



Black Sixes

Kenneth Martin

Not on display

Title/Description: Black Sixes

Artist/Maker: Kenneth Martin

Born: 1967 - 1968

Object Type: Painting

Materials: Canvas, Oil paint

Technique: Painting

Measurements: Unframed: (h. 1400 x w. 1525 mm) Framed: (h. 1485 x w. 1627 mm)

Accession Number: 31207

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

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Kenneth Martin was primarily concerned with movement in his artworks, which he recognised as an essential feature of life. In *Black Sixes*, Martin draws attention to the dynamic process of constructing and interacting with an artwork. The painting is dominated by shifting configurations of six black lines, carefully marked out against the painted white background.

Black Sixes highlights the rich variety of possibilities that Martin's units of six lines could generate. The experiences of movement and change inherent in this process of composition were crucial for Martin, and he made connections with a universal expressive force:

'Such kinetic construction has the potentiality to create expressive, symbolic entities. By arriving at the primary structure of forms and acts, one approaches an understanding, a consciousness, of that of our own make up.' [1]

Martin wrote extensively in this period about his interest in kinetic art, stressing that actual movement was not a necessary factor. He makes the distinction between his moving constructions, for which he was well known by the mid-1960s, and his abstract work 'consciously constructed of and expressing movement. In which the fundamental kinds of motion are used, with change of movement, change of rhythm etc. but actual movement does not take place.' [2] This kinetic energy extended to the experience of looking at the completed artwork, with the viewer's perception of change recognised as an equally lively element.

Kenneth Martin loaned *Black Sixes* to the University of East Anglia in 1968 for the exhibition 'Art and the Machine', organised by Alastair Grieve at the recently opened University Library. Later that year UEA acquired the painting from Kenneth Martin, along with a *Variable Screw* mobile, for the University's pioneering collection of twentieth century abstract and constructivist art. [3]

Lisa Newby, November 2020

[1] Kenneth Martin 'Construction and Movement', *Art International*, XI. No.6 (Summer 1967), pp.31-3. The article is reproduced in *Kenneth Martin*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1975), pp.22-24. See p.23 for this quote and p.82 for an illustration of *Black Sixes*, which was shown in the exhibition (Cat. No. 53).

[2] Kenneth Martin, 'Movement and Expression', in *DATA: Directions in Art*, ed. by Anthony Hill

(London: Faber, 1968), pp.68-75 (p.69).

[3] For an account of the early development of this collection see Alastair Grieve, 'A Retrospective View of the University Art Collection', in *The University of East Anglia Collection of Abstract and Constructivist Art, Architecture and Design*, ed. by Veronica Sekules (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1994), p.7.

Exhibitions

Art and the Machine, UEA Library, Norwich, 1968

Kenneth Martin, Tate Gallery, London, 1975

Kenneth and Marty Martin, Camden Arts Centre, London, 2007

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.76.
