"More Light and Less Heat": The Intersection of Henry Seldis's Art Criticism and the Career of Henry Moore in America

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In considering the reception of Henry Moore in America, one quickly realizes that it is a story of professional relationships, fortuitous meetings, and deeply held personal commitments nurtured over time. In the context of this story, many curators, collectors, and critics come easily to mind: Curt Valentin, Herbert Read, Joseph Hirshhorn, for example. A personality rarely if ever considered, however, is Henry Seldis (fig. 1), critic for the *Los Angeles Times* from 1958 to 1978 and a consistent champion of Moore the artist and of Moore the man.

Seldis was a critic who might well be considered conservative and perhaps provincial. Indeed, he was reviled by some area artists and curators. The dealer Irving Blum recently dubbed Seldis a "deadly critic," in a lament on the state of art criticism in Los Angeles in the 1960s.[1] Seldis sometimes completely missed the mark in his pronouncements; for instance, he declared in 1962 that pop art would "probably be as short-lived as the Neo-Dada fad of a year ago."[2] He was also one of Moore's many vocal proponents, an aspect of his

Figure 1
Henry Seldis at the LACMA exhibition *Henry Moore in Southern California,* October 1973. In William Wilson, *A Tribute to Henry Seldis (1925–1978)* (Laguna Beach Museum of Art, 1978), 2. Photo courtesy of the Seldis Estate

taste that contributed to Seldis's isolation from certain powerful critics, and which may very well have helped to isolate Moore as well.[3] None of this should lead to dismissal; Seldis's voice is an interesting one and he sometimes managed to surprise in his opinions while always maintaining consistent criteria for judgment. In a 1984 piece for *Artforum,* Thomas Lawson famously was asked a question about Hilton Kramer, a more familiar contemporary of Seldis who is sometimes mentioned in the same breath since their taste often overlapped. The question was "Does Kramer's criticism have any merit?" And Lawson's scathing answer was, in short, "not much—certainly not much of a lasting kind."[4] The same question is now asked here of Seldis, and part of answering this question entails understanding how Moore and his work functioned for Seldis both professionally and personally.

To start, we can consider how Moore's work functioned for Seldis in a very personal, autobiographical way, since this is also how his affinity for the artist began. In 1973 Seldis organized an exhibition of Henry Moore's sculpture, drawing, and prints for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and wrote a book, entitled *Henry Moore in America,* to accompany the exhibition.[5] The text was based largely on a series of lengthy interviews with Moore and curators, collectors, and dealers such as James Johnson Sweeney, Joseph H. Hirshhorn, Taft Schreiber, Mrs. Sam Zacks, Harry Brooks, and Harry Fischer.[6] Seldis, of course, wrote on thousands of artists over the course of his career and contributed essays for other exhibition catalogues, but the LACMA exhibition and book were unique in their scale and preparation and represent a pinnacle in his career, realized five years before his death at the age of 53.[7] The exhibition, it should be noted, was entitled "Henry Moore in Southern California," and was drawn from area collections with a few outside loans, primarily from Moore himself. Seldis was invested in this focus for the exhibition, knowing the strength of the local collections, notably the Sheinbaums, the Weismans, the Schreibers, and the Starks, to name just a few (fig. 2).

Seldis's stated aim was to shed light on Moore's "long and fruitful" relationships with people in the United States and Canada in order to reach a better understanding of both "the man and his work."[8] Seldis made the case for Moore's "American-ness" while also maintaining, even glamorizing, Moore's

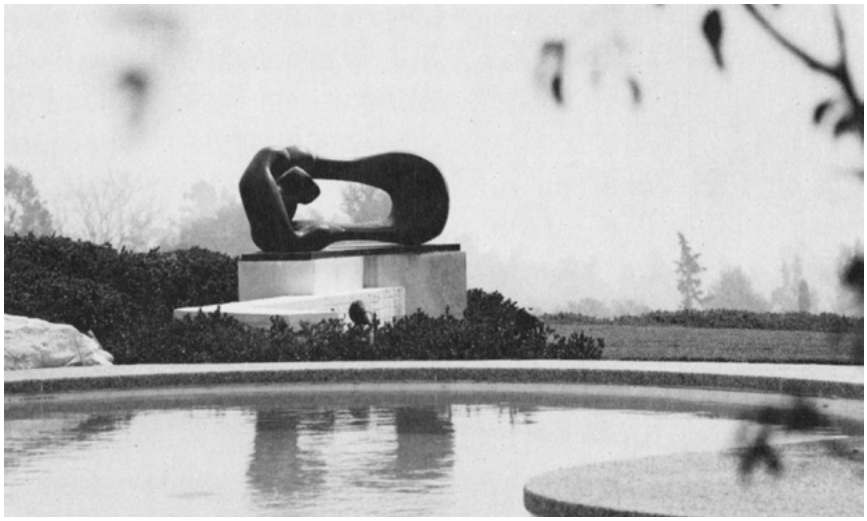

Figure 2
Henry Moore (British, 1898–1986), *Reclining Mother and Child,* 1960–61. Bronze, 228.6 × 90.2 × 132 cm (90 × 35 ½ × 52 in.). In Henry J. Seldis, *Henry Moore in America,* 207. Reproduced by permission of The Henry Moore Foundation

Englishness. Seldis, who was German by birth, began and ended the first chapter of the book by relating Moore to the quintessential American author Henry David Thoreau, thus casting this most English of artists in the most American of lights:

> Only four years after my narrow escape from Nazi Germany, I had been reading Thoreau's *Walden* in an effort to come to grips with some spiritual values of my adopted country when I happened upon an exhibition of Moore's drawings held at the Curt Valentin Gallery in 1943. His *Shelter Drawings,* especially, struck me as such convincing demonstrations of man's essential indomitability that for the very first time I gained a modicum of hope that Hitler would not rule the world, after all.[9]

Just as the drawings proved pivotal for Seldis, both personally and professionally, so they were for Moore himself (fig. 3). Julian Stallabrass has pointed out that the noteworthy change in Moore's status after the war is generally connected to the success of the Shelter drawings.[10] Herbert Read also felt that the drawings proved the "inherent humanism" of Moore's *earlier* work, thus validating the early, less appreciated work, and setting the stage for the work that followed the Shelter drawings.[11]

This early and striking experience in 1943 carried forward into Seldis's later thoughts on Moore's work. Through Seldis's friend, David Thompson, art critic for *The Times* in London, Seldis and his wife were first invited to Much Hadham in the summer of 1962 (fig. 4). Seldis returned many times over the

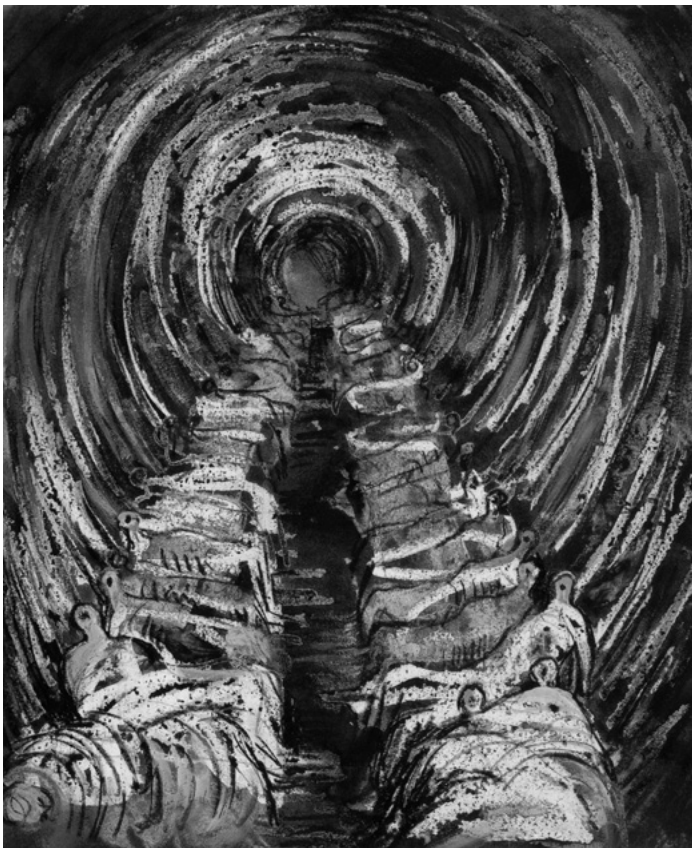

Figure 3
Henry Moore (British, 1898–1986), *Tube Shelter Perspective,* 1941. Pencil, wax crayon, colored crayons, watercolor wash, gouache, 19.1 × 23.8 cm. (7½ × 9⅜ in.). Reproduced by permission of The Henry Moore Foundation

Figure 4
Moore in his studio with Henry Seldis in 1962. From H. Seldis, "Henry Moore," *Art in America* 51 (October 1963), 56. Photo courtesy of the Seldis Estate

years, sometimes for extended periods, and also traveled with Moore in Italy. It is clear from his writing how intensely he admired the work and, it seems equally, the man himself—his personality, his ethics, and his lifestyle. His propensity to write about Moore in grand terms never abated, and indeed increased during Seldis's career. A photograph in the LACMA publication is dramatically captioned, presumably by Seldis: "In Carrara mountains Moore searches for marble near quarries used by Michelangelo" (fig. 5). In William Wilson's published reflection on Seldis upon his death, the accompanying picture was of Seldis with Moore.[12]

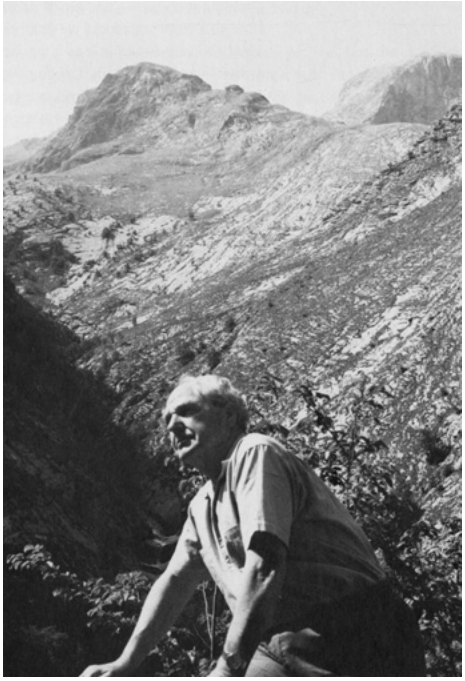

Figure 5
In Carrara mountains Moore searches for marble near quarries used by Michelangelo. In Henry J. Seldis, *Henry Moore in America,* 25. Photo: Fotografico I. Dessi. Photo courtesy of the Seldis Estate

The years during and immediately after the Second World War were an especially charged period of alliances, fascinations, and distinctions between Britain and the United States, and in this political context Moore's work served as a potent symbol of common values to some people, appealing to popular universalist and nationalist cultural constructions. Moore's sculpture, and the artist himself, embodied a modernist, humanist ideal understood on both sides of the Atlantic as wholesome, redemptive, and appropriate in the aftermath of the Second World War. This, in conjunction with his "cultured country life"[13] and "peculiarly English"[14] persona, made Moore the cornerstone of many American collections of the period, and critics such as Seldis both understood why this was so and helped to make it a reality. Seldis had an ally in the British critic and early Moore biographer John Russell. Russell wrote, in 1972, that "It is, in fact, not the least of Henry Moore's achievements that he has left behind him in so many parts of the world a new notion of what it means to be an Englishman."[15] And only a year later Russell wrote, in a plainer idiom, about the Moore exhibition at LACMA, "Americans have seen the point of Henry Moore since the mid-1930s . . . American enthusiasts think big, in a traditional American way."[16] Seldis begins the second chapter of the LACMA publication by matter-of-factly stating that "More than three quarters of Henry Moore's work is in America." In the next sentence he points to Moore's own assertion that it was the 1946–47 Museum of Modern Art retrospective that secured his international reputation. In a somewhat odd statement in the third person Moore offered this opinion:

> I doubt that one would have won the Biennale sculpture prize that year without the real groundwork and the real impetus that The Museum of Modern Art retrospective provided. Really the foundation where the international side of one's career is concerned—that international thing happened through the Museum of Modern Art exhibition.[17]

The United States and Canada were not the only countries to adopt Moore as their own. New Zealand, it has been claimed, also appropriated Moore as "New Zealand's greatest sculptor."[18]

Seldis and others were not only interested in forging an Anglo-American current, but a European-American current. For a small tribute exhibition organized in honour of Seldis at the Laguna Beach Museum of Art in 1978, William Wilson commented in his catalogue introduction that part of Seldis's spirit remained European, and that it showed in the art he had around him, mentioning work by Beckmann, Picasso, Moore, and Lipchitz. As a "conscientious critic," in Wilson's opinion, Seldis had ideas about "what form the extension of history ought to take, particularly in present day California."[19] Seldis saw the identity of California, and specifically that of Los Angeles, as distinct from and equal to that of New York, and he objected to what he saw as New York's purposeful divorce from European traditions and a general dependence on what he called "New York's art fashion co-ordinators" for judgment.[20] Seldis forthrightly objected to Moore's treatment by some people, writing that while

> dubbed an anachronism by art's fashion mongers, Moore continues to surprise less narrow-minded observers of the contemporary art scene by the astonishingly fresh and dynamic creations that spring from his mind and hand in advanced years. An indomitable optimism and tenaciousness can be readily recognized in this man.[21]

Seldis, of course, did not object outright to all art and opinions coming out of New York—quite the contrary—but he was clearly resistant to its self-appointed role as arbiter of art and was wary of certain forces at play within the art market. Seldis also felt that an important aspect of his job as an art critic and journalist was to speak in favour of West Coast artistic production, and, if necessary, to be a voice for the autonomy of its artists, collectors, and institutions.

Despite the occasional reference to one of his more fiery pronouncements, Seldis's critical criteria have never been carefully parsed. By reading hundreds of the thousands of reviews and other articles he wrote for periodicals this can be done. Within this body of writing, his thoughts about Moore's work seem to have functioned as a touchstone for how he approached disparate types of art throughout his career. Seldis wrote that "If Moore frequently does not hesitate to introduce elements of brutality into his work, its total meaning remains one of affirmation, of hope or at least survival,"[22] a statement that maps onto his opinions—positive or negative—of such various artists as Leon Golub, Edward Keinholz, and Roy Lichtenstein. The quotation in the title of this article comes from an early article he wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* in 1959 entitled "Art reaches a crossroad." He wrote: "The basic division in contemporary art is not stylistic but philosophic. It reflects the growing gap between the adherents to humanism and those who believe that this approach to life is not applicable in our time"; and he concludes: "what is needed is more light and less heat."[23]

When Seldis wrote this, I would suggest, he was talking about both art and its criticism. Seldis understood his role as a critic as someone who considers intentions and performance, taking into account contemporary context and the history of art. He wrote in a straightforward manner, and although he did not shy away from biting commentary at times, it is also clear that he firmly believed in the "benefit of the doubt."[24] And he did not blindly advocate local art and taste, though he certainly saw the monitoring of local institutions as an important aspect of his work, as well as encouraging the city's exposure to art from all over the world.[25] Unusually, and with great honesty, he reminded readers that critics are subjective and encouraged his own readers to seek out the views of multiple critics.[26] He also had this to say about the role of the critic:

> Presumably it is the function of the critic to illuminate the stage on which an artist performs, rather than to cast a shadow on it with his own verbal acrobatics . . . the peculiar verbal gyrations found in many art magazines seem designed to allow some critics to perform without committing themselves.[27]

Seldis was aware that his opinions diverged from that of most popular and influential art critics in the United States and he did not avoid pointing this out: "It may be old hat to some of the rash spokesmen for the 'novelty for novelty's sake' art movement, but the human situation still provides some of the best subject matter of contemporary art."[28] It must also be remembered that he was a journalist—a newspaperman—before, and in addition to, being an art critic. His readership was larger and more diverse than, for instance, that of the fledgling *Artforum* in the 1960s, and the management of the *Los Angeles Times* had more complicated priorities.

Seldis was not a sculpture specialist but it is evident that, in his opinion, sculpture has a particular edifying capability. The 1960 exhibition *Sculpture of*

Our Time, a selection of the Hirshhorn collection, inspired him to write that "the greatest sculptors of our time were concerned with the image of man and the theme of humanity and their infinite variations."[29] He also felt that the strengths and diversity of the medium were often "overshadowed by the more active and doctrinaire world of contemporary American painting" and that painting of the time relied too often on "a search for novelty."[30] He spoke plainly when he wrote:

> in frantically warding off tradition, America's action painters have colonized Europe and established an academy at home the like of which has not been seen since Bougereau's time. Significant aesthetic advances were made by the original abstract expressionists in the 40s, but the 50s have seen too one-sided an emphasis on non-objective painting coupled with an unprecedented boom in the contemporary art market.[31]

He felt he was sometimes "charged with having joined the habitual anti-modern-art sophists by not giving my wholehearted endorsement to an internationally touted art movement," but claimed that "nothing could be further from the truth."[32] What he objected to was a complete equating of "creative imagination with the unconscious," and he asserted that "both intellect and intuition must be joined in every meaningful work of art."[33]

This mantra carried over into his commentary on assemblage and pop art of the 60s, the latter a supposed "fad" about which Seldis was especially vocal, and a sensibility far removed from the work of Moore. He objected to its fashionableness, in that it was "so cool . . . that the essential poetic element of transformation is missing."[34] Pop and assemblage are perhaps the subjects on which Seldis is most quoted, with reviews bearing titles like "Another tired try by smashed-toy school," "'Art of assemblage'—the power of negative thinking" and "Dial $1-0-0-0 for plastic pay phone"; it was in such reviews that he most often displayed his penchant for using quotation marks around the word "artist" when discussing work he disliked and mistrusted.[35] In Seldis's mind, pop and assemblage were anti-art and generally functioned as negative cultural forces. Thomas Crow, in a recent essay on art markets and how they function as cultural forces in artistic change, notes that "the old avant-gardists, wedded to the struggle and sacrifice as the price of artistic integrity, naturally bridled at the surrender to the vulgarity they perceived in the pop vision: art that looked like products being sold like products."[36] This corresponds to Seldis's view that the worst of pop art possessed a "blatant slickness and idiotic blandness."[37]

Although he saw a cultural rationale behind the work of assemblage sculptors in the threat of nuclear war, Seldis nevertheless felt that "in their impatience with the line that separates art from life most of the adherents to junk and accident have descended to a vernacular as bland as it is sterile." He notes, however, that Duchamp and Schwitters, the predecessors of the new assemblage work, were different in that their work possessed "great aesthetic subtlety" and "prove that not all the assemblers wish the destructive to take over in their deliberate juxtaposition of construction and destruction."[38] In looking for a "positive note" in the group of exhibitions he was considering in this particular review, including a show of Robert Rauschenberg's work at the Dwan Gallery, and Ed Kienholz at the Ferus Gallery, Seldis concluded that "in their chosen state of negativism, only a sense of social criticism offers a positive element in some

of their expressions."[39] Although obviously no particular fan of Kienholz, later, in 1967, when the Kienholz retrospective at LACMA engendered so much controversy and the Board of Supervisors urged its cancellation, Seldis came out in support of both Kienholz and the museum, declaring that although the work may reject traditional concepts of fine art and thus "lacks aesthetic worth," it can offer "incisive social and even philosophical commentary" with astonishing inventiveness, and that it was incumbent on LACMA to offer him a retrospective regardless of potential controversy.[40] He also gave special consideration to Kienholz's *The State Hospital* of 1966 in his review of the *American Sculpture of the 60s* exhibition at LACMA. He wrote that the tableau was "his most moving work to date . . . and perhaps the ultimate statement that can be made by any artist of his generation on the subject of man's inhumanity to man."[41] These little-known quotations dispel the stereotype of Seldis as rigid and "party line" in his opinions of particular artists and art movements.

In 1962 Seldis offered the opinion that the basic question facing contemporary art, in what he saw as a time of transition, was concerned with artists' own attitudes towards the human condition "in a day where the incredible new horizons of human achievement and its further potential are clouded by the prospect of nuclear genocide made possible by some of those achievements."[42] In the review, which was of the *Recent Painting USA: The Figure* exhibition at MoMA, Seldis described Golub's *Seated Boxer* as "an affirmation of the magnificence of man," a painting of a colossal, sculptural figure which seemed to symbolize, in Seldis's opinion, "man's survival of all holocausts, past and future."[43] He continued, "in no way relying on the hackneyed traditional, Golub nevertheless is one of the few of the more gifted artists . . . who does not equate anxiety with annihilation."[44] It was also in 1962 that Seldis wrote positively about the British sculptor Elisabeth Frink, noting that she tackles "the self-destructive force of hate and power" in her "moving sculptures." [45] Unsurprisingly, Seldis wrote in gushing terms over many years about the "soul-searching" life and work of Jacques Lipchitz.[46] And although Seldis had mentioned his hope for a monumental Moore to be commissioned for a public plaza in Los Angeles after seeing the *Reclining Figure* for the Lincoln Center in New York, he called Lipchitz's *Peace on Earth,* commissioned for Los Angeles's Music Center and installed in May 1969, a "diadem in [the] Music Center crown" that "speaks of man's highest aspirations." [47]

Given Seldis's background, he was positioned as a critic to be sensitive to and an advocate of a kind of "crisis humanism" in the arts, from the period of the Second World War and on into the Cold War.[48] Seldis's reference in the review mentioned previously is only one of a number of invocations of the spectre of atomic war in his art criticism. The need to address "the hopes and destructive dangers of atomic experimentation" are found, to Seldis's mind, in such work as Moore's *Atom Piece* of the early 1960s, later retitled *Nuclear Energy* for its larger incarnation in Chicago. For Seldis, this work "[speaks] of the human protection and advancement that can be made possible through atomic science once it is turned from war-like uses" (fig. 6).[49]

Seldis's value system for art put him decisively at odds with such critics as Michael Fried, who called for art to be "untheatrical" and self-reflexive at all times.[50] How Seldis differed from such critics as Fried, Clement Greenberg, Thomas Hess, and Rosalind Krauss can be understood, in part, by looking at how they reacted to Moore's work. As Dorothy Kosinski aptly pointed out,

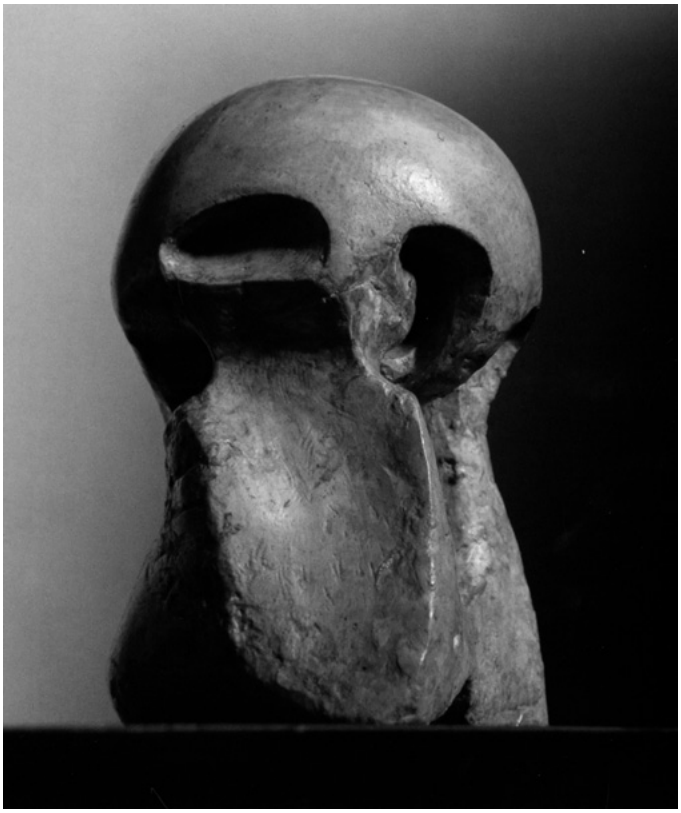

Figure 6
Henry Moore (British, 1898–1986), *Maquette for Atom Piece,* 1964. Plaster, H: 15 cm (6 in.). Reproduced by permission of The Henry Moore Foundation

"from early on in his career, Moore's popularity was written outside the context of avant-garde criticism."[51] In 1947 Greenberg was matter-of-fact in stating that he was bored by Moore's work because "it answers too perfectly the current notion of how modern sophisticated and inventive sculpture should look" and, thus, there was no possibility for "difficulty or surprise."[52] This "subservience to taste" and to the past—Greenberg also described Moore's work as "a helpless fingering of archaeological reminiscences"—was academic and European in an old-fashioned sense and the opposite of the types of American sculpture that Greenberg and Krauss championed.[53] At this point, Greenberg seems to take exception first and foremost to the critical reception of Moore, more so than to the work itself:

> Moore possesses no mean talent, and some of his later work, from the two reclining figures of 1938 . . . and *The Helmet* of 1940 . . . to the two bronze family groups of 1945 and 1946, will surely outlast the transient ardors of that informed contemporary taste upon which Moore's art is now making what I feel is an exaggerated impression.[54]

In making this claim, Greenberg certainly had in mind Herbert Read, Moore's long-time champion and a critic with whom Greenberg directly sparred, particularly in the 1950s and specifically over the subject of sculpture. This bout of sparring contained some of the most pronounced instances of anti-British sentiment to be found in Greenberg's writing of the period.[55]

Krauss's objections to Moore were of a different nature: she disliked the "camp-meeting religiosity"[56] of those who promoted direct carving and the "monolithic idealism of modern sculpture."[57] In her book *Mother Stone,* Anne

Wagner has convincingly made the case that Greenberg's and Krauss's dismissal of Moore from their accounts of twentieth-century art can be attributed to the fact that the bodily concerns of British modernism in sculpture, particularly of the female body, had no place in their ontologies nor in their prescriptions for what sculpture should be.[58] Fried did not directly write about Moore but he did write an early piece on Epstein which is instructive. Here he claims that "in his efforts to communicate, to make human statements and assert human values, Epstein created sculptural paradigms of wholly abstract and dangerously stupid emotions."[59] In brief, he argues that Epstein's monumental sculptures brutalize the humanistic sensibility because the emotion is inflated and thus debased, leading to a work of art that is decadent.

And for Hess, there was also a political aspect to his criticism of Moore, in that he objected to what he called the "cul-de-sac of Official Modernity" of a nationalistic Britain, and the ways in which art was co-opted for the purposes of foreign policy in the postwar landscape.[60] The work and the circumstances become somewhat muddled, however; that is, the objection is to the publicness and official-ness of large commissions and the fact that it was Moore who was "chivvied with honor and flattery into attempting architectural commissions far beyond the capacities of his dainty, eclectic style and his neat but limiting concepts."[61] These comments from the purported radical side of the fence—or, more rightly, "sides" of the "fences"—can be read as equally emotional in tone to the comments of Moore's defenders. Specific objections aside, it is clear from the number of times Greenberg addressed his work that he felt Moore was an international force to be reckoned with.[62]

In 1970 Hilton Kramer responded directly to Moore's critics, writing that the mystery of Moore's sculpture is "precisely the sort of mystery that is anathema to the positivist mind, with its sectarian taste for the literal" and concludes that it is Moore's revitalization of an aspect of the English Romantic pastoral tradition that is both his strength and the basis for the "strong current" that ran against him.[63] In the hands of the supposedly radical critics of the period, Moore's work is rendered neutral in a negative sense: bland and empty such that it could be used for various social and diplomatic purposes; and yet for his advocates, his work is anything but neutral.

Interestingly, however, Seldis's critical agenda intersected with that of Kramer, as well as Greenberg and Krauss, on the subject of David Smith's sculpture, although all had differing perspectives. Seldis interviewed him at length on the occasion of his first West Coast exhibition in 1960 and quoted Kramer (from about nine months earlier) when he wrote that "he has rightly been called 'one of the few artists anywhere today whose work upholds the promise and vision of the modern movement at the same level on which it was conceived.'"[64] And Seldis later wrote that Smith's posthumous exhibition of 1965 was the "first truly exciting exhibition of contemporary art staged at the [Los Angeles] County Museum of Art" and urged the museum to make purchasing some of the *Cubi* a top priority, which it did two years later.[65]

To summarize Seldis's criteria: he abhorred "an overt search for novelty and faddism" and any resultant trend-driven conformity and its attendant sense of "infallibility";[66] and he identified a "lack of conformity to any one predominant direction" as a strength of Los Angeles.[67] But he also rejected "deliberate pluralism" in the curating of exhibitions.[68] He generally favored figurative or representational art, but not in any way exclusively, just as he often favored sculp-

ture. He was mistrustful of an inclination to merge art and technology completely; for instance, he criticized John Coplans for welcoming such a merging and called him "that intrepid Lawrence Alloway satellite."[69] He was likewise mistrustful of the inclination to "erase all concern for the difference between art and nonart."[70] Seldis cautioned his readers that, "although we cheer many young artists' insistence that no convention is inviolable, we must remember those . . . who remain unwilling to drop the question of timelessness and universality," and further, Seldis rightly urged people to ask why artists and observers would take such a position at that particular moment in time.[71] He hoped for a new "venturesome generation" of artists "not adverse to thinking," and he valued artists who worked in a manner "peculiar to [their] own time and place."[72] Of course, he valued a humanistic and poetic mindset in an artist, and eschewed a nihilistic, overly cynical, or solely introspective one. He was convinced that external values had a place and a purpose in contemporary art. Some of the artists he wrote positively about—figures such as Larry Bell, Llyn Foulkes, John McLaughlin, John Altoon, Vija Celmins, Lee Bontecou, Ron Davis, and Francis Bacon—might seem surprising if one only knows Seldis's writing superficially, but he was, in fact, adhering to his artistic and ideological criteria. For instance, Seldis raved about works by Light and Space artist Ron Davis for being poetic, conceptual, and challenging perceptually.

Just as Lawson's "appreciation" of Kramer was a piece of its time and political context, that is, the "topography of power under the Ronald Reagan administration," so was Seldis's art criticism and ideology.[73] What may be deemed conservative taste in art does not necessarily equate to political conservatism, as Lawson rightly implies in his treatment of Kramer. Seldis, on the other hand, was in fact liberal in his political beliefs and actively supported liberal causes.[74] He took pride in being on one of Nixon's "lists" and, according to his son Mark, used to say in the 1970s that if Ronald Reagan ever became president, he'd leave the country, a promise he missed having to make good by two years, due to his unfortunate early death in February 1978.

In an early piece for the *Los Angeles Times,* Seldis wrote: "We tend to forget that there is a deep and inescapable connection between the man and the mark he makes."[75] If we defer to Seldis's logic here, then the answer, I think, to the question of "does Seldis's criticism have any merit" is in the affirmative. He didn't play it "clever and cool," to borrow his own expression, but he was rigorous, considered, altruistic, and willing to look, and to look again, if unconvinced. In 2005 Anne Wagner suggested that the time had come to open the "storage capsule" that Bruce Nauman drew in 1966 for Henry Moore's safekeeping.[76] Similarly, the time may have arrived for a reexamination of Henry Seldis and the mark he made, and how that mark was informed by his interest in Henry Moore and his work.

In closing, it is worthwhile for us to play devil's advocate and to ask whether or not the radical art of today bears closer resemblance to the work favoured by critics such as Seldis and Kramer, or to the production of those artists supported by Greenberg and Fried. Increasingly, critical voices can be heard that call for art to return to being a "crucial, ethically charged activity" and it is these voices that are often deemed radical today.[77] From critics such as Holland Cotter of the *New York Times*, Mark Nash in *Frieze,* and Hal Foster writing for *Artforum* have come statements on the need for socio-political content in contemporary art, the dire state of art criticism, and the intense influence of the

art market, all concerns that seem remarkably kindred in spirit to Seldis's call for "more light and less heat."[78]

This essay first appeared in the *Sculpture Journal*, volume 17.2 (2008).

Notes

1 Quoted from *The Cool School,* 2007, a documentary film directed by Morgan Neville.
2 H. Seldis, "'New Realism' Comes in Humor, Cynicism," *Los Angeles Times,* December 2, 1962, p. Q2.
3 See D. Kosinski's essay, "Some Reasons for a Reputation," in *Henry Moore: Sculpting the 20th Century* (New Haven: Dallas Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 21–31.
4 T. Lawson, "Hilton Kramer: An Appreciation," *Artforum* 23, no. 3 (November 1984), pp. 90–91. Kramer was born in 1928 and Seldis in 1925.
5 The LACMA curatorial files are apparently, and unfortunately, lost; only registrar files remain. Book chapters cover Seldis's own recollections, Moore's first transatlantic contacts, the 1946–47 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, dealers and curators, exhibitions and their reception, Moore and architecture in America, Moore's work in Southern California, and the Toronto Moore Centre.
6 The author wishes to thank the Seldis family for allowing access to the extant recordings of the interviews.
7 Catalogues for such artists as Rico LeBrun, Jack Zajac, and Frederick Eversley.
8 H. Seldis, *Henry Moore in America* (New York: Praeger Publishers, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1973), p. 28.
9 Ibid., p. 9. The other reference to Thoreau is to be found on p. 28. Seldis and his parents fled Nazi persecution in Berlin. His father Edward was Jewish, though his mother was not. His father had been the co-owner of the largest umbrella factory in Berlin, but was put in a work camp until he signed away his half of the factory for enough money to bring his wife and son to New York. E-mail correspondence with Mark Seldis, 2008. Curt Valentin himself emigrated to the United States in 1937 "because of his revulsion with Nazism" (Seldis, *Henry Moore in America,* p. 56).
10 J. Stallabrass, "The Mother and Child Theme in the Work of Henry Moore," in *Henry Moore: Mutter und Kind/Mother and Child* (Much Hadham: The Henry Moore Foundation, 1992), pp. 13–39.
11 Herbert Read, introduction to *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings,* vol. 1, *1921–1948* (London: Lund Humphries, 1994), p. xxvii.
12 N. B. Williams and W. Wilson, "Henry J. Seldis: Colleagues Remember," *Los Angeles Times,* March 5, 1978, p. N84.
13 J. Wood, "A Household Name: Henry Moore's Studio-Homes and Their Bearings, 1926–1946," in *Henry Moore: Critical Essays,* ed. J. Beckett and F. Russell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 18.
14 J. Russell, "Henry Moore: Englishman," in *Mostra di Henry Moore,* exh. cat. (Florence: Il Bisonte Editore/Nuovedizioni Enrico Vallecchi, 1972), p. 28.
15 Ibid., p. 26.
16 J. Russell, in *Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1973, p. 58. Russell had been a staff journalist for the *Sunday Times* in London for many years, and from 1950 its art critic. Later in his career, in 1974, Russell was hired to write for *The New York Times,* again as a staff journalist, at the suggestion of Kramer; Russell had previously contributed to the newspaper.
17 Seldis, *Henry Moore in America,* p. 67.
18 M. Stocker, "'The best thing ever seen in New Zealand': The Henry Moore Exhibition of 1956–57," *Sculpture Journal* 16, no. 1 (2007), p. 74.
19 W. Wilson, *A Tribute to Henry Seldis (1925–1978),* exh. cat. (Laguna Beach: Laguna Beach Museum of Art, 1978), p. 2.
20 H. Seldis, "Myopic Selections versus Balanced Taste," *Los Angeles Times,* May 20, 1962, p. A14. Interestingly, in 1962, 1,800 people attended a lecture by Kenneth Clark at UCLA (*Los Angeles Times,* March 20, 1962, p. B13).
21 Seldis, *Henry Moore in America,* p. 11. Kramer agreed: "He belongs to the great line of modern artists who stole back the concept of 'tradition' from the genteel academies and gave it a new purchase on contemporary experience. It is precisely this sense of creative continuity . . . that one feels is disappearing day by day, in Europe no less than in America, in the heartless new movements that are constantly emerging on the art scene." "Henry Moore: Twilight of an Era?" *The New York Times,* June 25, 1972, p. D19.
22 Seldis, *Henry Moore in America,* p. 10.
23 H. Seldis, "Art Reaches a Crossroad," *Los Angeles Times,* March 15, 1959, p. E12.
24 F. S. Wight, "Gentle with Artists, Firm with Their Institutions," *Los Angeles Times,* March 5, 1978, p. N84.

25 Seldis encouraged his superiors at the *Los Angeles Times* to send their art critic abroad to report on art events of international importance in London, Paris, São Paulo, and Venice. K. Ross, "Celebrant of Los Angeles' cultural metamorphosis," *Los Angeles Times*, March 5, 1978, p. N84.
26 H. Seldis, "The Biggest Threat Facing Modern Art," *Los Angeles Times,* February 10, 1963, p. B13.
27 H. Seldis, "Words Obscure Much Criticism," *Los Angeles Times,* December 28, 1958, p. D6.
28 H. Seldis, "Humanity's Guerreschi's Forte," *Los Angeles Times,* May 12, 1961, p. A4.
29 H. Seldis, "Great Names in Sculpture Here," *Los Angeles Times,* April 24, 1960, p. D13.
30 H. Seldis, "Power Found in Sculptures," *Los Angeles Times,* February 28, 1960 p. G6.
31 H. Seldis, "Visitor Airs Art Attitudes," *Los Angeles Times,* December 27, 1959, p. D6.
32 H. Seldis, "Art Needs Touch of Intellect, Even Now," *Los Angeles Times,* February 19, 1961, p. L20.
33 Ibid.
34 H. Seldis, "The 'Pop' Art Trend: This, Too, Will Pass," *Los Angeles Times,* August 4, 1963, p. D3.
35 *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1961, and March 18, 1962, respectively. Another example of Seldis referring to artists with quotation marks is found in "'New Realism' Comes in Humor, Cynicism," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1962, p. Q2, referring to artists in the Dwan Gallery's *My Country Tis of Thee* exhibition of late 1962 that featured Robert Indiana, Claes Oldenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and James Rosenquist. Seldis exempts from his criticism, in this particular review, John Chamberlain, Charles Frazier, Larry Rivers, Robert Rauschenberg, Tom Wesselman, Jasper Johns, and "even" Ed Kienholz, who "are saved from the complete banality and cheap sensationalism of their co-exhibitors by a modicum of invention and by their endeavor to project their own feelings, as well as their thoughts." Seldis also made use of such dismissive punctuation when he referred to "that British ex-patriot 'avant guardsman' Lawrence Alloway" in a scathing review of the *America '63* exhibition at MoMA in 1963. "Art Pendulum Swings away from Abstracts," *Los Angeles Times,* June 2, 1963, p. B13.
36 T. Crow, "Historical Returns," *Artforum,* April 2008, p. 289.
37 H. Seldis, "The 'Pop' Art Trend: This, Too, Will Pass," *Los Angeles Times,* August 4, 1963, p. D3.
38 H. Seldis, "'Art of Assemblage'—the Power of Negative Thinking," *Los Angeles Times,* March 18, 1962, p. A26.
39 Ibid.
40 H. Seldis, "Kienholz Art: Anything Goes," *Los Angeles Times,* March 27, 1967, p. B1.
41 H. Seldis, "U.S. Sculpture Exhibit Looks beyond the 60s," *Los Angeles Times,* May 7, 1967, p. C38. Seldis continues: "If some of his earlier works were melodramatic (though never, as was charged, pornographic), this recent creation plunges into the heart of tragedy." From this group show Seldis also wrote positively about Tony Berlant, Lucas Samaras, Mark di Suvero, Ellsworth Kelly, Fletcher Benton, Peter Voulkos, etc. The exhibition was curated by Maurice Tuchman.
42 H. Seldis, "In N.Y., Torsos in Torment," *Los Angeles Times,* August 12, 1962, p. A12.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 H. Seldis, "Sculptures Echo Hate and Power," *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 1961, p. A5.
46 H. Seldis, "An Unforgettable Experience—the Mystique of Jacques Lipchitz," *Los Angeles Times,* March 10, 1963, p. C3.
47 H. Seldis, "Henry Moore—Man's Hopes and Fears Put on a Pedestal," *Los Angeles Times,* September 19, 1965, p. B2; and H. Seldis, "'Peace on Earth' a Diadem in Music Center Crown," *Los Angeles Times,* May 11, 1969, p. O48.
48 The term crisis humanism was suggested to me by Stephen Bann, who has been most helpful and supportive.
49 H. Seldis, "Henry Moore—Man's Hopes and Fears Put on a Pedestal," *Los Angeles Times,* September 19, 1965, p. B2.
50 M. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum,* June 5, 1967, pp. 12–23. Fried was, of course, responding to a tendency he saw developing in minimalism. Fried championed Anthony Caro's work and had this to say in 1968: "It is as though with Caro sculpture itself has become committed to a new kind of cognitive enterprise: not because its generating impulse has become philosophical, but because the newly explicit need to defeat theater in all its manifestations has meant that the ambition to make sculpture out of a primordial involvement with modes of being in the world can now be realized *only* if antiliteral—that is, radically abstract"; M. Fried, "An Introduction to My Art Criticism," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 30.
51 Kosinski, "Some Reasons for a Reputation," in *Henry Moore: Sculpting the 20th Century,* p. 21. Kosinski also speculates that Moore's appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine in September 1959 was an impetus for an onslaught of negative criticism (ibid., p. 26).
52 C. Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Gaston Lachaise and Henry Moore," *Nation,* February 8, 1947, reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986–93), vol. 2, p. 127.
53 Ibid., pp. 127–28.

54 Ibid., p. 127.
55 See D. Getsy's article on Clement Greenberg and Herbert Read in this volume.
56 R. Krauss, *Terminal Iron Works: The Sculpture of David Smith* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), p. 62.
57 Ibid., p. 3.
58 A. M. Wagner, *Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 12.
59 M. Fried, "Epstein amid the Moderns," *Arts Magazine,* January 1962, p. 51.
60 Thomas Hess review of an exhibition at the Curt Valentin Gallery, published in *Art News,* December 1954, in H. Seldis, *Henry Moore in America,* pp. 135–36.
61 Ibid.
62 Although emotion is not typically addressed in discussions of such critics, it could figure in their negative responses to some art. There were also emotional components to Greenberg's relationship with Jackson Pollock and Krauss's response to David Smith, even if overt sentimentality was avoided in the writing. On the other hand, the pitfalls of such sentimentalization were clearly not avoided by Seldis and other proponents of Moore; he most likely did not identify it as something to be kept in check in his writing.
63 H. Kramer, "Henry Moore: A Very English Romantic" (April 26, 1970), in *The Age of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), pp. 170–71. The inability of Moore's defenders to resist commenting on Moore's personality, life, work ethic, etc., may also have helped to set up a certain impenetrable critical distance for both parties.
64 H. Seldis, "Rights of Wrongs in Art? Conviction 'all that counts,'" *Los Angeles Times,* November 20, 1960, p. O16. The exhibition was at the Everett Ellin Gallery.
65 H. Seldis, "David Smith, Sculptor in Steel, Proves His Mettle," *Los Angeles Times,* November 14, 1965, p. B18. LACMA purchased *Cubi XIII* in 1967, through the Modern and Contemporary Art Council Fund.
66 H. Seldis, "'New Realism' Comes in Humor, Cynicism," *Los Angeles Times,* December 2, 1962, p. Q2; and H. Seldis, "Words Obscure Much Criticism," *Los Angeles Times,* December 28, 1958, p. D6.
67 H. Seldis, "A Trio of Vanguard Types," *Los Angeles Times,* December 6, 1965, p. D12.
68 H. Seldis, "U.S. Sculpture Exhibit Looks beyond the 60s," *Los Angeles Times,* May 7, 1967, p. C38.
69 H. Seldis, "Artist as Computer Doesn't Add Up," *Los Angeles Times,* January 17, 1966, p. C9.
70 H. Seldis, "U.S. Sculpture Exhibit Looks beyond the 60s," *Los Angeles Times,* May 7, 1967, p. C38.
71 Ibid.
72 H. Seldis, "'New Realism' Comes in Humor, Cynicism," *Los Angeles Times,* December 2, 1962, p. Q2.
73 Lawson, "Hilton Kramer: An Appreciation," *Artforum* 23, no. 3 (November 1984), p. 91.
74 He worked, for instance, for the Helen Gahagan Douglas gubernatorial campaign against Richard Nixon in the 1950s.
75 H. Seldis, "Terms Source of Confusion," *Los Angeles Times,* January 4, 1959, p. E5.
76 Wagner, *Mother Stone*, p. 13. Nauman explained the title as a response to Moore's rejection by younger British sculptors in the 1960s: "Moore had been the dominant presence in British art for years; he was pretty powerful. I figured the younger sculptors would need him some day, so I came up with the idea for a storage capsule." Quoted by Coosje van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), p. 110.
77 "Dialogue in *Stone,*" *Time*, August 14, 1972.
78 For instance, Cotter wrote: "Near the end of a decade crammed with junk-art collectibles geared to junk-bond budgets, and a museum season of ragbag sculptures and wallpapered words, we get bare walls and open space in the Olafur Eliasson survey at the Museum of Modern Art and P.S.1," *The New York Times,* April 18, 2008. And in April 2008, Nash opined: "The fact that many artists working today continue to question this notion of the disinterestedness of contemporary art is encouraging. To my mind one of the most important achievements of 'documenta 11' was to bind critics of so-called 'political' art into the debate." M. Nash, "Reality in the Age of Aesthetics," *Frieze* 118 (April 2008). Foster begins his review by saying that the exhibition (at Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands) is one not likely to be found in a major institution in the US "given how politically restrained and financially driven our big museums are today" and concludes with "the exhibition compels the question, Why the apparent poverty of 'forms of resistance,' the apparent paucity of 'desire for social change,' today? On the one hand, the show demonstrates that these forms do indeed exist; on the other, it conveys how fragile, how precarious, they are." H. Foster, "Forms of Resistance," *Artforum,* January 2008, pp. 272–73.