



Untitled 3

Charles Biederman

Not on display

Title/Description: Untitled 3

Artist/Maker: Charles Biederman

Born: 1936

Object Type: Painting

Materials: Gouache, Paper

Measurements: Unframed: (h. 590 x w. 430 x d. 1 mm) Framed: (h. 930 x w. 779 x d. 23 mm)

Accession Number: 31156

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: The Americas, USA

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The geometric forms and use of bold, flat colour that dominate this early painting by Charles Biederman reflect his growing interest in structure and non-representational composition. He painted it in New York in March 1936, when he was experimenting with different modes of abstraction associated with recent European art movements.

Biederman later described this painting as engaging with the 'mechanistic structuring' used by the French painter Fernand Léger. [1] He had initially been inspired by Léger's innovative use of machine-related imagery, but soon became frustrated by the continued association with representational form:

'These works reflect a turning to the mechanistic structuring of Léger for a non-representational solution. This direction no more led me to a non-imitative solution than it did for Léger himself. Léger's method was essentially to adopt mechanistic forms as merely a structuring device for continuing, as did Braque and Picasso in their ways, the simple expressionist rendering of the obsolete art of imitation.' [2]

Biederman was committed to creating a 'new art', completely free from any attempt to imitate or represent the appearance of nature. The year after he made this work, he abandoned painting to focus on constructing abstract geometric reliefs. Using three-dimensional form, colour and light, his

reliefs engage with the creative structural processes underpinning the natural world, rather than its appearance. For Biederman, the abstract 'structuralist' relief was an art form in its own right, related to, but distinct from painting, sculpture and architecture. [3]

The University of East Anglia acquired this painting from Biederman in 1969 for its pioneering collection of abstract and constructivist art. The painting had been exhibited that year at a major retrospective of Biederman's work at the Hayward Gallery in London, initiated by the artist Robyn Denny. [4] Although Biederman's work had rarely been shown in Britain prior to this, he had been an important influence for British artists, including Victor Pasmore, Mary Martin, Kenneth Martin and Anthony Hill, who all corresponded with him directly in the 1950s. [5]

Lisa Newby, June 2021

[1] *Charles Biederman: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1976), p.49.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Jan van der Marck, 'Biederman and the Structuralist Direction in Art' in *Charles Biederman: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1969), p.12.

[4] 'Charles Biederman: A retrospective exhibition with especial emphasis on the Structuralist works of 1936-69', organised by the Arts Council of Great Britain at The Hayward Gallery, London, 18 September - 23 October, 1969, touring to Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, 29 November 1969 - 11 January 1970.

[5] Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.218-225. See also reflections on Biederman's influence on British artists published in *Studio International*, Vol.178, No. 914 (September 1969) to coincide with the opening of the Hayward Gallery exhibition.

Exhibitions

Charles Biederman: A Retrospective Exhibition, Hayward Gallery, London, 1969

Charles Biederman: A Retrospective, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, 1976

The Non-Objective World, South Bank Centre touring exhibition, UK venues, 1992-3

Constructed, 40 Years of the UEA Collection, Sainsbury Centre, Norwich, 2008

'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

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.29.
