

Rhythm and Geometry:  
Constructivist art in Britain since 1951

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Large Print Text



[Gallery 1]

## **Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951**

Constructivist art is about creating abstract geometric forms as a new way of engaging with our visual environment. Often works are built up through systematic processes and new approaches to materials. Rather than looking to illustrate the world, Constructivist artists create new forms that reflect modern life.

Constructivism originated in Russia in 1915 with the utopian and pioneering work of Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko, who aimed to redesign society for an industrial world. Their influence spread internationally. In Britain, the most dynamic legacy occurred after the Second World War.

1951 was a pivotal year for Constructivist art in Britain. Victor Pasmore and Mary Martin made their first reliefs, and Kenneth Martin created his first mobile. These art forms could be experienced three-dimensionally as a dynamic part of the environment.

This exhibition demonstrates the breadth of Constructivism made and exhibited in Britain in the last

seventy years. *Rhythm and Geometry* is drawn from the Sainsbury Centre collection, bringing together works bought by the University from the 1960s and more recent acquisitions, including a major bequest from collectors Joyce and Michael Morris.

\* \* \*

Kenneth Martin (1905–84)  
Mobile Reflector, Elliptic Motif  
1955  
Steel, duralumin and aluminium  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

Kenneth Martin made his first mobile in 1951. He was interested in how their movement and reflections enhanced awareness of the environment. His 'Mobile Reflectors' were designed to be seen from below, and Martin compared the experience to the enjoyment of nature: 'In the summer, in the open, we lie and watch the leaves of a tree, or the clouds.'

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)  
Emperor Relief  
1964

Painted wood

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Peter Stroud (1921–2012)

Transparent Relief

1958

Copper, plastic, canvas board and Perspex

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)

Curved Relief / Pierced Relief

1952–53

Wood

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

John Ernest (1922–94)

Relief: Triangular Motif II

1959

Formica, aluminium, wood and hardboard

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Mary Martin (1907–69)

White-Faced Relief

1959

Wood, plywood, paint, plastic and white PMMA

Purchased 1968

\* \* \*

Natalie Dower (b.1931)

Blue / Green Dudeney Relief

1989

Oil on wood

Donated by the artist

\* \* \*

Joost Baljeu (1925–91)

Synthetic Wall Construction

1964

Wood and paint

Purchased 1969

Dutch artist Joost Baljeu worked in Expressionist, then Cubist styles before he became interested in De Stijl, an abstract art movement that emerged in the Netherlands in

parallel with Constructivism. He made his first constructed reliefs in the mid-1950s. The negative spaces produced by the wooden planes in this relief interpenetrate one another and suggest rotational movement. Baljeu saw equivalence between his way of working and the way nature is structured by cells.

\* \* \*

Victor Pasmore (1908–98)

Transparent Relief Construction in Black, White and Ochre  
1956–57

Plywood, paint and PMMA

Purchased with support from the V&A Purchase Fund,  
1988

Beginning as a representational painter, Pasmore pioneered Constructivist art in Britain in the 1940s and '50s. He spent a summer in St Ives in 1950, where he had contact with abstract artists such as Ben Nicholson. The following year, he made his first constructed reliefs. He used industrial materials, wood and plastics, which gave variation in translucency and texture. For this composition, he created a root rectangle, before positioning the vertical sections of plastics by eye.

\* \* \*

Rana Begum (b.1977)

No. 684, L Fold

2016

Paint on mirror finish stainless steel

Purchased with support from Arts Council England / V&A Purchase Grant Fund; Art Fund; and the Sainsbury Centre Founding Friends

Begum manipulates, folds and collapses space through the reflective surfaces and fluorescent colour of this relief. Her influences include Constructivism, Minimalism, the urban built environment and Islamic art and architecture. With her 'Fold' reliefs, she aims to transcend nationality, class and gender through a common language of colour and form.

\* \* \*

[Link corridor]

## **1951: A New Era**

After the end of the Second World War, the Labour government invested heavily in reconstruction and the arts. In the summer of 1951, they staged the Festival of Britain across Britain. The centrepiece of the Festival was the South Bank exhibition, with new buildings and public artworks.

During this period, Modernist styles reflected progressive agendas. The socialist origins of Constructivism in Russia meant that adopting the style was a political statement as much as an artistic one. A version of this abstraction emerged in Britain in the post-war period. Materials and techniques were adopted from industry, such as plastics and welding. Many artists also became interested in biology, particularly via D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's influential book *On Growth and Form*, which identified how forms in nature follow mathematical rules.

In 1951, the first exhibition dedicated to abstract art since before the war was presented at the Artists' International Foundation. It was organised by artist Adrian Heath, who went on to stage exhibitions in his studio with

Constructivist artists including Robert Adams, Anthony Hill and Mary Martin.

\* \* \*

Ernest Race (1913–64)

Springbok Chair

1951

Stove enamelled mild steel rod with aluminium and PVC

Private collection

\* \* \*

Lynn Chadwick (1914–2003)

Hollow Men

1951

Copper, brass and iron

Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Chadwick was commissioned to make three works for the Festival of Britain, including a large sculpture titled *Cypress* for the South Bank site, pictured nearby. Its ovoid shape echoes the Skylon, which became an architectural icon of the Festival. This smaller version was made later that year. The title *Hollow Men* references T. S. Eliot's poem, a forlorn response to the First World War.

\* \* \*

Ernest Race (1913–64)

Antelope Chair

1951

Steel rod, aluminium, plywood and paint

Anonymous gift, 1985

Ernest Race was one of Britain's leading Modernist furniture designers. He designed the Antelope and Springbok chairs for the outdoor terraces and spaces at the Festival of Britain. Although the Antelope chair was based on the traditional English Windsor chair, Race used new engineering techniques for the shaped plywood seat and curved steel rods forming the back and legs.

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)

Pierced Relief

1952

Mahogany wood

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)

Standing Figure

1949

Brass

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

Resembling a deconstructed human figure in welded metal rods, *Standing Figure* was one of Adams' last figurative works. He went on to carve works that at first indicated the figure, but became more and more abstract.

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)

Divided Column

1952

Holly wood

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)

Pierced Sheet

1951–52

Brass

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Jocelyn Chewett (1906–79)  
Untitled  
1949  
Limestone  
Given by the artist's family, 1982

\* \* \*

Jocelyn Chewett (1906–79)  
Untitled  
1950  
Limestone  
Given by the artist's family, 1982

Chewett carved directly into stone, making complex forms with twisting or intersecting cubes. Chewett had been trained in carving by cubist sculptor Ossip Zadkine, but unlike him she worked in a purely abstract style.

\* \* \*

Mary Martin (1907–69)  
Climbing Form  
1957  
Plywood, Perspex and steel  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Anthony Hill (1930–2020)  
Progression of Rectangles, Version II  
1954–59  
Wood, Perspex and brass  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

Anthony Hill transitioned from painting to reliefs in 1954, with his *Progression of Rectangles*. The composition is a development from the paintings he had been making since the previous year. It introduces a three-dimensionality that Hill went on to develop more fully in his constructed reliefs. This version was made for Michael Morris in 1959.

\* \* \*

Adrian Heath (1920–92)  
Growth of Forms  
1951  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Grace Barratt, through the Alumni Association

Taking its title from Thompson's *On Growth and Form*, Heath replicates the growth formation in nature as he repeats a single unit like a structure of cells. Although

based on a grid, Heath's geometry is looser than that of many of the Constructivist artists that he exhibited alongside in the 1950s.

\* \* \*

Adrian Heath (1920–92)

Composition: Red and Black

1954–55

Oil on canvas

Purchased with support from the V&A Purchase Fund,  
1977

\* \* \*

## Constructionism

The Constructionists were a group of artists based in London in the 1950s who began exhibiting and publishing their work together. They were united by their shared interests in constructing non-figurative artworks built up through geometric form. There was no formal membership but the group included Robert Adams, Adrian Heath, Anthony Hill, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin, Victor Pasmore and Gillian Wise.

The term Constructionism was used in Charles Biederman's book, *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge* (1948). Biederman's commitment to non-representational composition was influential for these British artists, particularly through his confidence in the constructed relief as an important new art form.

The Constructionists collaborated with architects on the design of exhibitions and on architectural commissions, creating total environments. Although some had monumental aspirations, often their work was produced on a domestic scale.

\* \* \*

Anthony Hill (1930–2020)

Five Regions Relief

1960–62

Aluminium, wood and Perspex

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Anthony Hill (1930–2020)

Five Regions Relief

1960–62

Aluminium, wood and Perspex

Purchased 1975

Hill developed a series of reliefs that take a grid of twenty-five squares and make eight cuts to divide it into five 'regions'. He used mathematical formulae to find the possible variations within this system. Hill aimed for his work to 'function and operate with light, space and movement'.

\* \* \*

Mary Martin (1907–69)

Pierced Relief

1959

Wood and Perspex

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Gillian Wise (1936–2020)  
Black and White Relief with Prisms  
1961  
Perspex, glass and Formica  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Charles Biederman (1906–2004)  
Untitled 3  
1936  
Gouache on paper  
Purchased 1969

American artist Charles Biederman lived in Paris from 1936 to 1937, where he became friends with Fernand Léger. His influence can be seen here in the blocks of colour, reminiscent of Léger's tubular figures and objects. Biederman formed his own style in his later reliefs, which were influential for many British Constructivist artists. They knew Biederman's work from black and white reproductions, and believing them to be monochrome, they worked in muted tones.

## Urbanism and Utopianism

With the rebuilding of Britain after the Second World War, there were aspirations to integrate art into the spaces of daily life. Urbanism became desirable and bound to an optimistic vision of the future. Some Constructivist artists collaborated with architects, and others reflect architectural developments in their work.

The symbiosis between Modernist architecture and geometric abstraction led the University of East Anglia to begin to collect abstract art and design in the 1960s, and these works now form part of the Sainsbury Centre collection. It was felt that this geometric abstraction would be an appropriate focus for the collection of the University, considering its iconic Brutalist campus.

\* \* \*

Mary Webb (b.1939)

Circle Line Series: The Isle of Manhattan 2

1984

Screenprint on paper

Donated by Mary Webb, 2012

\* \* \*

Stephen Gilbert (1910–2007) and Peter Stead (1922–99)

House Néovision

c.1955

Ink on paper

Gift from a private donor

\* \* \*

Stephen Gilbert (1910–2007)

House model 'Néovision'

1955

Aluminium, steel and paint

Purchased 1982

Gilbert founded the group Néovision with artists Constant and Nicolas Schöffer and architect Claude Parent, who were united in their belief that artists should collaborate with architects in the design of buildings. Gilbert worked with architect Peter Stead to design metal houses for Huddersfield, which were never realised. Gilbert's model demonstrates how his sculptural concerns translated to architecture by creating geometric spaces defined by colour.

\* \* \*

Jocelyn Chewett (1906–79)

Construction

1965

Painted wood

Given by the artist's family, 1982

\* \* \*

Simon Nicholson (1934–90)

Sculpture No. 6902

c.1960–70s

Plastic and polystyrene balls

Bequest, 1990

Nicholson taught a course on Art and the Environment at the Open University. His 'Theory of Loose Parts' has been influential on children's play theory, suggesting that if children have access to natural materials, building materials and found objects, they will be more inventive in their environment. Nicholson was the son of artists Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson.

\* \* \*

Simon Nicholson (1934–90)

6303

1963

Acrylic and rubber on paper

Bequest from Lady Sainsbury, 2014

\* \* \*

[WINDOW FROM RIGHT TO LEFT]

Anthony Caro (1924–2013)

Table Sculpture CCCLXXI

1977

Steel, rusted and varnished

Given by the artist, 1978

Anthony Caro was known for placing his sculptures directly on the ground, rather than on a plinth. He also produced many 'table sculptures', in which the sculpture interacts with the supporting surface. Caro's teaching influenced a younger group of abstract sculptors, who became known as the New Generation. Caro's *Goodwood Steps* (1996) has recently been installed in the Sainsbury Centre Sculpture Park.

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)

Two Curves on a Rectangular Frame

1964

Painted steel

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Stephen Gilbert (1910–2007)

Construction

1954

Painted aluminium

Purchased 1972

Gilbert lived in Paris, where he was associated with CoBrA, a group that made Expressionist abstract art inspired by the art of children. This is one of his first constructions after he broke away from their style and began to create architectural sculpture. His wife Jocelyn Chewett also worked in geometric abstraction; her sculpture *Construction* is displayed nearby.

\* \* \*

Peter Collingwood (1922–2008)

Macrogauze: EX4, M. 178

c.1978

Linen, steel and aluminium

Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1985

Collingwood was considered the most important weaver of the twentieth century in Britain. His wall hangings, known as 'Macrogauzes', are innovative in that the warp threads cross over, rather than follow vertical lines. The structure itself therefore becomes a fundamental part of the design. He went on to create three-dimensional hanging structures.

\* \* \*

Peter Collingwood (1922–2008)  
Macrogauze: EX2, M. 180  
c.1980  
Linen, steel and aluminium  
Bequeathed by Lady Sainsbury, 2014

\* \* \*

[Gallery 2]

## **Chance and Order**

One of the fundamental characteristics of Constructivist art is the systems underpinning the process of construction. Many Constructivist artists work to mathematical or geometrical rules. Often artworks are composed of simple squares, rectangles and triangles, built up into complex forms. Artists such as Anthony Hill and Kenneth Martin set up systems that would give an unknown outcome, as they explored the tension between chance and order.

In the 1960s and '70s, some artists began using computer-based systems, even before computers were widely accessible. Like mathematical systems, the computer incorporated an element of unpredictability. Due to the nature of early coding, artworks that were created using computers were often linear or geometric, reflective of the Constructivist style.

\* \* \*

Anthony Hill (1930–2020)  
Reconstructed by Richard Plank (b.1951)  
1953–54 (1982 reconstruction)  
Catenary Rhythms

Paint and ink on board  
Gift from the artist, 1983

Hill created this composition based on root rectangles and catenary curves, and worked with a structural engineer to draw it accurately. The original painting was destroyed; however, this reconstruction was made by Constructivist artist Richard Plank for Hill's major retrospective at the Hayward Gallery in 1983.

\* \* \*

Lubna Chowdhary (b.1964)  
'Switch' Series 2: Number 4  
2020

Graph paper, adhesive paper and acrylic  
Purchased with support from the Art Fund, 2021

\* \* \*

Lubna Chowdhary (b.1964)  
'Switch' Series 2: Number 2  
2020

Graph paper, adhesive paper and acrylic  
Purchased with support from the Art Fund, 2021

Chowdhary references Constructivist abstraction in her layers of hand-painted stickers on graph paper in her 'Switch' series. A parallel series 'Code' is more ornamental, suggestive of Islamic imagery. Together the titles delineate 'code switching', the act of conversing in different languages. Chowdhary is known for making installations and sculpture in ceramic.

\* \* \*

Anthony Hill (1930–2020)

Parity Study No. 2

1970

Photoprint on aluminium

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Anthony Hill (1930–2020)

Relief Construction

1956–60

Perspex, aluminium and plywood

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Anthony Hill (1930–2020)

The Nine – Hommage à Khlebnikov No. 2  
1976

Laminated plastic on aluminium

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

The nine configurations in Hill's composition were selected from sixty-five variants which derived from a mathematical tree. Hill selected those which all had five right angles and could be drawn by connecting three L-shapes. This is one of several works that Hill dedicated to the Russian poet and aesthete Velimir Khlebnikov (1885–1922).

\* \* \*

Anthony Hill (1930–2020)

Prime Rhythms

1958–62

PVC, wood and Perspex

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Kenneth Martin (1905–84)

Chance and Order III

1972

Screenprint on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

In the composition of his Chance and Order works, Martin began with a grid and randomly selected pairs of numbered cards which located the points where his lines would intersect. Martin was fascinated by the unpredictable outcomes set in motion by his random selections, combined with the order of the grid.

\* \* \*

Kenneth Martin (1905–84)

Chance, Order, Change

1981

Ink, pencil and gouache on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Kenneth Martin (1905–84)

Chance, Order, Change – Sheaves: Commences,  
Becomes

1982

Ink, pencil and gouache on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Kenneth Martin (1905–84)

Chance, Order, Change: Time Sequence 1, 10 Days in  
June

1983

Ink, pencil and gouache on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Norman Dilworth (b.1931)

1, 2, 3, 4, 5

1999

Stained wood

Purchased with support from the V&A Purchase Fund,  
1999

Norman Dilworth moved away from making kinetic works in the 1970s, favouring large Constructivist sculptures based on mathematics. His sculptures are variously based on the cube. Despite the materiality of the wood, Dilworth gives the form a lightness as it appears to rise and fall and enclose space.

\* \* \*

Natalie Dower (b.1931)

Square Root Two Spirals Nine Moves

2015

Oil on linen

Donated by the artist

\* \* \*

Natalie Dower (b.1931)

Dudeney Oyster No. 2

1985–2019

Oil on wood

Donated by the artist

Mathematician Henry Dudeney's best-known discovery was that by dissecting an equilateral triangle into four and rotating the shapes on their points, it forms a square.

Natalie Dower was in the Systems group and later the all-woman group Countervail. She is unique amongst these artists in working in both painting and sculpture.

\* \* \*

Jeffrey Steele (1931–2021)

Syntagma Sg III 104

1992

Oil on linen

Loan from the estate of Jeffrey Steele

\* \* \*

Jean Spencer (1942–98)

Square Relief 4

1968

Wood with PVA

Purchased with support from MLA/V&A Purchase Grant  
Fund, 2008

Between 1960 and the mid-1970s, Jean Spencer created shallow reliefs in white that demonstrate the subtle differences in surface. She tried to identify the number of possible variations from overlapping identical squares. Her later works were explorations in harmonious or contrasting colours.

\* \* \*

Peter Lowe (b.1938)

Relief, Series A, No. 10

1974

MDF, paint and melamine

Purchased with support from the V&A Purchase Fund,  
1976

\* \* \*

Gillian Wise (1936–2020)

Textum Ars

1991

Digital drawings

Given by the artist, 1991

\* \* \*

Gillian Wise (1936–2020)

Textum Ars

1991

Digital drawings

Given by the artist, 1991

\* \* \*

John Ernest (1922–94)

Preliminary Sketch for Mosaic Relief I

1960

Paint and pencil on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

John Ernest (1922–94)

Sketch for Mosaic Relief IV

c.1966

Pencil and ink on paper  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

John Ernest (1922–94)  
Mosaic Relief III  
1964  
Aluminium and Formica on cellulose-sprayed board  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

American artist John Ernest moved to London in 1951, where he encountered the work of Victor Pasmore and other British Constructivist artists. Ernest created complex patterns of squares and triangles, which he described as 'mosaics'.

\* \* \*

Vera Molnár (b.1924)  
Twenty-five Squares  
1989  
Ink on paper  
Purchased with support from the V&A Purchase Fund,  
1991

Vera Molnár was among the first artists to use computer technology to create works of art. She had been making abstract art since 1946, but in 1968 she used an algorithm to create drawings for the first time. This series of drawings demonstrates her interest in the grid combined with the randomness generated by the technology.

\* \* \*

Gillian Wise (1936–2020)

Net 2, Peano open

1975

Screenprint on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Gillian Wise (1936–2020)

Net 1, Peano closed

1975

Screenprint on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Gillian Wise (1936–2020)

Quatre Épingles

1975

Screenprint on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Gillian Wise (1936–2020)

Net 3, Tiré à

1975

Screenprint on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Gillian Wise (1936–2020)

Relief: Sixfold progression on two planes

1968–69

Perspex, elastic, metal pegs and hardboard

Purchased 1969

Gillian Wise spanned various generations of Constructivist art, as she was part of both the Constructionist group and the later Systems group. Using six cubed grids threaded with elastic, Wise creates three-dimensional line drawings within this relief that encourage the viewer to move around it. She later developed this interest in a series of screenprints displayed nearby.

\* \* \*

Dominic Boreham (b.1944)  
Stos 8/1, 26.V.78 (solid transparent overlay study)  
1978  
Ink on paper  
Purchased 1992

\* \* \*

Dominic Boreham (b.1944)  
IM 36(2) P0.5, 16.VIII.78 (interference matrix)  
1978  
Ink on paper  
Purchased 1992

Boreham describes his works as 'computer-assisted', by which a writing program controlled a flat-bed plotter to create the drawing. This was his sole means of creation between 1977 and 1983. Composed of two transposed layers, a rhythmic and dynamic composition emerges within the grid.

\* \* \*

Max Bill (1908–94)  
Silkscreen in 4 colours

1970

Screenprint on paper

Anonymous gift, 1971

\* \* \*

Max Bill (1908–94)

Three Equal Volumes

1969

Perspex

Purchased 1969

Swiss artist Max Bill studied at the Bauhaus school in Dessau, Germany, from 1927 to 1929. He believed that art should be based on mathematical principles and should have simple formal relationships. His basic sculptural forms were appropriate for mass production, so *Three Equal Volumes* was made as a multiple by X Art Collections, Switzerland.

\* \* \*

Kenneth Martin (1905–84)

Variable Screw

1967

Brass

Purchased 1968

Martin made his first Screw Mobiles in 1953, which have become his most iconic works. Their undulating linear forms are emphasised by subtle movement caused by air currents. *Variable Screw* offers further differentiation as the rods can be changed on the central rod.

Please do not touch

\* \* \*

Kenneth Martin (1905–84)

Screw Mobile

1953

Brass and mild steel

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

Please do not touch

\* \* \*

Li Yuan-Chia (1929–94)

Double-Sided Black and White Magnetic Relief

1969

Steel, wood, magnets and paint

Purchased 1969

Please do not touch

\* \* \*

Victor Vasarely (1906–97)

Tlinco

1956

Screenprint on paper

Purchased 1968

Victor Vasarely is thought to have been the first Op Artist, making works that seem to shift in front of the viewer's eyes. In this print, the transition of squares into rhomboids suggests circles rotating within the grid.

\* \* \*

Kenneth Martin (1905–84)

Black Sixes

1967–68

Oil on canvas

Purchased 1968

\* \* \*

## Movement and Participation

Constructivist artists were interested in creating new art forms that relate to the space around them. Some artists developed this interest as kinetic art, involving movement in space. Movement had been important to the earliest Constructivist artists, including Vladimir Tatlin who imagined that sections of his unrealised *Monument to the Third International* would rotate at different speeds. A model of 'Tatlin's Tower' is in the Sainsbury Centre Sculpture Park.

The interest in movement saw a rise in art that plays with perception, in work that has become known as Op Art. Often through densely packed lines or moiré patterns, compositions seem to shift in front of the viewer's eyes. In the 1960s participatory art emerged, in which participants were invited to actively engage with the work to create form or composition. Many of these artworks were made as multiples, which meant that more people could own and interact with them.

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)  
Horizontal Movement No. 1  
1959

Bronzed steel  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)  
Conic Form  
1952–53  
Teak wood  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)  
Counterbalance No. 2  
1955  
Mahogany wood  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

Adams used asymmetry in his work to suggest movement, and pushed this to its extreme in his four *Counterbalance* sculptures, which became Adams' last carvings. This second sculpture suggests a ballerina in arabesque. Adams was inspired by the creations of avant-garde German dancer and choreographer Kurt Jooss.

\* \* \*

Eric Snell (b.1953)

Cuneiform III

1978

Aluminium, paint, PVC, resin, electrical motor and components

Purchased 1982

Snell carried out a series of experiments with kites, observing how differences in form affect their flight. His kinetic sculpture relates to this interest in the random movement between connected elements. He chose the title Cuneiform because of his work's similarity to the triangular marks of Sumerian script (c.3500–3000 BC), one of the oldest forms of writing.

\* \* \*

Takis (1925–2019)

Signals Series II

1968

Steel, tubular chrome-plated steel, acrylic, electrical components and glass

Purchased 1968

Greek artist Takis used magnets, light and sound as the materials for his art. He created a series of Signals

sculptures with long poles topped with found objects, lights, or coils of metal. This version was simplified for mass production and then created as a multiple by the British company Unlimited. Takis' Signals were so important to a group of artists and curators in London that they named their experimental gallery and news bulletin after them.

\* \* \*

Signals Newsbulletin  
Volume 1: Number 8, June–July 1965  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Denise René in London  
Redfern Gallery, 1968  
Exhibition catalogue  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Construction: England: 1950–1960  
Drian Galleries, 1961  
Exhibition leaflet  
Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Jean Tinguely (1925–91)

For Statics

1959

Ink on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

Jean Tinguely dropped 150,000 copies of his manifesto 'For Statics' from an aeroplane over Düsseldorf for his artwork *Concert of Seven Pictures* in 1959. 'For Statics' urges the reader to live in the present. His call to 'Be static – with movement' reflects his interest in kinetic art, of which he was a pioneer.

\* \* \*

Li Yuan-Chia (1929–94)

Cosmic Point Multiple

1968

Steel, styrofoam, cellulose paint and barrium ferrite

Purchased 1968

Chinese artist Li Yuan-Chia studied in Taiwan, where he developed his abstract art. He then moved to Italy, before settling in England, where he set up the LYC Museum in

rural Cumbria. Li explored the 'Cosmic Point' throughout his visual and participatory work, which he thought of as 'the origin and end of creation'. He was interested in art becoming part of daily life, and this relief was made as a multiple for the viewer to make their own compositions via magnets. Li used a restricted palette: white to indicate purity, black for origins and red as blood and life.

Please do not touch

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)

Rectangular Forms

1955

Engraving on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Robert Adams (1917–84)

Descending Forms

1955

Engraving on paper

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Victor Vasarely (1906–97)

Planetary Folklore Participants No. 1

1969

Polystyrene, metal and magnets

Purchased 1970

Each of the squares and circles in this relief is magnetic, so that they can be interchanged to give different colour and form variations. In total there are 390 elements in 19 colours. The relief was made as a multiple in an edition of 3,000, giving the possibility of endless variety. For Vasarely, 'Planetary Folklore' indicated a world of colour. He was interested in how his work could be integrated into the urban fabric through large, prefabricated units.

Please do not touch

\* \* \*

Yaacov Agam (b.1928)

Movement on White

c.1955–66

Perspex, plastic and wood

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

Israeli artist Yaacov Agam is known for kinetic and optical artworks which are often activated by the viewer; here the central disc would have been spun. Agam had an exhibition of his kinetic work in Paris in 1953, and was included in the first group exhibition of kinetic art at Galerie Denise René, Paris two years later, which included artists displayed nearby such as Victor Vasarely, Jesús Rafael Soto and Jean Tinguely.

Please do not touch

\* \* \*

Lygia Clark (1920–88)

LC2

1969

Aluminium

Purchased 1970

\* \* \*

Lygia Clark (1920–88)

LC3

1969

Aluminium

Purchased 1970

Clark's aluminium sculptures were made to be manipulated on hinges. She believed that the creative expression in the work came from this participation. She described them collectively in her native Brazilian idiom as *Bichos*, meaning 'little creatures'. She made unique versions of them from 1959, but in 1969 worked with the British company Unlimited to make these works as multiples.

\* \* \*

Mary Martin (1907–69)

Rotation

1968

Polystyrene and mirror glass

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

The mirrored half cube had dominated Mary Martin's practice since the early 1960s. This work was designed to be placed either on a wall or a table. Believing her works were suited to mass production, Martin created *Rotation* as a multiple with Unlimited, a company founded by collector and engineer Jeremy Fry.

\* \* \*

Matthew Frère-Smith (1923–99)

Double Khombic  
1965  
Aluminium  
Purchased 1969

Constructed from repetitions of a single unit, this sculpture seems to emanate and grow from a narrow base. He was interested in making form from 'impossible geometry.'  
Matthew Frère-Smith often made large sculptures to be positioned outdoors and collaborated with architect Ernö Goldfinger on a post-war development for Elephant and Castle in London.

\* \* \*

Matthew Frère-Smith (1923–99)  
Octahedron  
1965  
Ink on paper  
Purchased 1969

\* \* \*

François Morellet (1926–2016)  
Sphère-trame  
1962  
Stainless steel

Purchased with support from the V&A Purchase Fund,  
1981

Morellet believed that kinetic art gives control of the experience to the viewer, as the artist does not dictate a single viewpoint. The movement in this mobile adds to the shifting optical effect of the grid. The work was made as a multiple by Galerie Denise René. Morellet created multiples in order to disrupt the idea of the artist genius and facilitate machine production and audience participation.

Please do not touch

\* \* \*

Jesús Rafael Soto (1923–2005)

Kinetic Construction

1965

Painted wood and nylon thread

Purchased 1968

By positioning strands of fine wire together, Soto dematerialises form, which he described as a type of metamorphosis. He wrote, 'We are forced to question our perceptions which seem so reliable.' Soto was originally from Venezuela but lived in Paris and exhibited in

experimental galleries in London, such as the Signals Gallery.

\* \* \*

Stephen Gilbert (1910–2007)

Structure 12 B

1961

Aluminium

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

In the late 1950s, Gilbert began to experiment with curvilinear forms, which he considered to offer a universal experience of space. He wrote: ‘This changing colour and light, by its fluidity and movement, cut across by shadows, partially masks and sometimes completely transforms the original structural elements.’

\* \* \*

## Colour and Rhythm

In the 1960s and '70s, some artists in Britain began to take a geometric approach to painting and printmaking. Their work was rooted in Constructivism through its basis in geometry or mathematical systems. Painterly traditions were broken, and paintings were positioned as objects in space rather than as image. Unframed canvases were presented as installations, or shaped canvases pushed painting into the territory of sculpture. With this use of paint came bold colour. Artists used harmonious or contrasting colour combinations to achieve perceptual or emotive effects.

Like the Constructionists before them, a number of these artists formed groups. The Systems Group was formed in 1969 of artists who took a systematic approach to painting. Countervail was founded in the late 1980s by a group of women artists who wanted to disrupt the view that systems-based art was masculine.

\* \* \*

Michael Kidner (1917–2009)

Intersection

1992

Fibreglass, rubber, paint, metal, elastic and wood

Purchased with support from the V&A Purchase Fund,  
1993

\* \* \*

Jean Spencer (1942–98)  
Untitled (Green and Blue)  
1990

Pastel on paper

Purchased with support from MLA/V&A Purchase Grant  
Fund, 2008

\* \* \*

Michael Tyzack (1933–2007)  
Nickel Yard  
1967

Acrylic on canvas

Donated by Joyce and Michael Morris

\* \* \*

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham  
Olive Green Squares on Vermillion  
1968

Oil on canvas

On long loan from the Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust

Scottish artist Barns-Graham moved to St Ives in 1940, where she was one of a number of abstract artists who have become known as the St Ives School. Theirs was a gestural style of abstraction based on landscape. In this instance, like many Constructivist artists, Barns-Graham has based her composition on a repeated use of squares, but she uses them more freely as they seem to dance across the canvas.

\* \* \*

Mary Webb (b.1939)

Fritton

1971

Oil on canvas

Gift from East England Arts, 2002

Mary Webb uses blocks of pure colour selected for their harmonious relationships. She works within a square format, so that the movement comes from within the composition rather than the length of a rectangular canvas. In this composition of squares, the form seems to spiral outwards from the centre.

\* \* \*

Richard Bell (b.1955)  
Untitled  
1990  
Screenprint on paper  
Purchased 1991

\* \* \*

Richard Bell (b.1955)  
Untitled  
1991  
Screenprint on paper  
Purchased 1991

Bell made this screenprint for a collection of prints compiled by *Constructivist Forum*, the only journal dedicated to Constructivist art in the UK. He aimed to show the colour yellow in a light state and at absolute darkness. The yellow blocks have been printed over the ochre ground, as Bell is interested in layering and depth of colours.

\* \* \*

Stephen Willats (b.1943)  
Visual Automatic No. 1  
1964–65

Wood, paint, Perspex, electrical components and mixed media

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

The central cube rotates at the speed of the alpha rhythm, a type of brain wave, at a speed which alters the viewer's perception. At each corner are lights that flash randomly. Willats is interested in how the viewer perceives order that is not there.

\* \* \*

Richard Paul Lohse (1902–88)

Six systematic colour movements from yellow to yellow  
1955–56

Oil on linen

Purchased 1969

By repeating a consistent rectangle but varying the colour, Lohse believed the elements become 'active carriers of energy'. For him, these units were an integral part of the picture plane. Lohse was particularly influential on many British artists who experimented with colour within the Constructivist tradition.

\* \* \*

Trevor Sutton (b.1948)

Painting A

1980

Oil and acrylic on canvas

Gift from the Contemporary Art Society, 1983

\* \* \*

Tess Jaray (b.1937)

Tamlin

1971–72

Acrylic on canvas

Gift from East England Arts, 2002

\* \* \*

Merete Rasmussen (b.1974)

Form

2011

Stoneware with blue slip

Accepted under the Cultural Gifts Scheme by HM

Government from Leslie Birks Hay and allocated to the  
Sainsbury Centre, 2016

Early in her career, Rasmussen looked to mathematical models for inspiration; but her work develops intuitively.

She creates colourful, flowing continuous forms by hand and uses pigmented slip to achieve their rich colour.

\* \* \*

Richard Paul Lohse (1902–88)

Four coloured groups

c.1952–66

Silkscreen on paper

Given by the artist, 1969

\* \* \*

Nicole Charlett (b.1957)

(Dis)Placements: Corner Locus No. 1

1989

Oil on canvas

Purchased 1991

Nicole Charlett invites space into her compositions through unframed groups of canvases comprising a single work. Made for an exhibition in a disused water tower in the Netherlands, this is her only work to be positioned on a corner. The blocks of colours on the canvases, with the wall between, make a series of squares.