

RICHARD GREEN

FINE PAINTINGS • ESTABLISHED 1955

HENRY MOORE OM CH

Castleford 1898 - 1986 Much Hadham

Ref: BT 255

Family groups



Signed lower right: *Moore* and inscribed upper left: *Try this pose over again*; indistinctly signed and inscribed on the reverse
Mixed media on paper: 9 x 6 ½ in / 22.9 x 16.5 cm
Frame Size: 16 ½ x 14 ¼ in / 41.9 x 36.2 cm
In an antique coloured watercolour frame
Executed *circa* 1943-1944 / Recorded in the Henry Moore Foundation archives as HMF 2213



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Provenance:

Leicester Galleries, London
The Earl of Drogheda, Ireland
Christie's London, 18th April 1969, lot 192
Marlborough Fine Art, London;
Helene Rabb Cahners, USA, acquired from the above, then by descent
Osbourne Samuel, London;
private collection, UK, acquired from the above

Exhibited

Waterville, Maine, Colby College Museum of Art, *An Exhibition of Works of Art from the Collections of the Members of the Advisory Council for the Friends of Art at Colby*, 1971

Literature:

Kenneth Clark, *Henry Moore Drawings*, Thames and Hudson, London 1974, illus. pl.227, p.324, as *Family group (Page from sketchbook)*
Ann Garrould, *Henry Moore Drawings*, Thames and Hudson, London 1988, p.258, illus. in colour pl.111, p.108
Ann Garrould (ed.), *Henry Moore Complete Drawings 1940-49*, vol. 3, The Henry Moore Foundation in association with Lund Humphries, Aldershot 2001, no.AG 43-44.25 HMF 2213, illus. p.207

From the outset of his career, Moore considered drawing a fundamental skill in the development of any sculptor, stating, 'all the sculptors I admire from Michelangelo to Rodin were great draughtsmen, and the ability to draw was as essential to a sculptor as to a painter.'¹ For a period of almost two years from mid-1940 to the summer of 1942 during the Second World War, Moore produced no sculpture and worked exclusively on paper. Following his commission from the War Artists' Advisory Committee for the shelter drawings, which had gained immediate public recognition, he undertook a second commission documenting the coalmining industry in Yorkshire at the suggestion of Herbert Read. Upon completion of the project, Moore was eager to return to drawing as 'a means of generating ideas for sculpture, tapping oneself for the initial idea; and as a way of sorting out ideas and developing them.'²

The influence of the shelter drawings, in particular the naturalistic approach to the human figure and group compositions, can be seen to inform Moore's subsequent work, including his family group drawings *circa* 1943-44, from which Moore created a number of maquettes and two large public sculptures. In a letter to the American curator, James Johnson Sweeney, Moore remarked on the two major influences which the shelter drawings might have on his sculpture: the use of drapery and groups of two or three figures instead of one: 'As a matter of fact the *Madonna and Child* for Northampton and the later *Family Groups* actually have embodied these features.'³

¹ The artist cited in Alan Wilkinson (ed.), *The Drawings of Henry Moore*, exh. cat., Tate & Art Gallery of Ontario, 1977, p.9.

² The artist cited in Wilkinson, *ibid.*, p.21.

³ *Ibid.*, p.36.

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Moore's vivid, multifaceted drawing technique can also be seen to endure from the shelter drawings into his subsequent work. In his exhibition catalogue, *The Drawings of Henry Moore*, Alan Wilkinson writes: 'In the life studies of the early 1920s, Moore often combined as many as four different media in a single drawing: pencil, chalk, pen and ink and wash. Some time before the war, while doing some drawings to amuse his niece, he discovered quite by accident another medium, wax crayon, and this was used extensively in the shelter drawings and coal-mine drawings which followed. The artist has explained the technique and the use he made of the medium: 'I used some of the cheap wax crayons (which she had brought from Woolworth's) in combination with a wash of water-colour, and found, of course, that the water-colour did not 'take' on the wax, but only on the background. I found also that if you use a light-coloured or even a white wax crayon, then a dark depth of background can easily be produced by painting with dark water-colour over the whole sheet of paper. Afterwards you can draw with India ink to give more definition to the forms.'⁴

This multi-media method can be seen to inform the rich surface and sense of depth in the present work, which features three groups of figures, the largest and most finished at the top left of the paper. The gentle, sensitively rendered family of four contains a mother and father with two young children; one standing, facing out while reading a book held by its mother, the other standing on his father's legs, facing over his shoulder held in place under the arms. The group is clearly defined and modelled with lines in ink following the three-dimensional shape of limbs, with dense cross-hatching to suggest shadow, while white crayon or wash suggests both light and perhaps the potential medium for sculpture. The tightly-knit group of seated figures seems to combine both the spontaneity of life studies based on direct observation and the intensity of drawings for sculpture from the imagination. Asked by David Sylvester in 1963, what was the last important work you started from a drawing, Moore replied 'I think probably the 'Family Group' ones. The family group ideas were all generated by drawings; and that was perhaps because the whole family group idea was so close to one as a person; we were just going to have our first child, Mary, and it was an obsession.'⁵

Moore's studies of *Family groups* were originally inspired by a public commission for Village College, Impington, suggested by the architect Walter Gropius in the late 1930s. The school aimed to employ the progressive educational ideas of Henry Morris, the Director for Education in Cambridgeshire, in particular that rural schools should provide facilities for parents as well as children, providing space for films, plays and lectures, so as to become the social centre of the community. This notion of family unity was to be realised in Moore's sculpture.⁶ Postponed by the advent of war, Moore returned to the idea in 1944 when the commission was temporarily revived and began making 'drawings in note book form of family groups. From these notebook drawings I made a number small of maquettes... Some of the maquettes were ideas for bronze, but most of them were for stone because for the Impington school I felt stone would be the

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.34.

⁵ David Sylvester. 'Henry Moore Talking: A Conversation with David Sylvester, *The Listener*, 29th August 1963, pp.305-6.

⁶ A detailed account of the commission is recalled by the artist in Philip James, *Henry Moore on Sculpture*, MacDonald, London, 1966, pp. 224-229.

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suitable material.⁷ Moore developed a number of versions on the theme between the autumn of 1944 and the spring of 1945, one of which is the collection of the Tate.

Moore was inspired by the family group from the early 1940s, though it has been customary to attribute his interest in the subject to the longed-for birth of his only child Mary in 1946. Following the end of the Second World War, Moore's *Family group* sculptures took on even greater significance as symbols of familial strength, protection and nurturing. The three-member family naturally evolved from the artist's *Mother and child* theme, which had appealed to Moore because of its significance throughout the history of art, for the emotive relationship it represented and for its potential for formal development between figures.

⁷The artist cited in A Wilkinson, (ed.), *Henry Moore: Writings and Conversations*, Lund Humphries, Aldershot 2002, p.273.