



Spiral Movement

Mary Martin

Not on display

Title/Description: Spiral Movement

Artist/Maker: Mary Martin

Born: 1971 c. (reproduced from an original of 1951) - reproduced from an original of 1951

Object Type: Relief

Materials: Fibreglass, Plastic

Accession Number: 31588

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Copyright: © Estate of Kenneth and Mary Martin

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

This is a cast produced by the Tate Gallery of Mary Martin's first constructed relief, *Spiral Movement* (1951), which had been acquired by Tate in 1963.

In the original work Martin used rules of geometry as a starting point for arranging cut chipboard shapes on a baseboard grid of nine squares, which were all coated in white paint. Carefully balanced relationships between rectangles and squares based on the 'golden section' rule, lead the eye in right angle turns around the varying planes of the relief. Martin's methodical process of composing *Spiral Movement* in 1951 generated unpredictable results, as she described in a letter to the Tate in 1963:

'I took a simple element (in this case a parallelepiped) and subjected it to a system of changes, not knowing what would happen to it, and without any knowledge of the final appearance of the work. I think all my work has been based on this kind of curiosity.' [1]

Martin's experimentation with constructed relief in *Spiral Movement* (1951) marked a pivotal moment in her practice and this way of working dominated her creative output for the remainder of her life. She envisaged her reliefs as part of the viewer's experience and awareness of themselves and their architectural environment – to be seen as 'an object set upon the wall, if [...] not a development of the wall itself'. [2] She describes the space between the varying planes of her reliefs as 'a sphere of play, or conflict, between opposites, representing the desire to break away and the inability to leave the norm'. [3]

Lisa Newby, January 2021

[1] Mary Martin, letter to Tate, 21 May 1963, Tate catalogue files. Quoted in Matthew Gale's detailed account of *Spiral Movement* (1951) for the Tate Gallery Collection online catalogue: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/martin-spiral-movement-t00586#fn3>

[2] 'Mary Martin: Reflections' in *DATA: Directions in Art, Theory and Aesthetics*, ed. by Anthony Hill, (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p.95.

[3] Ibid.

Exhibitions

'Kandinsky's Universe: Geometric Abstraction from Constructivism to Op Art', Museum Barberini, Potsdam, 15/2/2025 - 18/5/2025

Provenance

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.
