

The Art and Life of Henry Moore

Audio guide

HENRY MOORE
STUDIOS & GARDENS

***Woman with Upraised Arms* 1924–25**

Our description starts at the first display case we encounter near the entrance to the gallery. *Woman with Upraised Arms* is a sculpture carved from one solid piece of Hopton Wood limestone.

At waist height on a grey plinth, she's placed on a small wooden base, between two other sculptures, all under an acrylic cover.

This carving, just under half a metre high, is a figure of a woman from waist up. She's stretching her arms, above her head, as if she's just got out of bed. It's a really long, strong stretch.

She cranes her head upwards, her short neck hunched into her shoulders, as if taking her first breath. Her arms are chunky but her hands clasp each other gently, aloft. The features on her face are suggested by simple cuts into the stone for eyes, nostrils and mouth. Her breasts are softly rendered simplified mounds, almost implied. It seems intimate, as if she's been caught in a moment.

The stone is a warm greyish white in colour. There are little flecks on the stone where Moore would have used a tool to scratch in texture.

When encountered from the opposite side, we are more aware of the hole made by the outline of the arms overhead: it reveals the vista of the gallery entrance beyond. From this angle we get

a real sense of the strain, the muscular action of the stretch releasing tension, the suggestion of the spine and the tresses of long hair flowing down the back. From the side, the belly protrudes and the neck cranes forward.

Made between 1924 and 1925, the work demonstrates Moore's interest in direct carving and exploring the idea of 'truth to materials'. This would have been one of Moore's first experiments with piercing through the stone block to create openings or holes through the material, which became a recurring theme throughout his practice.

In the following recording, Moore reflects on his desire to explore three-dimensional form.

Henry Moore: [...] I mean, you have to have a real desire to make three-dimensional form [...]. What I mean is, you could make, by just copying, a telegraph pole [...] it's like a table leg or something. Whereas this, in which those breasts, and the hands, and then the division between those, that really needs - or needed from me at that time - the desire to make a three-dimensional form that was special, even going through the arms of this girl figure here. That was the beginning of the holes period.

[Music]