore Foundation Archive

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Not for sale with this lot

Hepworth. Two years later, both sculptors won scholarships to the Royal College of Art in London, where Moore's genius began to take shape.

From the beginning, Moore's interest lay in the human figure: his enduring obsessions were *Reclining Woman* and *Mother and Child*, subjects he returned to again and again throughout his life. However, he rejected classical and Renaissance ideals, instead spending his time in the British Museum studying the art of the past untouched by Greek classicism: pre-Columbian, Cycladic, Mexican, Egyptian, African and Mesopotamian art that at the time was considered "primitive." For Moore, the idealized representation of the human figure in Western art overlooked



everything that was vital and essential in favour of the pursuit of beauty for its own sake. Behind the appearance of things there existed a spiritual essence, a force or imminent being that was only partially revealed in actual living forms.² A tension grew between the representational sculpture Moore was required to produce to pass his courses and the ideas he longed to explore. He was increasingly convinced that academic teaching “was not the whole of art, not the inner life but only the surface manoeuvrings of art.”³

While Moore had his early champions, London in the 1920s and '30s was not fertile ground for modernist ideas. Moore made several trips to Paris, where he found inspiration among artists such as Jean Arp, Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, Joan Miró, Max Ernst and Alberto Giacometti, many of whom attended London's *International Surrealist Exhibition* in 1936, to which Moore submitted three drawings and four sculptures. Ernst visited Moore's studio the same year, and in 1937, Moore visited Pablo Picasso's studio in the company of Ernst, Giacometti, André Breton and Paul Éluard. Despite these noteworthy associations, in London Moore's experimentation with Abstraction and Surrealism placed him on the extreme fringes of the avant-garde. And another devastating war in Europe was quickly approaching, bringing with it profound change.

World War II brought German bombs to London. For Moore, wartime not only wiped out commissions but left very few available materials and no means of transport for large-scale sculpture. He adjusted by returning to drawing and was soon sketching the people of London huddled in makeshift bomb shelters in the London Underground during nightly German raids. The anonymous figures, mostly women and children draped in blankets and crowded together in the dark, are somehow poignant and human, expressing fear and privation fused with the sense of communal spirit and a determination to survive. In this context, Moore's

distortions of the human figure were no longer seen as arbitrary and inhuman, but as a shared expression of suffering. The *Shelter Drawings*, as they came to be known, perfectly captured the emotional state of Britain at war. The experience of creating these drawings, Moore said, “humanised everything I had been doing.”⁴

The *Shelter Drawings* opened up a new phase of Moore's career. They were officially sanctioned by the War Artists' Advisory Committee and exhibited at the National Gallery, bringing Moore's work to a broad audience. Major public sculpture commissions soon followed as Britain began reconstruction after the war. Within a few short years, Moore became the pre-eminent British artist and a figure of international renown, with a 1946 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Two years later he won the prestigious International Prize at the *Venice Biennale*.

His *Family Groups* arose directly from the *Shelter Drawings* and were central to Moore's post-war success. They remain among his most accessible works, as they convey human feelings of care, love and protection, as well as the optimism of new life and rebirth. They were politically expedient as well, encouraging social solidarity in the aftermath of the war and a return to the peacetime virtues of home, family and fertility. On a more personal level, Moore related the *Family Groups* to his contentment following the birth of his only child, Mary, in 1946. However, the true genesis of the *Family Groups* dates much earlier, to 1934–1935, when the Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius asked Moore to create a sculpture for a school he was designing in Cambridgeshire. While that project was never realized, Moore filled nearly two sketchbooks with drawings presenting family units in different poses. Beginning in 1944, Moore returned to the subject in earnest; he created a number of small maquettes, several of which became large-scale bronzes commissioned at the end of the war, notably at the Barclay School in Stevenage.



Family Group (1954–1955) sited in its original position, Old Harlow, circa 1968
Photo: John Hedgecoe
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The present work depicts a nuclear family seated on a bench, the father's arm wrapped protectively around the mother's shoulders as she dandles a child on her left knee. The legs of the figures are swathed with drapery in a direct reference to the *Shelter Drawings*. Despite or perhaps because of the simplification of the figures, there is a purity to the emotion conveyed by their gestures: the cradling of the child by the mother, the protective embrace of the father, the knees of the parents knocking together beneath the blanket, the trusting child reaching to the mother with an outstretched hand.

Another edition of this important maquette was purchased by the Tate Gallery in 1945, one of the earliest works by Moore acquired by the museum. That edition later formed the basis of the life-size *Family Group* carved in Hadene stone, commissioned for the new town of Harlow in 1954–1955. This edition has been in the collection of the same family since it was acquired from Montreal's Dominion Gallery in the early 1950s.

1. David Mitchinson, “Henry Moore: The Early Years,” in David Mitchinson and Julian Stallabrass, *Henry Moore* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 14–15.
2. Herbert Read in *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings*, vol. 1, 1921–48, ed. David Sylvester, rev. ed. (London: Percy Lund Humphries, 1957), xvii.
3. Norbert Lynton, “The Humanity of Moore,” in *Henry Moore: The Human Dimension* (Much Hadham, UK: Henry Moore Foundation, 1991), 26.
4. Quoted in *ibid.*, 69–70.

This work is recorded in the archives of the Henry Moore Foundation, catalogued as LH 227, cast g. It was conceived in 1944 and cast in 1945, and is from an edition of 7 + 1 cast by Gaskin.

ESTIMATE: \$500,000 – 700,000