



Notes for Listener Article [18 August 1937]

Catalogue Number
HMW 1

Artwork Type
Archive HM Writings

Date
c.1937

Dimensions
paper: 230 x 176 mm

Medium
pen and ink

Ownership
Henry Moore Archive

More Information

1. Abstraction + Surrealism The conflict between the theories of surrealism + of pure abstraction leads many to look upon one as black and bad + the other as white and good. Yet it seems to me that a good work of art has always contained both abstract and surrealist elements – just as it has both classical and romantic elements (order and surprise?) An artist should use all his powers,

+ the intellectual ordering and designing of the work. when he takes up picks up a brush or chisel he does not cease to be a reasoning being - + the intellectual ordering + designing of the work within its medium, + its critical control will be necessary, but the subconscious perhaps plays a greater part in the creation of the fullest works of art. (The Surrealist theory) or Surrealism is widening the field of contemporary art + is giving more freedom to the artist (and perhaps what is not unimportant, - stretching the appreciation of the public, (by shock tactics)) Pure Abstraction, is re-establishing fundamental laws, bringing back form to painting and sculpture. There are many products of surrealism witch I personally dislike, - chaotic jumbles, paintings that are badly mixed salads of literary fancy; pornographic shock stuff, and the echoes of the nineties (Beardsley) decadence. But equally unimportant to me are the empty decorations produced in the name of abstraction. Decoration + Abstraction There can be two kinds of (abstract) painting (+ sculpture) one which is “easy to look at”, tickles üü pleases ü the visual 2. pallet, + is pleasingant tasteful decoration, + the other which is much more, a charged up concentration., + They are the results of two very different approaches or aims (attitudes in the artist.) one, to make a pleasing harmony of nice shapes + colours, designed + ordered within the given area to; _____ aAn exercise in taste + two dimensional design, producing at its best, lovely decoration. With The other attitude the artist also aims at ordering + relating forms + colours within his space, yet (+ added to the two dimensional design is a three dimensional vision (though ü not necessarily a 3 dimensional illusionist technique)) But there is a keyed-up tension within him, + forms + colours must be created and ordered, to the satisfaction + expression of this powerful emotional. (He may even use forms and colours which in themselves, taken from their context, are harsh and unpleasant.) Such work will get its meaning (its effect) from the unity the (unified + total effect) of its colour + form + not by literary reminiscences of its parts, (The literary association of its subject matter) But its unity will also have a surprise within it + a life of its own, And this which for most people will be may make it too intense, to hang upon the wall of a living room, there to serve as a distinguished decoration or as a restful pleasing change to the eye.ø ø (How easy a picture or sculpture is to live with is no criterion of its value as a work of art.) I should might prefer to live in a modern service flat with one discrete pale picture on the wall than to live say with MichaelAngelos Sistine Chapel paintings XXX always around me +. but I would not + should I therefore say that the picture in my flat because it is comfortable + pleasing to live with was the product of a greater mind of than that Miche the Sistine which produced the Sistine Chapel paintings?) 3. “Drawings for Sculpture” Often I draw for the enjoyment of drawing but most times I draw mainly as a help towards making sculpture;- as a means of generating ideas for sculpture, as a way of sorting out sculptural ideas + developing them. Also, sculpture compared with drawing is a slow means of expression, + so drawing is useful as an outlet for ideas which there is not time enough to realise as sculpture. And I use drawing as a method of study + observation of natural forms. But But the th difference there is between the mediums of drawing + of sculpture should not be forgotten. A sculptural idea which may be satisfactory as a drawing always needs alteration when translated into actual sculpture. At one time, whenever I made did

drawings for sculpture I tried to give them make them as much representations of real sculpture as I could, that is I drew by the method of illusion, of light falling on a solid object – But to make the drawing so complete as substitute (for the sculpture) may weaken the desire to do the sculpture or make it only a dead realisation of the drawing. So that I now prefer to leave myself a wider latitude in the interpretation of the drawing, + so +no longer do not make them into try to make them complete illusions of actual sculpture..... Sometimes I begin a drawing more in a surrealistic way with no preconceived problem to solve, with only a desire to use pencil on paper, + make lines, tones + shapes with no conscious aim, but as my mind takes in what is so produced, a point arrives where some idea crystallises + then a control + ordering takes place until the whole has reached as satisfying a completion as I can xxxx give it or the impetus has worked itself out. At other Sometimes I begin, more in the abstract way, with a set subject, or perhaps to develop a compositional idea for a block of stone of known dimensions, + consciously attempt to Surrealism & Abstraction Questions 4 & 5 continued 4 surprise, - form and content, - classical and romantic, - intellect & imagination, - conscious and subconscious, are present in the same work, (My own aim & present direction in sculpture might seem to some to be contradictory, for I believe that the human psychological content of a work can be intensified by the work being less representational, less the outward visual copying, that is by being what some would also be called more 'abstract'.) [the following text not in Henry Moore's hand] In the picture in my mind the boy holds a rose, he has plucked the petals off, the woman gathers the petals plucked from the rose, the man watches the flight of a bird across the marshes and I twist a piece of lead in my fingers In the picture the boy is saying "mother, I will fetch you more roses" the woman is saying "what are these in my hands?" the bird cries, the man says "bread for the hungry, bread for the hungry." And I wonder if it is not the lead that twists my fingers. Abstraction & Surrealism. It seems to me that all good art contains has always contained both surrealist & Abstract elements – (just as great artists in the past have both Xclassical & X romantic elements in their work) so that it is not surprising we find that some of the work of the most important contemporary artists working today can be claimed by both schools.