

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# APOLLO

## MOORE IN LONDON

**A selection of late works by Henry Moore are unveiled in the UK capital this summer, with an exhibition of the British sculptor at the Gagosian Gallery and the restoration of two important public sculptures**

by Richard Calvocoressi



This summer, three significant events in London throw a spotlight on the late and sometimes overlooked work of Henry Moore (1898–1986). The first is an exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery on Britannia Street, entitled ‘Henry Moore: Late Large Forms’ (31 May–18 August). It shows a group of bronzes on loan from the Henry Moore Foundation, many of them inside a gallery for the first time.

Henry Moore maintained that sculpture was 'an art of the open air; daylight, sunlight is necessary to it, and for me its best setting and complement is nature'. He also said that he 'would rather have a piece of my sculpture put in a landscape, than in or on the most beautiful building I know'. This did not stop him from occasionally collaborating with architects – for example, the Chinese-American I.M. Pei, siting his sculptures at the entrance to Pei's buildings in prominent locations in Washington, Dallas and other cities. But he rarely, if ever, displayed such monumental pieces indoors, preferring the natural backdrop of green fields, trees and sky at Perry Green, his home in Hertfordshire, or the more sweeping topography of Yorkshire Sculpture Park. After his death, public exhibitions of the larger bronzes tended to follow this pattern, with botanical gardens becoming an especially popular venue.

The problem with this approach is that it emphasises the romantic nature of Moore's work, its analogy with trees, hills, rock formations and so on, while playing down the industrial processes and hard materials with which it is made and the powerfully expressive language of simplified, abstracted forms which the artist evolved in the last two decades of his career. Certainly the origin of Moore's sculptures was often a hand-size maquette inspired by a particular stone or animal bone picked up in the fields around his house at Perry Green, as a shelf of such tiny objects in the Gagosian exhibition demonstrates.

But once he had moved away from enlarging the human figure to beyond life-size, Moore discovered a new freedom, clearly evident in the works in this exhibition. He developed forms that touch, point, twist, interlock, split into two or more sections, interpenetrate, soar upwards, span sizeable voids, contain one form within another, or repeat themselves in different permutations. As we move around (or in one case through) his later bronzes, in the relatively confined space of the Gagosian Gallery, they seem more physical, charged with aggressive and even erotic overtones – qualities that tend to get lost in the open air.

Given that Gagosian Britannia Street was built to show massive sculptures by contemporary artists such as Richard Serra, weight, size and access were not an issue. Another thing that convinced us to go ahead with the project was the fact that the gallery is one of the finest exhibiting spaces in London that boasts natural light, from above as well as the side, thus going some way towards satisfying Moore's desire for 'daylight'.

All the sculptures in the exhibition at Gagosian are in bronze. Moore loved bronze as a material. 'Bronze can do anything', he once said. 'It can reproduce any form and any surface texture through expert casting.' Before the 1950s, carving had been his favourite technique but after World War II, when demand for his sculptures increased significantly, he turned to bronze casting in a big way. He found that he could carve in plaster for bronze in a quarter of the time it took to carve a sculpture in stone or wood.

He preferred working in plaster because it was more malleable than clay, which dried and hardened too fast, making it difficult to add to. With plaster, by contrast, one could model or build up as well as carve or cut down. Moore would often draw into the wet plaster, creating rich surface textures. He would also on occasion paint the white plaster model to resemble bronze, to help him visualise what the solid cast would look like. These and other examples are on view at Perry Green over the summer in 'Henry Moore: Plasters', the first ever exhibition devoted exclusively to his use of the medium.

In the case of very large sculptures, Moore's assistants would build up layers of plaster over an armature to just short of the maximum dimensions required. At this point the artist himself would take over, cutting, carving, paring down, often with everyday kitchen utensils such as a cheese grater, to achieve his desired finish. In the 1960s Moore experimented with polystyrene, which is much lighter and easier to move than plaster; he would – for instance, with very large sculptures – carve the basic form in this new material before adding a plaster screed or outer layer for surface finish.

Moore was deeply involved in the casting of his own sculptures, often supervising the work at each stage: from mould-making to the lost wax process to patination and post-patination. He used a handful of 'long-established foundries with generations of experience', as he put it, such as Susse in Paris, Morris Singer in England and Hermann Noack in Berlin. His collaboration with the Noack foundry lasted some 30 years. Together they cast literally thousands of his bronzes.

Moore patinated all his bronzes himself, in contrast, for example, to many 19th-century French sculptors who employed patineurs. 'The addition of the patina is of great importance', Moore said, 'and something I must consider and evolve myself. My own patina is, of course, a preliminary to the one which nature herself will apply in time. Meanwhile the exercise of my own hand in this destiny is imperative.' He was particularly sensitive to the way that bronze weathers when placed outdoors – the atmospheric changes that will happen to it in different climates: by the sea, on windswept moorland, or in a big industrial town. He would accordingly mix the chemical composition of the patina in order to mitigate and even imitate the effects of these anticipated changes, as in the grey-green washes that cover some of his bronzes.

The colours of Moore's bronzes at the Gagosian Gallery range from the streaked, variegated green of *Large Two Forms* (1966; Figs. 2, 3 and 4), to black, brown and a type of reddish gold. 'Sometimes you can't repeat what you have done other times,' Moore once said in an interview. 'The mixture of bronze may be different, the temperature to which you heat the bronze before you put the acid on to it may be different. It is a very exciting but tricky and uncertain thing, this patination of bronze.'

After patination, Moore would often work on the surface of the sculpture, rubbing it, wearing it down, letting the bronze show through again. In 1968 he said: 'If you desire to achieve the real metallic quality of bronze, it is necessary to work on the surface of the sculpture after it has been cast'. He created a variety of surface textures, from smooth to rugged, where the marks of gouging and scratching are clearly visible; and from matt to gloss, the latter often achieved by lacquering.

The exhibition at Gagosian is called 'Late Large Forms' because, when analysing sculpture, and his own work in particular, Moore often used terms such as 'form-idea', 'shape meaning', 'form experience', 'form invention'. He believed that shapes had an intrinsic emotional significance separate from their representational value. As he memorably wrote in 1930: 'The sculpture which moves me most is full-blooded and self-supporting, fully in the round, that is, its components are completely realised and work as masses in opposition, not being merely indicated by surface cutting in relief; it is not perfectly symmetrical, it is static and it is strong and vital, giving out something of the energy and power of great mountains. It has a life of its own, independent of the object it represents.'

Moore could almost be describing *The Arch*, a work he created over 30 years after the statement just quoted (Fig. 7). At six metres high, it is one of the biggest sculptures he ever made. Although enlarged from a maquette only a few inches high, and inspired by a fragment of bone, it brilliantly transcends its origins. Arguably the most magisterial of Moore's public sculptures, it recalls the massive man-hewn blocks at Stonehenge as well as the triumphal arches of antiquity. It exists in three different materials. The bronze (1963–69) is permanently sited at Perry Green. Another cast in fibreglass was produced for travelling exhibitions – a practice Moore occasionally adopted with very large, heavy pieces that were difficult and expensive to move. A third version, in Roman travertine, was carved by the Henraux stonemasons at Querceta in Italy. It was presented by Moore to Kensington Gardens in 1980, two years after his 80th-birthday exhibition 'Henry Moore at the Serpentine'.

Reinstating *The Arch* in its original position in Hyde Park, on the north bank of the Serpentine, is the second big Moore event of the summer. Some 20 years ago it became apparent that *The Arch*, which is carved in sections, was structurally unstable, due in part to the fact that the travertine version was made long after the bronze and based on the latter's polystyrene model: no thought was given at the time to the stresses and strains that might develop in a carving (as opposed to a bronze). In 1996 the Royal Parks, owners of the sculpture, decided to dismantle it and institute a programme of scientific research and restoration. With the aid of a 3D scanner, the travertine sections were analysed and their structural weaknesses identified. The pins holding the blocks of stone together were then replaced with new stainless steel rods, acting as an internal framework to prevent future movement of the stone as well as internal corrosion. Finally, the stone itself has been cleaned. Back on its original site below the Serpentine Bridge, the dazzling white arch is again visible across the Long Water from the Serpentine Gallery; but it is also now only a stone's throw from the Gallery's new building, designed by Zaha Hadid, and so should be seen by a whole new public once the building is unveiled in the autumn.

The condition and look of Moore's sculptures in public sites are of concern to the Henry Moore Foundation, which helps with conservation when it can. But it is ultimately the responsibility of owners to maintain the works in their care. Fortunately, the Parliamentary Art Collection took the decision earlier this year to restore Moore's *Knife Edge Two Piece* (1962–65; Fig. 5). This is arguably Moore's most prominent sculpture in London, standing as it does on College Green, opposite the Palace of Westminster in Abingdon Street, and familiar to viewers of televised interviews with politicians, where it is frequently used as a backdrop. It is also just across the road from Rodin's *The Burghers of Calais* (1908), which Moore considered 'the greatest outdoor sculpture in London'. In the 45 years since its siting, the condition of *Knife Edge Two Piece* has seriously deteriorated, requiring the removal of degraded lacquer, graffiti, and the marks of corrosion; cleaning and repatination to reflect Moore's original tonal range from golden brown to mid-brown; and finally, rewaxing. As the third event in this 'Summer of Moore', the restoration of *Knife Edge Two Piece* to its original, sharp, gleaming forms will ensure that visitors to central London during the Olympic Games can appreciate this great public sculptor at his most commanding.