



Discs in Echelon, version 2

Barbara Hepworth

On display

Title/Description: Discs in Echelon, version 2

Artist/Maker: Barbara Hepworth

Born: 1935 - 1936

Object Type: Sculpture

Measurements: h. 350 x w. 520 x d. 280 mm

Accession Number: L.58

Credit Line: On long loan from the Hepworth Estate

Discs in Echelon, version 2 is a sculpture by the renowned British artist Barbara Hepworth, where the two-disc forms are in echelon formation.[1] *Discs in Echelon* started as a wood carving in 1935, which is now in the collection of MOMA. It was immediately bought by a Sheffield collector, W.B. Bennet, who presented it to the museum in New York in 1936. Prior to being sent to America, Hepworth made this plaster version. The plaster version was exhibited in London in October 1937 at the Lefevre gallery, *Sculpture by Barbara Hepworth*. This was unprecedented in Hepworth's practice up to that time and indicates that Hepworth considered the plaster a work in its own right. [2] The plaster version was made as a preliminary to a unique aluminium cast of the same year. In 1959, an edition of four solid bronze casts were made, once again taken from the plaster version.[3] The variation of *Discs in Echelon* proposes a move beyond the focus on direct carving, which had thus far dominated her artistic vision. Hepworth acknowledged this was contrary to her allegiance to the 'truth to materials', an example set by Brancusi and others in a rejection of the conventions of academic sculpture.[4] But by casting her work, she was able to supply the ever-increasing demand to show her work. And by carving the plaster for casting, Hepworth was satisfied that she could stay true to her artistic vision.

The word echelon appears in other Hepworth sculptures. The term, more often associated with military formations, must have appealed to Hepworth in expressing the relationship between two forms. Forms that are in unison but stepped in their placement on the base of the sculpture. Each disc is in fact distinct and differ slightly from each other. Whilst almost flat on the inner face and curvilinear on the outer sides. The simplicity and purity of each form is made more dynamic by the craft of hand carving. The white plaster is reminiscent of marble, which for Hepworth may not have been an unconscious decision. Hepworth's work of this period was concerned with the relationships in space, in size, texture, light and weight. But perhaps most significantly in the tension between forms. [5] The simplicity of form and predominance of white placed her work within International Modernism and the Utopian world of Piet Mondrian, Naum Gabo and Hans Arp. As well as the wood carving in MOMA, New York, there are bronze versions of *Discs in Echelon* at Tate and Kröller-Müller.

Calvin Winner, September 2023

[1] a military term where a formation of troops, ships, aircraft, or vehicles are in parallel rows with the end of each row projecting further than the one in front.

[2] Matthew Gale, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-discs-in-echelon-t03132>, accessed September 2023.

[3] Ibid, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-discs-in-echelon-t03132>, accessed September 2023.

[4] ibid, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-discs-in-echelon-t03132>, accessed September 2023.

[5] Barbara Hepworth statement in Herbert Read (ed), *Unit One: The Modern movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture*, London, 1934.

Exhibitions

Barbara Hepworth: Art and Life, The Hepworth Wakefield: 21 May 2021 - 27 February 2022;
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art: 8 April - October 2022; Tate St Ives, 25th November to 1st
May 2023.

Further Reading

Barbara Hepworth: Art & Life, Eleanor Clayton and Ali Smith, (London, Thames and Hudson Ltd,
2021)

Barbara Hepworth: Writings and Conversations, Sophie Bowness, (London, Tate Publishing, 2017)
