

# ***Beyond the Visual***

## **Audio guide**

**HENRY MOORE  
INSTITUTE**

### **Stop 3. Track 2.**

#### **Henry Moore, *Mother and Child: Arch* 1959**

We are at a low rectangular plinth, the top painted white. On the plinth sits a heavy object, cast in bronze, in two separate sections. The lower, less substantial part is a thin bronze pedestal, the inclined sides making the flat top wider than its base, like an inverted trapezium. On top of this podium sits a form that hovers between abstraction and figuration, which the title of the work reveals is a mother and child, though exactly where one figure begins, and the other ends is unclear.

The sculpture feels domestic in scale when we think of Henry Moore, who was known for his large-scale public works. It is like a maquette for an unrealised monumental sculpture. It is of a size that can be discerned through touch as a single entity, in that if we stretch out our arms, we can pretty much embrace the entire object. There is an added intimacy here being able to encounter something so close and face to face.

While free-standing, the sculpture definitely has a front and back. The front side, though textured, is smoother than the extremely rough back which has no recognisable figurative features. As we encounter the sculpture through touch we are drawn towards the mother's head. The face is smooth and flattened, her neck angled so that she faces towards the child; she has graphic rather than modelled features, with little round eyes and a triangle for the nose which seems to have been cut out like you would cut out eyes and nose when carving a

pumpkin. And then there's quite a heavy shoulder coming out to the left, and two breasts, angled as though the torso is leaning towards her child in a protective gesture. While there are no arms as such (just the merest suggestion of a hand), the mother, her weight shifted to the side, merges with the child she embraces, forming an arch. The child's head is simplified as a highly polished rounded form, the facial features reduced to a single little hole, a single eye or a mouth demanding to be fed. Together, the mother and child form a bridge – a single, conjoined entity reminiscent of natural arches emerging from the sea, or the knobby pieces of flint which Moore would collect.

The bronze is a rich, dark brown. The sculpture's texture is extraordinary to explore through our hands. The back is extremely rough, like a cliff face. But even the front, which is smoother, is gouged into, forming striations or hatchings not unlike a wrinkled elephant's skin. But there are also smooth and polished sections, protuberances such as the face, the two heads and the breasts, the latter which are lighter in colour registering a history of touch. Intriguingly, the mother's head, angled forward, seems to be emerging from the form, like a tortoise head and neck emerging from its shell, giving the feeling that the figurative elements seem to be breaking free from their base materiality. A similarly sized variation of *Mother and Child* exists in white plaster, owned by the Art Gallery of Ontario.

End of Stop 3, Track 2.

This is a transcript of an audio guide produced by Henry Moore Institute for the exhibition *Beyond the Visual*, on display from 28 November 2025 to 19 April 2026. For more information visit [henry-moore.org/beyond-the-visual](https://henry-moore.org/beyond-the-visual)