

HENRY MOORE OM CH
Castleford 1898 - 1986 Much Hadham

Ref: BR 30

Madonna and Child



Signed and numbered on the back of the bench: *Moore 1/6*.
Also stamped with the foundry mark: *NOACK BERLIN*
Bronze with a brown patina: 6 ¼ x 2 ¾ x 2 ¾ in / 15.9 x 7 x 7 cm
On a marble base: ¾ x 4 x 4 ⅜ in / 1.9 x 10.2 x 11.1 cm
Conceived in terracotta in 1943 and cast in 1955 at Noack Berlin in
a numbered edition of 6
LH 219

RICHARD GREEN

FINE PAINTINGS • ESTABLISHED 1955

Provenance:

Marlborough Fine Art, London;
private collection, UK, 1966, acquired from the above at the 1966 exhibition

Exhibited:

London, Marlborough Fine Art, *Henry Moore*, July-August 1966, no.5, illus.
London, Tate, *Henry Moore*, 17th July-22nd September 1968, no.57, another cast

Literature:

Herbert Read (ed.), *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings*, Lund Humphries & Company Ltd., London 1944, terracotta reproduced pl.107a
Robert Melville, *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings 1921-1969*, Thames and Hudson, London 1970, p.351, no.309, terracotta illus.
David Sylvester (ed.), *Henry Moore Complete Sculpture 1921-48*, vol. 1, Lund Humphries, London, 1990, p.13, no.219, p.138 (terracotta illus.)

The present work was cast from a terracotta model made in 1943 for the over life-size Horton stone *Madonna and Child* at St Matthew's Church, Northampton [LH 226], which Henry Moore described as 'one of the most difficult and heart-searching sculptures that I ever tried to do.'¹ Having been tremendously impressed by the majestic dignity of Moore's drawings of people sheltering in the underground during air raids at an exhibition of War Artists at the National Gallery, London, the Rev. Walter Hussey (later Dean of Chichester) commissioned the sculpture in 1942 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the church, giving the artist his first opportunity to carve in stone since the start of the Second World War. Despite the clear correspondence of the subject to his preoccupation with the Mother and child theme, the gravity of the commission made Moore apprehensive and he insisted upon months of preparatory drawing which he then translated into approximately twelve small clay models before being satisfied that his idea could be realised.² In his essay *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity*, Robert Sutton explains that these models, created in June/July 1943, are some of the earliest examples of Moore's preparatory experiments with clay, which enabled the artist 'to model his works with greater spontaneity and freedom, making it easier to transform an idea conceived on paper into a three-dimensional form.'³ The art critic, David Sylvester suggested

¹ The artist cited in John Hedgecoe and Henry Moore, *Henry Spencer Moore*, Simon and Schuster, New York 1968, p.159.

² See twenty-six drawings ascribed to the *Madonna and Child* Sketchbook, 1943, in Ann Garrould (ed.), *Henry Moore Complete Drawings 1940-49*, Vol. 3, The Henry Moore Foundation in association with Lund Humphries, London 2001, pp.190-195. The present work is directly related to the left-hand figure in a drawing in the sketchbook, ref: HMF 2177 / AG 43.91.

³ Robert Sutton, 'Maquette for *Madonna and Child* 1943, cast 1944-5 by Henry Moore OM, CH', catalogue entry, December 2012, revised by Alice Correia, March 2014, in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity*, Tate Research Publication, 2015, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/henry-mooreom-ch-maquette-for-madonna-and-child-r1147466>

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FINE PAINTINGS • ESTABLISHED 1955

that modelling in clay also helped Moore, ‘grasp the tactile as well as the visual plasticity of forms because he could reconstruct them with his hands and thus attain a profounder sense of their volume.’⁴

Sir Kenneth Clark, the director of the National Gallery, who advised Moore on the commission and helped to select 5 models for Hussey to view at the museum on 23rd July 1943, remarked to him: ‘It is the most exciting sight I have ever seen. Jaspar Ridley [the chairman of the National Gallery Trustees] wants to commission it if you don’t have it – or any other of them.’⁵ Hussey later wrote that having promised the chosen clay model to both him and Clark, Moore had it cast in bronze and presented a cast to each, ‘I believe this was the first time he had made such bronze casts.’⁶ Though not selected to be scaled up for the final sculpture, this model was later cast in bronze along with five of the other maquettes.

Moore wrote to Hussey of his conception of the sculpture, ‘I began thinking of the ‘Madonna and Child’ for St Matthew’s by considering in what ways a Madonna and Child differs from a carving of just a ‘Mother and Child’ – that is by considering how in my opinion religious art differs from secular art. It’s not easy to describe in words what this difference is, except by saying in general terms that the ‘Madonna and Child’ should have an austerity and a nobility and some touch of grandeur (even hieratic aloofness,) which is missing in the ‘everyday’ ‘Mother and Child’ idea. From the sketches and little models I’ve done, the one we’ve chosen has I think a quiet dignity and gentleness. And I have tried to give a sense of complete easiness and repose, as though the Madonna could stay in the position for ever (as being in stone she will have to do). The Madonna is seated on a low bench, so that the angle formed between the nearly upright body and her legs is somewhat less than a right angle, and in this angle of her lap, safe and protected, sits the Infant.’⁷

While Moore sought to define the ways in which the Madonna and Child differed from the Mother and child, his patron emphasised the sculpture’s sympathetic humanism. Hussey’s sermon the week before the unveiling of the large stone sculpture speaks not only of the figures’ relationship, but of the monumentality of Moore’s female figures in general: ‘Christ was born of a human mother - and so the Blessed Virgin is conceived as any small child would in essence think of his mother, not as small and frail, but as the one large, secure, solid background to life... The Holy Child sits safely in his mother’s lap, with her protecting hands on Him; but He looks

⁴ ADB Sylvester, ‘The Evolution of Henry Moore’s Sculpture: I’, *Burlington Magazine*, vol.90, no.543, June 1948, p.158. Moore explained in 1963 that the clay sculptures were then baked to become terracottas and it was from these terracottas that the small bronzes were cast. See Robert Sutton, *op.cit.*, footnote 17. Henry Moore letter to Martin Butlin, 22 January 1963, Tate Artist File.

⁵ Walter Hussey, *Patron of Art: The revival of a great tradition among modern artists*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1985, p.28. Clark was also Chairman of the War Artists’ Advisory Committee and had invited Moore to become an Official War Artist.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁷ The artist, 26th August 1943, cited in Walter Hussey, *op.cit.*, pp.32-33.

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out quite unafraid, and her hands do not grip or restrain Him, for she presents Him, offers Him to the world, as He will offer Himself.⁸

Seated on a low bench with her child in her lap, Mary looks over the head of her son while holding him protectively in place. The posture of the figures had been determined, though the positioning of limbs and the level of detail would alter in the finished work. Even at this early, impressionistic stage of the commission's conception, the figure's solemnity is established in her poise and expression. As well as in working method, the naturalistic treatment of this figurative subject marked a distinct departure from the abstract experimentation of Moore's pre-war work. The intimate familial arrangement foreshadows his postwar family groups of parents interacting with and protecting their children.

Moore carved another Madonna and Child in Horton Stone for St Peter's Church, Claydon in 1948–49 (re-sited in 1978 to St Mary's Church, Barham), commissioned by Sir Jasper Ridley as a memorial to his son and three other villagers killed during the Second World War.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.37.