

sculptural metaphors involving mountains and female figures, or produces a "Leaf Figure," or vaguely human shapes that call up associations with bones, driftwood, animal and insect forms, boulders, or tree trunks—when, in any one of a number of other ways, he tries to create generalised images derived from the forms of nature, and to fuse man into them—he evokes the same sort of feeling we get when we read Wordsworth's poetry. Although his best work is probably that done under African and Mexican influence, by temperament he is perhaps, more than anything else, at bottom an English nature-romantic.

IT is this very nature-romanticism that gives rise to doubts about a large proportion of his work. Beyond question it is attractive—provided one does not come to it with ridiculous preconceptions about sculpture. But does not the generalised "poetic" quality prevent this work from containing anything like those intense concentrations of meaning which, in the greatest works of the past, have resulted from the combining of the stylistic precision imposed by realism with the abstract harmonies of classical form? Is not the impact of this work somewhat analogous to that of the late Corot, after he abandoned painting those finely-structured early landscapes, and took to creating generalised effects of "mistiness," "willowness" and "riveriness"?

Moore has described sculpture as "an art of the open air"—and, indeed, his larger pieces need to be seen in parks, or on hilltops, to be fairly judged. A great deal of the finest sculpture of the past has, in fact, been placed in the open—but almost always in conjunction with buildings. Architecture supplies a *measure* for classically-conceived sculpture.



THE APPEAL OF HENRY MOORE
The exhibition at Auckland City Art Gallery broke all attendance records

ture. The tension of this situation is lacking when the environment is trees, and the sculpture leans away from the classical. To put it in another way, sculpture is essentially a classical art, and much of what Moore is trying to say might be more potently expressed in poetry. (This is not to be taken to contradict what I said earlier about the truly sculptural quality of Moore's work, but simply to question whether, in the circumstances, that quality can be produced in high concentration. If you like,

the greatest of Egyptian and Greek sculpture is brandy, where a good deal of Henry Moore is just *vin ordinaire*.)

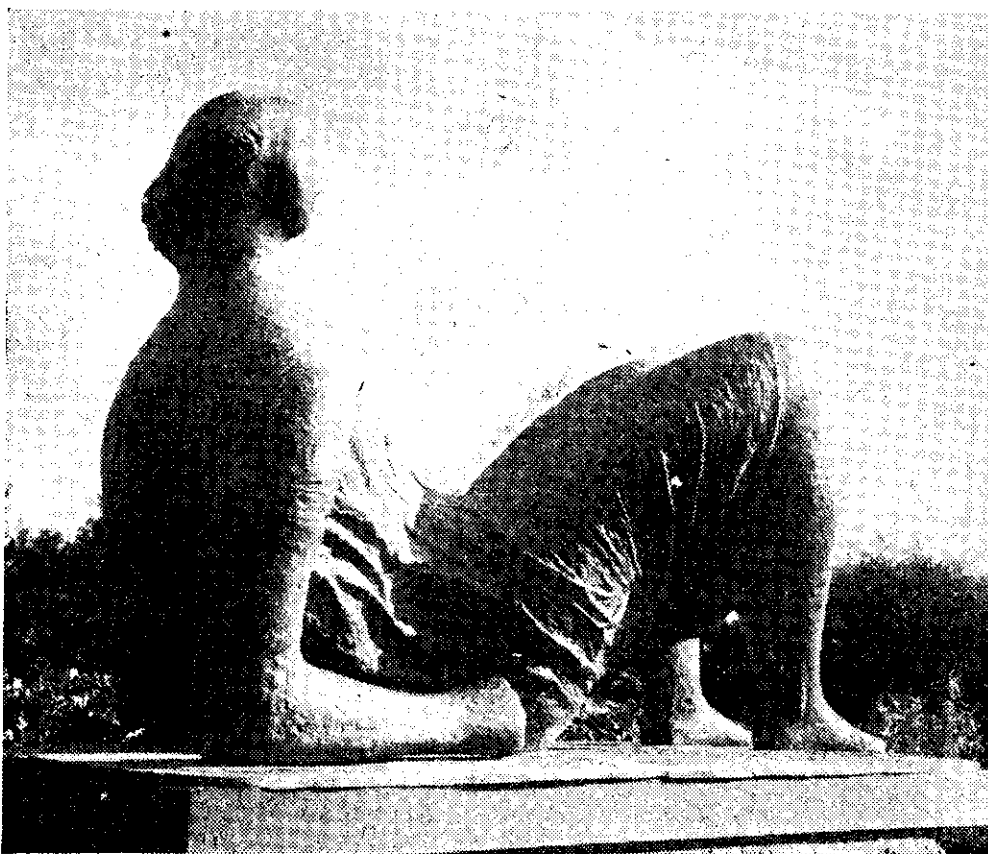
WE live in a chaotic period, when art has been bedevilled by ideological warfare. Because Moore has been made a battleground by the critics, he has been led at times, I feel, into a certain intellectual pretentiousness. It is doubtful whether he has escaped altogether from the general decadence of English (and, for that matter, European) art in this century. The root of this decadence lies in isolating the aesthetic, removing it from its necessary and traditional involvement with other modes of experience, and making it a pure end in itself. The work of art thus ceases to have any relationship with anything outside itself—it ceases to have a "subject." It becomes, in fact, its own subject. At a low level, this leads to an obsession with effects of texture, and to the production of those rootless abstractions which have become so modish in our time. Looking at some of the more abstract works of Moore's middle period, we may be forgiven for wondering whether their real "subject" is not merely Moore's own style, hypothesised, conceived as end-in-itself. One notes, indeed, in these works a sort of narcissism—a tendency for the sculptor to imitate himself.

There is much debate in England at the present time as to whether Henry Moore is "the beginning of something" or "the end of something." One needs a crystal ball to arrive at any firm opinions on this point. Only the unborn sculptor—the man who may, or may not, find his imagination truly fertilised, and not merely infected, by the sculptural images Moore has created—will know that. For the moment, we can only submit ourselves to these works, if possible with unclouded minds, and note what effects they have on us. The fact that they differ somewhat from the work of monumental masons, and from the statues we see in New Zealand parks, should not be allowed to influence us unduly.

One of the chief benefits to be gained from this exhibition is the experience of seeing *actual* sculpture, in a number of very different materials, and on widely differing scales. Even the best photography tends to make works of sculpture look to be all of the same material, and all of the same size, as well as producing other limitations and distortions.

An interesting thought intrudes suddenly: How is it that Moore, who has such a fine colour sense (as can be seen from the drawings in this show), has never re-introduced the Greek practice of polychromy? Much of his work would seem to be admirably suited to colour-treatment.

Finally—there is one thing that might well be kept in mind by those who (like myself) are tempted to make conjectures about Moore's ultimate status. T. S. Eliot once remarked that it is not the task of the contemporary critic to decide whether Mr. X is a *great* poet. That is the business of posterity. The contemporary critic should confine himself to investigating whether or not Mr. X is a *genuine* poet. I repeat that the very least that can be said of Henry Moore is that he is a genuine sculptor.



LEFT: Draped reclining figure, 1952-53