

The Promotion and Reception of British Sculpture Abroad, 1948–1960: Herbert Read, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and the “Young British Sculptors”

Author(s):

Henry Meyric Hughes

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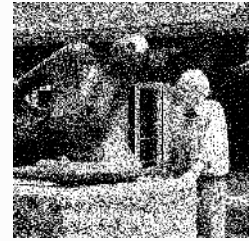
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The Promotion and Reception of British Sculpture Abroad, 1948–1960: Herbert Read, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and the “Young British Sculptors”

Article by **Henry Meyric Hughes**

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Abstract

In 1945, Europe lay in ruins. Networks needed to be established, new alliances forged. UNESCO was a child of that time, and the idea of a united, democratic Europe took wing. During the period 1948–60, Modernism was at its height, and its shape was defined in a number of important exhibitions and publications. Herbert Read and others, with the support of the British Council, established an international presence for Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and the postwar generation of “the Geometry of Fear”. In doing so, they introduced a particularly “English” flavour to the debates about European moral and spiritual reconstruction. Britain pioneered new forms of public patronage and display. In West Germany, the new British sculpture was interpreted as an expression of Western, humanist values, though it also carried intimations of the threat of nuclear war and destruction. Moore’s moderate Modernism and social democratic credentials went down well with artists in communist countries, who were seeking to escape from the narrow prescriptions of socialist realism. Over time, the British Council helped to create, and support, the notion of a self-regenerating sculptural tradition that was carried over until the full impact of globalization began to be felt, towards the end of the 1990s.

When hostilities ended in the spring of 1945, those who reflected on the European situation from the social, political, and philosophical point of view could not help wondering whether the deeper community of the creative forces which make culture possible, in the first place, had not been destroyed in the general collapse. (Will Grohmann)¹

The individuals in whom the spirit of modernism is embodied still survive, still work, still create—however obscurely and intermittently. When the cloud of war has passed, they will re-emerge eager to rebuild the shattered world. (Herbert Read)²

Introduction

It is hard now to conjure up in words a sufficiently overwhelming image of the postwar European continent, with its destroyed cities and economies and its starving, uprooted peoples. The

redrawing of boundaries after the Second World War led to untold hardship, but also called for international cooperation and exchange. The idea of Europe came to acquire new meaning and attraction, as an antidote to the various forms of nationalism to which the Continent had fallen prey in the course of the previous century and a half.

This essay suggests that Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and a new generation of postwar British sculptors associated with the catch-phrase, “The Geometry of Fear”, were able to profit from the new networks that were created after the War and to speak to a wider and often more receptive audience than they ever had at home—first, in war-torn Europe, then farther afield. They gave expression to many of the hopes and fears of the age, and their message was magnified, in part, through the activities of the British Council and the personal charisma of two dominant figures: Henry Moore, already hailed as Britain’s leading sculptor by the end of the 1940s, and his supporter, the writer and critic Herbert Read. The background to this was provided, first by the campaigns against Modernism of the previous decades, then by the ideological battles of the Cold War, whose frontier was drawn through the middle of occupied Germany and Austria. To a certain extent, the sculptors were able to capitalize on a sense of common identity, as Britain emerged from wartime isolation—hence the commonly held view that a “school” had appeared where none had existed before. Still more significantly, perhaps, this was the period when the Modernist canon was being comprehensively re-examined, redefined, and extended for a large public.

Reconstruction and Building a Network

Britain had survived the War with its economy in ruins, but its reputation intact, and offered a successful model of a functioning democracy. Much of the planning for postwar European reconstruction was undertaken in London, which had offered asylum to exiled governments from countries that had been overrun by the Nazis. It also served as a forum in which Allied ministers of education could plan new forms of European collaboration. The creation of the United Nations in 1945 and its offshoot, UNESCO, in 1946, was partly the outcome of those earlier wartime discussions in London.³

Reconstruction had to take place on many different levels. In the arts, “Zero Hour” meant just that—renewing artistic and critical activity from scratch. Among the formidable tasks, then, was the need to forge new networks out of old, and to recast the old histories to reflect new aspirations. Modernism now became identified with progressive liberal opinion and was easily identified with a supra-national agenda, just as abstract art—while hotly fought over—appeared deceptively value-free, beside the various forms of figurative art that had been exploited for propagandist purposes by illiberal regimes, of the left and the right.

Modernist art had remained a minority concern for much of its existence, and in England it had been constantly under siege, from the time of the half-forgotten Vorticists onwards. Herbert Read, as a leading internationalist and the apostle of a specifically English strain of Modernism (“provincial modernism”, to use David Sylvester’s term), played a prominent role in changing all this. However, it was only after renewing some of his prewar contacts on the Continent and striking up an informal alliance with the British Council that he was able to expand his sphere of activity.

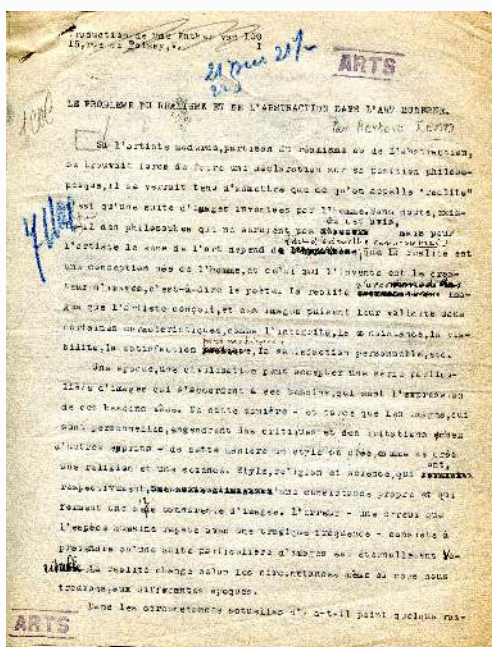


Figure 1

Herbert Read, The opening page of paper , *Probleme du Réalisme et de l'abstraction dans l'art moderne*. Digital image courtesy of Institut national d'histoire de l'art - Collection Archives de la critique d'art.

UNESCO played an important part in building new links.⁴ It pressed for the creation of an International Association of Art Critics (AICA), alongside comparable associations for museum directors (ICOM), and, a little later, for artists (AIA/AIAP). The members of all three associations—and particularly AICA, as far as the promotion of contemporary art was concerned—played a key role in developing global networks for promoting their members' views, exhibitions, and publications. Herbert Read was a founding Vice-President of AICA in Paris and one of its most active members (fig. 1). Many of his colleagues in the Association, drawn from all over the world, had been opponents of totalitarian rule and suffered professional hardships—among them, some of the most distinguished art historians, critics, and museum directors of the day—and this was not foreign, perhaps, to a certain *esprit de corps*.

They would meet annually in a different city at the time of the Association's Congress and General Assembly, and informally on numerous

other occasions, on the juries of the many prizes, competitions, biennales, and festivals that were launched in these years, as a stimulus to international cooperation.⁵

The British Council and Herbert Read

Travel was difficult and expensive in the early postwar years. This meant commercial galleries played only a minor role in the promotion of artists abroad. Even the internal market for British sculptors was limited to a handful of galleries, none of which were in a position to break into the international market by themselves.⁶ This left a gap, which cried out to be filled.

The British Council for Relations with Other Countries, as it was initially called before the abbreviation of its name to "The British Council", was set up in 1934, as the UK's belated riposte to French cultural promotion and the Axis Powers' more blatant cultural propaganda, in a period of mounting national and international rivalries. It could present itself, like the BBC, as operating at a distance from government, but usually pursued its objectives with the discreet, but effective, support of local diplomatic missions. In wartime, its sphere of influence had been severely curtailed by the scale of Nazi conquests; however, after 1945, with the onset of the Cold War, it treated expansion into newly liberated Europe as a top priority, as the entire region had been, in the words of the economic historian, R. H. Tawney, "the chief source and breeding-ground of the world's afflictions".⁷ By March 1947, the British Council had established "Representations" in no fewer than twenty-two European countries (East and West).⁸

Although Herbert Read was only formally invited to join the British Council's specialist Fine Arts Advisory Committee in autumn 1941, he had already played a role, as an outside selector for the British contribution to the Venice Biennale, in 1940 (withdrawn at a late stage).⁹ In 1940–41, at his own suggestion, he had selected, and written for, a British Council exhibition, *The Art*

of British Children, for touring in several instalments to the Americas and the Dominions.¹⁰ Subsequently he took part in almost all the selection committees for the Council's overseas exhibitions, as well as playing a decisive part in enriching the Council's loan collection with major works by Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and other British sculptors. Quite apart from his commitments to other institutions, including, notably, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, which he and Roland Penrose launched in 1946, he was involved as a selector and, frequently, author, lecturer, and publicist for at least ten British Council exhibitions, several of them large and most of them touring, between 1947 and 1953 alone, when most of the groundwork was laid for the future development of the British Council's visual arts work. And for the rest of the 1950s, the hard core of artists selected by the Council to show at numerous international exhibitions, including biennales, and in major touring exhibitions of British sculpture, was largely restricted to various combinations of the same ten, whom Read and his fellow selectors had first proposed for the Venice Biennales of 1948, 1950, and 1952.

Key Postwar International Exhibitions

From the late 1940s, a series of major international exhibitions played a crucial role not only in bringing together new constellations of artists, critics, and audiences for the first time, but also in stitching together a plausible narrative for the disrupted past and establishing the Modernist canon.¹¹ The key exhibitions, in this respect, were Rodolfo Pallucchini's first three Venice Biennales (1948, 1950, 1952),¹² Arnold Bode's and Werner Haftmann's first two editions of *documenta* (1955 and 1959—especially the former, with its retrospective, restorative character),¹³ and *50 Ans d'art moderne*, for the 1958 Brussels Expo, which was the only large exhibition of the decade to succeed in including a substantial number of artists from the Soviet Union and its East European satellites.¹⁴ National selections played a prominent part in all these exhibitions, and British sculptors were represented in all of them—often exhibited as a closed group (as in Venice) or perceived, written about, and seemingly displayed as a national “school”, or tendency. In every case, Herbert Read was involved in the initial selection.¹⁵ All of these exhibitions were supported by the British Council's Fine Arts Department. From 1948 to 1970 this was headed by Lilian Somerville, and had its own growing collection, a workshop and fine art handlers, its own government-backed indemnity scheme, and its recourse to the global network of “Representations”.

These early international exhibitions may be viewed as part of a Western European programme of moral and spiritual reconstruction, which gave Britain a unique opportunity for showcasing its artists. Of course, the British Council was as anxious to show painters as sculptors, but whilst Ben Nicholson, Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash, and others, commanded respect in Britain, they were viewed by many overseas critics as faintly *retardataire* and unable to bear close comparison with their French peers, who carried off the most prestigious awards. Sculpture was an altogether different matter. Henry Moore's well-timed emergence on the international scene—first with his Museum of Modern Art retrospective of 1946 in New York, and then, most importantly, with his prize-winning contribution to the British Pavilion at the 1948 Venice Biennale—filled a gap left by the ageing of the pioneers associated with the School of Paris, and created an opening from which his younger colleagues were able to profit in subsequent years. Better still, Moore's outstanding success in Paris at the end of 1949,¹⁶ with the Council's first major touring exhibition of his work, assured him a place in the line of continuity that had been established by the sculptors of the interwar period, and provided him with legitimation in the one place that really still mattered, in received opinion.¹⁷

British Sculpture in the First Postwar Venice Biennales

The 1948 Venice Biennale was the first pan-European exhibition of modern art since the War, and it had the ambition to inform and enlighten a broad public. Behind this lay an intention to exorcize the ghosts of the recent, fascist past—symbolized by their appropriation of the vacant German Pavilion for a major survey of French Impressionist painting—and to privilege all forms of abstraction and individual forms of expression, in preference to the figurative styles associated with totalitarian regimes. This Biennale was to be a celebration of the “new climate of freedom” and the “hard conquest of the European spirit”, in the words of Rodolfo Pallucchini, the general secretary of the exhibition and a Christian Democrat.¹⁸ Similarly, the Biennale’s President, Giovanni Ponti, stated: “Art invites all men, irrespective of national frontiers and ideological barriers, to share in a language designed to unite them all in a universal family and an intense humanism, as opposed to some form of Babelish disunity and disharmony.”¹⁹ In the British Pavilion, Henry Moore’s sculpture fitted in perfectly with this programme, and was paired with a selection of paintings and watercolours by J. M. W. Turner, in response to a request from Pallucchini for work by Turner, John Constable, or Richard Parkes Bonington, to serve as a preface to Lionello Venturi’s exhibition of Impressionists. Moore could be viewed at the time as the latest, and, at the age of forty-nine, youngest offshoot of the Modernist sculptural tradition, in terms defined as the School of Paris, from Rodin to the present.

Moore was at hand to help with the installation of his work: a total of thirty-six sculptures, dating from 1925 to the present, and fifty-three works on paper, from 1930 to 1946. Herbert Read wrote the short introductory essay for the catalogue, which was to become a standard point of reference for many foreign critics writing about Moore’s work: his humble origins as a miner’s son, his attachment to the British landscape, his cosmopolitan connections, his discovery of “primitive” and archaeological sculpture in the British Museum, his indebtedness to the artists of the Renaissance (notably, Michelangelo), and his assimilation into the grand European lineage of modern sculpture, from Constantin Brancusi to Alexander Archipenko, Jacques Lipchitz, Hans Arp, Henri Laurens, and Alberto Giacometti. Read showed due respect for Moore’s adherence to the doctrine of “truth to materials”, and commented on his references to the natural landscape and the morphological processes of nature. Above all, he paid tribute to Moore for his “humanism” (whatever that meant) and preoccupation with the human figure. In sum, Read concluded that only the painter Pablo Picasso could rival the sculptor Moore, in his ability to combine formal dynamics with an “animist” spirit.²⁰ Reactions to the exhibition as a whole, and to Moore’s success in carrying off the sculpture prize, in stiff competition with, among others, the Austrian figural sculptor Fritz Wotruba, were rapturous, and paved the way for a reappraisal of the “English” contribution to European Modernism—the terms “English” and “British” being henceforth virtually interchangeable, from the Continental perspective.

For the main exhibition of the 1950 Venice Biennale, the organizers again tried to create links with the past and to round out the picture of historic Modernism, with exhibitions of work by the Cubists, the Fauves, and Der Blaue Reiter, and a small, but choice, selection of sculpture by Arp and Ossip Zadkine (who won the Grand Prize), with an accompanying essay by Giulio Carlo Argan, and thirty-six sculptures and drawings by Laurens. The British Council did not quite pull off its earlier success with Moore in the British Pavilion. This time round, they showed sculpture and drawings by Hepworth in the same long room at the back of the building that had been used for Moore, and paintings by the colourist Matthew Smith in the side rooms. As before, the contemporary works were offset by a historical display in the main, central space—this time, of

English landscapes by Constable. Hepworth's contribution comprised a strong selection of twenty-two sculptures, dating from 1927 to 1949, eleven abstract drawings, eleven hospital drawings, and fifteen drawings of the human figure. The interpretation put on the work by the author David Lewis in his catalogue introduction, basically conformed to the prevalent call for a new humanism, though it also touched on her formal treatment of light and space and hinted at a speculative, cosmic dimension.²¹ The exhibition came at a difficult moment for her in her professional and personal life. It is possible that the hospital and figure drawings in particular—all of them completed in the preceding two to three years—gave the impression of a retreat from more radical positions in her work, and the public response appears to have been mixed. Whatever the reality, Herbert Read put a positive spin on it when he reported to the British Council's Advisory Committee that "there were some who said that she would have been given the sculpture prize but for the fact that the prize went to an English sculptor last year, or (alternative explanation), but for the fact that she was a woman." Somewhat tellingly, he added that: "There was an inclination to regard her work as derivative from Moore."²² Hepworth herself seems to have provided some confirmation of this, when she wrote from Venice to a friend: "I'm a fair success so far . . . The Italians have never heard of an emancipated or intelligent woman, for another they won't believe I am 47 & refer to me as the young BH & again they presume I am pupil of H.M."; and, again, on 5 June: "the Moore situation pursues me also."²³ Yet Read's visit to the pavilion in the company of a large group of fellow AICA delegates, who were in Venice for their annual conference, seems to have been a success. Included in the group were a number of professional colleagues, who, soon enough, were themselves to be directly involved in exhibiting and writing about Hepworth's work.²⁴ In the absence of the usual stack of foreign press reviews in the archives, it is hard to gauge the true measure of Hepworth's success, but it is safe to say that for her, as for Moore, the international exposure she received marked a turning point in her career and meant that she would be permanently associated in people's minds with the new "school" of British sculpture.²⁵ By 1952, the number of countries participating in the Venice Biennale had risen from fourteen to twenty-six. The French included sculpture by Emile-Antoine Bourdelle, Lipchitz, and Germaine Richier in their selection, though it was Raoul Dufy, in their pavilion, who surprisingly carried off the painting prize. The Americans scooped the sculpture prize with a display dominated by fifteen mobiles by Alexander Calder. This time, the British Council gave up on the idea of combining old with new. Instead, it led on a retrospective of paintings by Graham Sutherland in the main room at the front of the building, with some further, vaguely surreal (or "super-real") paintings by Edward Wadsworth in the rooms at the side. For the long room at the back of the pavilion overlooking a wooded area of the *Giardini*, which had previously been occupied by Moore and Hepworth, in 1948 and 1950, Herbert Read brought together a selection of sculpture and drawings by eight younger artists (Robert Adams, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, Geoffrey Clarke, F. E. McWilliam, Bernard Meadows, and Eduardo Paolozzi) under the somewhat inauspicious title, *New Aspects of British Sculpture* (fig. 2).²⁶ By way of an introduction to this selection, two new monumental works by Moore (*Double Standing Figure*, 1950) and Butler (*Woman*, 1949), were stationed outside the entrance to the building at the front. Most of the "young" sculptors (young in career terms, that is) had emerged since the end of the War and had spent their formative years in military service. Their work, in a variety of different cut, welded, and collaged materials, might be described as a reaction against the earlier work of Moore. Whilst influenced by his example, it also took elements from other artists of the School of Paris, including Calder, Giacometti, and Richier, and exuded an altogether different

atmosphere of existential uncertainty. The essayist Egon Vietta was among several European critics to comment on the success of these sculptors and on their sudden emergence: “It is not the French but the young English sculptors who are the sensation of the Biennale.”²⁷



Figure 2

Installation view, *New Aspects of British Sculpture* display in the British Pavilion, XXVIth Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, 1952.

The young sculptors' collective success and branding by the critics as a “school” caught even the British organizers unaware, in part, since they had expected Graham Sutherland, with his Continental connections, to be the star of the show.²⁸ As British Council records explain: “The inclusion in the British pavilion at Venice in 1952 of a group of works by various young sculptors was considered necessary, as a demonstration of the fact that Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth are not isolated phenomena but parents of a considerable school”, with its own distinctive characteristics. However, “there was little expectation of the extent of its success abroad.”²⁹ Much of the success was due to Read's short catalogue essay, which captured the darkening mood of the time, with its intimations of war and nuclear annihilation. He warned that “the monumental calm that a Winckelmann had imposed on the formal imagination of Europe”, and the dreams of the Constructivists, who had “turned away from the ruins to create new values, to create the images of a civilization not yet born, perhaps never to be born”, had “gone for ever”. These younger artists had adopted more of a linear, cursive style, preferring metal to stone, and construction and assemblage to carving and modelling, in keeping with their “avoidance of massiveness, of monumentality”. Like the majority of the young sculptors he was writing about, Read had been exposed, early on, to the existential philosophy and the stylistic innovations of the French sculptors, and he found apt expression in words for the “iconography of despair” and the “geometry of fear” that served temporarily to mask their individual differences.³⁰

Not everyone at home was impressed with the achievement in Venice, however. The British public and conservative establishment were still hostile to contemporary art in general, and the British Council always felt vulnerable to criticism from the right-wing Beaverbrook press. Therefore, an article on 24 June by the Rome correspondent of the normally sympathetic, left-leaning *Manchester Guardian*, criticizing the British Council for its choice of artists for the British Pavilion, called for, and received, an immediate reply from Herbert Read, who declared, no doubt truthfully, that: “As commissario I was overwhelmed with congratulations. Again and again I was told that the British Pavilion was the most vital, the most brilliant, and the most

promising in the whole Biennale”—an opinion that was evidently shared by many of the British and foreign delegates to the International Artists’ Congress in Venice at the end of September.³¹ As if that were not enough to allay the anxieties at home—and it evidently was not—it also spurred Alfred Barr into a ringing defence of his British colleagues, in a letter to the newspaper, published on 3 September, in which he declared that: “As an American I can scarcely express my astonishment at [your correspondent’s] half-querulous, half contemptuous critique of what seemed to many foreigners the most distinguished national showing in the whole Biennale.” He gave fulsome praise to the British Council, for their “extraordinary work”, not least in being the only country to publish its own special catalogue, and declared that, “the exhibition was astutely planned, boldly selected, and installed with exceptional taste and intelligence.” He concluded: “Finally, instead of some public official or administrator, the Council sent as British Commissioner one of the most distinguished philosophers of art now writing in English, Herbert Read.”³² The critic Robert Melville recalled: “When the works of several young British sculptors were brought together for the first time at the Venice Biennale in 1952, the occasion seemed to mark the rise of a new British school with well-defined characteristics of its own.” He suggested that all these young sculptors “were involved in a violent yet methodological struggle to eradicate from their work every stylistic, doctrinal and philosophical connection with the art of Henry Moore. The British exhibition faithfully reflected the climax of that rupture.”³³ In reality, it was never as simple as that, and there was both continuity and a temporary convergence between the generations. A similar exhibition with the title *Young British Sculptors*, that toured six centres in Germany between 1955 and 1956, enjoyed considerable success, as did the numerous occasions on which these artists were included in group exhibitions throughout the decade. However, the collective atmosphere, and the occasion provided by Venice, could not be repeated, after these sculptors had been launched on their individual careers.

British Sculpture at the São Paulo Bienal, and South American Responses

One outcome of Herbert Read’s success with the sculpture selection for the 1952 Venice Biennale, was his appointment as British Commissioner and international jury member for the second São Paulo Bienal. This Bienal was founded in 1950–51 in a mood of optimism and competitive rivalry, after the successful revival of the postwar Venice Biennale—along similar lines to it, and with some of the same structures, including the national selections, international ambitions, and Cold War rivalries (in this case, largely a regional struggle for influence, between the Old World and the New). Read had been in touch with the Italian-Brazilian founder, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, from the beginning and had possibly ventriloquized Matarazzo’s request for significant British participation, with representative work by, for example, Moore, Hepworth, and Ben Nicholson. Only at the time of the second Bienal in 1953, however, was the British Council in a financial position to do much about this, by sending out a small retrospective of Moore’s sculptures and drawings (including his recent, important, *King and Queen* and *Draped Reclining Figure*, both 1952–53), along with work by five prominent painters of different generations. Read served on the jury which awarded the Grand Prize to Henri Laurens—possibly as a result of French lobbying, and a reflection of the fact that two of the rival candidates, Moore and Calder, had already carried off the Grand Prize in Venice in 1948 and 1952 respectively—though Moore received widespread praise for his contribution and was rewarded with the Prize for a Foreign Sculptor, in compensation. In 1955, the British Council sent a retrospective of Ben Nicholson’s work, which was rewarded with the Prize for a Foreign

Painter, and, in a further echo of its 1952 selection for Venice, accompanied this with an enlarged version of work by seven of the eight original participants in *New Aspects of British Sculpture*, with the addition of two others: Leslie Thornton and Austin Wright. The entire British section in São Paulo then toured to Rio de Janeiro, as the inaugural exhibition of the new Museu de Arte Moderna, and on to Montevideo, Lima, and Caracas, in keeping with the Council's practice of touring its main contribution to São Paulo to a number of capital cities in the region, largely at the expense of the local hosts—a practice that continued up until the abolition of national sections at the Bienal, around the turn of the century.

Ana Gonçalves Magalhães, in her essay in this issue of *British Art Studies*, gives a detailed description of the reception of Barbara Hepworth's work at the 1959 fifth São Paulo Bienal, which was of capital importance to her subsequent career—not least, in influencing her nomination to create a memorial to her friend, Dag Hammarskjöld, whom she first met in New York that autumn, fresh from her triumph in São Paulo.³⁴ In this instance, Hepworth's exhibition of sculptures and drawings, which were practically all new (in contrast to the retrospective character of her Venice showing in 1950) went on to the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, under the direction of Jorge Romero Brest, and museums in Venezuela, Chile (Valparaíso and Santiago), and Uruguay, meeting, in general, with a warm critical reception, often enough, however, simply based on the catalogue text by J. P. Hodin, rather than any direct knowledge or experience of the artist's work or its context—something the Council had tried to counter, for instance, by lining up sympathetic academics to talk about her work and, in one or two cases, inviting them to visit the artist in Cornwall.³⁵ The Chilean sculptor Lorenzo Berg Costa, who came into the latter category, was awarded a grant to visit Hepworth in St Ives, and reported on his return that she showed a spiritual affinity to classical fifth-century BC Greek sculpture, at the same time referring also to her friend and contemporary, Henry Moore, as “possibly, the main global influence on contemporary sculpture”.³⁶ The critic Victor Carvacho, writing one month earlier for the same newspaper, did not have the good fortune to travel to England or meet the artist behind this “artistic event of the greatest possible perfection”, but he did have the benefit of earlier attending a lecture by Read, that “most transparent of historians of modern art”, at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Washington, where he also heard mention for the first time of artists including Paolozzi, Armitage, and Chadwick.³⁷ Several other commentators, in the course of the tour, referred to the existence of an English “school” and to the British Council's touring exhibition, a couple of years previously, of work by the group of young artists (Armitage, Butler, Chadwick, and Paolozzi among them), for whom Moore and Hepworth had paved the way. María Luisa Terrens, writing enthusiastically and perceptively for *El País* in Montevideo (27 April 1960), remarked that local audiences were woefully unprepared for an exhibition of this quality, given the lack of exhibitions of work by foreign artists and the fact that there were only three modern (male) sculptors worthy of the name in her country—Eduardo Yepes, Germán Cabrera, and the late Nerses Ounanian. On the other hand, an anonymous reviewer for an English-language newspaper in Buenos Aires considered that the exhibition there “looks fussy and appears to lack space”, as well as being “less likely to appeal to prevailing Anglo-Argentine tastes”. Whilst expressing his appreciation of some of the later works (presumably, the figural drawings), he advised visitors to the exhibition to ignore the catalogue altogether, as it gave the impression, either that its author (J. P. Hodin) thought the whole exercise to be meaningless or that what he was trying to do for the artist was “what an imaginative advertising writer does for Scotch whisky”!³⁸

Henry Moore and German-speaking Audiences

Henry Moore's international career took off after Venice, in 1948. His success at the Biennale was such that the British Council quickly decided to arrange a new, touring exhibition of his work in Europe, starting in autumn 1949, in response to a number of requests it had received from leading museums in Brussels, Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, and Berne. Budgets were contained by introducing standard arrangements for sharing catalogue and transport costs between venues, except, initially, in Germany, for which special funding was required. Thus, the British Council was able to establish a durable system and an expanding network, which could easily be reinforced with occasional loans to museums for their own projects and displays, and a regular supply of smaller-scale travelling exhibitions, drawn from the Council's own growing collection of contemporary artists' work.

Everywhere, this initial exhibition tour of Henry Moore's work was an outstanding success, but held a special significance in Germany. It reached the still half-destroyed city of Hamburg in March 1950 at a moment of particular tension, when the British authorities were attempting, controversially, to demolish the largest dock in the city. This may have kept down the number of visitors, but the response of the critics was also equivocal: they "stalked round the subject, well-disposed, but cautious, striving to define".³⁹ Carl Georg Heise, the Director of the Kunsthalle, which hosted the exhibition, urged visitors to go to the exhibition with an open mind, and called this "a question of enlarging our artistic horizon, badly narrowed through the War and Hitler's influence". The dilemma was well expressed in an article in the *Lübecker Freie Presse*, on 22 March: "Modern art is again and again a riddle, because we still feel and deplore the loss of representational reality." According to the British Council's Liaison Officer in Germany, several of the critics were "overcome by the idea of the machine-age" and "haunted by the tension between East and West". Not a few felt disturbed by the difficulty they had in distinguishing between art and life; in the words of the critic for *Die Welt*, on 22 March: "Look around in the tram: everywhere Henry Moores. What he experienced in the shelters during the blitz we should be able to understand, too . . . Sweat, blood, and tears. That's what it is: man hunted by the machine taking refuge in the earth!" By far the most upbeat account was given by Werner Haftmann, the "young critic from Munich", whose long speech, delivered at the opening, was reprinted as an article in *Die Zeit* on 12 March, in which he concluded: "If art can express the peculiar humanity of a period in a spiritual form, then this expression is to be found in the work of Moore." Summing up, a Mr Murray-Paillie of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Branch of the Control Commission (one of the now celebrated "Monuments Men") concluded that: "Political crisis both external and internal did not help much. But we have had 297 visitors in the first week." He added that, although the exhibition had not been notably popular with the general public, it had caught the attention of artists, collectors, and dealers — two artists, making the journey on foot from Berlin, to see it (a distance of some 300 km). By the time the exhibition reached Berne, at the end of its European tour, the Director of the Kunsthalle, Dr Arnold Rüdinger, had no hesitation in placing Moore's work in the company of Lipchitz, Marino Marini, and Giacometti, declaring that: "Since the decline of England's world power, however, a new world power seems to be proclaiming itself in England: that of sculpture and painting. And the messenger who bears the glad tidings is no limping cripple."⁴⁰ Intriguingly, however, reports in the local press of a *contretemps* at the opening of the exhibition brought to light a sharp difference of opinion about the merits of Moore's newest work since his turn from an experimental phase, typified by the abstract string pieces of the late

1930s, to a more popular accessible style, anticipated by the wartime “Shelter Drawings”, when he had stopped making sculpture for a while. Namely, the principal speaker at the opening, the Munich-based British critic, John Anthony Thwaites,⁴¹ who had known Moore since the early 1930s and had once owned some of his works, had the temerity to point out that, from the time of the Shelter Drawings onwards, “Moore has consistently moved away from abstract sculptural form towards a ‘more stylized naturalism’, because ‘he wishes to be understood not only by the small group of the friends of art who are filled with enthusiasm by his abstract sculptures, but also by the great mass of the public.’”⁴² The works Thwaites had in mind included the *Madonna and Child* (1943–44), that Moore had created for St Matthew’s Church, Northampton, and certain of the recent “Family Groups”, represented in the exhibition in eleven large photographic blow-ups; as well as (it might be surmised) the *Three Standing Figures* (1947–48) from the open-air sculpture display in Battersea Park, here represented in replica. Needless to say, the artist, who was present at the opening, “strongly disagreed with Mr. Thwaites’ statement, but did not have any opportunity for saying so in public”.⁴³ And it was the large-scale works—increasingly editioned, and in bronze—that Moore turned to making in the decade that followed, partly under the pressures of success and partly in response to the numerous commissions that started to flow in.

Sculpture Parks and Public Art

The stylistic debate over figuration versus abstraction was a notable feature of the 1950s, and is reflected in Thwaites’s comments. However, there were also arguments within the Modernist movement itself, between those who were trying to reach out to a new public and those who were perceived to be more hermetic in their concerns (often associated with varying degrees of geometric abstraction). Many artists, like Moore, who had belonged to the beleaguered avant-gardes of the 1930s, now sought to break out of their self-imposed—or -induced— isolation, by experimenting with more “accessible” styles and large-scale “public” work that courted social and social democratic engagement. Sculpture parks, open-air sculpture displays, and sculpture commissions, formed a part of what became a widespread movement to build new audiences for modern art; to provide public amenities; to promote urban regeneration; and, on occasion, to offer restitution for the ravages of war. The first international open-air display of sculpture on the Continent took place in a wooded park at Sonsbeek on the outskirts of Arnhem (The Netherlands) in summer 1949, and was repeated at three-yearly intervals thereafter, until 1958. It was directly inspired by the London County Council’s first outdoor exhibition in Battersea Park the previous year, and had similar aims. As was common, artists were grouped by nationality, and a recent cast of Henry Moore’s *Three Standing Figures* was sited (like the Darley Dale stone originals in Battersea) in a prominent position on top of a gentle mound, with trees behind (fig. 3).



Figure 3

Henry Moore, *Three Standing Figures*, Darley Dale Stone, h: 213.4cm, 1947.

A similar institution, with similar motives, was launched in Middelheim (Belgium) the following summer, again with Battersea Park as a model, and with the explicit intention of making modern art “accessible” to ordinary people. The parkland was a former military depot for German and Allied forces, now returned to the public. In his inaugural speech, the Burgomaster of the town declared: “Where stupidity and hatred have lain waste works of the spirit, born in different lands, have found a meeting place.”⁴⁴ The initial advisers on the project included Moore himself, Henry Moore, Ossip Zadkine (soon to become universally known for his bronze memorial to the destruction of Rotterdam, *De Verwoeste Stad* [The Destroyed City], 1951–53), and two critics and AICA members closely connected to the Venice Biennale: Umbro Apollonio and Rodolfo Pallucchini. Over the years, Middelheim succeeded in building up a major international collection of Modernist sculpture, including, during the 1950s, a cast of Moore’s *King and Queen* (1952–53), Hepworth’s *Cantate Domino* (1958) (touched on in Ana Gonçalves Magalhães’s essay in the present publication), and others by Lynn Chadwick and Jacob Epstein. Other early initiatives of this nature included temporary outdoor displays beside the Alster in Hamburg (1953);⁴⁵ in the mining town of Recklinghausen, in the Ruhr (with British participation in 1952–53 and 1955–56)⁴⁶ and, most importantly, in the sculpture garden set up by Abraham Marie Hammacher at the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo (The Netherlands), which was opened to the public in 1961.⁴⁷

It is difficult, at this distance in time, to appreciate the extent to which Moore came to dominate the international field of sculpture in the 1950s. A great deal of this was due, not only to the exceptional accessibility of his work, through exhibitions and publications, but to his sheer force of personality, commented on by almost all he encountered: his humble origins, his evident sincerity, his simplicity and modesty, and his openness to colleagues’ ideas and concerns. He travelled with exhibitions of his work whenever possible (frequently, in parallel to his friend, Herbert Read) and took a personal interest in every aspect of its display and reception, usually making a special point of visiting professional colleagues in their studios and in the art schools where they taught. His visits, like the two-and-a-half weeks he spent in Greece at the time of an opening of an exhibition of his work in Athens, in February 1951, turned into triumphal tours. A good example of this was provided by his 1954–55 exhibition tour in Yugoslavia in 1945 (which

Želimir Košćević describes in detail in the present publication), of which he remarked on his return to England, that he had been treated “as something between a film star and royalty”.⁴⁸ In his demeanour he seemed to exemplify the stereotypical Englishman, with his love of individual freedom and tolerance, and in his work he displayed a moderate form of Modernism that addressed a wide audience and offered them a measure of reassurance in a troubled world. Almost unwittingly, he was treated as a standard bearer for Western democratic ideals, and it was more than natural that his work should have been treated with such enthusiasm in countries like Yugoslavia in 1954 and Poland in 1959, that were shaking themselves free from the grip of socialist-realist aesthetics.

German Revendications and Cold War Tensions

Unquestionably, the most important field of activity for the British Council, and for the promotion of British sculpture in Europe in the 1950s and beyond, now became not Paris, but the newly established Federal Republic of West Germany, with its German-speaking hinterland in Austria and Switzerland and affinities to the Lowlands. Germany, with its numerous galleries and Kunstvereine, its publishing industry and strong regional media, its universities, its educated middle-class audiences, and, not least, its history and geography, offered the greatest number and variety of openings for contemporary art.⁴⁹ In the early days of economic recovery, even the more adventurous German museum directors were cautious about mounting exhibitions that might alienate the public, but found that audiences were genuinely keen to explore new ideas—possibly, as a way of forgetting the recent past. Cold War struggles in Central Europe added a strongly ideological dimension to the “hearts and minds” campaign of the 1950s, with Moore emerging in public perceptions as a champion of freedom, (social) democracy, and human rights. Otto Benesch, the Director of the Albertina Museum in the then quadripartite, occupied Austrian capital, Vienna, pleading for an exhibition of Moore’s drawings, wrote: “We are really a long way east. It is vital that we keep our relations with the great art centres of the West. If our museums are to lose this contact, then that is one more position that we surrender to the Powers of Darkness.”⁵⁰ However, the reactions to contemporary art—particularly, from this part of the world—could also take other forms of negativity, whose violent undertones were often far in excess of anything that could be thrown at modern artists in the distinctly cool emotional environment of postwar Britain. A prime example of this was the controversy about “degenerate art”, unleashed in the letter columns of the local newspaper by a certain Dr. med. Otto Müller, in connection with a touring exhibition of Henry Moore’s sculpture and drawings in autumn 1954. As Müller put it, rhetorically: “If all that is not degenerate art, what then is ‘degenerate art’?”⁵¹ Justifying his own position in the light of Emile Zola’s theory of realism (though he did not mention the novelist by name), he took as his starting point the notion that art was “nature seen through the temperament of the artist”, though the implicit reference was to a more recent, and more sinister, basis for aesthetic judgment. The editor allowed the correspondence to run for some days, before coming down on the side of the artist and closing it down, though not before allowing Dr. Müller to return to the attack, by likening Moore’s beechwood sculpture, *Figure I* (1932), in “strictly medical terms”, to a “pigeon-breasted creature with a hole in its head”.⁵² Examples of this kind of attack on foreign, Modernist art abounded in the 1950s, and were often related to the Austrian art historian Hans Sedlmayr’s pessimistic diagnosis of contemporary culture, in his influential book, *Verlust der Mitte* (Art in Crisis: The Lost Centre), first published in 1948.⁵³

***documenta* and Shaping the Canon**

The exhibition *documenta*, in Kassel in 1955 (the number “i” was only added later), was primarily intended to throw a bridge over the twelve wasted years of National Socialism and performed much the same function for Germans as the early postwar Venice Biennales had done for Italians, in trying to mend the fabric linking contemporary art with a forgotten, or occluded, past. At the same time, it brought together some of the scattered Modernist impulses from the Western capitalist democracies, in defiance of the state-sponsored realism that was favoured in the communist regime on the other side of the border, and in the Communist parties of Western Europe. It was intended as a lesson on the past and an experiment in the future, set in the context of a city which had been 80 percent destroyed and was undergoing a process of comprehensive redevelopment. The founder, Arnold Bode, had opted for installing the exhibition in the simplest possible fashion, with the kind of materials and techniques that he had learned to use in trade fairs, and with an eye to dramatic effect. As far as the sculpture was concerned, a sequence of spaces was inaugurated inside the main entrance to the not yet restored Fridericianum, with Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s *Kneeling Woman* (1911), which had featured prominently in the *Degenerate Art* exhibition of 1937, followed by a marble *Venus* (1928) by Aristide Maillol in an adjacent corridor, leading to a large sculpture hall, in which the tone was set by Arp in the foreground, a Calder mobile in the middle ground, and Moore’s upright *King and Queen* against the back wall, dominating the scene from afar (fig. 4). As Doris Schmidt, the critic for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, put it:

*something new and exciting in this century is the fact that for the first time Europe is receiving new stimuli from England—a country that has traditionally been viewed as hostile to sculpture . . . Thus, a new door opens for sculpture in our time, in the soft light of the English climate. The range of Moore’s influence is comparable to that of Picasso; in his figural works, Moore has turned into the counterpart of the painter around twenty years his senior, who casts a long shadow over the art of our time.*⁵⁴

And partly in homage to Moore, no doubt, and the younger British sculptors, who were exhibited together as a group, some musicians from the Kassel opera house played the Phantasy Quartet, opus 2, by Benjamin Britten at the opening ceremony. Will Grohmann, writing in the Berlin newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*, declared that Moore, with a superlative display of ten sculptures, along with younger sculptors such as Armitage and Chadwick, were among the stars of the show. However, John Anthony Thwaites, whom we have encountered already, was again critical about Moore’s transition from experimental, spatially daring forms towards a “not very felicitous” use of expressive (“ecstatic”) line in *King and Queen* and his return to modelling. Overall, he saw this as a missed opportunity and regretted the absence of key figures such as Brancusi and Julio Gonzalez, and the inclusion of someone like Max Bill, at the expense of a mixed bag of sculptors, including Robert Adams, Robert Jacobsen, Norbert Kricke, Ibram Lassaw, and David Smith, and German academic modellers such as Gerhard Marcks and Hermann Blumenthal.⁵⁵



Figure 4

Installation view, Sculpture Hall at *documenta I*, Kassel, Germany, 1955, (showing works by artists including Arp, Laurens, Calder, Moore).

In some ways, *documenta ii*, in 1959, marked the watershed in the international presentation of a “school” of British figural sculptors in the 1950s, just as it signalled the highpoint and prefigured the rapid demise of European *informel* painting, in competition with new, partially market-driven, impulses from North America.⁵⁶ In the same year, the Paris *Biennale des Jeunes* was launched, in a bid to reassert French—and European—cultural supremacy, but the times were clearly changing. And one of the things that *documenta ii* did was to stake the claim of West German artists to equal attention with the rest. As far as the sculptural component was concerned, Bode and Haftmann delegated their authority (and, broadly, their overall approach) to the art historian Eduard Trier, whose book, *Moderne Plastik* (Modern Sculpture, 1955), took over where Haftmann had left off and laid the theoretical basis for the selection.⁵⁷ This time, the main display was in a specially created open-air arena immediately in front of the still-ruined Baroque Orangery in the parklands of the Karlsau, and, quite consciously, provided continuity with the open-air sculpture displays that had been such a feature of the decade (fig. 5). For the occasion, Arnold Bode constructed a stage in front of the ruins, at the centre of which Henry Moore occupied pride of place, as the pre-eminent sculptor of the postwar period, with the maquette for his UNESCO sculpture (*Reclining Figure*, 1958) and around ten other sculptures, including his significantly placed *Fallen Warrior* (1958) (fig. 6). Figurative sculpture predominated—especially, that of the “School of Paris”, with the inclusion of Brancusi and Gonzalez this time, as well as Arp and the recently deceased Henri Laurens—and the British sculptors were again present in force, and again received many favourable, though critically undifferentiated comments in the media.⁵⁸ Most of the sculpture was placed on brick and cement plinths, in a maze of whitewashed walls, offering a combination of close-up views and long vistas, to which the ruined buildings and tree-lined parkland provided a fitting backdrop.⁵⁹ This part of the exhibition, and the adjacent café with six Picasso “Bathers” (*Les Baigneurs*, 1958), standing in a pool of water, was unticketed, in keeping with Trier’s (and his colleagues’) view that “sculpture is public art, to a higher degree than any of the other visual arts and, as such, needs, therefore, to assert its presence.”⁶⁰ Like its predecessor, it was an enormous success with the general public, but *documenta ii* left historical gaps—this time, in its attempt to sketch out the entire panorama of “Art since 1945”. However, it evidently succeeded in one of its principal aims. As one critic

put it: “At one and the same time, the past has been laid to rest and the present has us in its grip.”⁶¹



Figure 5

Installation view, Arnold Bode's open-air stage at *documenta I*, Kassel, Germany, 1955.

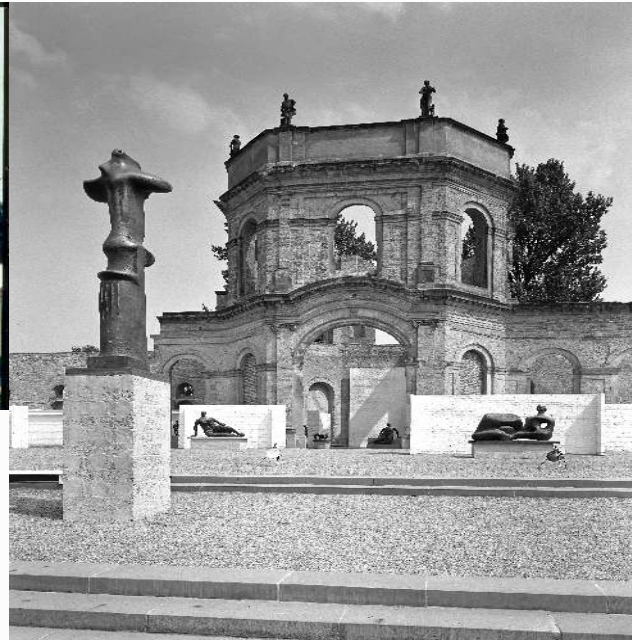


Figure 6

Installation view, Arnold Bode's open-air stage at *documenta I*, Kassel, Germany, 1955, (showing works by Henry Moore).

Berlin, and a Cold War Watershed

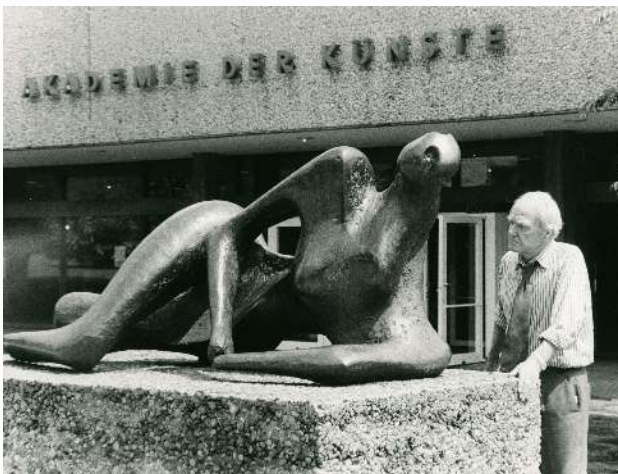


Figure 7

Henry Moore, *Reclining Figure*, 1956, bronze, (LH402) at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 1971. Digital image courtesy of Reinhard Friedrich.

A fitting end to this account is provided, perhaps, by reports on the showing of yet another touring retrospective of Henry Moore's works at the West Berlin Akademie der Künste, in the middle of its 1960–61 European tour. The artist, who had come out earlier to inspect the latest of his large-scale works to emerge from the Hermann Noack foundry (*Reclining Figure*, 1961), just in time for inclusion in the exhibition, was present at the opening, where he was made an Honorary Member of the Academy, and witnessed the unveiling of another of his bronze *Reclining Figures* (1956), which still rests on its plinth opposite the entrance to Werner Düttmann's newly completed Academy building, in the Hansaviertel (fig. 7). Unusually for the times, the entire ceremony was televised live, and the

artist and his old friend Will Grohmann gave each other a fraternal embrace in front of hundreds

of guests.⁶² Also present in force was a one-hundred-strong delegation of the International Association of Art Critics, headed by their President, James Johnson Sweeney, who had all made the trip from Munich at the end of their 13th General Assembly.⁶³ Herbert Readerbert was prevented by illness from attending, but his speech was read out for him by a British Council official. Later, Will Grohmann reported in a long appreciation, published in the West Berlin newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*, that

No one can speak with more authority about Moore than Sir Herbert Read. Read's works display a deep understanding of Moore's work. In this he has given us a lead so that the Germans understand the British artist better than any other nation. After all, Moore is a northerner, but we have only seen this in English writers, up to now. Moore is in the last analysis a man of the north of a quality indeed that we have met hitherto only among the greatest English poets.

And he went on to say that today, Moore was “a European phenomenon like the Spanish Picasso and like him so far-ranging in his vision as to embrace opposites and reconcile them to one whole.”⁶⁴ The exhibition received a (for the time) remarkable 10,000 visitors in the first week. However, “Later attendances were reduced by the Berlin crisis which from 13 August kept East Berliners away and West Berliners at home watching television. The final attendance figure was about 20,000. Even so, the catalogue was sold out and had to be reprinted.”⁶⁵ The British Ambassador to Bonn, who came to Berlin for the event and also spoke at the opening, suggested that Moore’s work should be viewed as an expression of “the Christian culture of Western Europe” and “a symbol of Western unity and cultural life”.⁶⁶

A West German Postlude

This chapter in Moore’s long creative life was closed, but the enduring impact of Moore’s sculpture on the German public at large, thanks to its almost daily use as a backdrop to the televised news of events at the Federal Chancellery, means that it is deeply ingrained in the memory of anyone who was old enough to take an interest in current affairs, up to the time of the transfer of the German capital from Bonn to Berlin, in 1999 (fig. 8). As the journalist Heinrich Wefing put it:

*The best-known work of art in the Federal Republic is presumably the British sculptor, Henry Moore’s “Two Large Forms”. Moore’s sculpture was not merely a decorative adjunct to the Chancellery, but became the emblem of the symbol-impooverished Bonn Republic; the art historian, Silke Wenk, once described “Large Two Forms” (1969) as an allegory of the modern welfare state.*⁶⁷

The old Chancellery, together with Moore’s sculpture of 1969, is now a classified monument, and the circus has moved on. The reality of that state, and the political symbolism of the work, have now been irrevocably consigned to the past. However, the later Moore’s humanist vision of the “Family of Man” seems to have exercised a continuing appeal for Germans, weighed down by feelings of personal and collective guilt and anxious to forget the suffering they had inflicted and endured. According to one calculation, there are still eighteen freely accessible sculptures by Moore in public spaces in twenty-three West German cities—many of them, carefully located under the direct supervision of the artist.⁶⁸



Figure 8

Henry Moore, *Large Two Forms*, 1966-69, bronze, (LH556) outside of the former Chancellery of the German Federal Republic, Bonn. Digital image courtesy of Henry Moore Archive.

By Way of a Conclusion

This account of the promotion of British Modernist sculpture in Europe has been conditioned by a reading of contemporary sources. It was only during the 1950s, and partly in reaction to the traumas of the previous decade, that a systematic attempt (however inadequate) could be made to establish a canon for Western Modernism (“*Westkunst*”), through a series of key exhibitions and publications such as those referred to above. Nowadays, as far as sculptural histories go, any fresh assessment of the period would pay somewhat critical attention to Henry Moore’s postwar output, which had arguably lost some of its edge (the 2010 exhibition at Tate Britain tended to support this view), and closer attention to the all-round achievements of his contemporary, Barbara Hepworth (this, too, was the intention of the exhibition of her work at Tate Britain, in 2015). More can be told today about both these artists’ indebtedness to the early pioneers—Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, in particular. Closer attention might also need to be paid to the individual trajectories of the sculptors who were hastily packaged together under the generic label of the “Geometry of Fear” and were heavily promoted at the time, but who had until recently come to be viewed with generic indifference. The same goes for the interesting and dynamic British constructive moment that developed out of the 1950s, and whose significance has been persistently downplayed in historical surveys (see Sam Gathercole’s essay on the subject in this publication). Above all, the reputation of Herbert Read, the most celebrated, the best informed, the most cosmopolitan, and one of the most generous writers about art in Britain at the time, deserves to be both thoroughly rehabilitated and soberly reassessed, in relation to a number of other excellent critics of the period such as John Berger, David Sylvester, and Lawrence Alloway (to name but a few), whose influence never reached far into Europe beyond

the Channel. If for nothing else, Read should be remembered for contributing in so many ways to the idea of an “English”, or “British” (the terms were virtually interchangeable) sculptural tradition, where nothing of the kind had existed before. Long after his disappearance from the scene, but thanks, in large part, to his advocacy of a peculiarly insular brand of avant-gardism, there grew up an almost self-perpetuating myth that each successive generation of art school graduates would coalesce (with their teachers) around a new, national, artists’ rallying point, from “New Generation” to “Saint Martin’s”, to the “New British Sculpture”, down to the “Young British Artists” of the 1990s—after which, the outdated notions of sculpture as a discrete medium, and of national schools or groupings, seem finally to have imploded.

This story altogether leaves out of account the vital contribution of the Independent Group, which was nurtured by the Institute of Contemporary Arts, over which Read presided, but whose artist members, such as Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, increasingly worked against his long-standing vested interests and commitments. These young Turks, who were working across the entire “long front of culture” (Alloway) were far more receptive than their mentor to the “winds of change” that blew in over the Atlantic. Also excluded from this account, as it was never acknowledged at the time, and is only now regarded as a fitting topic for research, was the growing importance and impact of the numerous artists and students who came to Britain from Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth after the War, and contributed, in ways that are still felt, to the richness of this country’s artistic heritage. All these fresh contributions to British sculpture from a wide variety of sources were largely excluded from the international Modernist canon that briefly took shape in the 1950s, then rapidly dissolved."

About the author

Henry Meyric Hughes is an independent curator and writer on art, Hon. President of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA, Paris), and Chair of the International Awards for Art Criticism (IAAC, Shanghai/ London). He is also a member of the Advisory Board of the Archives de la critique d’art and of the journal, *Critique d’art*, in Rennes and of the Boards of Iniva and Matt’s Gallery, London. He was a co-founder of the European Biennial for Contemporary Art, Manifesta (2003), and President of the Manifesta Foundation, Amsterdam (1996–2007). From 2007–15 he was Special Adviser for Council of Europe exhibitions.

He has been commissioner and curator for British contributions to the São Paulo Bienal (1978–79 and 1986–92) and the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (1979–92) and curator of the Cypriot Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2002–03). His co-curatorial projects have included *The Spirit of Romanticism in German Art, 1790–1990* (1994–95), *Blast to Freeze: British Art in the 20th Century*, and the XXX Council of Europe exhibition, **Verführung Freiheit: Kunst in Europa seit 1945** (Art in Europe since 1945). He has co-edited and translated a number of books on contemporary art and published numerous articles in a variety of languages, on topics ranging from criticism and curating to art in Eastern Europe.

Footnotes

1. Cited in Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd rev. English ed. (London: Lund Humphries, 1961), 311.

2. Herbert Read, "Threshold of a New Age", in *This Changing World*, ed. J. R. M. Brumwell (London: Routledge, 1944), 12.
3. The signing of the European Cultural Convention followed, in Paris, on 19 Dec. 1954 and was accompanied by the first in the Council of Europe's on-going series of large-scale pan-European exhibitions (now up to thirty), which was appropriately devoted to the theme of *L'Europe Humaniste*, at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 16 Dec. 1954—28 Feb. 1955.
4. Describing the circumstances which led to the creation of UNESCO and its offshoots, the Czechoslovak art historian Mojmir Vaněk recalled, in 1948: "Scarcely had the relations between artists and art critics that had been disrupted or severely limited by the recent War begun to be re-established than new international political tensions have started to impede their free development. The world is now tending to divide into blocs; travelling from country to country is sometimes becoming very difficult, not to say impossible; newspapers and periodicals are not often allowed across frontiers; even if only for monetary reasons, books are not put on sale outside the countries in which they have been printed; exhibitions going on tour to different countries often come up against insurmountable obstacles. And yet all these activities are indispensable, if art is to make any progress." Unpublished typescript paper, translated by Henry Meyric Hughes (hereafter HMH) from the French, delivered at the First International Congress of Art Critics, Paris, 21–26 June 1948. Archives de la critique d'art, Rennes.
5. The membership included art historians, such as Jean Cassou, the director of the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, and a hero of the French Resistance; the Austrian, Otto Benesch, a member of the Vienna School of art historians, Director of the Albertina, and AICA's Regional Secretary for Central Europe; the Swiss art historian, Carola Giedion-Welcker, who had written the first analytical history of modern sculpture in 1936 (revised and enlarged, 1955); the Italian art historian, Lionello Venturi, who had published the first history of art criticism in the same year; James Johnson Sweeney, who had taken the lead with Henry Moore's retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1946; Palma Bucarelli, the Director of the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, who provided a valuable staging post for exhibitions, including the Henry Moore retrospective of 1950–51; the Italian art historian, Giulio Carlo Argan (later, the first Communist Mayor of Rome), who published a short monograph on Henry Moore as early as 1948; the Dutchman, Abraham Marie Hammacher, the director of the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, who included a great deal of contemporary British work in the sculpture park he opened there in 1961 and in his 1969 publication, *The Evolution of Modern Sculpture: Tradition and Innovation* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1969); Jorge Romero Brest, from Buenos Aires, and Mário Pedrosa, from São Paulo, who both welcomed exhibitions of British sculpture in the 1950s (the latter, becoming curator of the Second São Paulo Bienal, where Read was a juror and Moore won the Prize for a Foreign Sculptor, in 1953); the classically trained Italian art historian Rodolfo Pallucchini, who became the General Artistic Director of the first five postwar editions of the Venice Biennale; Read's old prewar friend, the art critic, Will Grohmann, who likewise published a monograph on Moore, in German and English, in 1960; and the critic and art historian Werner Haftmann, who was the shaping force behind the first three editions of *documenta* in Kassel (1955, 1959, 1964), and whose *Painting in the Twentieth Century* (German, 1954 and English, 1960) was the first, and for many years the standard, account of the subject. (The German edition was dedicated to Herbert Read, along with Will Grohmann, Siegfried Giedion, and Jean Gebser.)

6. After 1945, a number of galleries with international connections, such as Lefevre, Mayor, Redfern, and Zwemmer, slowly got going again, but few of these, with the exception of Gimpel Fils, had a particular vocation for sculpture. Dealers were obliged to follow, rather than lead, and they were hamstrung by the paucity and conservatism of local collectors. Import restrictions lasted until 1956 and the procedures for moving goods across national frontiers were complex and lengthy. Throughout this period, many artists had to work with an agent, if they were fortunate enough to have one, rather than with a commercial gallery. However, the British Council stocked photographs of works by the artists it was primarily concerned with and, in Henry Moore's case, largely regulated the flow of foreign visitors to his studio.
7. See A. J. S. White, *The British Council: The First 25 Years, 1934–1959: A Personal Account* (London and Eccles: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965), 65.
8. See White, *The British Council*, 65–66.
9. This project was dropped on the outbreak of war, and the planned exhibition was shown at Hertford House (the Wallace Collection) instead in May–June 1940. See the Minutes of the 14th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 3 Sept. 1940. The German artist, Arno Breker, won the Grand Prize at the 1940 Venice Biennale, though in the absence of Russian, French, and British participation.
10. Minutes of the 16th and 17th Meetings of the Fine Arts Advisory Committee, on 3 Sept. 1940 and 4 March 1941.
11. For accounts of the history of the Venice Biennale, see Nancy Jachec, *Politics and Painting at the Venice Biennale, 1948–64: Italy and the Idea of Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007); Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895–1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968); and Enzo Di Martino, *The History of the Venice Biennale, 1895–2005* (Venice: Papiro Arte, 2005). For the British Pavilion at the Biennale, see Sophie Bowness and Clive Phillpot, eds., *Britain at the Venice Biennale 1895–1995* (London: British Council, 1995). For *documenta*, see Harald Kimpel, *documenta: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Cologne: Dumont, 1997) and Manfred Schneckenburger, ed., *documenta—Idee und Institution: Tendenzen, Konzepte, Materialien* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1983). For the São Paulo Bienal, see Margaret Garlake and Guy Brett, *Britain and the São Paulo Bienal/ A Grã-Bretanha e a Bienal de São Paulo, 1951–1991* (London: British Council, 1991). See also the exhibition catalogues of the Venice Biennale, 1948, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1960; *documenta* (1955, 1959); and the São Paulo Bienal, 1951, 1953, 1955, 1957, 1959.
12. Rodolfo Pallucchini, who was close to the governing Christian Democrats in Rome, was the Secretary-General of the Venice Biennale from 1948 to 1957. He was a classically trained art historian, favouring abstract styles over politically engaged figurative art, of the kind favoured by the Italian Communist Party and the *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti*.
13. Arnold Bode (1900–1977) was an architect, designer, and university lecturer, who organized the first four editions of *documenta* in Kassel (1955, 1959, 1964, 1968). For Werner Haftmann (1912–1999), see note 5 above.
14. *50 Ans d'art modern: exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958*, exh. cat. (Brussels: Palais International des Beaux-arts, 1958). The British contribution to this exhibition comprised seven out of the eight young sculptors from the 1952 exhibition at the Venice Biennale, described further on in this essay, to the exclusion of Geoffrey Clarke, but with the addition of Robert Clatworthy and Leslie Thornton.

15. Selection committees for these events were drawn from the British Council's main Visual Arts Committee and usually composed of the Chair of that Committee (often the director of a national museum) and two other individuals, including Herbert Read, who were closely connected with contemporary art (e.g. the Director of the Tate Gallery or another critic).
16. From Paris, Jean Cassou, at the Musée d'Art Moderne, reported on 18 Nov. 1949 that it had attracted record attendances for a living sculptor, with daily attendances of 254 visitors, in comparison with 60 for the recent Zadkine exhibition and 53 for the Wotruba exhibition. A record 1,500 guests attended the opening. See Report on Progress for the 48th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 11 July 1950.
17. The French critic Franck Elgar could have paid no higher tribute to Henry Moore than when he declared, on the occasion of his Paris exhibition (see above): "Henry Moore is without doubt the greatest sculptor of our time. We are grateful to the British Council for convincing us of this by organising this very important exhibition", and "We can now safely say that Moore's name is a by-word of artist's fame in the International School of Paris." Quoted in Minutes of the 46th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee on Tuesday, 8 Sept. 1949.
18. "Il nuovo clima di libertà, dura conquista dello spirit europeo." See Rodolfo Pallucchini, Introduction to *Catalogo XXIV Biennale di Venezia*, exh. cat. 2nd ed. (Venice: Edizione Serenissima, 1948), xii (trans. HMH).
19. Giovanni Ponti, Preface to *Catalogo XXIV Biennale di Venezia*, x (trans. HMH).
20. In essence, these were the arguments Read put forward in the Preface to his *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings* (London: Lund Humphries and A. Zwemmer, 1944). Copies of this publication were widely used by the British Council abroad for promotional purposes, and Read's interpretations formed the basis for the majority of critics' reviews.
21. David Lewis, text on Hepworth in the leaflet *Exhibition of Works by John Constable, Matthew Smith, Barbara Hepworth* for the XXVth Venice Biennale (London: British Council, 1950).
22. Letter of 3 July from Herbert Read to the British Council (Lilian Somerville), included in the Report on Progress for the 48th Meeting of the Fine Arts Committee, Tuesday, 11 July 1950.
23. Letter of 3 June to Norman Capener; quoted with thanks to Sophie Bowness.
24. AICA's Second General Assembly was held in Venice that year at the time of the opening of the Biennale, at the invitation of Rodolfo Pallucchini, Secretary-General of the Biennale and himself an AICA member. Members of AICA's Committee, the majority of whom may be expected to have attended both the Biennale itself and AICA's General Assembly, included Giulio Carlo Argan, Mário Barata, Palma Bucarelli, Jean Cassou, Paul Fierens, Clement Greenberg, Alfred Frankfurter, Carola Giedion-Welcker, Abraham Marie Hammacher, Sergio Milliet, Mário Perosa, James Johnson Sweeney, and Lionello Venturi.
25. The artist herself wrote enthusiastically to Lilian Somerville, after her return to England, to say that: "I came away feeling very satisfied—indeed more than satisfied for I felt a real appreciation of my work from many people and the visit to Venice was one of the major experiences of my life." Letter from Barbara Hepworth to Lilian Somerville, quoted in Report on Progress for the 48th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, Tuesday, 11 July 1950.
26. Herbert Read, Introduction to *New Aspects of British Sculpture* at the British Pavilion in Venice, exh. cat. for the British Pavilion at the XXVI Biennale di Venezia (London: British Council, 1952), n.p.

27. Egon Vietta, quoted in translation from *Das Kunstwerk* (Baden Baden, Part III), in Report on Progress to the 54th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, Tuesday, 9 Dec. 1952.
28. Read nevertheless was at pains to emphasize that whilst Henry Moore was "in some senses no doubt the parent of them all", these young sculptors were not members of any group, beyond sharing in "the iconography of despair or of defiance", transmitting a sense of "collective guilt", displaying a certain "cursive, linear quality" to their work, and avoiding monumentality. See Read, Introduction to *New Aspects of British Sculpture*, n.p.
29. Chairman's "Memorandum on the Function and Activities of the Fine Arts Department." Paper attached to the agenda for the 63rd Meeting of the Fine Arts Committee of the British Council, 24 April 1956.
30. See Read, Introduction to *New Aspects of British Sculpture*; also Margaret Garlake and James Hyman, *Henry Moore and the Geometry of Fear*, exh. cat. (London: James Hyman Fine Art, 2002).
31. Herbert Read, Letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, 26 June 1952.
32. Alfred Barr, Letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Sept. 1952. Report on Progress to the 54th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, Tuesday, 9 Dec. 1952.
33. Robert Melville, "A Note on the Recent Work of Henry Moore", leaflet, commissioned by the British Council, to accompany the touring exhibition of Henry Moore's works for Yugoslavia, 1955–56.
34. Barbara Hepworth's *Single Form* (1962–63), was unveiled on the United Nations Plaza, New York, 11 June 1964.
35. J. P. Hodin, Introduction to *Barbara Hepworth*, exh. cat. (London: British Council, 1959). The exhibition for the fifth Bienal do Museu e Arte Moderna, São Paulo, organized by the British Council, was seen in São Paulo from Sept.–Dec. 1959, then travelled throughout South America the following year.
36. Lorenzo Berg Costa, in *La Nación de Santiago*, 15 Oct. 1960 (trans. HMH). Press cuttings in British Council file ref. Gen/641/142R, in TLA 9712/2/191, Tate Archive.
37. Victor Carvacho, in *La Nación de Santiago*, 21 Sept. 1960 (trans. HMH). Press cuttings, as in note 36, above.
38. Anon., in *Buenos Aires Herald*, Sunday, 22 May 1960. Press cuttings, as in note 36, above.
39. Anon., undated British Council report. All quotations in this paragraph, including the quotations in English translation, are from the Report on Progress for the 48th Meeting of the British Council's Visual Arts Committee, Tuesday, 11 July 1950.
40. Arnold Rüdinger, quoted in translation from the Zürich newspaper, *Die Tat*, 17 June 1950, in the 49th Report on Progress for the British Council's Fine Arts Committee Meeting, Tuesday, 12 Sept. 1950.
41. John Anthony Thwaites (1909–1981) was a British-born member of the British diplomatic service, then "Monuments Man" in Munich, up until 1948. After that, he settled permanently in West Germany as a freelance critic and lecturer, and co-founder of the artists' group *Zen* 49. He had owned three of Moore's works, but lost them when he had to abandon his flat in Katowice in a hurry in 1939, in advance of the German invasion of Poland.
42. Report by Maria Netter, in *Luzerner Neueste*, 24 June 1950, cited in the British Council's 49th Report on Progress for the British Council's Fine Arts Committee's Meeting, Tuesday 12 Sept. 1950.

43. Report on Progress for the British Council's 49th Report on Progress for the Fine Arts Committee Meeting, Tuesday, 12 Sept. 1950, prepared by Lilian Somerville, to whom the artist presumably made this comment.
44. M. R. Bentein-Stoelen, Introduction to *Collection Catalogue of the Open-Air Museum of Sculpture, Middelheim* (Antwerp: Middelheim, 1993), ix.
45. The British contribution to this Hamburg event comprised Butler's *Girl and Boy* (1951) from the Arts Council's Collection, and Moore's own version of *Double Standing Figure* (1950); in parallel to this, Eduardo Paolozzi created a fountain, to a commission awarded to him by Werner Haftmann, at the Federal German Garden Architecture Festival in Hamburg, which prefigured the Federal Garden Festival in Kassel, in 1955, of which *documenta* was nominally a part.
46. The Ruhr Festival in Recklinghausen, in North Rhine-Westphalia, which continues to this day in a slightly different form, dated back to the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, when the Hamburg theatres sent representatives to the Ruhr in search of fuel for heating, to enable them to stay open to the public. The miners in Recklinghausen proved cooperative, and the first theatre festival there opened on Labour Day (as it has done, ever since) under the slogan, "*Kunst gegen Kohle*" (Art for Coal). See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruhrfestspiele> (accessed 6 May 2016). Henry Moore, himself a socialist and the son of a coal miner, exhibited work there in 1952–53 and again in 1955–56, both times with assistance from the British Council. His *Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 5* (1963–64) now sits in front of the Festival building, constructed in 1961–63 with funds from the Friends of the Ruhr Festival, whose founder, Theodor Heuss, was the first President of the German Federal Republic (1949–59), and had himself studied art history alongside economics and political science.
47. Hammacher, who purchased two carvings by Barbara Hepworth from her exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1954, went on to publish a monograph on the artist in 1958.
48. Letter to Lilian Somerville, quoted in the Progress Report for the 60th Meeting of the British Council's Visual Arts Committee, 24 May 1955.
49. Lilian Somerville to Controller Arts and Science Division, the British Council, on the Country Policy file for Germany ref. GTB/640/1, 24 April 1958, TGA/9712/1/6: "[In Germany] . . . the arts are held in far higher place in informed opinion than in this country."
50. Otto Benesch, in a letter, reporting on a travelling exhibition of drawings by Henry Moore, quoted in the Progress Report for the 53rd Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 1 July 1952.
51. Dr. med. Otto Müller, letters to the editor, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 6 and 12 Oct. 1953 (trans. HMM).
52. Müller, letters to the editor, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 6 and 12 Oct. 1953.
53. Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte* (Salzburg and Vienna: Otto Müller Verlag, 1948). The old controversy surrounding modern art in Germany dated at least as far back as to the period before the First World War, and took on particularly virulent dimensions at the time of the parallel exhibitions of *Degenerate Art* and state-approved art in Munich in 1937. In postwar Western Germany, it was reignited by Werner Haftmann's attack on Sedlmayr's polemic, at the German Art Historians' Conference in Munich, in 1949. It then rose to two climaxes: the first, at the *Darmstädter Gespräche* (Darmstadt Conversations), a series of symposia that ran from 1950 to 1975, in which Willi Baumeister and Sedlmayr took pole positions; and the second, in the very public quarrel in West Berlin between the Modernist critic Will Grohmann and the figurative painter Karl Hofer, which began in 1952 and only ended with the death of

- the latter in 1955. See Steffen Dengler, *Die Kunst der Freiheit?* (The Art of Freedom?) (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010).
54. Doris Schmidt, "'documenta' – Bilanz des Jahrhunderts: Fünfzig Jahre abendländische Kunst, ausgestellt in Kassel" (*documenta* – Survey of the Century: Fifty Years of Western Art, exhibited in Kassel), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 July 1955; reprinted in Schneckenburger, ed., *documenta—Idee und Institution*, 40 (trans. HMM).
 55. John Anthony Thwaites, "*documenta*—Grosse Internationale Kunstausstellung im Fridericianum in Kassel" (*documenta*—Great International Art Exhibition in the Fridericianum, in Kassel), *Deutsche Zeitung*, 23 July 1955. Quoted in Schneckenburger, ed., *documenta—Idee und Institution*, 41–42.
 56. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). That New York should have "stolen" the idea of modern art in quite the way that Guilbaut imagined may be something of an over-simplification. Throughout the 1950s, there was a push-pull between European and American influences on British art, with only a gradual tilt towards the latter, as the decade progressed. Many British artists and the majority of artists on the Continent, and in countries with traditional links to France, still looked to Paris for cultural leadership until some time after 1960. See Alan Bowness, in relation to the second *Biennale des Jeunes* in Paris in 1961: "Biennales notwithstanding, it begins to look ominously clear that Paris is no longer the place to go to for what is new in modern art." *The Observer*, 8 Oct. 1961.
 57. Eduard Trier, *Moderne Plastik* (Modern Sculpture) (Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1955). Trier, like Haftmann before him, benefited from the full support of the British Council's selection committee (including Herbert Read) for *documenta* and the Fine Arts Department's facilities, in arranging for him to meet artists and consult reference works and their photographic library, and in packing and transporting their works.
 58. This time, the British sculptors were Armitage, Butler, Chadwick, Hepworth, Meadows, and Moore.
 59. See Harald Kimpel and Karin Stengel, eds., *documenta 2 1959: Kunst nach 1945, Internationale Ausstellung, Eine fotografische Rekonstruktion*, Schriftenreihe des documenta Archivs 7 (Kassel: Edition Temmen, n.d.).
 60. Eduard Trier, "Skulptur nach 1945" (Sculpture after 1945), exh. cat., *II. Documenta '59*, (Cologne: Verlag DuMont-Schauberg, 1959). Cited in Kimpel and Stengel, eds., *documenta 2 1959*, 56 (trans. HMM).
 61. M. Buttig, "Das grosse Treffen der Abstrakten" (The Great Encounter of Abstractionists), *Der Monat* 11, no. 131 (1959): 75–82 (trans. HMM). Quoted in Kimpel and Stengel, eds., *documenta 2 1959*, 136, n. 4.
 62. L[ucie] S[chauer], in *Der Tagesspiegel, Feuilleton*, Sunday, 30 June 1961 (trans. HMM), which also included Will Grohmann, "Magie und Gegenwart: Zur grossen Henry Moore Ausstellung in der Akademie der Künste" (Magic and the Present: On the Great Henry Moore Exhibition at the Akademie der Künste).
 63. They included Pierre Francastel, from Paris, Palma Bucarelli from Rome, Mário Barata, the Brazilian Regional Secretary for Latin America, and Miroslav Míčko, the Czechoslovak Regional Secretary for Eastern Europe.
 64. Will Grohmann, report on the opening ceremony, printed in *Der Tagesspiegel*, Sunday, 30 July 1961, quoted in translation in Report on Progress for the 75th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 12 Dec. 1961.

65. Report on Progress for the 75th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 12 Dec. 1961.
66. Speech by Sir Richard Steele, H.E. the British Ambassador to Bonn, reprinted in *The Morning Advertiser*, London, 24 July 1961, and quoted in the Report on Progress for the 75th Meeting of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee, 12, Dec. 1961.
67. Silke Wefing, "Warum Willy Brandt gern Heino hörte: Norbert Seitz befragt die Kunstliebe der deutschen Bundeskanzler" (Why Willy Brandt was pleased to listen to Heino: Norbert Seitz asks about German Federal Chancellors' artistic preferences), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Feuilleton*, Sunday, 16 March 2005 (trans. HMMH). See www.faz.net/suche/?query=silke+Wenk&suchbegriffImage.x=7&suchbegriffImage.y=5&resultsPerPage=20 (accessed 8 May 2016).
68. Hans-Joachim Throl, ed., *Henry Moore unter freiem Himmel in Deutschland* (Henry Moore under an Open Sky in Germany), exh. cat. (Wolfsburg: Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, 1998) 16.

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