

The Art and Life of Henry Moore

Audio guide

HENRY MOORE
STUDIOS & GARDENS

Working Model for Oval with Points 1968–69

In the middle of the gallery, to the right-hand side, this large sculpture stands on a dark, square bronze base, set on a waist-high plinth. Made between 1968 and 1969, this piece is titled *Working Model for Oval with Points*.

It is over a metre high, nearly a metre wide and just over half a metre in depth. The top is higher than head height. It's not in a display case and you can move all around the work.

The outside shape is roughly an oval, but it is not perfectly symmetrical. Inside the oval shape are two circular holes, one above the other. The one at the bottom is slightly larger: they make a negative space, like a snowman shape, through which we can view the gallery behind.

Encountering the piece from the front it appears more like a figure of eight or a giant pretzel. Made of bronze, the colour is a rich brown, like molten milk chocolate or a caramel. It is highly polished and has a glossy sheen. Although made of metal, the shape seems fluid and silky, and full of movement.

Coming closer, towards the centre, it becomes apparent that the middle section dividing the two holes is not quite complete. There are two spiky points, that do not meet in the middle. They are sharp and potentially dangerous and perhaps take us by surprise, as they are unlike Moore's usual soft and rounded forms. There is a tension here. The two points seem to be trying to meet but something repels them back.

Although he had earlier rejected classicism, Moore maintained an interest in Renaissance painting and sculptures. It is possible that this work refers to Michaelangelo's fresco painting *The Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel, where God and Adam are nearly touching fingers.

Moving around the work, the sides are narrower, the surface of the sculpture at the back is much flatter and very smooth. We also get a different view of the gallery through the two holes from this side.

By the 1960s Moore had spent many decades experimenting with the dynamic three-dimensionality of form created through the use of holes and openings. Using bronze allowed for works to be cast in sections and subsequently welded together to make much larger, stronger structures. The metal's tensile strength also gave Moore freedom to experiment with these pointed shapes that would have been almost impossible to achieve with direct carving in wood or stone.

In the following recording, he explains why bronze was the ideal medium for this kind of experimentation.

Henry Moore: I like using plaster as a medium for my bronzes because nobody makes bronze direct in bronze. When people talk about 'truth to material' applying to bronze, it doesn't strictly apply to bronze because the sculptor can't take a solid piece of bronze and cut it like he can a piece of stone. He has to make it in something else to begin with anyhow.

He may finish it by the final finishing like I do in some of the highly finished and polished sculptures. But the shaping is made in some other material, and therefore you have to work from knowledge and from experience of what you can do. So that this 'truth to material' idea - that you make a thing in what it's going to be finally in - doesn't apply to bronze, and bronze is

a material that is a reproductive material that can do almost anything you like.

[Music]