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—VERA LYNN, with Woolf Phillips and his Orchestra, and the Clubmen. Recorded at THE GUARDS' DEPOT, CATERHAM.

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Looking for Henry Moore

AN argument is a sort of warfare in which the casualties are generally confined to bruised feelings. If it is conducted in public, the battle is watched from afar; sympathies are enlisted on both sides, and skirmishing may occur a long way from the main engagement. It must therefore have been with a fearful joy that people heard rumblings from Auckland on the opening of the Henry Moore exhibition. The first sounds of criticism were strong enough to break through the languor of spirit which descended upon New Zealand after the departure of the Springboks. A sigh of relief could be heard through the land as once again there was something to talk about.

Few of us can claim much knowledge of sculpture. Many New Zealanders go abroad, and some of them visit art galleries and inspect statuary in places where it has not been made by monumental stonemasons. What is to be seen in public, however, is generally traditional. In these circumstances, the observer may not understand that sculpture, like every other art, is a changing process, and that it is influenced by its environment in space and time. It may therefore be asking too much to expect him to be pleased when he is confronted by works of art which, although not "advanced" in terms of European culture, are for him quite new and unsupported by any sort of tradition. All that can be asked of the observer is that, in the words of Mr. G. Dawson, President of the Auckland Society of Arts, he "should reserve judgment till he has made an effort to understand what the artist is trying to convey." It may also be necessary to visualise the setting for which some of the pieces were intended. A figure designed for a park, or

for symbolical use above the entrance to a building, is not seen clearly when it is detached from its appropriate background.

Full understanding is hard to reach, even for the educated observer—"educated," that is, in the history and appreciation of art. There may be people who can stand before the works of Henry Moore for the first time with wonder and excitement, but they are the fortunate ones who "know" without understanding. For most of us there must be an effort, a confused recognition, or a failure of perception. In encounters of this sort it is easy for reactions to be strong, even violent. People who do not like contemporary sculpture have no wish to be told that the fault is in themselves. They are entitled to say that, if what they have seen is great art, they prefer to stay outside the sort of experience it represents. If a man thinks that the work of Henry Moore is nonsense, he is free to say so; and if he uses strong words to say it he is merely expressing an indignation which comes understandably from the conflict between his own idea of beauty and a conception which seems to repudiate and even to deride it.

That, however, is as far as he should go. The world of Henry Moore is not for him. Fair enough—provided he does not suggest that it should be closed to others. Similarly, the pleased observer has no right to despise the man who cannot see. Indeed, he should be careful of his opinions unless he is quite sure that they are his own. It is not enough to be impressed by Henry Moore because his work has been praised by eminent critics. All that his reputation can do is to remind us of the need to look carefully. It is a man's own concern, after that, whether he looks again or turns away.

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 5, 1956.