

The Art and Life of Henry Moore

Audio guide

HENRY MOORE
STUDIOS & GARDENS

Family Group 1945

At the far end of the gallery, is a very large, dark grey wall-mounted display case. Inside there are a number of small sculptures, predominantly featuring a mother and child or family groups.

This work titled *Family Group*, made in 1945, is at the top shelf, second from the left. It's nestled between two other small terracotta sculptures, in the same series. They are displayed roughly at head height and although behind an acrylic cover we can get quite close, but only to the front of the sculpture.

Two figures, perhaps a mother and father, are facing towards us. They are seated very close together on a low bench, holding a young child between them. The scale of the sculpture is small, roughly the size of a human head. It could be held in two large hands but being bronze, it would be quite heavy. The plinth that the bench rests on is part of the sculpture and is also rendered in bronze.

The mother, on the left, wears a long skirt which drapes over her legs. She is supporting the weight of the young toddler, with its legs resting on the father's arms, to the right. It seems to connect the two figures forming a bridge between them.

The adults have strong shoulders and long limbs. They contrast with the child, which seems to wriggle in their arms.

The limbs of the figures are intertwined, protecting and cradling the child between them. The knees of the parents seem to

almost touch, emphasising the close bond. It's an intimate scene depicting a close, caring family.

Although definitely recognisable as figures, the style of the sculpture uses very simplified forms. The heads are not portraits. They are small and round with only a reference to facial features, for example pin-prick eyes.

The father's head suggests a heart-shape, with an indentation at the top.

This bronze sculpture is predominantly dark brown or burnt umber in appearance but is not uniform in colour. It has a shiny and smooth finish. Where it has been highly polished and reflects the light, the colours are brighter, almost golden and glistening. The light picks up the folds of the mother's skirt, as it stretches over her legs. This contrasts with the reddish terracotta sculptures either side.

These small sculptures would have been maquettes, which are small prototypes or 3D models. Moore often made maquettes to try out his ideas for larger sculptures. Unlike his earlier direct carvings, he could use a variety of modelling materials for these family groups, such as wax or plaster, which could be modelled, incised and carved and then cast in bronze.

This *Family Group* was one of many that Moore made in the 1940s, shortly after his move from London to Perry Green, but the seed for the idea came from an earlier commission.

Henry Moore: I think the *Family Group* idea really crystallised when Henry Morris, the Director of Education of Cambridgeshire [...] did Impington Village College. [...] He asked me if I would do a sculpture, and because Impington Village College was going to be used in the evenings for adult education as well, and for parents [...] it became my idea of connecting the parents and the children. And I think that the

first *Family Group* idea, seed for it, came in that time, in 1935–36.

[Music]