



Large Reclining Figure

Catalogue Number

LH 192b cast 0

Artwork Type

Sculpture

Date

1984

Dimensions

artwork (h x l x d): 420 x 940 x 290 cm artwork (published dim check): 900 cm

Medium

bronze

Signature

unsigned, [0/1]

Ownership

The Henry Moore Foundation: acquired 1986

More Information

Large Reclining Figure is the product of Moore's fourth and final collaboration with the architect I. M. Pei. In 1976, one of Pei's most ambitious projects opened in Singapore: a fifty-two storey skyscraper – then the tallest in South East Asia – for the Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation. Pei had wanted to site a major sculptural commission at the base of the building, but it was several years before a suitable space became available. When Pei approached Moore about the commission, he was fearful of his response. Moore – by now in his eighties - had already told Pei that he was no longer producing monumental sculptures and that he was concentrating on producing drawings for the Foundation. He conceded, however, that it might be possible if the commission were based on an existing work.[1] Together, Moore and Pei selected Reclining Figure 1938 (LH 192) – a 33 cm sculpture - as an idea suitable for enlargement. However, Moore didn't own a cast of this work. The original wax maquette was destroyed during the casting of the unique lead version, which Moore had sold to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1939. In 1946, Moore had authorised the Modern Art Foundry, New York, to cast a bronze edition of 3 from a wax mould of the lead at MoMA, but he did not retain an artist's copy.[2] For this latest project, Moore felt the lead would have been too soft to cast from, so he arranged for two plaster casts to be taken from one of the bronzes which was in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. In 1982, Moore wrote to Thomas Messer, Director of the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, explaining, 'The casts will only be used in making the enlargement – one will be cut up into several pieces to help in the enlarging, and the other kept whole to see that the joining and fitting together is correct...'[3] Work on the enlargement began in 1983. Initially, Moore's assistants made a full-size model in polystyrene (now destroyed), which was then refined before being cast in bronze at the Morris Singer Foundry in Basingstoke. At over 9 m long and weighing 4 tons, the final work is Moore's largest to be cast in bronze. Only two bronze casts were made; the one destined for Singapore was sent by sea in 1984, and the second is sited at Moore's former home in Perry Green.[4] The cast in Perry Green sits atop a small hill created to Moore's design. Originally a pyramid of waste gravel, he had it bulldozed into a more rounded shape to accommodate a sculpture. Finding an appropriate sculpture, however, proved challenging. Moore said: 'This hill is first seen from three or four hundred yards away, and therefore a sculpture there needs to be of some size. The first things I tried on the hill were too small – from a distance they just looked as though there could be a stray sheep that had got there.'[5] When Large Reclining Figure was finally chosen for the site, it was the realisation of an idea he had had more than 40 years earlier, when he photographed the original lead maquette against the landscape, bringing it close to the camera so that it appeared colossal.[6] The siting exemplifies Moore's belief that the contrast between solid and void makes the sky the perfect background for sculpture.[7] Seen across the fields, the work's cleft head, pointed breasts and molten backbone punctuate the horizon, commanding attention. When Moore conceived Reclining Figure in 1938, he had become a leading exponent of Surrealism and Abstraction in England. Although the work is clearly figurative, its fluid, biomorphic forms allude to these artistic movements and the beginning of a particularly expressive and inventive phase of his career in which he embraced techniques – like modelling and casting – that afforded new possibilities in his exploration of form. Moore did not live to see Large Reclining Figure placed on the hill in Perry Green, but the posthumous realisation of this ambitious vision serves as a powerful reminder of the creative energy that characterised his career. [1] Roger Berthoud, The Life of Henry

Moore, Faber and Faber, London, 1987, revised and updated 2003, p. 471. [2] In 1985 Moore authorised another bronze edition of 4+1 (LH 192a) which was cast by the Royal College of Art in London, from a model owned by Pei. [3] Letter from Henry Moore to Thomas Messer, 1982, Henry Moore Archive. [4] There is also a white fibreglass version, made in 1983, in the Henry Moore Foundation's collection. [5] Gemma Levine, *With Henry Moore: The Artist at Work*, photographed by Gemma Levine, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1978, p. 40. [6] Moore photographed Reclining Figure 1938 (LH 192) in the garden of his former home, Burcroft, in Kent. [7] *Ibid.*, p.40.