



Reclining Mother and Child

Catalogue Number

LH 649 cast 0

Artwork Type

Sculpture

Date

1975-76

Dimensions

artwork: 136 × 239.5 × 120 cm pedestal: 245 × 125 × 85 cm

weight uncased: 800 kg case: 264 × 145 × 180 cm artwork

(published dim check): 213 cm weight cased: 1200 kg

Medium

bronze

Signature

stamped Moore, 0/7

Ownership

The Henry Moore Foundation: acquired 1986

More Information

The 'Mother and child' idea is one of my two or three obsessions ... But the subject itself is eternal and unending, with so many sculptural possibilities in it – a small form in relation to a big form, the big form protecting the small one, and so on. It is such a rich subject, both humanly and compositionally, that I will always go on using it.[1] Moore was a student when he made his first sketch of a mother and child in 1921-22. He swiftly recognised the richness of the subject, both on a human and a formal level, and it became an artistic obsession that he explored throughout his life. In his later years, Moore's interest in the theme eclipsed all others and was translated into works marked by their inventiveness. Reclining Mother and Child was made in 1975-76, when Moore was in his late seventies. The sculpture combines two of his dominant themes: the reclining figure and the mother and child. Although several examples of this combination exist in Moore's drawings, he very rarely conflated them in sculpture, preferring to treat them as separate subjects. Individually, both themes explore a single relationship: the reclining figure with landscape, and the mother with her child. When combined, these potentially competing relationships are brought together in a single work.[2] Here, the reclining mother's relationship with the landscape is evident, but arguably overshadowed by her relationship with her child. The mother's softly undulating form evokes rolling hills, and the hollows in the recesses of her giant limbs recall caves and rock formations. Although firmly grounded, however, she is not inert but active and engaged. In contrast with her lower limbs, her head and torso rise sharply upwards, as if drawn towards her child by a powerful, invisible force. The two forms appear held in a moment of dynamic tension, poised to interlock; child's head and mother's breast are parallel, their concave and convex forms in inverse proportion to one another. While the mother and child relationship is commonly associated with positive notions of love, protection and nourishment, Moore's treatment of the theme reveals a more nuanced understanding.[3] In Reclining Mother and Child, the contrast between the naturalistic mother and abstracted baby enhances the impression of maternal protection and childlike dependence. The mother's serene gaze is fixed on the child which projects from her centre, as if rising directly from the womb. Her giant, protective arm sweeps up and fuses with her child in a steadying, unifying embrace, while her horizontal pose suggests permanence and stability. The baby's vulnerability is conveyed through its highly abstract form, which renders it unrecognisable and only identifiable in relation to its mother. At the same time, however, the contrasting forms of mother and child amplify their independence as two separate beings. The baby's smooth egg-like backplate and compact form emphasise its nascence but also give it a tough, armoured quality. The series of angular ridges protruding from the backplate, the genesis of a head, shoulders and pelvis, are also quite unlike the mother's fleshy contours.[4] Neither mother nor baby assume traditional poses; the baby rises up independently, supported but not cradled by its mother who maintains a conspicuous void between them. [1] Henry Moore, Henry Moore: Drawings 1969-79, Wildenstein, New York, 1979, p. 29. [2] David Cohen in Celebrating Moore, David Mitchinson (ed.), Lund Humphries, London, 1998, p. 308. [3] Chris Stephens (ed.), Henry Moore, Tate Publishing, London, 2010, p. 117. [4] Malcolm Woodward, one of Moore's former assistants, recalled that the child was derived from a broken seashell with an internal spiral structure.