

The Art and Life of Henry Moore

Audio guide

HENRY MOORE
STUDIOS & GARDENS

Draped Reclining Figure 1978

Situated near the bottom right of the gallery, the sculpture, *Draped Reclining Figure* from 1978, rests on a pale plywood base, on a large waist-high, rectangular plinth. It's not behind an acrylic cover so we can move all around it.

The sculpture is about two metres long and over a metre wide and high. This is one of Moore's enduring forms, the repeated motif of the reclining figure as subject matter.

The sculpture has been carved from one piece of solid Roman travertine marble. It's creamy white in colour, like bone or ivory, with a tinge of pale pink.

The naturally occurring striations of the marble form horizontal flecks across the whole sculpture, directly reminding us of the quarry of the stone's origin.

Each viewpoint of the sculpture shows us a different aspect and impression of the figure.

From one side, she's reclining but not lying fully flat. Her lower back and torso are firmly grounded on the plinth, but her upper back is raised up as her weight is supported by her bent elbows and forearms.

From the side her head is in profile. It's quite small in comparison to the rest of her body. The eyes are simplified circles cut out, with a single hole to suggest a pupil. The gaze points outward, like a bird or a lizard, rather than straight ahead. Her forehead and nose seem to run together in one lumpen form and her mouth and lips are just a carved line. Her

arms are strong and solid with chunky hands like mittens. The breasts are just suggested gentle curves, sloping away to a concave belly. Her legs are bent at the knee and her feet are firmly planted on the ground, like blocks. Although reclining and relaxed, it's an active rather than passive pose.

Encountered from behind, the back of her head is flattened with the suggestion of a bun. She has strong sloping shoulders, with her bent elbows and forearms taking her full weight as she reclines.

Moving round to the front, her bent legs are slightly apart and at an angle. The two legs are unified by a long skirt which has been carved and scooped out across the legs to suggest drapery. The folds are full of movement emphasised by gouged out lines and creases.

This figure can offer us different interpretations from each angle. From one side, she seems relaxed but alert: as if ready for action. From another we are aware of her strength. Her expression is also ambiguous, and the stance could remind us of the pose of childbirth.

Henry Moore was in his eighties when he was making this sculpture. As time went on, he needed more help from assistants in order to fabricate his work.

He travelled to Greece, and some of his works reflect an interest in Ancient Greek art. He also sourced marble from a quarry which Michaelangelo had used for his sculptures during the Italian Renaissance. While Moore was aware of this classical lineage, his own work was pushing forward the portrayal of the human form with modern, simplified forms. In the following recording, Moore discusses how his travels to Greece influenced his decision to use drapery.

Henry Moore: When I went to Greece and saw how the Greeks used drapery to emphasise the tension of the form inside [...], and there one has the projections of form inside the knees, the breasts, the shoulders being not blank, but pushing the drapery from the inside outwards, and between these projections, the drapery falls more slackly in folds. And so you emphasise the pressure from inside, and this principle was why I tried out to use drapery myself.

[Music]