

Henry Moore Bibliography - Detailed Report

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A Bridge between Science and Art? The Artistic Reception of *On Growth and Form* in Interwar Britain c.1930-42

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Description

Article exploring artistic response to D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's work on morphology, *On Growth and Form* 1917, which Moore first encountered as a student in Leeds. Artists, including Moore, have drawn on this text as a means to ground their artistic ideology. 39 Quotes Herbert READ on Moore as a sculptor who has "sought among those forms of nature for harder and slower types of growth, realizing that in these he would find forms *natural* to his carving materials. He has gone beneath the flesh to the hard structure of bone". JULER writes that Thompson's portrayal of development energies in the natural world had an impact on Moore's writing and practice. Moore's statement of 1934, "organic forms though they may be symmetrical in their main disposition, in their reaction to environment, growth and gravity, lose their perfect symmetry", is a summary of Thompson's comments on the subject. 43-45 Reference to Moore's *Transformation Drawings* between 1930-5 uncovering "principles of form and rhythm from the study of natural objects". Sketches of lobster claws, tree roots and bones were graphic studies of morphological laws that underpinned the production of form in nature. The angle of vision drastically alters the form of the object represented. Illus of *Studies of Bones 1932* (HMF 938). Moore quoted: "Bones have a marvellous structural strength and hard tenseness of form, subtle transition of one shape into the next and great variety in section" (reference taken from Christa LICHTENSTERN). Thompson's chapter on *The Theory of Transformations* is of particular relevance to Moore's practice. By mapping the shape of an organism onto a grid-like matrix of mathematical co-ordinates, Thompson conjectured that any bodily distortion could be geometrically represented so as to demonstrate the morphological affinity between species. "Moore's interest in this morphological process might be deduced that the fact that many of his *Transformation Drawings* provided the groundwork for his full-scale sculptures". Moore improvised upon the morphology of natural forms to imagine probable forms, anatomically linked but transformed into something other. "A sketch for a jawbone laying on its bottom edge is thus metamorphosed into a template for one of Moore's sculptures of a reclining figure". 45 Moore's friendship with scientist Julian Huxley in the 1930s and 40s. In 1967 Moore recounted "Julian would quite often drive out here with little bits of bones or information for meand Julian asked me to go and see on one occasion the skull of an elephant, which was the most wonderful sculptural object". 46 JULER concludes "by tailoring aspects of Thompson's theory of transformations to his own graphic practice, Moore thus visually exemplified the 'significance which the science of form has for the theory of art', employing morphology as an empirical basis for creative improvisation".