Henry Moore in America:  
The Role of Journalism and Photography

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In 1946, after viewing Henry Moore’s solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, an American reviewer visited the sculptor at home in Hertfordshire, England, and described the “deep pleasure of knowing the man himself—kind, sincere to a rare degree in a veiled society, alive with ideas and strength, undidactic, in short with all the seldom encountered marks of greatness.”¹ This response to Moore was the norm among American journalists, photographers, businessmen, museum personnel, architects, and philanthropists, and it was among such influential individuals that Moore would find support in the decades following World War II. The reference to a “veiled society” is of interest because, in the context of the ensuing Cold War, the very persona of Henry Moore would challenge the generalized American fear of the “enemy within,” as well as the perception that most contemporary artists were likely to be communists.

Varied personal encounters with Moore seem to have confirmed preconceptions of the man that were created and circulated in the United States through journalism and photography. I will focus in this essay on the significance of such means of communication, as well as on its role in shaping perceptions of Moore for American audiences. Although the cult of the celebrity artist would become commonplace in the United States beginning in the 1960s, the special treatment Moore received was unusual at the time. In newspaper and journal articles Moore was frequently quoted verbatim, and as such he was able to control the personal and artistic attributes ascribed to him. Interviewers who visited Moore in the United Kingdom were able to photograph his home and studios for their publications. As a result Moore was presented as an English artist par excellence to a broad American audience. Journalism and photography are rich resources, often more revealing of just how Moore was regarded in America than are more academic texts. The impact of such writings and photographs on perceptions of Moore in the United States should not be underestimated; indeed, these primary sources have the advantage of locating Moore in a context and thus help to avoid the pitfalls of the traditional monograph, whereby an artist may be presented in an overly autonomous manner—as
though unaffected by contemporary cultural, social, and other factors—and whereby accepted, sometimes inaccurate, accounts of his or her career tend to be repeated and thus reinforced.

Significant American support for Moore from the 1940s onward culminated in the placement of major examples of his sculpture in city locations, expedited by architects, chief executive officers, and city mayors alike, who were keen to demonstrate and realize their civic and corporate credentials. They shared a need for reliable and dependable imagery—for endorsements from cultural icons that would contribute to “product recognition” and encourage a positive response from the general public as consumers and citizens.

Moore was a complex figure, seemingly approachable, yet clearly certain of his status—a man who appeared not to court publicity but who was repeatedly interviewed and photographed, and who used such means of communication to present himself and his work. Images of Moore, his work, and his home and studios focused on his nationality, on his personality, and on his apparently “simple” way of life, portraying this newly created celebrity as a modest, home-loving family man who did not seek the limelight. One image (fig. 1) shows Moore at home with his wife Irina (the photograph was taken by John Hedgecoe, whose 1968 publication *Henry Spencer Moore* I will discuss later), and is an example typical of photographic representations of Moore. Of course other artists have been recorded with their families, but in most cases these images depict them as part of an extended artistic social grouping. The self-sufficiency of the Moores in images such as these is, I believe, quite striking.

Interviewers and visitors were undoubtedly affected by being in the presence of one of the world’s most famous living artists; the impact of Moore’s presence was likely even stronger precisely because he did not fulfill
the expected traits of either the modern artist or the modern celebrity. Instead he appears to have given every interviewer and prospective client alike the impression that he was without pretensions. It is remarkable just how many of his American contacts felt the need to publicly comment so favorably on Moore’s personality and “homely” appearance, on his apparent ability to withstand the temptations of fame and financial reward, and on his peculiarly “English” living and working arrangements in the hamlet of Perry Green, near Much Hadham, Hertfordshire, England.

In the postwar period Britain used national stereotyping, through written and visual means, to present itself abroad as a country that had won a major conflict and had preserved civilization and (by association) the British “way of life.” However one conceives of the relationship between America and Britain at this time, from an American perspective the public installation of Moore’s monumental sculptures could be understood to signify the maintenance of an Anglo-American “civilized” way of life with the recognition of “Englishness” as a core value. At the same time, British governmental and other official bodies clearly recognized the actual and symbolic value of cultural exports to the United States.²

Even before World War II, controlling Britain’s image overseas, including within the United States, was seen as an imperative in order to maintain the perception of civilized British values. The construction of a range of positive national stereotypes was encouraged at a governmental level in the United Kingdom. It was argued that tourism would enable visitors to “see John Bull at home” and to “discover that he is really a good natured person of simple tastes.”³ This characterization completely matches the most common description of Moore by Americans, and it is interesting that such generalizations provided a perfect template for Moore’s later self-presentation, not least because they arose out of British national policy several years in advance of the sculptor’s first American successes. Thus Moore’s status as a major international artist and his reputation as a quintessentially English man would appear over the years to coexist as compatible readings of the man and his work, especially so in America.

James Hall has discussed the postwar placement of large amounts of modern British sculpture in American museums, plazas, parks, and private homes, noting that “one of the most interesting and pervasive factors in all this is the way that American critics have sought to define the ‘Englishness,’ of English . . . sculpture.”⁴ Routinely, such definitions were framed so as to represent democracy, honesty, and quality, and in all cases to operate in opposition to totalitarian regimes. Awareness of the power of “image” to promote a particular ideology was an important facet of British and American culture from the 1950s onward, not just “the image of products, but the image of people and of corporate concerns.”⁵ As Jane Beckett and Fiona Russell have noted: “After 1945 . . . ‘Englishness,’ with Moore as its representative, became a commodity which could . . . be marketed in an international arena.”⁶

Thus Moore came to be presented as an ambassador of England and of Englishness. To refine this role he retained the persona of “ordinary Yorkshireman”—routinely locating his creativity in his working class roots—while simultaneously forming relationships with influential individuals within the British “Establishment,” who in turn recognized how Moore and his work could be employed in presenting British civilization abroad. In 1958 an English reviewer suggested that “in the raw new towns of England, Stevenage and Harlow, wholly working class and downright, the people are proud to have
Moore’s statues in their public squares . . . the people know that Moore is no arty exquisite from another social world. He is their own kind.” The American Andrew Ritchie saw a relationship between Moore’s sculpture of the early 1940s and the fact that the sculptor’s father had been a miner. He noted that Moore had “come from Yorkshire and from a mining community. I myself came from a very tough mining community near Glasgow, so I had a particular sympathy for his approach to the cutting of coal and stone, the digging into the figure, as it were, as you would dig into the earth.”

The history of relations between Britain and the United States is complex and variable, although in the face of international and political threat, invariably the two countries have presented a united front. This affiliation was fundamental in enabling Moore’s American career, since Americans perceived Britain as a friendly nation with the same language and a similar political structure. Additionally, Moore was clearly aware of the opportunities open to him in America, and in 1961 it was suggested that his achievements in the United States were a product of his being “in tune with the zeitgeist; in a restless age of wars, when populations and ideas were on the move, Moore’s massive dynamic calm was immediately appealing and inspirational. It is difficult for us in Britain to understand . . . just how much Moore is revered abroad: he is considered quite simply as the greatest living sculptor.”

In the United States the political tensions resulting from the Cold War frequently led to contemporary art and artists being characterized as “un-American.” This was largely due to an extreme conservatism that regarded contemporary art as being a direct challenge to accepted American values. Moore, however, seemed immune to this categorization. Clearly, this was largely because he was not an American, but another contributing factor was Moore’s “English” character—his homely appearance and his politeness, which manifested in a willingness to attend interminable dinners, private views, and so on. Moore was thus well regarded as a person, and his sculpture was perceived as expressing humanistic qualities. It is no coincidence that the backdrop for all of this was the period between World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall. The sculptor was explicitly situated within a Cold War context by a broad spectrum of political, journalistic, and aesthetic commentators. For example, in 1960 American commentator John Russell described Moore’s themes as “particularly welcome to humanity at a time when it is, for one reason or another, at war with itself.”

The role of fine art in the context of Cold War anxieties was often debated, in the United States as in Europe, as evidenced by a 1946 multidisciplinary conference held at Princeton, titled The Humanistic Tradition in the Century Ahead. There it was argued that the artist was probably the only person in society who could represent and continue humanistic values. This was an aspect of Moore that his supporters could promote and which found a ready outlet in America, drawing together a general American understanding of Englishness and a specifically American perspective on Moore. In the United Kingdom, perceptions of Moore appear to have been more closely related to his work; thus, it was his sculpture that was under examination, rather than the man himself. Unsurprisingly, this meant that his work was open to attack. For some, his work was incomprehensibly modern, or was the butt of the cartoonist’s art; for others he was an artist who in the years following World War II allowed the power of his sculptural expression to become weakened through inflated size and unsympathetic positioning.

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Support from the British Council both facilitated Moore’s career and reinforced the ways in which he might be perceived as a particularly “English” artist. In 1941 the Council had published *British Life and Thought: An Illustrated Survey*. Supposedly typical national personality characteristics are described and they are strikingly similar to the tone of American commentary on Moore: “The ordinary Englishman is not in the common acceptance of the word ‘intellectual.’ He has a great respect for men who are masters of their craft . . . he pays no attention to . . . advice which may be given to him by men, however distinguished, who talk about things of which they have comparatively little knowledge.”

The construction of Moore’s persona was achieved through a variety of means but essentially can be divided into linguistic and visual forms, which clearly resonated for American audiences, be they dealers, civic officials, businessmen, museum curators, journalists, or indeed the general public. Moore’s early American successes in New York, his relationship with MoMA, and the latter’s response to the political and cultural climate in the years immediately following World War II were all of significance, and the importance of New York to Moore’s career is clearly articulated by the city’s journals and newspapers.

Reviews of Moore’s first New York exhibition in 1943—held by his dealer, Curt Valentin—were generally favorable, if at times unnecessarily elaborate. *Art Digest* noted that Moore had not hitherto been considered in the United States alongside artists such as Picasso but that “he should have been. England has not added a leaf to the flowering tree for so long, one forgets to look for foliation from that direction.” Henry McBride wrote a mainly sardonic review but nonetheless utilized what would become familiar tropes concerning Moore’s appeal to an American audience:

> It’s a bit of a test for the Entente Cordiale, these drawings by Henry Moore . . . for Mr. Moore is British and we all, naturally, wish to love British art, but Mr. Moore is also abstract. This is not a test for me personally, I hasten to add, for I got used to abstract art long ago, but it is for you, Mr. Average Citizen. The average citizen in this country refuses to take abstract art seriously. But this time, with a war going on, we really ought to make an effort. It’s all the easier because . . . Mr. Moore is not quite abstract. You can tell, partly, what some of the drawings are about. . . . All this is accomplished in admirable taste. Good taste is Mr. Moore’s middle name. It is his chief asset. . . . Picasso, on the other hand, is not much noted for good taste. . . . When he is at his best, even I . . . am as much repelled as pleased by the reverberations from his thunderbolts. Mr. Moore is much more discreet.

Moore’s 1946 solo exhibition at MoMA was characterized as “the largest ever held in America for a living British artist.” *Art Digest* linked Moore’s success with British stoicism in the face of war:

> It has been said that England loses every battle except the last. Could it be that Henry Moore personifies his country’s El Alamein in the history of modern art expression, which was originally conceived from the brushes of Constable and Turner? . . . There is more aesthetic

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vitality in a single drawing by Henry Moore at the Modern Museum than in the entire crop of post-war Picassos now exciting controversy in New York. . . . When it comes to the validity of modernism as an artistic outlet in an age faced by mechanical tyranny, the response to the Moore show can only be, “This is it!”

A 1947 article in *Art in America* emphasized Moore’s success and greatness as having been achieved “with a steadfastness and singleness of purpose and aim; with a minimum of compromise to public taste or demands. This contrasts with so many gifted and promising English artists, where official patronage and public acclaim led to their ruin as free and independent artists.” Life magazine featured an article on Moore’s MoMA exhibition for a readership of twenty million, and in 1947 published a letter from James Thrall Soby, who had held various posts at the Museum, including that of Chairman on an interim basis during 1947. He wrote: “One of Moore’s many distinctions . . . is that he is able to describe his own aims with rare clarity and eloquence. I know that a number of ordinary citizens visiting his recent exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art were particularly impressed by Moore’s simple and coherent words of self-explanation.” MoMA’s Alfred Barr singled out Moore as the greatest British sculptor, conceding that “American sculpture may possibly be somewhat inferior to that of France, Italy or (because of Henry Moore) Great Britain.” James Johnson Sweeney, who was Director of Painting and Sculpture at MoMA, also referred to Moore’s nationality as a factor in his success: “At the time of the Moore show here, he was still some sort of avant garde figure. . . . But he was an Englishman. He was not a Frenchman. And Englishmen give an impression of conservative experimentation when they are being experimental and they never seem to stir the excitement a French explorer does.”

Moore’s 1946 show received extensive press coverage, his personality and appearance often attracting as much attention as his work. Indeed, it was commonplace for his work not to be discussed at all; instead what was of interest was the fact that he was “a man of middle size with a ruddy complexion, regular features and flat silky hair [who] looks much too young to be a veteran of World War I, and much too young to be too old to serve in World War II.” The *New Yorker* described Moore as “a short, alert, friendly man of forty-eight, with . . . an easy conversational style.” Life described him as “soft-spoken but highly articulate . . . short, brown-haired, tweedy and married.”

Later, in the 1970s, journalist Henry J. Seldis clearly was affected by Moore’s domestic arrangement, recalling his first visit to Moore’s home—called Hoglands—in the summer of 1962: “An air of fertility and tranquility enveloped us as we drove from the village station of Bishop’s Stortford . . . to the unpretentious . . . farmhouse which is the center of the creative and domestic life of Britain’s greatest living artist.” Seldis wrote extensively about Moore’s daily routine, noting the pattern of his domestic life and work, punctuated by regular mealtimes, photographic sessions in his studios, dealing with correspondence, and ending the day by having supper with his wife “on trays before the television.”

James Hall has referred to the “Renaissance ideal of the gentleman-artist” as having been “supplanted by the cult of the ‘worker-artist’ who performs down-to-earth tasks.” In many ways, Moore straddled these two extremes; he was seen as both a gentleman and a physically hardworking,
“hands-on” sculptor. Both he and his supporters consistently stressed his “ordinariness,” startlingly at odds with his status as cultural hero. In *Time* magazine in 1959 an article on the sculptor included an often reproduced photograph of Moore in his maquette studio, the caption reading “Moore at Work in his Generating Room.” Part of the text reads:

Sculptor Henry Moore sits in an aged wicker chair on a crumpled cushion. He is small and compact . . . with a high-domed face that is benign yet cragged. Thinning strands of graying hair stretch errantly across his head. From beneath brows that jut at least an inch beyond pale blue eyes, he stares intensely at a small plaster shape held in his left hand. The right hand, thick-wristed and broad, with straight fingers that are surgically muscular, holds a small scalpel. In a few minutes, the chunk of thumb-shaped plaster takes on form.  

The rootedness of Moore the man, and the presentation of his studio as a “generating room” is both vivid and unusual. It conjures up for the reader a scene of industry, but one that is the source of individual creative objects rather than mass-produced, utilitarian goods.

In the following year Donald Hall interviewed Moore for *Horizon*. He described the “tiny village” of Perry Green and how he walked with the sculptor “in the field of bronzes,” referring to Moore’s face as “sculptorly and massive.”  

In 1966 Aline Saarinen interviewed Moore and recalled later for NBC Television the “charming little village called Much Hadham—I like the name—it sounds so British.”  

In 1968 *Fashion* magazine described Moore:  

Handsome, tough, gentle, beautifully mannered, articulate without being intellectually pretentious. Moore is one of the most attractive artistic personalities in the world. For many years, he has lived in a charming old house at Much Hadham . . . he is always ready to receive foreign artists and young people with whom he will discuss his work with modesty and courtesy. No living artist commands such devotion and respect.  

Photography played a significant role in creating and supporting Moore’s persona, defining readings of his work, and advertising his sculpture to international audiences and potential clients. This is significant because photography can simultaneously romanticize the artist and suggest to the viewer that what he or she is seeing is truthful documentation. Certainly the increased circulation in the postwar years of mass-market journals and the concurrent popularity of magazine features on contemporary artists is relevant here. Moreover, as early as 1946 an article in the *Magazine of Art* noted that American businesses were not only purchasing art for their offices but were also producing in-house journals full of high-quality color reproductions of artworks. These were disseminated at no charge and in large quantities, reaching many people who never visited galleries or museums. Coincidentally, an advertisement by the Container Corporation appeared in this same issue of the *Magazine of Art*, making use of one of Moore’s *Shelter* drawings.

In studio images, Moore was often shown working alone, rather than with his assistants. A 1964 photograph (fig. 2) reinforces this presentation of Moore as an artist without pretension, performing all studio tasks with equal commitment. However, it has been argued that some photographs were staged:
“Photographs of Moore wielding a chisel in a marble quarry in Italy . . . were apparently arranged solely for the benefit of the photographer since most of Moore’s later marble carving was carried out by assistants working from models.”32 Such images were commonplace in American mass-circulation journals. Indeed, images of Moore and/or his work appeared with great frequency in nonspecialist magazines and in advertisements, demonstrating Moore’s heightened profile in the United States and an assumption that the sculptor and his sculpture would be recognized by a broad audience.

Not only are there abundant images of the sculptor himself, but Moore’s sculptures have of course been extensively photographed. Over the years he collaborated on a number of books with professional photographers; in the earlier part of his career he photographed his own work as well (fig. 3). The visual positioning of the sculptor in relation to his own works was also a recurring theme; in one photograph (fig. 4), taken on his estate in 1972, Moore is literally positioned at the center of his sculptures. The conflation of sculptor and sculptures is striking. John Hedgecoe’s 1968 *Henry Spencer Moore*, published in New York and London, was the first major text on the sculptor that was overwhelmingly pictorial. However, many of the illustrations depict neither the book’s subject, nor his work. Instead, much of the emphasis is on visual material suggestive of Moore’s birthplace in the north of England, realized through cultural and social stereotypes (as in fig. 5). The first image in the book is a grainy photograph of a slag heap, captioned by Moore: “As a small boy these slag heaps seemed much larger than the Pyramids.”33 Moore wrote the text that accompanied Hedgecoe’s photographs; thus there was tight control over the tone of this publication. Robert Hughes has described it as:

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*Crispin Eurich, Henry Moore sweeping up after a day of work on Reclining Figure (1959–64), 1964. Black-and-white photograph. Reproduced by permission of The Henry Moore Foundation*
Figure 3

Figure 4
a monument . . . a seductive book . . . the images pile up: a slag-heap at Castleford silhouetted against a hardly less black and granular sky, a Romanesque corbel shot to look like an early Moore. . . . the aim of this luscious treatment is to give the reader the illusion that he “knows Moore.” . . . A book on Moore without roots and flintstones would be as precious an escape from metaphor as a film on Barbara Hepworth without those St. Ives seagulls creaking obstreperously on the soundtrack. 24

Images of Moore’s home were of central importance in articles about him. In “Henry Moore at Home,” published in The New York Times Magazine in 1972, Moore’s home is described thus: “The house itself exudes a solidity; it is devoid of plantings around the perimeter and thus seems rooted in the enormous blocks of the stone paving.” 25 Photographs taken both outside and inside Moore’s home reinforced the idea of a restrained and quiet existence, exemplified by an image from the mid-1950s (fig. 6).
The photographs of David Finn—founding partner of a major New York public relations firm, Ruder Finn, and a collector of twentieth-century sculpture, including several Moores—have been especially important. He produced a photo-essay of one of his own Moore sculptures, *Reclining Figure: Bridge Prop*, subsequently published under the title *As the Eye Moves* (1973). Finn commented that “the object was to show you could discover so many things in one piece of sculpture. Henry was quite surprised to see some of the shapes in it. I was thrilled to show through my photographs aspects which he found surprising, or at least pretended he found fresh.”36 For his ambitious publication *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Environment* (1977), Finn decided to take advantage of overseas business trips to photograph Moore’s work around the world.37 Reviews of this book were numerous, one describing Finn as “a world-traveling paparazzo, photographing Moore’s sculptures . . . in diverse locations in 16 countries.”38 Another reviewer recommended that “Some enterprising travel agent should arrange a Henry Moore World Tour . . . . The photographs are awfully good, as Henry Moore says many times in the commentary, and a book which has a foreword by Lord Clark of Civilisation must be definitive.”39

David Finn has long conflated quality in corporate matters with outstanding sculpture, using images of Moore’s work within his company’s publicity material, including the poster series *Conference Room Quotations*, where each photograph of a sculpture is supported by a quotation from a well-known artist, writer, philosopher, or leader (fig. 7). Finn believes, as have many other business leaders, “that these posters encourage people to think creatively while they are at work.”40

In the mid-1970s a major Henry Moore sculpture was planned for the new City Hall in Dallas, Texas. Raymond Nasher, a local businessman and major sculpture collector, was involved in the realization of this commission. Before the installation Nasher hosted an exhibition of Moore’s sculptures and of Finn’s photographs, titled *Dallas Gets Moore*, at Nasher’s NorthPark shop.
ping center in Dallas. On the first day, Finn discussed and autographed his book *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Environment*; a review noted that the book’s publication had “perfect timing. . . . the book seems especially pertinent to Dallas. . . . [it] offers the type of views that will be seen when the Moore work is installed at City Hall. . . . The book is a powerful one, as powerful as the sculpture it celebrates.”

In the last decade of Moore’s life John Russell proposed that the sculptor was:

> a great many people’s favourite Englishman. . . . Moore the sculptor and Moore the man have a very large American constituency. It is now half a century since discerning Americans began to collect his work. . . . Over and over again he has been the No. 1 choice for a big new public commission in this country. Many thousands of Americans in cities and towns and on campuses big and small pass a monumental Moore every day of their lives. More than any other artist of our time, he has been brought out of the museum and into the open and offered the gift of ubiquity.

Thus, by the 1970s, photographs of Moore’s sculptures and carefully selected passages of text were routinely deployed alongside actual displays of his work. The significance of this type of photography and public use of the written word in mobilizing and defining Moore’s career has been under-researched. Of course, other major artists have, to differing degrees, been presented in such ways; the distinction with Moore I would argue is the precision and consistency of such communication. Even the moving image was employed in this way; many films were made about Moore and were shown on American television networks. This persistent use of both still and moving images as a means to “know” an artist would now be treated with some caution, but that was unlikely to have been the case in the earlier decades of Moore’s American career. It is also the case that sculpture lends itself to the medium of film in a way that painting does not. Sculpture’s three-dimensionality allows for dramatic treatment, for distortions of scale, for the moving view as the camera pans around it. Overlay this with Moore’s voice and the effect is powerful. From this perspective, the promotion of English painters in the United States was bound to be less compelling. As one of the most interviewed and photographed artists of the twentieth century, Moore was one of the first modern artists to collaborate with mass media in developing himself into a household name—in constructing what might, in later years, be known as a “brand.” The nature of his personality, his appearance, his living situation, and his steady and continuous creative output could vividly be conveyed through words and images, and the effect on his reception in America was profound.

**Notes**


2 The phrase “the special relationship” was coined by Sir Winston Churchill on March 5, 1946, when speaking to a group of businessmen in Fulton, Missouri. Churchill saw the alliance as one of equals. Robert Reich has noted that “any shortfall in Britain’s economic power would be compensated by her political skills and historic wisdom.” Robert Reich, Review of “Decline and Divergence: The Special Relationship,” ed. W. R. Louis and H. Bull, *Times Literary Supplement*, March 6, 1987, pp. 231–32.
16 Peyton Boswell, “Moore, Vital Briton,” Art Digest 21, no. 7 (February 15, 1947), HMF 0008440.
20 See Seldis, Henry Moore in America, p. 68.
25 Ibid., p. 21.
36 Roger Berthoud, interview with David Finn, New York, November 29, 1983, HMF.
37 Author’s interview with David Finn, New York (2 August 2003).
38 Review of David Finn’s Sculpture and Environment, Publisher’s Weekly 241, no. 15 (April 11, 1977), p. 67.

Rose, “Henry Moore in America: The Role of Journalism and Photography.”