



Pierced Sheet

Robert Adams

Not on display

Title/Description: Pierced Sheet

Artist/Maker: Robert Adams

Born: 1951 - 1952

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Brass

Accession Number: 31555

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

Pierced Sheet relates to a series of works Adams created titled *Construction in Space*, which he developed from 1950. In them, he manipulates and bends wire to seemingly define and enclose space. In this, they relate to the work known as 'drawing in space', developed by Spanish artist González and in Britain by Reg Butler. *Pierced Sheet* differs from Adams' earlier *Constructions in Space*, in that it incorporates a flat plane, through which the metal rods intersect. As well as the rods, the sheet is pierced by two small holes as if awaiting further insertions, which serve to visually lighten the plane and allow the light through.

This period saw Adams creating purely abstract works, whereas before he had been creating figurative works, which gradually became more and more abstract. *Pierced Sheet* had no basis in representation, instead Adams is celebrating the materials and the balance of line and form. He emphasises the properties of his materials, the finer rods being more curved than the thicker ones.

Robert Adams was one of eight young sculptors to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1952 in the exhibition *New Aspects of British Sculpture*. *Pierced Sheet* was one of the artworks exhibited in this important exhibition, along with *Standing Figure* [31559], also in the Sainsbury Centre collection. Adams was predominantly represented by his earlier figurative work, rather than the abstract work he was making by 1952. This would have been more in keeping with the figurative work of the other artists who he showed alongside: Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, Geoffrey Clarke, Bernard Meadows, Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull. In the exhibition catalogue Herbert Read identified Adams as distinct from the other artists, writing he was 'isolated in his architectonic pursuits', acknowledging his abstract tendencies. [1]

Pierced Sheet has also been known as *Spatial Construction*, a title that links it to some early Russian Constructivist works. Alexander Rodchenko titled some of his works *Spatial Construction*, and some of Naum Gabo's works were titled *Construction in Space*. Adams' abstract work was closely aligned with the British Constructivist artists. Adams exhibited alongside this group of artists who included Adrian Heath, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin and Victor Pasmore. Their work was antithetical to the styles being exhibited in most museums and galleries, so they self-organised exhibitions and publications. Adrian Heath organised three weekend-long exhibitions in his studio in Fitzroy Street, London and *Pierced Sheet* was exhibited on the mantelpiece in the second exhibition in July 1952. Like the artists who he exhibited with at the Venice Biennale, often Adams' work did not entirely follow their foundational ethos and he continued to carve until 1956 whereas the other constructivist artists built up their forms through constructing.

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, May 2021

[1] Herbert Read, 'New Aspects of British Sculpture', in *Exhibition of works by Sutherland, Wadsworth, Adams, Armitage, Butler, Chadwick, Clarke, Meadows, Moore, Paolozzi, Turnbull, organised by the British Council for the XXVI Biennale, Venice* (London: British Council, 1952),

Exhibitions

'Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951', Djanogly Art Gallery, UK, 07/03/2023 - 23/07/2023

'Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951', Sainsbury Centre, UK, 02/10/2021 - 17/07/2022

'London-Paris. New trends in painting and sculpture', ICA at the New Burlington Galleries, London, 7/03/1950 - 04/04/1950

Second exhibition at Adrian Heath's studio in Fitzroy Street, 11/07/1952 - 14/07/1952

'New Aspects of British Sculpture', British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Italy, 1952

'British Sculpture in the 20th Century', Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 11/1982 - 01/1982

Further Reading

Alastair Grieve, *The Sculpture of Robert Adams* (London: Lund Humphries, 1992)

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

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.107.

Provenance

Bought by Michael Morris from the artist in 1958.

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.
