



Two curves /Reacting curved form No.1

Robert Adams

Not on display

Title/Description: Two curves /Reacting curved form No.1

Artist/Maker: Robert Adams

Born: 1957

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Iron alloy, Steel

Accession Number: 31551

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

During the past year, forms in my work have changed from rectangular to curvilinear, solid mass and weight has given way to light linear forms and curved planes, and a fresh element - counterbalance - has appeared... In the new linear works the place of the screen is taken either by a cone or a rod. Upon these, curved planes or lines balance and react upon each other, but their movement this time is not held back, the cone or rod acting only a stationary object or point in space around which one might describe an arc, and their direction is outwards to infinity. I speak of the cone or the rod as being stationary and the curved planes as having movement, when in fact the whole sculpture is quite static. I am of course speaking of implied movement which is brought into being when a form, plane or line is placed on a certain relationship to another. [1]

Adams published the above statement in 1957, in the Royal College of Art's journal, *Ark*. Created in the same year, he is clearly describing works such as *Two Curves/Reacting Curved Form No. 1*, in which a plane curves around three vertical rods. Whilst many of Adams' sculptures of this period included triangular planes, like *Two Triangular Forms*, also in the Sainsbury Centre collection [31550]. Alastair Grieve, the compiler of Adams' catalogue raisonné, described the planes on the *Reacting Curved Form* series as more like shields. [2]

The sculpture is made from welded rods and sheet steel. In Paris from 1948 onwards, Adams had seen the work of Spanish sculptor Julio González, who pioneered welded sculpture. In Britain, Adams' contemporaries Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick and Geoffrey Clarke all welded sculpture, having

learnt the technique on a course with the British Oxygen Company in 1950. The technique was new to sculpture, which was why they partook in the industrial course. In a catalogue about British sculpture from this period, *Exorcising the Fear*, Gallery Director Polly Bielecka explains how advances in technology in the 1940s and '50s meant the processes were available to sculptors in terms of efficiency and economy. [3] Whilst Butler, Chadwick and Clarke remained committed to figuration through their welded sculptures, Adams was alone in creating purely abstract forms through welding.

The work bears resemblance to Reg Butler's maquette for *The Unknown Political Prisoner*, an international competition organised by the ICA, London in 1952 for a sculptural monument to political prisoners. Butler's prize-winning entry was a linear structure perched on a rock, the structure suggesting architecture, a cage, surveillance equipment and broadcasting transmitters [4]. The maquette, on long term loan to Tate, has three figures on the rock gazing up to the structure [L01102]. In contrast, Adams' *Two Curves* does not have any of these figurative and political references, however it maintains a suggestion of utility with its three-pronged base and antenna-like rising rods.

The Sainsbury Centre has the most important body of work by Robert Adams in a public collection in the UK with 27 sculptures and 8 works on paper. They were acquired by collectors Joyce and Michael Morris and bequeathed to the Sainsbury Centre in 2016.

Tania Moore, April 2021

[1] Robert Adams, 'Personal Statement' in *Ark, Journal of the Royal College of Art*, no. 19, 1957, p.29.

[2] Alastair Grieve, *The Sculpture of Robert Adams* (London: Lund Humphries, 1992), p.78.

[3] Polly Bielecka, *Exorcising the Fear* (London: Pangolin London, 2012), p.11.

[4] Tania Moore, 'Elisabeth Frink and the Geometry of Fear' in Calvin Winner (ed.), *Elisabeth Frink: Humans and Other Animals* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2018), p.81.

Further Reading

Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005)

Provenance

Bought by Michael Morris from the artist in 1974.

In October 1984, the University of East Anglia accepted a planned bequest from Joyce and Michael Morris (UEA Alumni). Michael died in 2009 and Joyce in December 2014 when the couple's wishes were implemented.
