LOT 22
HENRY MOORE
1898 - 1986
SHELTER DRAWING: SEATED MOTHER AND CHILD
signed
pencil, wax crayon, coloured crayon, watercolour, pastel, gouache, and pen and ink on paper
sheet: 36 by 28cm.; 14¼ by 11in.; image: 27.5 by 21.5cm.; 11 by 8¼in.
Executed circa 1941.

ESTIMATE £600,000-800,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 855,000 GBP

PROVENANCE
Private Collection, U.K., from the 1950s, and thence by descent to the previous owner
Their sale, Bonhams London, 16th November 2011, lot 32, where acquired by the present owner.

**EXHIBITED**

Barcelona, Fundacio "la Caixa", Henry Moore, 18th July - 15th October 2006, un-numbered exhibition;

**CATALOGUE NOTE**

Recorded in the Henry Moore Foundation archives as HMF 1861a.

A true masterpiece of British art, executed by one of the greatest artists of the past century, Henry Moore’s Shelter Drawing: Seated Mother and Child captures the artist working at his very best. No stranger to conflict, having served in the First World War, Moore approached the events of 1939 with a stark realism of the threats posed to everyday life. He wrote to his close friend Kenneth Clark in 1939: ‘I hate intensely all that Fascism and Nazism stands for, & if it should win it might be the end in Europe of all the paint, sculpture, music, architecture, literature we believe in’ (Henry Moore, quoted in Julia Andrews, London’s War, The Shelter Drawings of Henry Moore, Lund Humphries, Aldershot, 2002, p.18).

Having left London, like many, at the start of the conflict, Moore moved back to the capital in the summer of 1940, seeing it as a safer location than Kent, which was considered by many as the most likely location for a Nazi invasion on land. In London he took up in the abandoned studio of his friend Ben Nicholson at 7 Mall Studios in Hampstead. Nicholson, who had once been at the heart of the Herbert Read’s ‘nest of gentle artists’ that congregated around Hampstead, had left London with his wife Barbara Hepworth for the remote safety of St Ives. In his Hampstead studio Moore continued to work, and with restrictions to large-scale sculptural materials brought about by the war, sought refuge in working on paper and small-scale maquettes.

As the war progressed Londoners came under increasing threat from the Nazi air raids, which decimated parts of the city (as well as other cities and towns up and down the country). The Blitz saw swathes of London plunged into darkness. And whilst some made use of the self-constructed Morrison Shelter to protect them from falling debris, many took to the city’s underground stations for safety and refuge. Deep underground these stations became makeshift sleeping quarters during the Blitz, including Moore’s nearest underground station at Belsize Park – one of the city’s deepest stations. It was here that Moore encountered the shelters for the first time, quite by chance, on 7th September 1940 when returning home from the centre of town with his wife Irene. He later recalled: ‘When we got to Belsize Park we weren’t allowed out of the station for an hour because of the bombing. I spent the time looking at the rows of people sleeping on the platforms. I had never seen so many reclining figures, and even the train tunnels seemed to be like the holes in my sculpture. Amid the grim tension, I noticed groups of strangers formed together into intimate groups and children asleep within feet of the passing trains.’ (Henry Moore, quoted in Roger Berthoud, The Life of Henry Moore, Giles de la Mare Publishers, London, 2003, p.191).

When in 1941 the War Artist’s Advisory Committee – chaired by Kenneth Clark – approached Moore, the artist chose to depict scenes of civil defence in the form of these shelters, capturing the resilience that was such a vital part in the British War Effort. Moore was granted a permit, giving him free rein of the shelters and the permissions to move unhindered about the city. This was captured on film by documentary director Jill Craigie in Out of Chaos (a film that included other official War Artists Stanley Spencer, Leonard Rosoman and Evelyn Dunbar, released in 1944), with stills taken at the time by photographer Lee Miller.

Even after being forced to leave the capital due to bomb damage of his Hampstead studio, Moore continued to visit the capital from his new home at Perry Green in Hertfordshire, observing and recording these scenes of a united and defiant home front.

Shelter Drawing: Seated Mother and Child is amongst the most tender and worked drawings Moore created during the war, chosen for inclusion in the recent major 2010 London retrospective. Whilst it is a scene of Londoners sheltering...
from the air raid, at the centre of the composition, and really the heart of the work, we see the mother and child – one of the artist’s most significant motifs. The work displays the hope and humanity that drove the defiant home front. In this drawing we see everything that Moore believed stood at risk of being lost in his earlier letter to Clark. Here is a message of defiance – of the strength and power of humanity – and ultimately of hope. A work that today, seventy years after its inception, is every bit as vital and relevant as it was to society in 1941.

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Fig. 1

Henry Moore, Pink and Green Sleepers, 1941. Collection Tate, London. Presented by the War Artists Advisory Committee 1946; Photo: © Tate, London 2019

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Fig. 2

Henry Moore taken during the filming of ‘Out of Chaos’, Holborn Underground, London, England 1943 by Lee Miller. (Detail) © Lee Miller Archives, England 2019. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk