



Linear Relief II

John Ernest

Not on display**Title/Description:** Linear Relief II**Artist/Maker:** John Ernest**Born:** 1964**Object Type:** Relief**Materials:** Aluminium, Perspex, Wood**Accession Number:** 31543**Historic Period:** 20th century**Production Place:** Britain, England, Europe**Credit Line:** Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

The meticulous arrangement and repetition of geometric shapes in the central horizontal strip of this shallow relief have been built up in layers of plywood, formica and aluminium. Thin strips of black formica are used to distinguish horizontal and vertical lines, some of which come in and out of view as the spectator moves around the relief. Set against a large panel of sprayed hardboard, the different elements of *Linear Relief II* work together to create a dynamic harmony of abstract forms and surfaces.

John Ernest was committed to exploring the potential of non-figurative art and was part of an informal network of artists associated with British Constructivism. He began making abstract constructions in London in 1954 and went on to focus on constructing geometric reliefs. [1] The tension between viewing the individual parts of the relief and experiencing the work as a whole was crucial for Ernest:

‘I want to bring about a struggle in the mind of the spectator between the separateness of the parts and the unity into which they are meant to fuse.’ [2]

Ernest had an advanced understanding of mathematics. He was fascinated by parallels between the rules of geometry and the new ways that artists were engaging with abstract spatial relationships. Writing in 1961 about his interest as an artist in mathematical concepts and systems, he described ‘trying to achieve some of the beauty of a formal mathematical system in a visual experience’.[3]

Linear Relief II was part of Ernest’s solo exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1964. Michael Morris purchased *Linear Relief II* from Ernest in 1964. [4]

Lisa Newby, June 2021

[1] Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.195-204. *Linear Relief II* is illustrated on p.200.

[2] John Ernest, 'Statement', Gazette No.1, London, 1961, p.3. Copy available in the Sainsbury Centre Archive.

[3] John Ernest, 'Some Thoughts on Mathematics', *Structure*, Third Series, No.2, 1961, pp.48-53, p.49.

[4] *John Ernest Constructions 1955-64*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1 July - 1 August 1964, Cat. No. 20. See 31573 and 31547 in the Sainsbury Centre Collection for the two additional reliefs that Morris purchased from this exhibition.

Exhibitions

John Ernest Constructions 1955-64, ICA, London, 1964

John Ernest, The Queen's University of Belfast, 1964

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

Further Reading

Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.195-204, ill. p.200.

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.102.

Provenance

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.
