



Torso

Catalogue Number

LH 37

Artwork Type

Sculpture Carving

Date

1926

Dimensions

artwork with base (h x l x d): 21.6 x 13 x 9.8 cm

Medium

cast concrete

Ownership

The Henry Moore Foundation: acquired 2012

More Information

Henry Moore's work in concrete There was a period in 1926 or 7, when architects were all turning to concrete construction, when I thought I ought to know about this material that was being used and I made several experiments with concrete, both reinforced

and carved concrete, and there's a whole period between – what, 1925 to 1928 – in which I did these experiments, because I thought I should know about it. But I've not been tempted to use the new, plastic material – I hate plastic anyhow. I think it's a horrible material and I wouldn't want to use it. I use materials that I like.[1] Henry Moore kept few precise records of his working methods and with most of the pieces in concrete being rather early, documentary evidence relating to their production tends to be scarce. When creating them we can assume, however, that his technique would have been quite experimental as to begin with, despite the assertion above, he was almost certainly only using concrete in the absence of suitable stone or wood for carving. Each piece doubtless involved a certain amount of trial and error, but he nonetheless produced two distinct groups of concrete works: some twenty-one small sculptures between 1926 and 1934, including Torso (LH 37), and a later batch of larger reproduction casts, made in the 1960s. Method Most of the works are uncomplicated direct casts, all of which would have been surface worked during finishing. In some cases, e.g. Composition 1933 (LH 133) and Mother and Child 1932 (LH 120), additional carving is more evident and this may well have been done before complete setting of the compound. There are three 'carved and reinforced' pieces: Reclining Figure 1932 (LH 122), Reclining Figure 1933 (LH 134) and Composition 1934 (LH 140), all of which are of sufficient complexity to warrant an internal armature, probably of mild steel rods. In these examples some modelling may have taken place, but they could also have been partially cast prior to carving. Moore asserted in an interview with John Hedgecoe that he had used the reinforced method first of all, but this is contradicted by the chronology.[2] Texture The surface of the earlier examples is noticeably rough, indicating the use of a coarse aggregate, and pocked with air bubbles suggestive of inexperience, although the form itself becomes increasingly elaborate. By 1932, with Mother and Child (LH 120), the surface is smoother and clearly more sophisticated, indicating a distinct advance in technique and quite conceivably the use of Ciment Fondue. Sculptor and casting expert John Mills, whom Moore knew in later years, has asserted that this material was available from 1929 onwards.[3] Colour For the first group colour, if any was to be seen at all, was added to the cement during mixing. In most cases these tend to be fairly muted hues, but Seated Figure 1929 (LH 65) is of a deep red that prefigures the effect of the artist's later carvings in rusty-coloured Corsham stone. Half Figure 1929 (LH 67) is listed in the catalogue raisonnée as having two casts, and these are said to be quite different in colour, with one a much deeper shade of pink than the other (although this cannot be substantiated at the time of writing). Furthermore, the pigment in Composition 1933 (LH 133) seems to have been mixed incompletely - perhaps deliberately - giving a swirling, marbled effect, a technique that may also be true of Reclining Figure 1932 (LH 122). Development So there appear to be three distinct phases of development, with the carved, reinforced and smoothed-surfaced pieces being the technical limit of Moore's early explorations in concrete. Two as yet unidentified, and probably destroyed, works allegedly combined stone and carved concrete and may indicate a fourth method, but no evidence of this remains. By contrast, the larger 1960s pieces - there were at least three - were simply duplicate casts of pre-existing works made to fulfill hectic exhibition commitments, cast in aluminous concrete and surface coloured by applying bronze combined with Uni-bond adhesive. John Mills illustrates these in his later publication Sculpture in Concrete.[4] In the 1990s, serious

consideration was given to destroying these casts as superfluous to Moore's oeuvre, but thankfully the concrete Draped Reclining Figure (from an original of 1952-53) still survives as a testimony and final expression of his technique in this interesting material. [1][1] Moore, interviewed by Edwin Mullins, BBC Radio 3 17 July 1968 [2][2] See, John Hedgecoe, Henry Spencer Moore, Nelson, London 1968, p.58 [3][3] John W. Mills, Ciment Fondue, London, Contractors Record Ltd, 1959, p.9 [4][4] John W. Mills, Sculpture in Concrete, London, Maclaren and Sons Ltd., 1968 Michael Phipps 2012