



Curved relief/Pierced relief

Robert Adams

Not on display

Title/Description: Curved relief/Pierced relief

Artist/Maker: Robert Adams

Born: 1922 - 1992

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Wood (African hardwood)

Accession Number: 31542

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

The concave shape of *Curved Relief/Pierced Relief* gives it a dynamism as it bends away from the wall and into the space towards the viewer at the top and bottom. This curve of the base means it is unusually three-dimensional for a relief. The curve is carved from a single piece of wood and pierced with a circular void. The hole visually connects it to the wall whilst letting light into the concave section and onto the pegs. Two tapered rods have been inserted through the form in different directions. The opposing energy is emphasised not just by the shapes, but by the grain of the wood thrusting in each direction. The sum is a dynamic composition and experiment in volume and void.

Robert Adams' work was marked by a transition from figurative forms to completely non-representational. His early figurative works were carvings in the style of his near-predecessors, the early works of Epstein, Moore, Hepworth and Skeaping. He transitioned to carved abstract forms, before beginning to construct sculptures using welding and later began to cast as well. *Curved relief/Pierced Relief* is notable for having both carved and constructed elements.

Adams made numerous reliefs, the largest of which was his 20 metre-long commission for the Opera House at Gelsenkirchen, Germany in 1959. In the 1950s, Adams regularly exhibited alongside the group of artists who described themselves as the Constructionists, including Victor Pasmore, Kenneth and Mary Martin and Adrian Heath. The relief was important in the oeuvre of many of these artists, as they had utopian visions of how art could be integrated into the fabric of society. American kinetic sculptor George Rickey noted the prevalence of the relief in Britain at this time, who described the relief 'as a kind of architecture applied to a wall, where it does not require a helicopter to be fully seen'. [1] *Curved Relief/Pierced Relief* seems to break out of this definition in that it does not appear to be a bird's-eye view of a gridded structure like many of the reliefs of his contemporaries. Whereas they had begun as painters before exploring constructions and reliefs, Adams was primarily a sculptor. This becomes clear in the three-dimensional aspect of *Curved Relief/Pierced Relief*.

The Sainsbury Centre has the most important body of work by Robert Adams in a public collection in the UK with 27 sculptures and 8 works on paper. They were acquired by collectors Joyce and Michael Morris and bequeathed to the Sainsbury Centre in 2016.

Tania Moore, February 2021

[1] George Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution* (New York: George Braziller, 1967), p.117.

Exhibitions

'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

Alastair Grieve, *The Sculpture of Robert Adams* (London: Lund Humphries, 1992)

Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005)

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.8.

Provenance

Michael Morris bought *Curved Relief* from the artist in 1955, their first of 35 works by Robert Adams they would go on to own.

In October 1984, the University of East Anglia accepted a planned bequest from Joyce and Michael Morris (UEA Alumni). Michael died in 2009 and Joyce in December 2014 when the couple's wishes were implemented.
