



# Variations on a Square

Henry Clyne

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## On display

**Title/Description:** Variations on a Square

**Artist/Maker:** Henry Clyne

**Born:** 1964

**Accession Number:** 41289

**Copyright:** © The Artist's Estate

**Credit Line:** Commissioned by architects Feilden & Mawson for the University, 1964

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This sculpture was the first outdoor sculpture placed on the University of East Anglia campus and was the result of a commission. Whilst the campus was still under construction, a temporary site was created called *The Village*. This was designed by local architects, Feilden & Mawson, who commissioned Henry Clyne to create the work for this site. Clyne was teaching at the Norwich School of Art (now Norwich University of the Arts) at the time.

Born in Caithness, Clyne studied at Edinburgh, 1948-54. He also undertook a two-year Harkness Fellowship, teaching and touring the United States of America. As well as Norwich, he taught at Cheltenham and Winchester schools of art.

When the village was decommissioned in 1988, the sculpture was moved to the main campus. In 1988, the sculpture was moved again and relocated to behind the University Library, where it resides today. The sculpture now forms part of the campus Sculpture Park.

The tower-like sculpture is firmly rooted in the tendencies of post-war geometric abstraction. However, the artist employed novel techniques to fabricate the sculpture. What at first might appear to be a typically constructed sculpture of the period is in fact a metal framework, which the artist wrapped in patinated copper sheeting, brazed together with brass rod. The sculpture has the appearance of bronze and therefore is a merging of contemporary and historic techniques of sculpture.

As the title suggests, the inspiration for the sculpture comes from Modernism's fascination with the square. Although this may at first appear to be a very narrow conceptual framework, it reveals itself as one of extraordinary variation and complexity. Clyne's interest mines a rich theme that had started in the 1920s with, for example, Le Corbusier and may in part been inspired by the architects writing about modular design.

In addition, this work takes its inspiration from the teaching activities of the Bauhaus, most notably artists such as Joseph Albers, whose series, *Homage to the Square*, started in 1950, would seem a likely point of reference for Clyne. The exploration of the square in this sculpture creates a cage-like structure, forming various volumes or partial squares, which produce a fascinating interlocking pattern.

In 1967 Clyne took part in the International Concrete Poetry Exhibition in Brighton, presenting collaborations with Ian Hamilton Finlay. Following his busy academic career, he also taught at the Tokoname Ceramic Center in Japan.

Calvin Winner, November 2020

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