

The Art and Life of Henry Moore

Audio guide

HENRY MOORE
STUDIOS & GARDENS

Square Form 1934

Further into the gallery space on the left is a rectangular display case, which is sideways on and contains two sculptures. The work we will be describing here is on the left and is titled *Square Form*. It's made of one solid block of stone.

The work is displayed on a plinth at waist height and is just larger than a human head in scale. It sits on a dark wooden base. The shape is squarish, but its corners are filed to form rounded edges.

The first impression is of solidity and heaviness. Made from a block of Burgundy limestone it has a warm oatmeal colour with a pinkish tinge. The surface appears smooth and is highly polished but pockmarked in places with little indentations.

On closer inspection, this sculpture presents a more complex interpretation. Is this piece abstract or figurative? In places Moore has completely cut away sections of stone transforming it from a simple square. Peering over the top of the sculpture there is a shallow semicircle scooped out. On the front there are geometric shapes carved into the stone. He has incised some very precise vertical and horizontal lines into the surface. Here, Moore seems to be combining sculpture and drawing. From the front, these can be read as facial features: two fish-like shapes, like eyes, are drawn one above the other in the top right and a circle - perhaps an ear? - at the bottom left, suggesting a head profile. This is further reinforced by a long incision carved out low-down on the side. Could this be a mouth?

The rounded edges and the sharp lines also suggest armour, a helmet.

The back of the sculpture is smooth and flat. The only feature is a thin, vertical rectangular shape carved out at the bottom like a shallow doorway, with a vertical slot inside.

This sculpture, made between the First and Second World Wars, is an example of Moore's experimentation with abstraction, but his work still reminds us of the human form. Moore at this time would have been fully aware of the work of his contemporaries: Ben Nicholson, Naum Gabo, Constantin Brâncuși, all of whom were exploring abstraction through their work.

Listen to Moore as he describes some of the challenges of direct carving.

Henry Moore: One had this belief in direct stone carving, in direct carving, and in trying to keep the material keep its own quality and its own character [...]. One was frightened to make the material do what you wanted it to, because you didn't want to force it beyond its, what was its obvious, stoniness [...] often the forms were all buried inside each other. The heads were given no necks. And even in some of my early ones you'll find that there's no neck, because one was frightened to weaken the stone [...]. The material was being more powerful than you.

[Music]