



Prime Rhythms

Anthony Hill

Not on display

Title/Description: Prime Rhythms

Artist/Maker: Anthony Hill

Born: 1958 - 1962

Object Type: Relief

Materials: Perspex, PVC, Wood

Accession Number: 31602

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

Anthony Hill used patterns of prime and composite numbers between one and a hundred to determine the height and arrangement of the reflective black and white laminated plastic strips in *Prime Rhythms*. Hill had a strong understanding of mathematical concepts and by the late 1950s was increasingly interested in how these ideas could inform the composition of his abstract constructed reliefs. [1]

Hill made seven versions of *Prime Rhythms* between 1958 and 1962, which vary in size, composition and materials. In a detailed written account of this series of reliefs, published in 1966, Hill stresses that the prime number sequences were used as a starting point for engaging broader concerns with visual patterns of distribution, deviation and density ratios:

‘Its function was to overlay “unpredictable” rhythms over a very simple modular beat. By unpredictable I mean visual, even the module is only perceivable through the appearance of the “off-beats”.’ [2]

This version of *Prime Rhythms* was completed in 1962 and was purchased directly from Hill by Michael Morris in 1963. In a letter to Morris, Hill groups the seven different versions of *Prime Rhythms* into three phases of development. Hill notes that he ‘corrected’ the composition in four of the reliefs made between 1960 and 1962, and that he removed the central spine and Perspex plane in the two versions completed in 1962. [3]

Lisa Newby, February 2021

[1] Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.191. This version of *Prime Rhythms* is illustrated on p.189. For Anthony Hill’s account of the relationship between his interest in mathematics and his art work see Anthony Hill, ‘A View of Non-Figurative Art and Mathematics and an Analysis of a Structural Relief’, *Leonardo*, Volume 10, No.1 (Winter, 1977), pp.7-12.

[2] Anthony Hill, ‘The Structural Syndrome in Constructive Art’, in *Module, Symmetry, Proportion*, ed. by György Kepes (London: Studio Vista, 1966), p.170.

[3] Letter from Anthony Hill to Michael Morris, dated 7 June, 1963. Sainsbury Centre Archive.

Exhibitions

Anthony Hill: A Retrospective Exhibition, Hayward Gallery, London, 1983

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

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

Further Reading

Anthony Hill, 'The Structural Syndrome in Constructive Art', in *Module, Symmetry, Proportion*, ed. by György Kepes (London: Studio Vista, 1966), p.170.

Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.189.

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.
