

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
Office of Special Events
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NUCLEAR ENERGY

A bronze sculpture entitled "Nuclear Energy," by the eminent British sculptor, Henry Moore, marks the spot where Enrico Fermi and 41 other scientists achieved man's first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction at 3:25 on December 2, 1942.

The sculpture, erected, unveiled and dedicated in 1967, commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the birth of the atomic age. It was purchased from the artist by B. F. Ferguson Monument Fund and presented to the citizens of Chicago. The sculpture is twelve feet high and weighs three tons. Cast by Noack's Foundry, West Berlin, Germany, it was shipped aboard the S. S. Trans Ontario, Poseidon Steamship Lines, and arrived in Chicago on October 27, 1967.

The unveiling and dedication were part of a three-day program at The University of Chicago marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the controlled release of nuclear energy, and took place at 3:25 on December 2, 1967. Mrs. Enrico Fermi and Mr. Moore took part in the dedication ceremonies.

The sculpture is mounted on a base of black polished granite nine feet six inches in diameter. A few feet from the platform on which the sculpture stands is a slab of granite in which four plaques are secured.

They read:

1. On December 2, 1942,
man achieved here
the first self-sustaining chain reaction
and thereby initiated the
controlled release of nuclear energy
2. Site of the First Self-Sustaining
Nuclear Reaction
has been designated a
Registered National Historic Landmark
under the provisions of the
historic sites act on August 21, 1935.
This site possesses exceptional value
in commemorating and illustrating
the history of the United States.
U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
1965
3. This sculpture was provided
by the trustees of the
B. F. Ferguson
Monument Fund
1967

4. Nuclear Energy

Henry Moore - Sculptor

Dedicated December 2, 1967

the 25th Anniversary of the

first controlled generation of nuclear power

an experiment by Enrico Fermi and his colleagues

Henry Moore of Perry Green, England, is one of the foremost sculptors of modern times. His work includes the bronze "Reclining Figure" in Lincoln Center, New York City, a stone sculpture at the UNESCO building in Paris, and a screen carved in Portland Stone for the Time-Life Building in London.

Of his "Nuclear Energy," Moore says: "I prefer to let my work speak for itself, but sometimes it is possible to give a hint or a clue of what was in one's mind in making the sculpture. In this, the upper part is very much connected with the mushroom cloud of an atomic explosion, but also, it has the shape and eye sockets of a skull. The lower half of the sculpture is architectural and in the arched cavities and domed interiors, I had reminiscences, in my mind, of the inside of a church or cathedral. The whole sculpture was meant to have a contained power and force."

After an exhibit showing a small model of "Nuclear Energy," Art News for September, 1965, stated: (The piece) "turned out to be strikingly apt and ingenious. Basically it consists of a dome-like structure, half-lookout tower, half-skull, half-mushroom cloud, which stands on a rugged semi architectural support that is big enough, in the full-scale piece, for a man to walk through. The challenge of the subject could have been avoided by making what would have been, in effect, primarily a new sculpture by Moore and only coincidentally a memorial; and it could have been met by a complex of melodramatic allusion. What Moore has done is to produce something that works as a three-dimensional form and has just that nuance of allusion which will remind the visitor of where he is."

Harold Haydon, Associate Professor of Art and Director of the Midway Studios at The University of Chicago, feels that "The dominant effect, however, is of powerful upthrusting forms, not of a mushroom cloud but of the mushroom's sudden burst of energy in growth."

Moore first works on a maquette, a sketch in clay, which he shapes under his fingers. The process of enlargement begins with a wooden armature of pointed sticks, arranged to reproduce the original proportions of the maquette when covered with plaster. After shaping, a full-size mockup is formed in bonewhite plaster.

Then the giant plaster cast is cut into pieces--in just the right places--and shipped to Herman Noack, a master founder in Berlin. The bronze casting is a complicated process revolving around the jigsaw-puzzle plaster model. It takes ten months from the time the plaster pieces are shipped from England until they are cast and surfaced with chemicals to produce the proper patina.

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