



MacLaren Art Centre Podcast Series

Transcript of the Audio Guide for the *Etrog / Moore* Exhibition

Introduction by Christina Mancuso and Jennifer Withrow:

Welcome to the MacLaren Art Centre's Podcast Series

C.M:

Hi, I'm Christina Mancuso, Education Officer at the MacLaren Art Centre. In this audio guide, guest curator Jennifer Withrow takes us through the Sorel Etrog and Henry Moore exhibition, on view in Gallery 3 until November 2, 2014.

J.W:

Hello, my name is Jennifer Withrow. I'm the curator of the Etrog / Moore show at the MacLaren Art Centre. The podcast begins as you walk into the gallery to your left and continues clockwise throughout the room.

All of the works in this show are drawn from the MacLaren's permanent collection. The MacLaren is very fortunate to have extraordinary works on paper by Sorel Etrog, one of Canada's

preeminent modernist sculptors, and Henry Moore, one of the giants of international modernism.

Group 1 / Track 1

In this section we see works on paper by Etrog and Moore as they deal with the subject for which they may be best known, the reclining figure. While Moore's works on paper showing the reclining figure bear a great affinity with his works in three dimensions, Etrog's reclining figures seem to be more explorations and studies of the human form, because his reclining figures are not really grounded in three-dimensional space. In many of Etrog's works on paper you can see that the artist is really experimenting with the figure in two dimensions, not always grounding the figure or the object in a particular point in space. This gives the viewer a clue, in the case of both Etrog and Moore, of whether or not the artist is thinking about this two-dimensional work as a preparatory drawing for a sculpture or whether it's an exploration that will begin and end on the page.

One of the most interesting works for me in the whole show is Etrog's reclining hinge figure. It is almost as if he is imagining one of Henry Moore's very well-known reclining figures and reimagining it recreated in his metallurgical visual language using hinges. This comparison of seated figures by both Etrog and Moore reaffirms this contrast between which works on paper were definitely made with a sculpture in mind, and others that seem to really be an exploration of the human form in two dimensions.

Group 2 / Track 2

Multiple figure groups are rarer in both the oeuvre of both Moore and Etrog, but they do exist, as you can see here, Henry Moore and Sorel Etrog interweave two figures in very different ways. In the Moore work you have two monumental figures sitting facing one another. In the Etrog work you have contours of two figures that are linked and almost seem to be mirror images of one another. In both cases, the artist is exploiting the idea of symmetry. In both of these works we see a horizon line on which the figures are placed, so we really get the sense that the artist, in both cases, the artist is imagining both figures existing in the same physical space.

Group 3 / Track 3

This pairing shows Etrog and Moore's preoccupation with the silhouette. The main difference between the two, of course, is that in the case of the Moore we have two silhouettes of reclining figures that float one atop the other so it's really a sort of schematized or a conceptual arrangement. Whereas with the Etrog we see the two standing figures on a horizon line, so we can imagine that Etrog is conceptualizing these figures existing in the same space. In the case of the Moore work this is a sort of exploration of the possibilities in a reclining figure and we can see on one sheet of paper two different iterations, whereas with the Etrog you really get the sense that he is planning to have these two figures coexist in the same three-dimensional space.

Group 4 / Track 4

These two landscape works are different from everything else in the show and they are rare in the bodies of work of both Etrog and Moore. Whereas almost all of the works in the rest of the show focus on a single object, its contours and mass in space, these landscape works create a three dimensional environment that extends all the way to the edges of the page. The fact that these works are anomalies in the wider context of the two-dimensional work of both of these artists make them particularly interesting and somewhat mysterious.

Group 5 / Track 5

Many people will be familiar with Henry Moore's drawings of sheep and know that he was a keen observer of nature and a great admirer of the things that exist in his natural environment. Later in his life Henry Moore moved from central London out to the countryside and there were sheep in the pastures near his home. This work shows a mother sheep with a baby lamb. It was fascinating to discover a very similar work in among the works on paper in the MacLaren's collection by Sorel Etrog. In this work by Etrog we can see a baby being sheltered under its mother's body. Bulls and cows were a common motif in Etrog's body of work. One wonders whether his interest in anatomy might have fueled this particular association given that cows and bulls have their, the structure of their skeletons is so visible through their skin. While Etrog's work of the mother sheltering the baby demonstrates a greater interest in the formal and spatial

relationship between the two, Moore seems to be more drawn to the social and emotional bond between the two animals.

Group 6 / Track 6

One of the most interesting opportunities that this show presents is to look at the work of Etrog and Moore when they tackled the same subjects. This is especially true when it comes to the hand studies. Both Etrog and Moore studied their own hands and recreated them in two dimensions. A key difference between these two sets of work is that while Moore approaches the view of his own hand in a contemplative and delicate way, Etrog's hand works have a more concrete feeling and we get the sense that he is getting ready to translate them into sculpture. He did indeed translate these hand works into sculptures, in both small and large scale bronze works.

Group 7 / Track 7

This group of six works centres on the idea of the head and the skull. In the case of the Moore works, all three come from his elephant skull portfolio. Moore's studio was full of found objects that interested him that he used for observation and inspiration for sculpture and for two-dimensional work. This elephant skull was the source for dozens of lithographs and etchings. He sometimes depicted the entire skull as you can see in two of the three works here, but he was also very interested in taking a close up view and looking at the environments created on the inside of the skull.

Whereas Moore's works in this section tend to be very focused on direct observation, Etrog's studies on heads and skulls are more fanciful and imagined and combine the direct observation with conceptual elements. For example, Etrog's heads exist simultaneously as portraits of human heads and also as studies of human skulls when you consider that they are made up of bone-like pieces, but they are formed together to make something that looks much more like a face. This distinction is especially evident in the head by Etrog that is placed on a neck and shoulders, wearing a t-shirt. This could be contrasted to the other of Etrog's heads shown here where the neck terminates in a plinth, so we can clearly hypothesize that Etrog is imagining this as a sculpture.

Group 8 / Track 8

This pairing shows Etrog and Moore, who are both sculptors, grappling with the notion of showing multiple sides of an object in two dimensions. This pairing really summarizes what makes this show exciting. It's an investigation of how sculptors have this special sensibility about the mass and contour of an object and how they try to translate that into two dimensions.

C. M:

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