



Family Group

Catalogue Number

LH 269 cast 00

Artwork Type

Sculpture

Date

1948-49 cast c.1985

Dimensions

artwork (including base): 152 × 113 × 76 cm base: 10 × 114 × 75 cm pedestal: 125 × 85 × 40 cm weight uncased: 500 kg case: 146 × 113 × 202 cm weight cased: 903 kg

Medium

bronze

Ownership

The Henry Moore Foundation: acquired 1992

More Information

In 1934, Moore was approached by the architect Walter Gropius to make a sculpture for a new school that he was designing at Impington, near Cambridge. The 'village college' was intended to be a focus of community life and a centre of education for all generations. Moore liked the idea and felt that the subject of a family group would be appropriate. Henry Morris, Director of Education for Cambridgeshire, supported the project but struggled to raise funds for Moore's sculpture, or convince the education board of its merits. Gropius completed the designs for the college building in 1937, but moved to America the same year. Another two years passed before the building opened, just two weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War. The realisation of Moore's sculpture now seemed impossible.[1] In 1944, Morris approached Moore again hoping to resurrect the commission. Moore was keen, as he had already made a number of maquettes and drawings on the theme of family groups.[2] Reinvigorated, he continued to develop these ideas over the following nine months. Sadly, however, Morris's attempts to raise funds for the work were ultimately unsuccessful but in 1947, his friend John Newson, then Director of Education for Hertfordshire, approached Moore with a new proposal: a sculpture for Barclay School in Stevenage, a similarly new and progressive institution. In 1949 the commission for Family Group – Moore's first life-sized sculpture to be cast in bronze - was finally approved. Moore agreed to make the sculpture at cost price (materials, casting and transport) on the proviso that he could make a small edition to sell. Cast in an edition of six, the original commission remains at Barclay School and the other casts are in the collections of the Henry Moore Foundation; Tate; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Hakone Open-Air Museum, Japan; and Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena.[3] Moore repeatedly explored the motif of seated figure groups in the years after the Second World War. Indeed, the first carving he made after an enforced wartime hiatus was Madonna and Child (LH 226) for St Matthew's Church in Northampton. In 1948-49 he completed another work on the same theme for a church in Claydon, Suffolk (LH 270). Family Group is closely related to these works, as well as previous representations of this subject. The sculpture borrows a compositional device from Leonardo da Vinci's so-called 'Burlington House Cartoon' (c.1499-1500) in the National Gallery, London, in which the Christ child stretches across his mother's lap towards his grandmother, Saint Anne, unifying the two halves of the group configuration. In Family Group, the child also fulfils a unifying role, forming a central knot between the two adults, binding their limbs together.[4] Formal and familial unity are further emphasised by the curving torsos of the encircling parents, each mirroring the other. Earlier, Moore had explored the relationship of internal and external forms in his work. In this sculpture, the child constitutes the nucleus of a family cell. The lifted position of the infant also finds an echo in religious prototypes. The gesture is both poignant and hopeful, the Christ child simultaneously a sacrifice and symbol of new life. While not overtly referenced, these themes would have been pertinent to Moore working in the immediate aftermath of war, on a sculpture intended to reflect communal feeling and inspire regeneration. In Family Group, Moore moderated the more extreme elements of his modernism in favour of enhanced humanism, perhaps emulating a sensitivity he had so successfully employed in his recent shelter drawings. This shift in approach can be traced in his preparatory maquettes. In his original design (LH 259), the male figure has a split head, which Moore abandoned in the final version in favour of greater naturalism and harmony with the rest of the group. Moore's change in approach could also be attributed to a change in his personal circumstances. Between Gropius's first approach and the eventual installation of the work at Barclay School, Moore himself had become a father.[5] [1] Moore

describes the development of the commission in a letter to Dorothy Miller in 1951, reprinted in Alan Wilkinson (ed.), *Henry Moore: Writings and Conversations*, Lund Humphries, Aldershot, 2002, pp. 273-4. [2] *Family Group* is the last work for which Moore explicitly made preparatory drawings, later preferring to develop ideas in three dimensions. Preparatory works for the commission include: LH nos. 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 240a, 259, 265, 267 HMF nos. 2052, 2053, 2016 verso, 2196, 2199, 2205, 2224a, 2232, 2236, 2249a, 2329a, 2330, 2334, 2469 verso, 2507. [3] Originally Moore intended an edition of three plus an artist's copy but eventually increased this to four and two artist copies (with the agreement of the owners) due to interest from collections in the United States. [4] In discussing the plaster for *Family Group* Moore describes the child as a knot between the mother and father. See John Hedgecoe and Henry Moore, *Henry Moore*, Thomas Nelson & Sons, London, 1968, p. 177. [5] Moore's daughter Mary was born in 1946.