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Author(s): Katrina Posner

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HENRY MOORE'S *BRONZE FORM* AND *LARGE FIGURE IN A SHELTER*: INTERPRETING THE ORIGINAL SURFACE

KATRINA POSNER

ABSTRACT

Henry Moore's final two sculptural series—*Bronze Form* and *Large Figure in a Shelter*—were fabricated in 1985-6 by welding together cast-bronze elements. The abstract shapes were likely polished to a high shine after assembly to give a uniform golden appearance. Many of these sculptures, which are now installed throughout the world, have undergone restoration treatments that have addressed the environmental impact on such fragile surfaces – darkening and modulation of the bright color. As it is likely that Henry Moore did not see the completed sculptures in these series before he died, to what aesthetic should the modern conservator refer? This paper will look into the history and context of these sculptures as well as investigate the process for determining their future treatment.

1. BACKGROUND

At the end of his lifetime, the English artist and icon Henry Moore undertook the realization of two final monumental outdoor bronze series: *Bronze Form* (in an edition of 6 plus the artist's copy) and *Large Figure in a Shelter* (in an edition of 1 plus the artist's copy).



Fig 1. *Bronze Form* 4/6 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. 2005.117.1. © The Henry Moore Foundation. All Rights Reserved. / ARS, New York / DACS, London (Photograph by Katrina Posner)

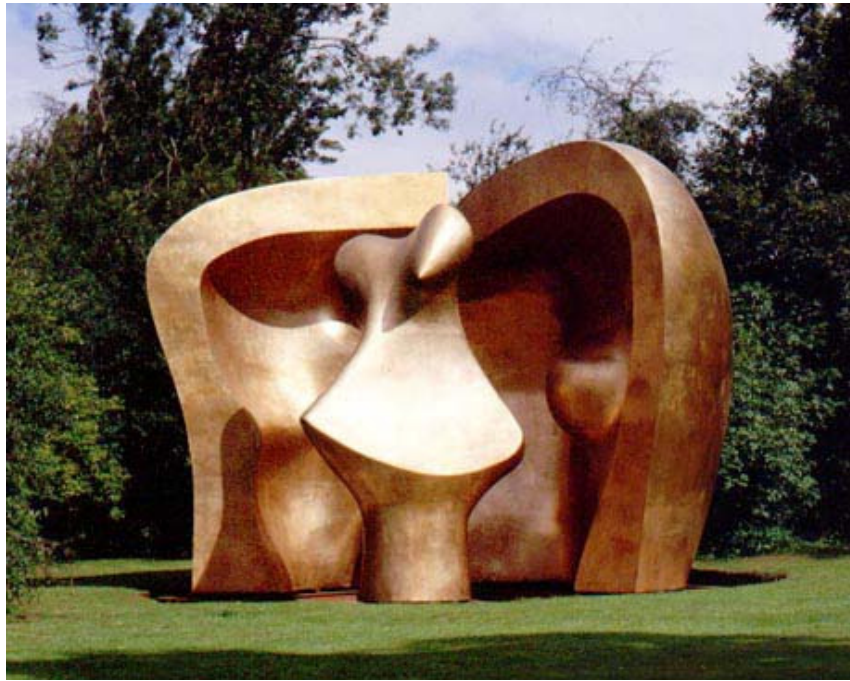


Fig. 2. *Large Figure in a Shelter 0/1* at Henry Moore Foundation, Perry Green after installation, ca. 1988. LH 652c.
 © The Henry Moore Foundation. All Rights Reserved. / ARS, New York / DACS, London
 (Photograph by The Henry Moore Foundation)

These nine sculptures, which were all sand cast in sections and welded together at Morris Singer Art Founders outside London between 1985 and 1986, represent both the culmination of Moore's artistic concepts that had been percolating for decades, as well as what can best be described as a significant departure from the artist's aesthetic norm.

Research into these series was initiated by the fact that it is apparent that the Getty's version of the sculpture is in need of treatment. The sculpture, which was a gift to the Getty Museum, was installed at the Getty Center in May 2007. It was untreated prior to installation due to time constraints and the need for research into its original appearance. At some point prior to its acquisition by the museum, the sculpture was coated with a clear acrylic-urethane. This coating, which has been compromised due to years of outdoor exposure, is breaking down and is no longer protective. The lack of a cohesive coating is causing uneven darkening, as well as deep pitting and associated corrosion.

While there are other more minor aesthetic issues that will be addressed, the impetus for a near-future treatment will be to remove the coating and reapply something more protective. Two other Moore sculptures – *Draped Reclining Mother and Child* (JPGM 2005.117.2) from 1983 and *Seated Woman* (JPGM 2005.117.3) from 1958 – were also a part of a 28-piece gift of modern outdoor sculpture in 2005 from the recently deceased film producer Ray Stark and his wife, Fran. Their collection now comprises the Fran and Ray Stark Sculpture Garden at the Getty Center. *Draped Reclining* and *Seated Woman* were installed after their treatments that involved removing their accumulated coatings followed by the reapplication of wax. The *Bronze Form*, however, was installed untreated pending future research into the original and subsequent surfaces.

2. PROCESS

Fortunately, Henry Moore's creative and working processes are well documented. Many of his large sculptures find their origins in his drawings and/or were inspired by the pieces of flint, bone and shell he found along the seashore. Working maquettes made from plaster, bronze, lead and even silver often initiated the three dimensional stage in his process.



Fig 3. On the left is the piece of flint found by Moore that ultimately inspired the *Bronze Form* and *Large Figure* series. The other pieces in the series show the progression, in plaster, to the final *Bronze Form* figure. (Photograph by Katrina Posner)

Frequently, sections of realized sculptures were modified and re-oriented to become passages in new works; his process was a series of overlapped and interlocking themes, where he revisited past ideas to engender new designs.

These overlaps are truly evident in the *Large Figure* and *Bronze Form* sculptures, which were two separate series, made from the enlargement of the last of Moore's middle-sized *Helmet Head* sculptures - *Helmet Head Number 6* - from 1975. One version of this sculpture is currently located at the National Gallery for Foreign Art in Sofia, Bulgaria.

In the mid-1980s, an enlarged model made from expanded polystyrene was created from the *Helmet Head* to make *Large Figure in a Shelter* and *Bronze Form*. According to Chris Boverhoff (2010), a representative of Morris Singer, the polystyrene would have been subsequently skimmed in plaster and then cut into the sections for sand casting. After polishing the surface of the metal to what Boverhoff described as a "sateen" finish, the sculptures would have then been waxed, without he believes, the prior application of a chemical patina.



Fig. 4. Polystyrene models for *Large Figure in a Shelter* and *Bronze Form*, ca. 1985
(Photograph by The Henry Moore Foundation)

Moore assigned Bernard Meadows to oversee the fabrication process for these sculptures at the Foundry. Meadows, who was Moore's assistant from 1936 to 1940 (Mitchinson 1998) and went on to have a successful art career of his own, returned to Perry Green in 1980 as a Trustee of The Henry Moore Foundation, and was appointed director in 1983. As Moore was quite ill during the fabrication of these final series, Meadows stood in for the artist during their casting and, according to past and current employees at the Foundation, was instrumental in the decision to leave the surfaces of the sculptures a polished, bright and *unpatinated* golden hue. According to several current Henry Moore Foundation employees, it is very likely that Moore never saw any of the completed sculptures from this series.

James Copper, the Foundation's current sculpture conservator who trained under Moore's longtime assistants – John Farnham, Malcolm Woodward and Michel Muller – corroborated Boverhoff's statement that the surfaces were left unpatinated (Copper 2010). He went on to note that the decision, again presumably made mostly by Meadows, was an unpopular one. It seems

that it was a major departure from the standard palette for the artist's outdoor works to date. Incidentally, according to the Foundation's current archivist Michael Phipps (Phipps 2010), the three assistants refused to work on the pieces at the time, saying they would allow them to "go green" after Meadows passed on, which was in 2005.

3. HENRY MOORE AND PATINAS

While Moore was indeed creating bright gold sculptures in the later part of his career, their surfaces were generally given washes of dilute patinating chemicals- either Liver of Sulphur or Ferric Nitrate. Applied cold, these salts were used to help define the form of a sculpture where the gold was made to go slightly darker in recesses and interstices, generally remaining bright at the edges. Moore likened this interplay of lights and darks to the tension seen in a clenched fist – lighter areas where the skin is stretched tautly over the underlying bone structure (Pullen 2010). These variations in color would be both intensified and animated by sunlight.

In the writings of and interviews with Henry Moore, it is apparent that he considered the application of patina to be an indispensable step in the generation of his art. Moore's understanding of the chemistry of oxidation is elucidated in the interview he gave to Mervyn Levy for his *Studio International* article, "Henry Moore: Sculpture Against the Sky" in 1964: "I work out and apply all patinas myself. The chemical composition is largely determined by the climactic conditions in which the particular work is going to be set... Different things will happen to the patina of bronze according to the kind of atmosphere in which it is gradually weathered." He goes on, "My own patina is, of course, a preliminary to the one which nature will herself supply in time" (Wilkinson 2002, 236). In her article, "Preserving the Artist's Intent: Henry Moore's Monumental Sculptures," presented at the 1987 AIC Conference in Vancouver, conservator Linda Merk-Gould describes the time she spent working with Moore and his assistants at the studio in Perry Green. She addresses the concept of "appropriateness" in the use of protective coatings for Moore's outdoor works, acknowledging that there are some who have argued that applying a coating disallows the sculptures from reacting to their environment, thereby contradicting the artist's intent. However, she writes, his monumental sculptures with gold patinas were coming back from the Noack Foundry (Fine Art Foundry Hermann Noack, Berlin, Germany) with a polyurethane-like coating, indicating to the author "an acknowledgement of how quickly the monumental golden patina sculptures darken outdoors" (Merk 1987, 73).

As Merk-Gould notes, the statements made by Moore about the natural weathering of his pieces were "made during the time period when the majority of his sculptures were patinated green or brown" (Merk 1987, 69). Indeed, the attempt to categorically describe Moore's intent for his patinas is met with contradictions that were initiated by the artist himself. In "Gilding The Lily: The Patination of Henry Moore's Bronze Sculptures," Julie Summers, then Deputy Curator at The Henry Moore Foundation, writes: "Moore never fully resolved the problems and contradictions in his own attitude towards his outdoor pieces. On the one hand, if he was pleased with the result after patination he might advise that nature should be allowed to take its course and the sculpture carry on patinating naturally, as dictated by the elements. On the other, he might take preventive action to maintain a certain colour to prevent oxidation taking place and the patina 'going wrong' " (Summers 1995, 145). Preventive action, presumably, meant the application of a coating, and "going wrong" can be interpreted as whether the color change interfered with the visual interplay and balance of the form.

Moore's method, namely, what he wanted for his sculptures and how he perceived the place coloration would take in their future, has been well-dissected. However, what we have with these final series is an issue that predates the concerns about longevity. The *Large Figure* and *Bronze Form* sculptures were not patinated; therefore, how do we approach their treatment?

It would be useful at this point to introduce the purpose and function of The Henry Moore Foundation. It was established in 1976, while Moore was still alive, to keep the artist's collection together and accessible to the public after his death (Mitchinson 1998). There are those who were present at its inception who are still working there today, and it is clear that both the institutional knowledge and spirit of Henry Moore is carried through these people. Throughout the conversations with current employees it was never indicated that the Foundation aims to have the final word in all Moore restorations, though their understanding of Moore's process and desires is undeniable.

The three main assistants who continued to restore sculptures at the Foundation and around the world after Moore's death – Farnham, Woodward and Muller – are no longer working. However, as mentioned, they trained current conservator James Copper. Thus, although there is still a connection to the original source through his predecessors, it will soon become impossible to argue that decisions for maintenance and treatment are based on first-hand knowledge.

In terms of the artist's intent and the preservation of his memory, there are broader philosophical issues at hand than merely who was present when he was working. What is at the crux of this discussion is that the sculptures were uncharacteristically left unpatinated. They are, arguably, the product of another artist – Bernard Meadows – whose own aesthetic preference was for smooth, highly polished, unpatinated bronze. This presents an ethical question in and of itself- just because the past and present believe the pieces were inappropriately finished, is it permissible to change their original state for the future? And if so, is that where the artist's intent, for these pieces at least, lies: at the point of patination?

Finally, where do conservators stand? This is a summary of the possibilities for treatment:

- Restore the pieces to their originally unpatinated state. If so, let them darken or keep them bright?
- Continue with the practice to which the Foundation subscribes, of applying washes of Liver of Sulphur or Ferric Nitrate, as the assistants have, and presumably Moore would have, done. And if so, let them darken or keep them bright?
- Or, dispense with the periodic re-patinating scheme altogether, keep the surfaces as they are and either a) lacquer them to hold them relatively steady or b) apply wax only to the surfaces with the intention of allowing them to darken slowly.

4. THE SERIES

As mentioned, there are nine sculptures in the two series, *Large Figure in a Shelter* and *Bronze Form*, listed here with their edition numbers and current locations.

Large Figure in a Shelter, 1985-6 edition of 1 +1 (artist copy)

0/1: The Henry Moore Foundation, Perry Green, Much Hadam, England.

1/1: Parque de los Pueblos de Europa, Guernica, Basque Country, Spain.

Bronze Form, 1985-6 edition of 6 + 1 (artist copy)

0/6: The Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art, Chiba, Japan.

1/6: Frederick Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids, United States.

2/6: A.P. Møller - Mærsk Group Headquarters, Copenhagen, Denmark.

3/6: Ho Am Art Museum, Seoul, Korea.

4/6: J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, United States.

5/6: Private Collection, Japan.

6/6: The Wellington Botanic Garden, Wellington, New Zealand.

In discussions with those at the Foundation, I was able to garner treatment information about those of the sculptures that were restored by their employees and these will be reviewed below. It is interesting to note that, clearly due to the reactivity of the bright surfaces, these sculptures were all treated for the first time within a few years of their fabrication.

Large Figure, 0/1 in Perry Green piece was installed in 1988. The surface coloration is currently quite modulated, stemming primarily from the fact that the Incralac has been seriously compromised and is flaking heavily.

Conservator James Copper said that he treated the interior form several summers ago by sanding down the surface and applying a wax coating without a patina (Copper 2010). Copper plans to treat the piece during Summer 2010 by sanding down the surface of both sections with a disc sander, applying a thin wash of Liver of Sulphur, and waxing the surface. Based presumably on his training by Farnham and others, Copper is among those who considers Bernard Meadow's choice to keep the surfaces unpatinated anathema to Moore's aesthetics. Further, by using only wax and not lacquer, it is his intention that the surface will continue to darken, or self-patinate, with time.

The *Bronze Form* artist's copy (0/1) is at the Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art in Chiba, Japan. Mr. Kozo Kumamoto, a conservator at Hakone Open Air Museum sent this description of his process, which was developed during the first restoration of the sculpture that was performed in 1990 with Michel Muller, one of Moore's assistants. Kumamoto restored the piece again in 2006 using the same process.

1. Take off the Incralac completely with paint stripper.
2. Grind down the surface of bronze with disk sander to make the surface rough.
3. Apply Potassium Sulphide to the surface of bronze with a brush - starting at the top and lighter part and emphasizing the under-cut and lower part with a darker and more concentrated solution of the chemical.
4. Using Scotch-Brite pads, gently even out the gradation of color. And finally, spray apply the Incralac coating (Kumamoto 2010).

Bronze Form, 2/6, in Copenhagen, was treated by John Farnham of the Henry Moore Foundation in 1988, two years after it was fabricated and, presumably, after it had darkened significantly. Notes from the Moore Foundation describe his process: the polished area at the top, front and sides were lightly burnished with an orbital sander to brighten the areas. Two coats of beeswax were applied and the surface was polished. He recommended waxing four times a year and a light abrasion of the polished parts with a pumice powder should they get too tarnished (Phipps 2010).



Fig. 5. *Large Figure in a Shelter 0/1*, current condition at Henry Moore Foundation, Perry Green. LH 652c. © The Henry Moore Foundation. All Rights Reserved. / ARS, New York / DACS, London (Photograph by Katrina Posner)

5. BRONZE FORM AT THE GETTY CENTER

Ray Stark bought *Bronze Form 4/6* in 1986, just after it was cast, and it was sent directly from the Morris Singer Foundry to his home near Santa Barbara. It arrived damaged, and the Stark's conservator wrote the following about its condition: "Numerous dirty hand prints overall, gauges in the metal along several of the edges, copper corrosion from moisture and chemical action, damage to the patina where the packing material stuck to the surface of the sculpture, runs from dripped chemicals. Overall," she wrote, "it appears as though there has been abusive handling"

(Milam 1987).

Reg Woolf, a representative from Morris Singer, traveled to California to address the issues and his treatment was as follows: “Completely sand down the sculpture to remove grease and discolourations, wash down and repatinate, wax and polish” (Woolf 1987).

Chris Boverhoff said that Woolf would have used an orbital sander to take the surface down to fresh metal followed by the application of patina, likely Liver of Sulphur. There are subsequent notes from Stark’s conservator that the sculpture was coated both with Inctalac and wax, and recent analysis found the aforementioned acrylic urethane.

What is interesting about the treatment of these four pieces is that in each case, Foundation and/or Foundry representatives oversaw restorations that did not attempt to return the sculptures to their originally bright, unmodulated and unpatinated state.

As previously mentioned, the impetus for this research is the impending treatment of the Getty’s piece, which will involve removing the current acrylic urethane coating, reducing the extant corrosion, and potentially mitigating and integrating the surface anomalies of past treatments and damages. Though the balance of the treatment is still being discussed, it will likely not involve the application of a patinating chemical to the surface. And while the application of a wax coating seems to be most relevant in keeping in line with Moore’s wishes, it is a decision that would require a significant amount of staff time—rewaxing and polishing every few months to ensure the continuity and protection of the coating. Although this aspect is still being discussed, it is likely that the surface coating will be one akin to Inctalac.

6. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Derek Pullen, Head of Sculpture Conservation at Tate was consulted during this research process for his breadth of understanding and experience with Henry Moore and his works. His perspective is invaluable, as his consideration of Henry Moore and his aesthetic legacy goes back 25 years. Indeed, Alan Bowness who was then the Director of the Henry Moore Foundation, phoned Pullen on the event of Moore’s death to seek his opinion as to whether they could ethically keep the two final series moving through the Foundry, as not all of the sculptures were complete when he died (Pullen 2010). Ultimately, it was decided that the series would be finished as planned.

Pullen has argued for the development of a shared language between curators, art historians and conservators. Akin to the nomenclature of geology, which describes visual and structural minutiae in material, he argues for a language that describes the visual surfaces of modern sculptures – both those as they were originally finished and how surfaces have been transformed since – could be useful in the consideration of modern art. Jargon, he points out, has a place. It is a means of getting the “meaning across quickly between experts and interested parties” (Pullen 2010). Perhaps that is a step for the 21st century.

In this murky realm of an artist’s intention, it is important to keep in mind both the passage of time and the fluctuating concerns of those involved – both directly and peripherally – in a sculpture’s preservation. And while we as conservators are quite attuned to, reliant even, on facts and analytical results, outdoor works demand that we employ a certain amount of fluidity in our approach to their maintenance. It is, as always, important to keep our eyes and ears open to the collective story.

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KATRINA POSNER is assistant conservator of decorative arts and sculpture at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. She received her BA in from Vassar College in Art History and graduated from Buffalo State College with an MA specializing in objects conservation.

Address: J. Paul Getty Museum; Decorative Arts and Sculpture Conservation; 1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 1000; Los Angeles, CA 90049. Phone: (310) 440-7182. E-mail: kposner@getty.edu