



bronze

Signature

stamped Moore, 0/7

Ownership

The Henry Moore Foundation: acquired 1987

More Information

The three elements of this late, monumental, reclining figure incorporate smooth and curvaceous passages which are sharply cut into stump-like forms. The largest part, a rising chest and neck, juxtaposes one amputated arm with a heavily bowed and bulbous counterpart which merges with the torso. The torso juts up and outwards towards the centre of the composition before being bluntly severed. This treatment is echoed in the head, resulting in a blank facial plane. The verticality of this element contrasts with the horizontal arched 'skirt' of the figure, which shields a separate and more sinuous 'leg-form'. The component parts are carefully spaced across the flat bronze base. Moore had been preoccupied with the idea of breaking the reclining figure into multiple parts since the 1930s. Early explorations include *Composition* (LH 140) and *Four-Piece Composition: Reclining Figure* (LH 154), both of 1934. These highly abstracted figures allude to Moore's involvement with surrealism and geometric abstraction. Despite the apparent conflict between these two trends in contemporary art, Moore incorporated aspects of both in his work. The arrangement of multiple sculptural elements across a flat surface also points to the influence of Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) and Jean Arp (1886-1966). Moore understood that perceptual unity did not require physical continuity, and he could therefore explode the figure into several parts. In 'reconstructing' it, the viewer – unable to see all elements at once - would need to move around the work. Changes in their angle of vision would create an infinite number of views and therefore no fixed meaning or single comprehension of the whole. These qualities were considered in line with surrealist thinking.[1] However, in contrast to the surrealist tendency toward the irrational or subconscious, Moore's multi-part figures are highly conceived and controlled creations. His understanding of spatial arrangement aligned him with artists such as Ben Nicholson, who promoted a formal, non-objective abstraction. The interdependence of space and form was further explored by Moore in his stringed sculptures later in the 1930s, and in his *Helmet Heads* and related works investigating the interplay of internal and external forms. Moore's profound understanding of the human body allowed him to experiment with breaking it apart. In *Three Piece Reclining Figure: Draped* the space between the forms is of crucial importance. Moore commented: 'You know how sometimes in a museum they will reconstruct an animal, and they put a piece of knee, and then they will leave a blank with just a bit of armature, and then they put the foot. Now, the distance that they make the knee from the foot is terribly important... Now the same thing applies in these two-piece and three-piece sculptures. The space between those pieces is just as important, and if somebody put them together in the wrong way it would be for me as wrong as if somebody put a knee and a foot too close together.'^[2] Moore's fragmented figures of the 1930s, seen by some as a deformation of the human body, were followed by works with a greater degree of humanism in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1959, when he returned to the subject of multi-part figures,^[3] the component parts are clearly related to landscape and geological structures. *Three Piece Reclining Figure Draped*, however, is not boulder-like or evocative of nature; it is carefully considered and arcane. Completed when Moore was 77, the sculpture shows him re-engaging with some of his earliest, most daring, abstract tendencies. The work cleverly combines the shifting comprehension and activation of sculpture beloved by the surrealists, and the command of formal relationships essential to geometric abstraction. [1] For Moore's use of interdependent space and form in his figures see Rudolf Arnheim 'The Holes of Henry Moore: On the Function of Space in Sculpture' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Sept. 1948), pp. 29-38. For Moore and surrealism see Michael Remy, *Surrealism in Britain*, Aldershot, 1999, p. 133. [2] Moore in *The Donald Carroll*

Three Piece Reclining Figure: Draped

Catalogue Number

LH 655 cast 0

Artwork Type

Sculpture

Date

1975

Dimensions

artwork: 474 cm pedestal: 480 x 275 x 50 cm

Medium

Interviews, 1973, pp. 49–50, reprinted in Alan Wilkinson (ed.), *Henry Moore: Writings and Conversations*, Lund Humphries, Aldershot, 2002, pp. 289. [3] The first of these is *Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 1* 1959, LH 457.