



House Neovision

Peter Stead

Not on display

Title/Description: House Neovision

Artist/Maker: Peter Stead

Object Type: Drawing

Materials: Ink, Paper

Measurements: h 56 x w 76 cm

Accession Number: 31329C

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England

In 1955 architect Peter Stead and artist Stephen Gilbert worked together to conceive a house that aimed to synthesise painting and architecture. They looked to the theories of De Stijl, a movement founded in the Netherlands in 1917 by artist Piet Mondrian and artist and architect Theo van Doesburg. Stead and Gilbert proposed a modular house composed of cubes of space defined by the primary colours and black. This colour was integral to the structure, rather than supplementary decoration. As Gilbert wrote, he could 'in fact, sculpt space; making a structure which is interpenetrated by space visually unenclosed by its transparent glass-wall areas, and determined by the planes of colour composing it.' [1]

The designs for the house are demonstrated by five objects in the Sainsbury Centre Collection: a model by Stephen Gilbert [31271] and four drawings by Peter Stead [31329C; 31329D; 31329E; 31329F]. While Gilbert's model demonstrates how aluminium and colour can be used to construct space, Stead's drawings are line drawings in black ink demonstrating various compositions for the structure.

The close material and stylistic relationship between Gilbert's model for this house and his geometric sculpture, such as *Construction*, in the Sainsbury Centre collection [31183], demonstrates how closely he was translating his sculptural concerns into architecture.

Gilbert had formed a group they termed 'Néovision' with the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys; Hungarian born French artist Nicolas Schöffer; and French architect Claude Parent. One of their theories was 'spatiodynamism' or 'space dynamism, defined as 'the constructive and dynamic integration of space in a plastic work'. [2] Through this idea, they aimed to build cities as total environments. Gilbert and Stead used this name to define their collaboration, indicating that they were utilising the theory and ambition of this group for artists and architects to collaborate. The British architect and colleague of Peter Stead, David Lewis, wrote that the houses conceived by Stead and Gilbert, 'should be seen, I think, not as art theory, but as buildings which drew from art theory'. [3]

Whilst Néovision House was never realised exactly, Peter Stead built one with similar aims in Huddersfield. Stead had been born in Huddersfield and went on to run an architect firm there he had inherited from his father, and had a gallery in the city called the Symon Quinn Gallery. Stead met Stephen Gilbert through the artist Roger Hilton, who had an exhibition at Stead's gallery. [4]

Stephen Gilbert was part of the CoBrA group that was formed in Paris in 1948, with artists who made gestural abstraction, inspired by the art of children. He later turned to geometric abstraction and is best known for his sculptures in curved aluminium of the 1960s, such as *Structure 12 B* in the Sainsbury Centre Collection [31558].

Tania Moore, February 2022

[1] Stephen Gilbert, 'The Plastic Elements of Construction' from Synthesis with Architecture, 1954, Tate archive [TGA 8316/1]

[2]
<https://highlike.org/nicolas-schoffer-2/#:~:text=In%201948%20he%20created%20the,city%20full%20of%20utopian%20spaces>. Accessed 7 February 2022

[3] Letter from David Lewis to Alastair Grieve, 12 July 1982, Tate archive [TGA 8316/3]. Stead had founded an urban design firm in Pittsburgh with Lewis.

[4] Stephen Gilbert interview with Adrian Lewis, Sainsbury Centre Archive.

Exhibitions

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

Further Reading

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951 (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.74.
