

Helaine Blumenfeld - Henry Moore
A Dialogue 1985–2015



BOWMAN SCULPTURE

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Henry Moore - Helaine Blumenfeld, Alex Rosenberg Gallery, 1985.

Helaine Blumenfeld - Henry Moore, A Dialogue 1985–2015

2015 marks the 30th anniversary of Henry Moore and Helaine Blumenfeld's joint exhibition, *A British Dialogue: From Perry Green to Cambridge*, at the Alex Rosenberg Gallery, New York. To celebrate, Bowman Sculpture presents a major new exhibition reuniting their work.



Helaine Blumenfeld with Alex Rosenberg, 1985.

Blumenfeld and Moore — then and now

‘Looking back these many years, I realize my reasoning for having originated an exhibition linking Helaine Blumenfeld to Henry Moore had a far different meaning to me then than what it means to me now.

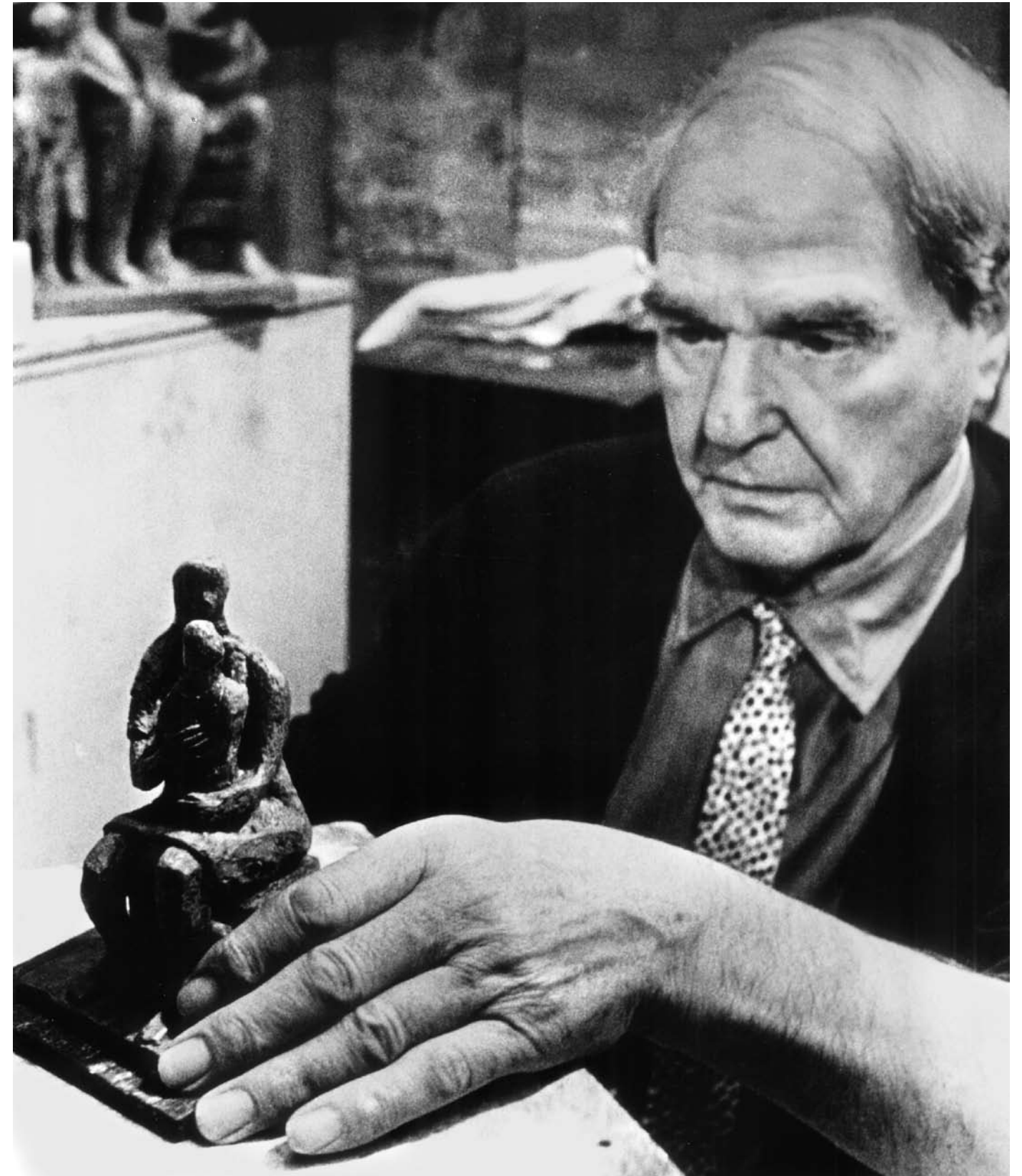
Thirty years ago I attempted to reward an artist who, in my eyes, exemplified freedom and courage in both her life and sculpture. By exhibiting her art alongside that of Moore, I now feel I was trying to pay her the greatest honor I could bestow in my gallery.

Today, no longer looking for an artistically romantic reason to have held the exhibition, I see the reason far clearer. Helaine’s work was conceptually a more modern expression of the same emotions exhibited by Moore in his sculpture: The difference being that while Moore recorded what the English were willing to reveal of the female form during his career, Helaine’s artistic expression was in keeping with that of a newer generation. I now see Moore’s nudes as personifying controlled erotica while Helaine’s figures appear unfettered and in tune with our more open desires. Each is very different but both are among the best when telling their stories.’

Alex J. Rosenberg, Sc.D.



Helaine Blumenfeld OBE PhD FRBS



Henry Moore OM CH FBA RBS

Helaine Blumenfeld, *Esprit*, 2013, Private Collection, UK

Blumenfeld and Moore

Although they shared common roots in the 20th century and participated in many of its cultural preoccupations, their paths were different. Henry Moore lived through two world wars which directly affected the form and content of much of his work. In his early years, the dominance of ‘primitive’ art from various traditions outside Europe exerted a powerful impact on his figurative sculpture.

Helaine Blumenfeld was born during the Second World War. An American and European education brought her into contact with an art world where abstract forms had become a normal part of an artist’s vocabulary. The impact of Renaissance and Baroque sculpture could be added to the more intense abstraction of her older contemporaries. Some of the shock and rhythm of the massive stone and bronze shapes she has created stems from this interplay of sources.

In 1985, the New York exhibition *Moore: Blumenfeld—A British Dialogue: From Perry Green to Cambridge* marked the kinship between the two sculptors. Moore and Blumenfeld share an interest in elemental images, usually based on the human body. They also share a level of abstraction which does not dwell on narratives, personalities and direct portraits but searches for a spiritual dimension which is monumental—and in many ways transcendent. With those elements in common, they inhabit two ends of a spectrum which makes their work very different: Moore is earth and solid; Blumenfeld is air and light. Moore is ‘masculine,’ forceful; Blumenfeld is ‘feminine,’ sensuous.

Alan Caine

Henry Moore, *Large Standing Figure: Knife Edge*, 1961

Blumenfeld and Moore — a new dialogue

The inspired exhibition in 1985 provided an opportunity to explore the relationship between the works of the two sculptors, illuminating the flow of influence, the correspondences in their abstract sculptural language and the contrasts in their respective visions.

Today's exhibition is equally fascinating, but for different reasons, not least because it reveals how in the intervening years the dialogue has taken a new direction. Now we can see how Blumenfeld's work developed after 1985 as she continued to fashion her own destiny. The 1985 show hinted at her possible line of progression, or might we say succession? After all, few other contemporary artists have emerged who are capable of filling the vacuum that Moore left.

Many artists would have been overawed, even intimidated, by the prospect of their work being exhibited alongside that of Henry Moore, but Blumenfeld has never lacked self-belief. American by birth, she left the groves of academe at the tender age of 21, armed with a doctorate in moral philosophy from Columbia University but she decided to become an artist. This might seem a curious change of career direction, but for Blumenfeld sculpture offered a more direct way to explore and express the existential mysteries of life and the conjunctions of human relationships that lend it shape and substance. She was bringing something deeply personal and intellectually focused to her art.

After enrolling at the famous La Grande Chaumière art academy in Paris, she was taken under the wing of the Russian emigré sculptor Ossip Zadkine (1890–1967) who recognised her potential. Blumenfeld often cites that the most valuable lesson she learned from Zadkine at this early stage in her career was experiencing the tremendous focus required. “I witnessed an example of how a great artist works. He was totally absorbed, consumed by the sculpture he was working on.”

In 1984 Blumenfeld was contacted by the Rosenberg gallery about a new exhibition. “When I was asked if I would show with another sculptor, I said, ‘No; I never have.’” There were further discussions with the gallery, and finally Blumenfeld, “ready to get my guns out,” she says, asked who the other sculptor was. It was Henry Moore. “That stopped me. You can't really say, ‘I won't show with Henry Moore.’”

The resultant “dialogue” brought together two sculptors whose abstract forms at that time had much in common. Reflecting on the influence of Moore, Blumenfeld says, “Moore liberated sculpture and opened the way for so much of the work that has followed. The sculptures he projected were presences more than bodies. They had weight and solidity, but were uninhibited and unencumbered, allowing their form to tell their story, they were part of the landscape, part of nature. I felt an enormous affinity with his work as well as an admiration for his commitment to craftsmanship and his reverence for the material.” However, even at the time of the 1985 exhibition Blumenfeld stated “My work is in many ways in opposition to Moore’s. It’s another concept of form. I don’t believe in fixed positioning of sculpture. I’m more concerned with sensuality and movement than he is.”

The stylistic distance continued to grow between the work of Moore and Blumenfeld in the intervening years. Yet one can immediately see in Blumenfeld’s Roman travertine work entitled *Seascape* why this provided (and continues to provide) a fruitful moment in the dialogue. First shown in the 1985 exhibition it is by great good fortune also one of the highlights of the current exhibition. Moore himself had often combined separate elements in a single work: “The distance between pieces... becomes an important part of the whole sculpture. [It] means that, as you walk round it, one form gets in front of the other in ways you cannot foresee, and you get a more surprising number of different views than when looking at a monolithic piece. It’s as though one was putting together the fragments of a broken antique sculpture in which you have, say, only the knee, a foot and the head.”ⁱ

Moore might have been thinking of the fragmented pediment figures of the Parthenon Marbles in the British Museum, a favourite haunt throughout his life, and surely representing an endorsement of the “big tradition” with which he identified. Blumenfeld’s *Seascape* is a masterpiece in its own right, partaking of infinite formal variations, richly allusive and displaying a dazzling array of carving techniques ranging from smoothly undulating planar surfaces to crinkly, overlapping folds and fleshy creases. It might be fruitfully compared with Moore’s UNESCO *Reclining Figure* of 1957–58 (also in Roman travertine), which was “inspired by general considerations of nature, but which are less dominated by representational considerations,” and in which he used “forms and their relationships quite freely.”ⁱⁱ

The current exhibition explores the dialogue of 1985 but also addresses what happened next, after Moore’s death in 1986.

Blumenfeld’s shared interest with Moore in the “Human Landscape” remains but has moved forward. The major influence on Moore was the natural landscape, for Blumenfeld it is the interior landscape of the human psyche. In 1985 Blumenfeld stated: “I really am not trying to portray a natural landscape; I am trying to express emotion and emotional relationships with an aesthetic form.” Looking back now, she adds: “The body is the common point of reference for both Moore and me. It provides the sculptural contours that inform the shapes we create. Although I am still concerned with the human body, it now is more subtly incorporated into my work, in a way that expresses the lyricism and musicality of the body, the harmony of it. Thirty years ago it would have been easy to identify elements of the body in my work, but now the references are more of a fleeting image seen one minute and vanishing the next.”

It is also Blumenfeld’s development of her technique that has allowed her sculpture to fully convey her vision. She explains, “I have always been more interested in the spirit and expressing that which cannot be seen, but still giving it form—expressing the mystery, the drama that moves the body. I can now express these ideas with a translucency and movement that wasn’t possible in 1985. In my work, the body in some ways has given way to reveal the spirit. And in being committed to the form, however fleeting, this is what I take from the legacy of Moore. Moore was bound to the body and committed to representing it in an abstract way, freeing it from the details of its physicality.”

The Moores included in this exhibition remain within the artist’s timeline, whereas Blumenfeld’s 1985 works become a springboard to an array of exciting new work produced in the last two years that stand testament to how she has now taken Moore’s innovation forward into another dimension and with her own voice. “I have been aware, looking at new work before it is about to be roughed out, that the perfect white marble block, beautiful and pristine standing next to my model, seemed at odds with the complexity of my sculpture. The block seemed to be telling me to simplify. Many of the works in this exhibition have resulted from this process: Reducing the complexity. Eliminating details as I moved forward—always with a sense of focusing on the inner, integral energy and melody within the sculpture. Creating a greater sense of openness, of inner space. Concentrating on what seemed essential; listening to the music.”

i Hedgecoe, J. (1999) *Henry Moore: My Ideas, Inspiration and Life as an Artist*, London, Collins and Brown, p102

ii James, P. (1966) *Henry Moore on Sculpture*, London, Macdonald, p258

Blumenfeld’s work since 1985 has become more sensual, one might even say more erotic, in its connotations. This is often to do with a calculated ambiguity. It is as if she has extracted from the canon of ancient sculpture the most sensually arousing elements, which she rephrases using her own vocabulary.

Blumenfeld explains: “In the past few years these themes have come together, flowing through my work as individual melodies or musical passages, joining together, at times creating harmony and occasionally producing dissonance. These individual voices overlap and add to the understanding one of the other. Often, though seeming more complex, there is a new unity as the themes merge into a single more powerful composition, forming part of greater description of the entire human condition.”

Now we see this musical influence reflected in the titles of the new work — *Allegro, Crescendo, Sinfonia*— and naturally with music comes Blumenfeld’s defining difference with Moore—movement. In an interview with Alan Bowness, Moore said, “One of my points is that sculpture should not represent actual physical movement. I believe that sculpture is made out of static, immovable material.” By contrast, Blumenfeld confirms: “My sculpture has been increasingly defined by a desire to contradict the weight of the material.”

Moore himself once observed that, “It is only the truly great artists who can emerge to create their own individual style. Then with the artist’s own ideas and abilities one hopes that an added vitality will be embraced within the work he produces.”ⁱⁱⁱ Vitality is one of the defining characteristics of Blumenfeld’s work.

Finding and developing a unique creative voice in sculpture is not as straightforward as one might imagine. The task is all the more difficult when working in demanding materials such as clay, marble and bronze, which require skills that can only be acquired through decades of persistent experimentation and rigorous discipline. And let us not assume that traditional approaches to making sculpture—the modelling of clay, the carving of marble, understanding the complexities of bronze-founding, and so on—present purely manual challenges that an apprenticeship can bestow. In fact, they demand the union of hand and eye, the harmonious marriage of skill and imagination, sensitivity to both concept and craft. Helaine Blumenfeld’s singular vision has brought us the “Genre Blumenfeld,” a style forged from a sculptural grammar that is entirely her own.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hedgecoe, J. *op. cit.*, p181

The art education system in which Moore was schooled is long gone, having been steadily dismantled during the post-war period by a series of critical processes that combined to steer sculpture into the so-called “expanded field”—a territory comprising a multiplicity of largely “un-sculptural” activities and practices, many of which nevertheless lay claim to be classified as sculpture. However, despite this paradigm shift, Moore’s “big tradition of sculpture” has endured, as Blumenfeld’s work makes clear.

Few took up Moore’s baton and ran with it with more vigour and imagination than Blumenfeld. She knew that the influence of Moore’s generation could not be simply ignored, but had to be negotiated. She promptly set about the challenge of getting past those influences, beyond them, in order to discover her own voice. Her facility at coaxing marble into proximity with more pliable matter such as cloth or human flesh, and imbuing it with a certain vitality, is one of the keys to her individuality. When combined with her profound interest in spirituality, mythology, the complexity of relationships and the unfathomable mystery of the human soul, it endows her work with a timelessness that few artists since Moore have come close to.

Tom Flynn



Helaine Blumenfeld, the artist's studio, Pietrasanta



Henry Moore, Bourne Maquette Studio, Perry Green



Working Model for Thin Reclining Figure (1978)

Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 9

Length: 65cm



Working Model for Sinfonia (2013)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 9
Height: 31cm





Model for Temporale (2010)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 3
Height: 22cm



Velocità del Vento (2010)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 3
Height: 22cm





Reclining Figure No.1 (1952)

Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 9

Length: 20cm



The Space Within (2010)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 3
Height: 110cm



Meridiana (2015)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Polished Bronze, edition of 9
Height: 38cm





Maquette For Seated Torso (1954)

Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 9

Length: 14cm



Seascape (1983)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Roman travertine
Height: 54cm





Creation: In The Beginning (1984)

Helaine Blumenfeld

Marble

Height: 96cm





Sinfonia (2014)
Helaine Blumenfeld

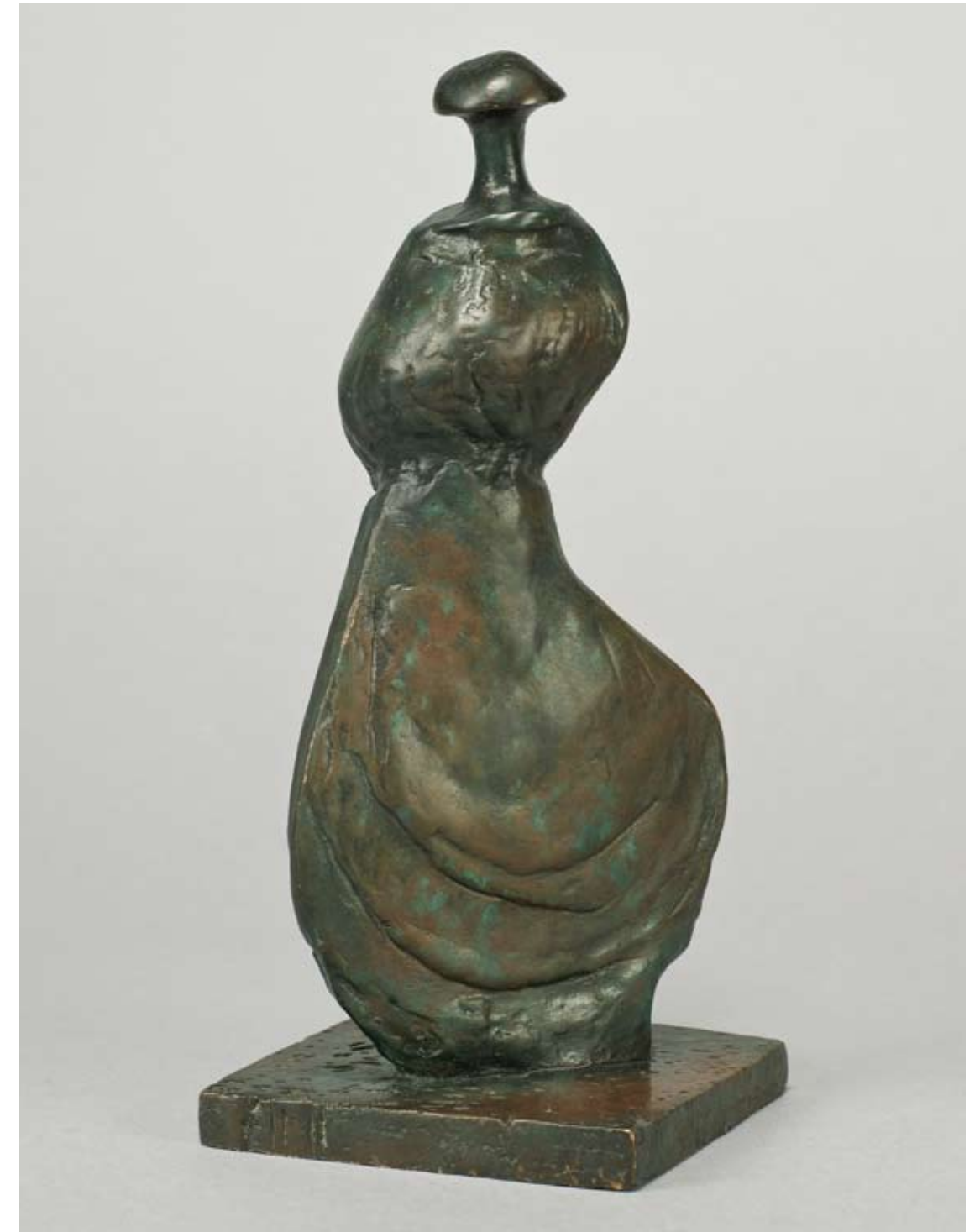
White statuario marble
Height: 72cm



Rondo (2015)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Marble
Height: 72cm





Standing Woman - Shell Skirt (1975)
Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 9
Height: 17cm



Esprit (2013)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 9
Height: 60cm





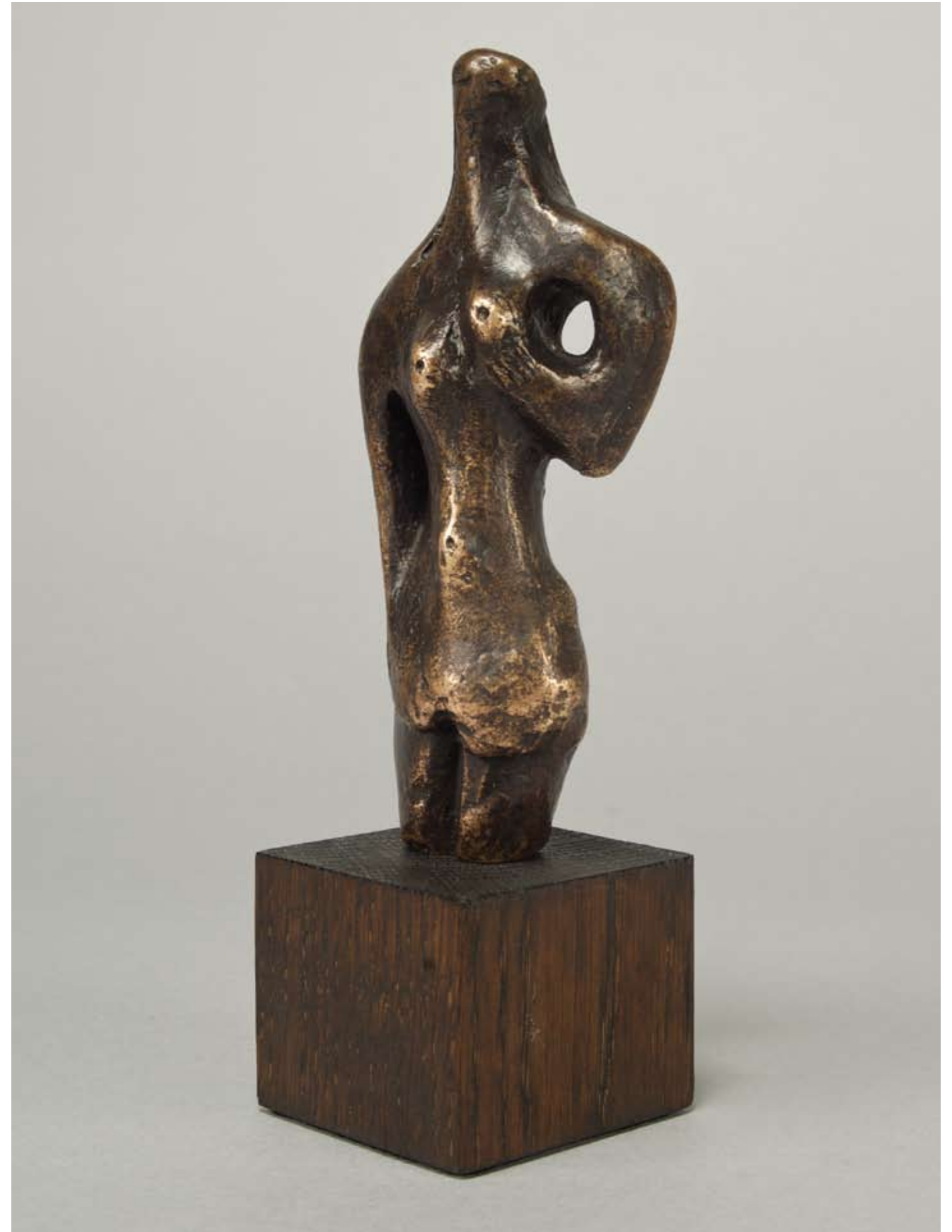
Rondo (2015)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 6
Height: 60cm



Half-Figure (1936)
Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 7
Height: 12.7cm





Volare (2015)
Helaine Blumenfeld

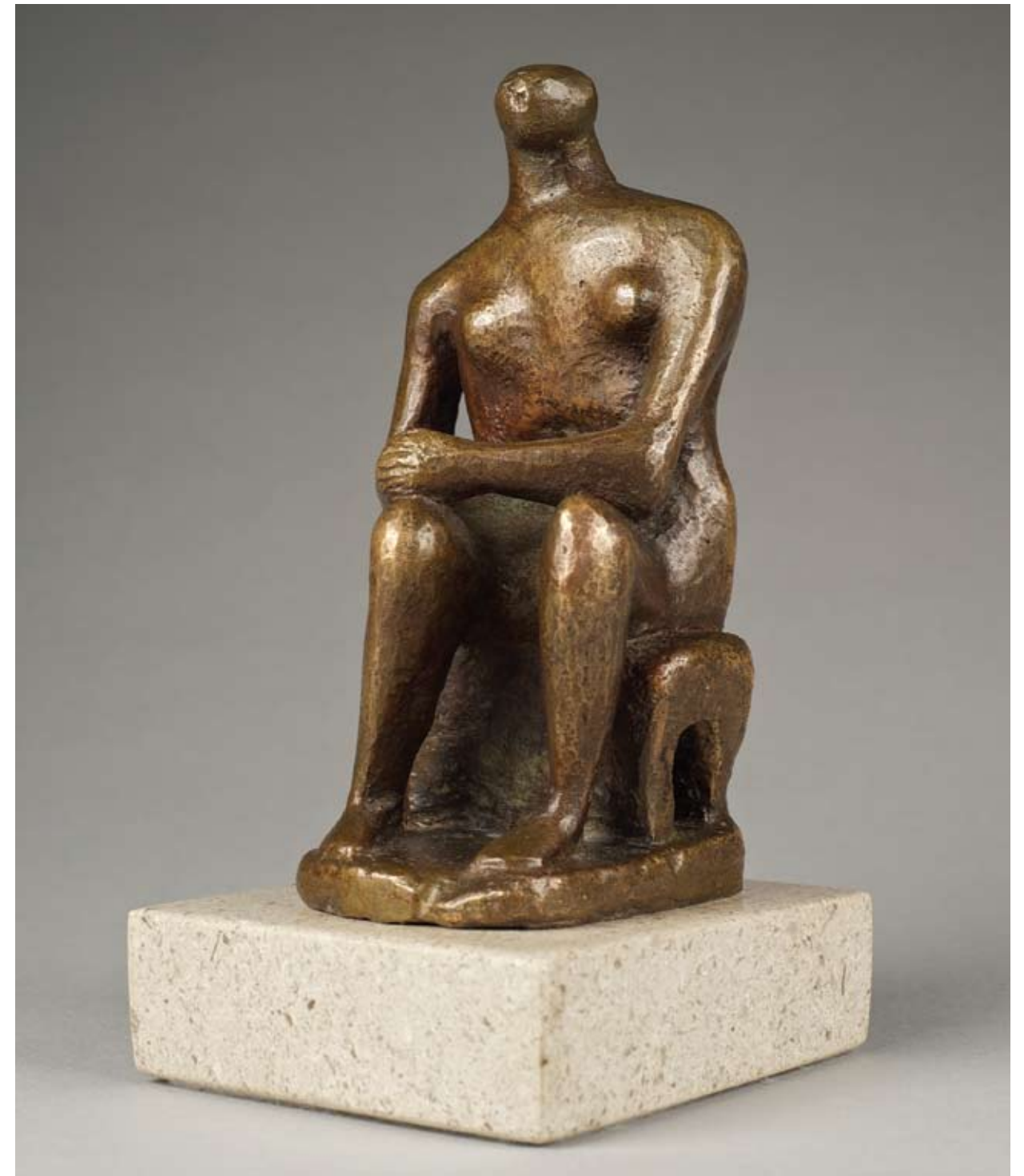
Bronze, edition of 3
Height: 130cm



Crescendo (2015)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Marble
Height: 60cm





Seated Figure (1934)
Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 6+1
Height: 14.5cm



Homage (2010)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Statuary Marble
Height: 60cm





Reclining Figure (1939)

Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 3

Length: 23cm



Nuvolo (2014)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 3
Height: 34cm



Sinfonia (2014)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 3
Height: 72cm





Maquette for Standing Figure (1956)
Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 7+1
Height: 27.5cm



Shadow Figures (Cast 2014, Conceived 1992)

Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 3

Height: 97cm





Intimacy (2007)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Bronze, edition of 3
Height: 145cm



Reclining Figure: One Arm (1938)

Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 9

Length: 33cm



Allegro (2014)
Helaine Blumenfeld

Marble
Height: 75cm



Relief No.2 (1957)

Henry Moore

Bronze, edition of 7

11.8 x 10.3cm



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