



HoMA shows works, for sale, by Henry Moore's first assistant who went on to be a major British sculptor in his own right:

BERNARD MEADOWS



Bernard Meadows became Henry Moore's assistant in 1936 when he was just 21. According to Moore's biographer, Roger Bertholt, "It was to be by far Henry's most enduring relationship with another artist".

The direct professional relationship continued until Meadows volunteered for the the RAF in 1941 serving in air sea rescue for the next five years, until 1943 at Dover, then being posted to India and final on a coral atoll on the Cocos Islands. Although during this period any sustained artistic endeavour was not possible, the natural history particularly the birdlife and crabs were to have an enduring impact on his work.

The relationship with Moore was very much a double edged sword for Meadows. While it was a phenomenal education and a creative relationship for both artists he struggled to establish an reputation untouched by his mentor's shadow.

Although twenty works on paper and two bronze casts we are showing are eloquent testimony to his distinctive voice, we are showing this work to coincide with the tremendous Moore show in Leeds City Gallery. Again, ironically the shadow falls.



Cock's Head: A hugely impressive, and unusually highly realistic, green patinated bronze by Meadows. Another cast was acquired by the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds as part of its acquisition of a number of Meadow's works in lieu of death duties. All the works we are showing at HoMA, including this and another, posthumous, cast of figure are available for sale.

But Meadows didn't become Moore's assistant, and then become an artist.

Born in Norwich, to a family with little interest in the arts he left school at sixteen, working for a coach builder and then for an accountant. After three years the accountant sacked him, telling his father he would never be an accountant. Now aged 19 his parents relented and allowed him to go to Norwich School of Art. In 1936 three students were offered the opportunity to visit Moore in his studio. Each took along a sculpture they had made, Meadows taking a beech wood carving of a flint. The following day Moore asked him if he could come and help him over the Easter vacation.

By the summer he was showing a piece in the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition organised by Moore's neighbour Roger Penrose. But his association with Moore also probably cost him a place studying sculpture at the Royal College of Art in 1937. He succeeded in gaining a place to study painting in 1938. By 1939 Meadows and Moore were carving away on the same block of stone, with Meadows leaving the last centimetre to be finished by Moore. Amongst the pieces the two men worked on together are the elm reclining figures that are one of the highlights of the current Leeds show.

"The Geometry of Fear"

After the War the show that really established Meadows international reputation as an important British sculptor was the 1952 Venice Biennale which he shared with Edward Paolozzi, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, William Turnbull, Lynn Chadwick and Geoffrey Clarke. Herbert Read wrote the catalogue note in which he drew attention a common thread in the works which he called "the geometry of fear".

Indeed much of Meadows work at the time involved not so much fearful images, as images of creatures startled or fearful. The angular rhythms and forms of his work at this time are distinctly his own while the work also has strong echoes of the work of other emerging artists of the time, particularly Sutherland.

This is particularly some of the works on paper in the HoMA show.

Meadows started teaching at Chelsea in 1948, becoming head of sculpture in 1950. Elizabeth Frink was one of his students there. Although part time it provided some regular income to support his young family and to continue to work on his own. In 1960 he was invited to become professor of Sculpture at the Royal College of Art, although Moore had actually recommended another former assistant – Anthony Caro – for the post. He held the post until he retired in 1980, when surprisingly he again worked to support Moore with some of his demanding public commissions. He was a key active member of the Henry Moore Foundation, and after Moore's illness in 1983 he became for five years the acting director of the foundation advising on all aspects related to exhibitions of Moore's work.

His move to the Royal College had also also signalled a change in direction away from birds and crabs which he saw as "human substitutes", and as victims to more aggressive human forms (represented in our show by the bronze relief which was cast posthumously with the approval of the estate).

Later on his work was to change again, the angularity being replaced by more fluidity, rough surfaces being replaced by sumptuously smooth and sensuous forms, and rotund pointing figures. Some of this more sinuous work can be seen in some of the later pieces in our show, including the Molloy series of coloured prints.

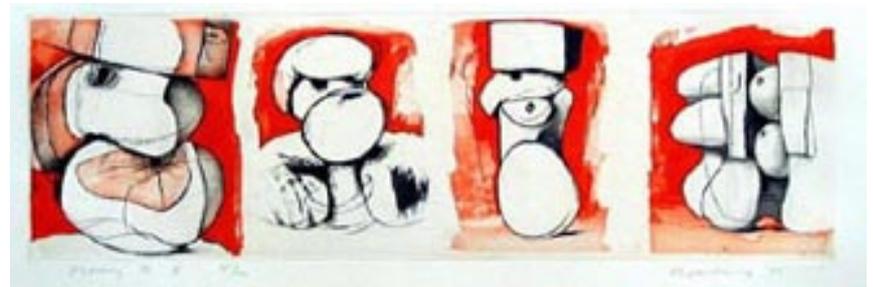
Also although his sculptural work often avoids identifiable or representational human forms, amongst his drawings there are a number of stylistic portraits and heads, not often seen, which are included in our show.

Meadows died in January 2005 at the age of 89. He was drawing and working until the day before he died. Our show case of Bernard Meadow's work is on during March and April and complements the Henry Moore show at Leeds City Gallery which includes many works from the period when Meadows was his assistant.

I look upon birds and crabs as human substitutes, they are vehicles expressing my feelings about human beings. To use non-human figures is for me at the present time less inhibiting ; one is less conscious of what has gone before and is more free to take liberties with the form and to make direct statements than with the human figure: nevertheless they are essentially human ...

“The form of my figures have no immediate connection with actual visual appearances. Forms are often reminiscent of other forms: often forms in action with the shape and action combined. Sometimes the source is forgotten; it has become part of one’s form repertoire.”

Bernard Meadows writing in the catalogue of his second one man show at Gimpel Fils Gallery in 1959



A selection of some of the twenty works on paper by Bernard Meadows on show at HoMA during March and April.

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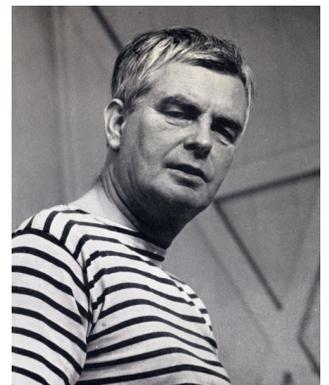
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