

Meet the Masters

March Program

Tang Dynasty Tomb Sculpture
Henry Moore "Reclining Mother and Child"

Artwork Overview:

The Tang dynasty, China's second great imperial era (618-907), was a time of expanded borders, foreign goods and visitors and travel. Women enjoyed greater freedom during the "golden age" than in any other period in Chinese history. Written accounts, wall paintings and ceramic tomb figures portray aristocratic women playing polo and riding horses together on outings. The most famous (or infamous) court lady was Wu Zhao, the imperial consort and empress of the third Tang emperor. After the emperor's death, Empress Wu declared herself sovereign-empress of a new dynasty, the Zhou (690-705) - becoming the only female ruler in all of Chinese history. However tyrannical and repressive, she ruled firmly over an era generally characterized by peace and prosperity.

The Art Institute's equestrienne tomb figure is datable to the second quarter of the eighth century, shortly after the death of empress Wu. The unknown Tang artist has depicted an expert horsewoman, her hands clenched around now-lost reins. As she leans forward and to the left, her horse turns slightly as if responding to her command. Her rounded face, double chin and ample figure represent a shift in ideals of feminine beauty in the early eighth century, from a slender willowy silhouette to a more robust, weighty figure. Her loose-fitting, wide-sleeved robe and upturned shoes represent the latest styles for the fashion-conscious Tang, while her smooth coiffure topped with a trumpet shaped but has been referred to by some scholars as a style called "falling off the horse". (Katie Dowling)

Topics for Discussion:

1. Does this clay figure look realistic to you?
2. Notice how the figure and horse appears to be one single form.
3. Does this clay figure appear to be large or small?
4. Do you want to touch this clay figure? Why.
5. Although this is a flat (2 dimensional) photograph of the sculpture can you tell why this is not flat (3 dimensional)? (You can look at the sculpture form all sides not just from the front.
6. When we make art in three dimensions we deal with volume. Volume is how the visual world is measured. The inside and outside spaces make volume.
7. Compare the Tomb Sculpture to Henry Moore's "Reclining Mother and Child". How do these sculptures look different? How do they look alike?
8. What material was each sculpture constructed from?

Hands-on Art Activity: Make a Clay Sculpture

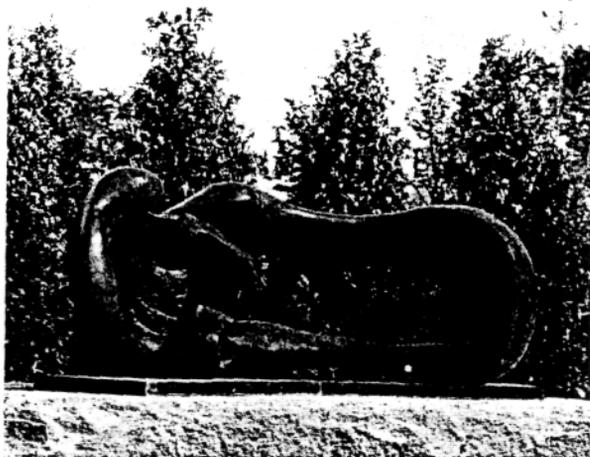
Materials: Cardboard for a base (approx. 5" x 5")
 Model Magic modeling clay in four colors (class pack packets)
 Carving tools (plastic utensil, Popsicle sticks, and toothpicks)

Directions:

1. Give each student approx. half of a packet of clay in each of the colors.
2. Make a sculpture using some or all of the colors. Additional colors can be made by mixing the colors together.
3. Keep sculpture on cardboard base.
4. Place name on cardboard.
5. Leave out to air dry for at least 24 hours. This will leave the sculpture in a slightly flexible and resilient state.

Sculpture

Henry Moore, *Reclining Mother and Child*



Henry Moore, English, 1898–1986
Reclining Mother and Child, 1960–1961, bronze,
90 x 35½ x 52-in.
Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
Gift of the T. B. Walker Foundation, 1963.

The Artist

It was once suggested that if Earth needed to send a perfect ambassador to inhabitants of another planet, someone who could represent the best of the human race, that person should be Henry Moore. Moore has been described by those who knew him as having a combination of the best of human traits: original, creative, genuine, responsible, kind, and above all, *ordinary* — he never let the overwhelming worldwide success he achieved go to his head.

Moore was born in 1898, a miner's son, in a small town in England's industrial north. Within a mile of his home were coal mines, chemical works, coke ovens, and potteries. To escape the grime of this setting, he took walks, and from these humble diversions he gathered many ideas from the softly molded hills as well as some actual objects — bones, pebbles, rocks — that were to figure so prominently in his organically shaped sculptures. He was also inspired by the human body, earlier cultures, and the masterpieces of Michelangelo.

Moore's work is perhaps most often associated with his reclining female or mother and child abstract forms. He created over 5,000 sculptures representing these and other themes. The United States claims more Moores than any other country, and they are enthusiastically collected everywhere in the world.

Because Moore believed that sculpture should be placed where the greatest number of people could view it from the greatest number of perspectives,

he wanted his works placed in an outdoor setting. In fact, he most often created them in an outdoor studio at his home in England. He believed museums inhibited the viewer's response, both physically and emotionally, and approved of touching and even climbing on his sculptures. When we look at his larger-than-life undulating forms, we can almost feel the pleasure of sliding or crawling in and about the curves!

The Art

Reclining Mother and Child (1960-61) is an example of the female figure in a reclining or lying position that always intrigued Moore. He modeled the form in plaster, then cast it in bronze. He added the final texturizing touches to the patina of the surface by incising various lines to further bring out the form. Like many of Moore's works, it rests in an outdoors setting.

This sculpture reflects the organic forms of nature which continually inspired him. At the same time, the subject of a mother and her child projects humanity and tender affection. The sculpture is softly rectangular in shape. The forms are simple and bold with flowing contours that *contain* the characteristic holes or openings of Moore's works. This compact sculpture whose main subject is in a position of repose also possesses energy: the legs are wide apart, the upper leg raised and held in space with some effort; the shoulders roll forward from the base and the arms thrust forward forcefully and protectively to surround the child.

The forms of the sculpture burst with life, simultaneously holding in and pushing out the space that flows into and around the figures. The shape of the space is as important as the shape of the figures themselves. Moore has said, "A cave is a shape, not the mountain over it." He also stated, "By making holes through a block, you can relate the front to the back."

Why might Moore have shortened the upper arm of the mother figure? Try to visualize a completed arm. How would you position it? Why?

Guided Analysis

Cultural Context:

When discussing the art of any particular period, Moore said, "The real influence (on a culture) comes from the artist. Mondrian, for instance, greatly influenced the architects of his day, not the other way around." What Moore was saying was that the artist affects his time rather than the

Henry Moore, *Reclining Mother and Child*

reverse. Can you support or contest his idea using examples in art and the world around you? *Pop Art might contest this: soup can labels were abundant before Warhol created his paintings; spoons existed long before Oldenburg's Spoonbridge and Cherry interpretation. On the other hand, the winding vine or tendril is the most commonly recognized Art Nouveau motif, and this style was rapidly adopted throughout Europe and the United States, showing up in architecture, furniture, fabrics, and elsewhere.*

Subject:

During his 60-year career, the sculpture materials with which Moore worked included at least ten kinds of stone, three kinds of wood, reinforced concrete, bronze, lead, plaster, terra-cotta, porcelain, and wax. And certain themes preoccupied him. These were universal and timeless: the female form, seated or lying down; mother and child; the family group.

In what ways were these motifs like Raphael's Madonnas, Rembrandt's rabbis, Cezanne's apples, and van Gogh's flowers? *These great artists worked continually with their themes, but each effort was an original creation and the secret to their greatness lay in what they did with the subjects, not in the subjects themselves.*

Media and Techniques

Henry Moore's works have always reflected his desire to be true to the materials he used. He said he wanted to preserve the "stoniness of stone." He did not want the finished piece to appear to be stone transformed into flesh, but rather to suggest that the stone *happened* in the form of a human.

Moore's varied creations demonstrate his vast knowledge of sculpting techniques which include among others the carving and modeling processes. Unlike Michelangelo, who carved his marbles from the front view to the back, Moore worked around his block from all sides.

His sculptures started with many drawings and small, preliminary models (maquettes). He and his assistants would then reproduce them in their monumental size. The original of a piece he did for a corporation in Singapore started as a 13-inch maquette and the final version measures 35 feet!

In the end, Moore decided the process was not really important: "I don't think it matters how a thing is produced, whether it's built up, modeled, welded, carved, constructed, or whatever. What counts really is the vision it expresses; that is, it's

the quality of the mind behind it rather than the way in which it's done."

Judgment:

Moore did considerable work on his sculpture after it was cast. He changed the patina, or finish, on it by burnishing or possibly using acids to make highlights and coloration. He also did considerable polishing with abrasives to smooth out the roughness left by casting. He incised lines to bring up its form. All of this work after the casting means of course that the sculpture achieved its personality when worked on personally by the artist.

Since a bronze mold can be used more than once, there exist a number of copies of Moore's originals. Theoretically, as with Rodin's works, casts can still be created for collectors after the death of the artist.

If Moore worked on his rough cast until he considered it completed, what becomes of the casts made after Moore's death? Can they be considered complete and of the quality the artist intended if they are left in their post-casting state? If trained assistants take over the finish work, is the assistant making artistic decisions and adding his style to Moore's sculpture? Since every cast must have been different in its finished state because Moore worked individually on each one, should an assistant take over a master's interpretation?

Style and Comparison

Study the other sculptures in the series. How would you describe the style of Moore's work? In your opinion, which school of art that you have studied in this series is Moore closest to, if any? *Children might cite the subject matter and smooth texture of Michelangelo's Pieta; the energy and minimal detail of Rodin's The Thinker; the organic shapes of Calder's Lobster Trap and Fish Tail. Can you discover any association with Oldenburg's Pop Spoonbridge and Cherry?*

Activity: Using clay, roll a long thick coil. Twist, turn, and mold the coil to make an abstract form of a figure or animal. Be sure to leave negative spaces or openings in the sculpture. Add one or more smaller coils for other forms.

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