



Coalminer with Pick

Catalogue Number
HMF 1987

Artwork Type
Drawing

Date
1942

Dimensions
paper: 493 x 495 mm

Medium
pencil, wax crayon, coloured crayon, watercolour, wash, pen and ink

Signature
pen and ink l.r. Moore/42

Ownership

Imperial War Museum, London: presented by the War Artists' Advisory Committee

More Information

After a year spent working on the shelter drawings, Moore felt he had exhausted the subject. In winter 1941, he accepted another commission from the War Artists' Advisory Committee, to record the coalminers working to power wartime Britain. Moore chose to visit the mine his father had worked in, Wheldale Colliery in Castleford, where he spent two weeks sketching the miners at work, especially those working at the coalface. Although the shelter drawings had given Moore experience of drawing people in dark, subterranean spaces, recording what he saw and felt in the mines posed new physical and artistic challenges. Moore later recalled the 'thick choking dust', 'almost unbearable heat', and the 'dense darkness hardly penetrated by the faint light from the miners' lamps'. In addition, Moore's preferred subjects were female and static: here he faced the task of drawing the male body in action. In *Coalminer with Pick*, 1942, Moore uses a range of techniques to communicate the atmosphere of the mine and the activity of the miner. The square composition, which tightly frames the crouched figure, echoes the constricting cross-section of the tunnel at the coalface. The gloom and blanketing coal dust are evoked through layers of media, heavily worked on with ink and crayon, while the feeble lamplight is rendered using the wax resist technique. Yellow and white crayon repel the dark wash, giving volume and definition to the muscular contours of the miner's back, his glinting pick and the pit-prop in the foreground. The miner's back – a prominent feature in many of Moore's coalmine drawings – twisted by the swinging of his pick, emphasises both the claustrophobic conditions and the intense physicality of his labour. In *At the Coalface: Miner Pushing Tub* (HMF 1991), made the same year, the horizontal progress of miner and load are similarly framed. Pine pit-props further divide the composition, the reddish-brown wood punctuating the darkness. Lamplight draws attention to the miner's struggle, his back bent parallel to the ground and legs pushing back like a beast of burden. Although Moore considered his coalmine drawings less successful than those of the shelterers, he said they were drawings he was 'glad to have done' as they forced him to explore new subjects and aspects of draughtsmanship. Echoes of the miners can be seen in Moore's later sculpture, which includes broad-backed kings and fallen warriors. He also continued to explore the depiction of dark forms shrouded in gloom in his *Stonehenge* drawings, etching and lithographs.... Sylvia Cox 2019