

The Arts

Moore is less in the great indoors

Henry Moore's large sculptures were made for outdoor sites – and the Tate's vast interior does his work no favours

AT THE back of the vast entrance hall of Tate Modern is a clutch of "large, public sculptures" by Henry Moore dated from the early 1940s to late 1960s, the years of his popular prime. "Large" they are not in this dwarfing context, which could easily accommodate Paul McCarthy's 130ft-high inflatable grotesque of Pinocchio, currently displayed on the lawn outside. The 20 Moores, all but three from the Tate's collection, look minuscule by comparison.

Among critics, the consensus is that where Henry Moore was once seriously overrated, he is now lamentably outdated. Briefly, the work resisted this expectation: against current vibes of urban violence, I deeply appreciated the work's evocation of a long-lost but gentler England, when motherly virtues and the rural sublime held sway. Chaste reclining nudes, earth mothers, happy families and suavely interlocking shapes encouraged a trip down memory lane; a becalming respite from the clamour for attention which results from today's debauching fusion of art and advertisement.

But "gentle" gave way to "quaint" as three criticisms of the artist came to mind. The aesthete Douglas Cooper once quipped that "every time someone puts up a new building Henry Moore comes along and craps in front of it". An American artist at a Moore opening back in the 1950s sighed: "All those reclining figures – Gahd, they make feel me so tired!" And Bruce Bernard, artist and compiler of the best-selling photographic history *Century*, described Moore to me as "a suburban caveman". The mud sticks.

Suburban caveman is the most apposite. It pinpoints how Moore's search for basics was compromised by Puritanism and

by John McEwen

English reserve, both of emotion and form, which amounts to a genteel combination of evasion and ambiguity. This cannot be said of the earliest work here, though, the famous *Madonna and Child*, 1943, borrowed from St Matthew's Anglican church in Northampton. It is the only stone piece in a show devoted to bronzes, and it restates Moore's right to be better considered as a carver than a modeller. The motherliness is emphasised by the gleaming knees, polished to a shine by the instinctive touch of countless pilgrims.

The remainder of the pieces reveal a steady evolution away from the figure to the literal bones (*Working Model for Three Piece No 3 – Vertebrae*, 1968) of pure form. At first facial features disappear, then the figure becomes disconnected and rock-like, and finally rocks turn to bone. It gives the misleading impression that the show represents his mature artistic progression, whereas he had already run a course from figurative to abstract in his smaller works of the 1930s.

At Tate Modern there are examples of his most familiar pieces, single examples of bronze editions which could, theoretically, be limitless but have been restricted to a precious few to maintain the price. His most famous work, the seated *King and Queen*, 1952, is best seen at Glenkiln, a private estate in Dumfriesshire. There the sci-fi heads look less like those of some interplanetary monarchs out of *The Eagle*, the 1950s schoolboy comic, but nobly and timelessly heraldic. Moore himself thought his

Moore's Upright Motive shows his progression from figurative to abstract work



Lost in space: Moore's *Madonna and Child* is dwarfed by Tate Modern's Turbine Hall

outdoor work looked better at Glenkiln than anywhere else, and it is easy to see why. Hill country suits sculpture that deliberately recalls rocks and bones, and the roughness and bleak grandeur of the setting knocks some of

'Without the prop of nature, Moore "the suburban caveman" is all too apparent'

the gentility out of the work. It allows it to be seen against the limitless sky, a key factor when shapes created by gaps and holes are as crucial as the bronze itself; and it adds the beauty of patina, the colour changes in bronze created by oxidation through contact with the elements.

Until the Second World War almost all sculpture was commemorative and public. Moore was among the first to make "artistic" sculpture for public

places and almost certainly the first in modern times in the West to place it in open countryside. The idea was his Scottish patron's, but the innovation rests with the artist.

Indoors, at close quarters and without the prop of nature, the suburban caveman is all too apparent – the tentative drawing, the polite avoidance of the erotic (the manhood of *The Falling Warrior* a particularly embarrassed apology); the growing slickness of form as he entered the final, total, decline.

So this show serves little purpose other than airing pieces otherwise confined to store. What is needed is for Moore to be seen in the less flattering context of his peers – of those in England who showed him the way (Epstein, Brzeska), who influenced him abroad (Picasso and the *Ecole de Paris*, Gabo), his English contemporaries and followers. Only then can we judge his proper, inevitably diminished, art-historical place.

● *Henry Moore: Public Sculptures* is at Tate Modern until 25 August. Brian Sewell is away

Chill out to Eno in this history of wellbeing

EXHIBITION

Treat Yourself
Science Museum

Nick Hackworth

THE third in the Science Museum's new series of themed, art-cum-science exhibitions, *Treat Yourself*, explores contemporary and historical attitudes towards healthy living. In what the curators clearly hoped would be an exciting, cross-cultural juxtaposition, works of art by the likes of Brian Eno, Sophie Calle, Spencer Tunick and Mona Hatoum have been installed alongside more usual museum-style displays, including here, examples of historical medicines, contemporary health manuals and old, public-information posters such as sleep, exercise, food and mental health.

Predictably, the art does little to meaningfully enhance the educative experience of the exhibition, which is perfectly sound. The exhibition does still less for the art, leaving it generally looking useless and laboured. In some cases, however, as with Hatoum's steel bed, standing in here as a hilariously crude physical representation of sleeping problems, those are simply inherent characteristics of the work. Elsewhere, one of Tunick's infamous photographs of naked people sits prettily but vacantly in a section about health and the environment. Similarly, Calle's images of monochromatic meals look nice but don't do much to illustrate the connection between food and wellbeing.

Fortunately, the centrepiece of the show, *Lydian Bells*, a specially commissioned sound installation by Eno, is an exception, being aesthetically interesting as well as conceptually in tune with its surroundings. In a corridor painted bright fuchsia and lit by pink neon lights, Eno has placed 12 CD players, each one playing a different element of an ambient composition that draws upon a pre-modern music theory about the emotional effects of different types of music. True to form, the music soothes the soul and calms the mind, providing welcome relief from the hordes of screaming children that infest the rest of the museum, and proves that not all attempts to merge art and science are doomed to failure.

● Until 7 September.
Information: 0870 870 4868.

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