



Spiral Form No.3

Robert Adams

Not on display

Title/Description: Spiral Form No.3

Artist/Maker: Robert Adams

Born: 1960

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Steel (tinned)

Accession Number: 31596

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

In 1960 Adams made four sculptures titled *Spiral Form*. They are each composed of steel rods bent at right angles, at which they are welded together with the rods emanating outwards to create a spherical shape. They are unusual in comparison to Adams' other works, in their symmetry, and being composed of the same repeated unit. They are also unusual in being placed directly on these units, rather than being held on a stand or base.

Compiler of Adams' catalogue raisonné, Alastair Grieve, writes that these works are 'Adams's very personal response to Kenneth Martin's mobiles of brazed rods'. [1] Two of Martin's screw mobiles in this style are in the Sainsbury Centre collection (31208 and 31560). The mobiles have brass spiralling rods emanating from a central rod. The spiralling form suggests the patterns found in nature, and was inspired by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's *On Growth and Form*, published in 1917 and republished in 1942. In the influential book, the mathematical biologist identified how the shape of living organisms conforms to mathematical laws, evidencing why patterns appear in nature. This book was influential on many British artists working in the constructivist tradition, including Adams.

During visits to Paris from 1948 onwards, Adams had seen the work of Spanish sculptor Julio González, who pioneered welded sculpture. In Britain, 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. [2] Whilst Butler, Chadwick and Clarke remained committed to figuration through their welded sculptures, Adams was alone in creating purely abstract forms in welding.

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] Alastair Grieve, *The Sculpture of Robert Adams* (London: Lund Humphries, 1992), p.85.

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

Further Reading

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

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.
