



Construction

Stephen Gilbert

Not on display

Title/Description: Construction

Artist/Maker: Stephen Gilbert

Born: 1954

Measurements: h. 913 x w. 310 x d. 458 mm

Accession Number: 31183

Historic Period: 20th century

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In *Construction* the basic unit of a square is used to build up a series of interconnected open spaces. Vertical and horizontal planes of thin aluminium sheet determine the spaces, using colour to establish the overall form and rhythm of the construction. It is an early example of Stephen Gilbert's interest in the crucial role colour can play in creating and animating three-dimensional space:

'The colour elements when in equilibrium form an integral part of the structure and cannot be disturbed, for without balanced colour there is no determined space and consequently no form.' [1]

Gilbert had trained and worked as a painter in the 1930s and 1940s, and in 1952 began to use large, flat, geometric forms in his paintings. Fascinated by the dynamic relationship between colour, form and space, he made at least one relief in 1953 and began a series of freestanding aluminium constructions in 1954, including this work. [2]

Gilbert experimented with architectural models in this period and was involved in debates and exhibitions exploring the significance of the 'new architecture' for artists. [3] He was based in Paris and joined Groupe Espace in 1954, an association of geometric abstract artists and architects committed to the synthesis of architecture and the visual arts. Gilbert collaborated on architectural projects in the mid-1950s, notably with Peter Stead in Huddersfield (see 31271 in the Sainsbury Centre collection). From 1958 onwards Gilbert focused on the development of free-standing curvilinear sculptures (see 31558).

The University of East Anglia acquired *Construction* for its collection of abstract and constructivist art in 1972.

Lisa Newby, June 2021

[1] Stephen Gilbert, 'The Plastic Elements of Construction (Synthesis with Architecture)', June 1954. Republished in *DATA: Directions in Art*, ed. Anthony Hill (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp.126-9, p.128.

[2] Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.204-9. *Construction* is illustrated on p.207 (fig.284).

[3] For example, an architectural model by Gilbert was included in the experimental exhibition *Man vs Machine* in London in 1954. *Ibid.* p.27, p.206.

Exhibitions

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

Further Reading

Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.204-9, ill. p.207.

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.65.
