



# Catenary Rhythms (reconstruction 1982)

Richard Plank

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## Not on display

**Title/Description:** Catenary Rhythms (reconstruction 1982)

**Artist/Maker:** Richard Plank

**Born:** 1953 - 1982

**Measurements:** h 616 x w 1227 x d 32 mm (675 x 1291 x 67 mm framed)

**Accession Number:** 31301

**Historic Period:** 20th century

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In *Catenary Rhythms* Anthony Hill experiments with using mathematical systems to construct abstract compositions. The relationships between root rectangles and catenary curves in this monochrome painting have been arranged by Hill to create a carefully balanced experience of pure geometric form.

Hill started working on the composition for *Catenary Rhythms* in the early 1950s. After many preliminary studies, he collaborated with a structural engineer to accurately draw out the catenary curves in the final arrangement. A photograph of the engineer's drawing was made into a print, measuring just over 1m x 2m, which Hill painted over in black and white Ripolin, and mounted on board. [1]

In 1954 this early version of *Catenary Rhythms* was part of the experimental exhibition *Artist vs Machine* at the Building Centre in London, which highlighted abstract artists' creative use of industrial materials and techniques. Hill's painting was shown next to a relief by Mary Martin and photographs of reliefs by Charles Biederman, who had been an influential figure for Hill. [2] *Catenary Rhythms* was destroyed after *Artist vs Machine*. However, studies and images of the work continued to circulate. A reproduction was included in the influential book *Nine Abstract Artists*, published at the end of 1954 to draw attention to contemporary non-figurative art in Britain. [3]

*Catenary Rhythms* was reconstructed for Anthony Hill's major retrospective exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London (20 May - 10 July 1983), where it was shown alongside nine studies for the original work. The artist consequently donated this version of *Catenary Rhythms* to the University of East Anglia's pioneering collection of abstract and constructivist art, which had been initiated by Alastair Grieve in the 1960s. [4]

Lisa Newby, February 2021

[1] Alastair Grieve, 'The development of Anthony Hill's work from 1950 to the present' in *Anthony Hill, A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1983), pp.5-67 (p.18). For a detailed discussion of Hill's early paintings, including *Catenary Rhythms*, see Sam Gathercole, 'The Geometry of Syntactics, Semantics and Pragmatics: Anthony Hill's Concrete Paintings', *Tate Papers*, No.31 (Spring 2019),

<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/31/anthony-hill-concrete-paintings>

[2] Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.28.

[3] Lawrence Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists: their work and their theory* (London: Tiranti, 1954), fig.24.

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

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## Exhibitions

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

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

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## Further Reading

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), pp.136-37.

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