

(Devangana Desai) – Guha-Thakurta relegates important debates and acknowledgements to rather dismissive footnotes.

Considering that most of *Monuments, Objects, Histories* is republished material, the structure of the book needs to be called into question. Such a project demands a far weightier introduction than the nine-page offering the reader encounters here or, alternatively, the addition of a concluding chapter. This could have usefully taken the place of the chapter on 'Art History and Nationalism in Bengal', which covers very similar ground to the author's first monograph and is the oldest of the articles. Despite these minor flaws, and the predictable temporal linearity of the various sections (colonial-national-postcolonial), the monograph deals effectively with important cultural, political and methodological issues, and should be covered by those teaching and learning in the 'new humanities'.

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Note

1 See for example Vidya Dehejia, ed., *Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art*, New Delhi, 1997; Sumathi Ramaswamy, ed., *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, New

Delhi, 2003; Shivaji K. Pannikar et al., eds, *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art*, New Delhi, 2003.

MODERNIST SCULPTURE AND THE MATERNAL BODY

Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture by Anne Wagner, New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2004, 256 pp., 60 col. and 110 b. & w. illus., £30.00

Anne Wagner's account of modernist sculpture does more than draw renewed attention to such important, but often misunderstood, artists as Jacob Epstein, Barbara Hepworth, and Henry Moore. It succeeds in arguing for their conceptual sophistication and, in so doing, it demonstrates how any analysis of international modernism is impoverished without them. Advocates of Moore, in particular, have often lamented how art-historical characterizations of modernism fail to account fully for the complex developments in British modernist sculpture – or, of sculpture at all. In *Mother Stone*, Wagner addresses these lacunae through a critical evaluation of each of these artists' agendas and charts the trajectories of their interconnected struggles with sculptural representation and subject matter. She does this through a highly focused account of pivotal works from these three artists from 1908 to 1934.

Wagner's argument centres on the ways in which these artists made maternity, fecundity, pregnancy, and the reproductive body the fundamental themes of their work. At issue is both the search for metaphors for change, growth, and potentiality as well as the pursuit of a subject matter that would be attuned to the figural pull of sculpture. Unlike modernist painting, sculpture retained a deep and long-lasting attachment to the figure. Many accounts of modernism are disinclined to include

much, if any, sculpture in their canon because of this. Sculpture's bad reputation as lagging behind developments in painting is less an accurate discussion of the trajectories of modernism than a refusal to account for the different registers in which modernist sculptors struggled with conceptual issues. By contrast, Wagner forcefully demonstrates how the imagery of the maternal body became the site at which a large group of artists in Britain conceptualized modernity and art's role within it. As she says, 'The reproductive body was both the catalyst and the vehicle for the new idiom, and vice versa.' (11) Wagner's analysis pays close attention to the exigencies of the sculptural medium and to the particularities of the objects she analyses while at the same time showing how the 'new idiom' of modernism understood the maternal body in relation to larger societal developments. Throughout *Mother Stone*, Wagner draws connections both intimate and broad to a range of contexts such as the rapid developments in medical discourses, debates about the social and political roles of women, the emergence of a British school of psychoanalysis that took parenting as its central object of study, and the international network of modernist artists in which the British sculptors took part.

As Wagner rightly notes, there is a great deal of material to support an analysis of the imagery of maternity in British sculpture of this period. However, the dominant accounts of such artists as Moore and Hepworth have tended to stress other themes such as the importance of materials and processes (notably under the rubric of 'direct carving'). Wagner demonstrates how any discussion of the practice of these artists needs to account for the ways in which the imagery of the maternal body served as the foundation for their innovations and the site of their artistic research. The sculptor's attempt to 'summon material aliveness' (29), in short, was not merely a formal or technical concern, but one that was deeply embedded in a complex struggle with the maternal body as the central allegorical image of generativity.

Wagner's first case study pursues this issue in Jacob Epstein's 1908 architectural sculptures for the British Medical Association building in London. These works caused a scandal in 1908 due, in part, to Epstein's frank display of the nude and the pregnant body. Rather than see this as just a run-of-the-mill case of philistinism, Wagner instead situates these reactions in the larger context of the debates about women's suffrage that were also raging at the time. Motherhood was, for both the advocates and critics of the suffragists, a central social and political issue, and Wagner makes a compelling case for how an 'excessive motherhood' underwrote the scandal around Epstein's works in 1908. Beyond her analysis of this event, Wagner goes on to discuss Epstein's less-often-discussed sculpture of *Matter* – a male nude holding a block containing a fetal figure. Through an analysis of this work, Wagner rewrites the history of direct carving, showing how Epstein sought in this work and others to visualize the internal gestation of forms and figures from matter. While not itself exemplifying the direct carving process, this figure nevertheless aligned the sculptor's creation of figures with the mother's procreativity. As Wagner argues, this was 'a principle that reshapes the medium in a fundamental way' (56). Epstein's declaration with this piece foreshadows subsequent developments in British modernist sculpture that also used the imagery of maternity as the allegory for vitality, organicism, and originality in sculptural practice. Wagner connects this concern to works by George Segal and Byron Kim, two of the many contemporary artists who have returned to the pregnant body recent years, in order to demonstrate how its imagery can be reduced to a 'few central terms' (59). This issue of the formal shorthand for the representation of the pregnant body is

important, as it allows Wagner to extend her analysis to the biomorphic abstractions of Moore and Hepworth, pursuing the discussion of the maternal body even when its mimesis was no longer a concern. Epstein himself provides the bridge, as his carving became, in the years after 1908, less and less concerned with verisimilitude. Wagner discusses this through the 1910 *Maternity* and other works, but it seems that missing from this story is the intense and crucial period of collaboration with Eric Gill during which the metaphors of carving and generativity were expanded upon. Beyond clarifying the development of Epstein's imagery and processes, a full analysis of Gill's work would have, in its own right, helped fill in the leap from Epstein in 1910 to Moore's work in 1927 and after.

It is a little known, lost cast concrete work by Moore from 1927 that Wagner makes the topic of her second case study. A truly astounding and unprecedented object, the *Suckling Child* depicts a child at a breast. From some viewpoints, the sculpture posits the viewer as spectator but from some it places the viewer in the position of the mother at whose breast the baby suckles. 'The relationship makes each viewer a nursing mother' (101), she claims. Wagner sees this work and its corporeal implication of the spectator as a hard-won, utopian development – one from which Moore would retreat in his later work (122). Developing her analysis with the contemporaneous psychoanalytic work of Melanie Klein as a guide, Wagner leads her readers through a detailed history of Moore's drawings in which he conceptualized the core issues. Throughout, Wagner reminds us, Moore 'is after a way of forming that will lend his work a sense of life, of aliveness; and for that task mere bodily mimesis will not suffice' (20).

Often, the cliché of 'direct carving' that guides understandings of Moore's and Hepworth's work carries with it the implication that the artistic practice was similarly 'direct' – that is, unconceptualized and based solely on the artist's reactivity to the local demands of the material and the technique. In this and other chapters, Wagner refutes this and makes a sustained and convincing case for the deep intellectual engagement with metaphors of fecundity and maternity through which these practices were conceptualized. She shows how the imagery of the maternal body transformed in Moore's practice under the pressures of identification that he had put in place. After a protracted struggle, he eventually settled on a practice of containment, stability, and wholeness for his figural compositions that hedged in the more open and unorthodox identifications with the maternal body that the 1927 sculpture employed. Wagner's analysis of Moore is important, for it demonstrates Moore's complexity while not holding back from criticizing the ways in which Moore limited and arrested the potential for cross-gender identification that had initially been the catalyst for some of his bravest leaps. Scholarship on Moore's work is often highly polarized, with his advocates disallowing negative comment and his detractors failing to see sophistication or complexity. *Mother Stone* bridges this schism, offering an account of Moore that is both critical and sympathetic – and one that helps its readers better understand the formulations and stakes of modernist sculpture.

Without a doubt, Hepworth is the pivotal figure in Wagner's account of British modernist sculpture. Her large chapter on Hepworth's work before 1934 is the centrepiece, the most vehemently argued, the most involved, and consequently the least singular in its thesis. This sets it apart from the other chapters, and it is clear that – on this issue of the maternal body – Wagner's multifacetedness takes its cue from the contradictions and complexities of Hepworth's own project. As the most

prominent woman sculptor associated with British modernism, the issue of Hepworth's identification with the maternal body was neither simply adversarial nor utopian, as it sometimes could be with Epstein and Moore. Wagner's analysis proceeds through layers of context in order to evoke the choices that Hepworth faced when she, and others, made maternity the fundamental metaphor for sculpture's potentiality. Wagner starts with a discussion of Hepworth's connections to Piet Mondrian in London, and examines how both saw the boundaries between studio and domestic space to be porous. This proves to be a central issue, as Hepworth staged her own artistic persona as deeply engaged with a particular imagery of studio practice (in photographic essays in *Unit One* and in her *Pictorial Autobiography*). In many ways, Wagner's chapter is more concerned with this persona of Hepworth's than with any single work (though she does provide some engaging object analyses in the course of the chapter). She focuses this chapter, in particular, on a very short review written by the psychoanalytically inclined critic Adrian Stokes. Widening her analysis to the complex ways in which British modernism, in particular, was predicated on metaphors of gender and sexuality, she shows how for Stokes, for Herbert Read, and for our understanding of British sculpture, Hepworth both determined and complicated the categories of analysis. This is not a simple case of the mapping of the biographical mother Hepworth onto her work, and Wagner refutes any notion that there could be a singular or unreflective linkage between Hepworth's own personal experience and her artistic agenda. Wagner shows that Hepworth had multiple aims that cannot be reduced so simply. Through a series of subtle juxtapositions – with Jean Arp, with Moore, with Stokes, with Mondrian, with Read – Wagner's study explores the ways in which gender operated at multiple sites of identification and disidentification in Hepworth's practice and in modernism more broadly. That is, Wagner makes the methodological exemplary step of treating Hepworth as an artist for whom gender was a terrain on which she negotiated aspects of both connectivity and alienation from modernism and its metaphors. Hepworth's own reticence makes such an approach necessary. By attending to it, Wagner successfully establishes how varied, complex, and problematic British modernism's focus on maternity was.

Wagner's final chapter focuses on another Epstein scandal – this time around the 1931 carved statue of *Genesis*. Over the previous decade, Epstein's fascination with so-called 'primitive' cultures had grown and intensified (he would become one of the most important collectors of non-Western art in twentieth-century England). This manifested itself in Epstein's sculptural practice most strongly in the early 1930s, and *Genesis* was an initial foray in a group of carved works that also includes other sculptures such as *Elemental* and *Woman Possessed* (both 1932). In *Genesis*, Epstein fused the imagery of the pregnant body and of the 'primitive' in one statue, resulting in a work that some in England found scandalous because, following the title, it presented an 'African' Eve. Wagner concludes, 'In proposing itself as a beginning, a new point of origin, *Genesis* condenses past, present, and future in one multivalent bodily form.' (221) Wagner charts the fascinating history of the reception of this work, including the ways in which it was interpreted both positively and negatively by women viewers as an image of motherhood. She then offers an extended discussion of the conflation of primitivism with the imagery of maternity through discussion of Leon Underwood and Ernest Mancoba, showing how 'each aimed to address a traditionally Christian and European myth of origins, and, in one way or another, to make it African and black.' (239) In her analysis of *Genesis*, it becomes clear that Epstein's work was not just

a problem for the British public, but more fundamentally a problem for the ways in which modernism is narrativized.

Epstein's stylistic heterogeneity and seeming retreat from abstraction has led many to discount his work after the 1914–18 war. He cannot, in short, be easily placed in the evolutionary teleology of style that often underwrites the story of modernism. Wagner tackles Epstein's purported 'traditionalism' in the 1920s and after and attempts to see it as thematized in *Genesis* itself. She urges that Epstein's work pursues issues that are 'modern, though not modernist in any familiar way: the aesthetic Epstein is pursuing, or so I will argue, actively envisions contemporary sculpture as demanding something other than disruptive revisions or purities of form.' (205) This she accomplishes, though all the while remaining cautious of how antagonistic many readers will be when they try to consider Epstein's figural statues as a different interpretation of modernism. While her efforts are compelling, there are moments when her analysis strains in reaction to this pressure. For instance, a sub-argument contends that the face of *Genesis* is not a face but a mask, and Wagner marshals the time-honoured precedent of Pablo Picasso's *Demaiselles d'Avignon* as a means of providing a suitable genealogy for Epstein's choice. While interesting as a comparison, the conjectural nature of such attempts to improve Epstein's reputation by association detracts from the otherwise detailed and rigorous historical analysis. Would not a better precedent have been the sculptures of Amedeo Modigliani, with whom Epstein had close connections due to their interest in the relationships between their modernisms and their Jewish identities? Both Modigliani and Epstein shared a fascination with the primitive, and he seems like a more plausible (yet less canonically modernist) intertext than Picasso for Epstein's formally analogous carvings.

This brings me to what seems to be a significant contradiction that emerges in Wagner's framing of her account. What is fascinating about *Mother Stone* is that it makes strange the familiar, heroic narrative of the embrace of abstraction in modernism. However, in her earnest attempt to re-value her objects of study, she has adopted the familiar tactic of dismissing some of the related influences, precedents, and parallels that might, by association, make this moment in British sculpture look suspect. That is, while she rightly decries the lack of attention to the complexity of Hepworth, Moore, and Epstein from the perspective of modernism's canonical narratives, she often tries too earnestly to argue for the originality and worth of these artists at the expense of other alternatives and precursors. This is evident in the later chapter on Epstein, but it occurs most visibly in her caricature of earlier versions of modern sculpture in Britain. From many quarters, there has been a recent re-evaluation of British sculpture that has sought to attend to the complexity of its history and the ways in which it complicates the accepted taxonomies of modern art. Wagner's study contributes to this, but in rushing to see Epstein, Moore, Hepworth, and the other modernists of the 1920s and 1930s as worthwhile, the complex interconnections with late-Victorian and Edwardian variants of modern sculpture, for instance, go unrecognized. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, British sculpture articulated itself as modern through a sustained engagement with questions of sculptural representation's interdependence with materiality, physicality, corporeality, and (Wagner's titular keyword) 'vitality'. These earlier sculptors may, from a stylistic perspective, appear 'traditional', yet they articulated a modern idiom through an engagement with the core sculptural themes that later underwrote Moore's and Hepworth's biomorphic abstraction. For instance, the emergence of

direct carving as a practice and as a rhetorical justification for modernism can only be understood in this more extended history, taking into account its late-Victorian practitioners such as James Havard Thomas and Thomas Stirling Lee. Wagner's casual remarks about the 'somnolent art' (1) of British sculpture or her dismissal of anything before Epstein's 1908 sculptures (40) are not just historically imprecise, they also rely upon and re-install a pattern of disregard for alternative practices and trajectories. It is true that the early advocates of non-verisimilar sculpture in Britain also deployed this rhetorical strategy, but Wagner has accepted these earlier modernist pronouncements without questioning how they are symptomatic of the same narrow presumptions she has set out to critique in a later historical moment. This contradiction, however, is a relatively small problem in an otherwise compelling and sophisticated analysis. I emphasize it to point to the ways in which the historical understanding of the terms of modernism can continue to be reconsidered from the challenges a wider and more diverse view of British sculpture presents.

Unquestionably, *Mother Stone* offers an important contribution to literature on modern art, and its argument is both powerful and highly original. Wagner prompts her readers to reconsider the assumptions brought to the representation of the body, to sculpture, and to the historical period she has investigated in such detail. In addition, one of the most valuable components of her discussion is the connection she makes throughout the book to contemporary art. Wagner's tone is urgent, at times personal, and emphatic that the current scientific, medical, political, and ethical debates about the body can be productively informed by an analysis of this earlier moment when modernity, nature, and the body were all negotiated through the theme of maternity. That is, not only does she bring readers a new and complex perspective on these modernist British sculptors, but also her expansive analyses point to the ways in which an understanding of the historical context, the art-theoretical debates, and the conceptual sophistication of these artists is important not just for the history of modernism but for contemporary art and culture.

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REMBRANDT, MONEY AND ART

Rembrandt's Bankruptcy: The Artist, his Patrons, and the Art World in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands by Paul Crenshaw, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 221 pp., 39 b. & w. illus., £45.00

According to the seventeenth-century commentator, Filippo Baldinucci, Rembrandt van Rijn went bankrupt because of his high-risk strategy of buying up all his prints in order to make them scarcer, and therefore more valuable. Whatever its cause, the bankruptcy of Rembrandt has taken on mythical status, a watershed event holding many consequences for the struggling painter and his family; it has also ensured his future reputation as a profligate spender rushing headlong towards self-destruction. Yet, Rembrandt's imprudent spending and highly idiosyncratic position towards money in the materialistic culture of seventeenth-century Amsterdam is only part of the story since, as Paul Crenshaw acknowledges, opening Rembrandt up to financial