



Conic Form

Robert Adams

Not on display

Title/Description: Conic Form

Artist/Maker: Robert Adams

Born: 1952 - 1953

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Wood

Accession Number: 31549

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

Conic Form is composed of two joined cones. Without a flat base, the sculpture seems as if it may roll on its surface. Adams made a series of carved sculptures in which cones were placed on top of each other. In these, the series of cones adjoin to suggest a human figure in works such as *Dancer* (1950). The simpler construction of *Conic Form* is more strictly abstract. Adams made two works titled *Conic Form* in this period, this in teak and another larger version in oak.

The British sculptor Lynn Chadwick, a contemporary of Adams, began to create a series of sculptures based on the pyramid from the mid-1960s. Like Adams, Chadwick pierced the forms with holes cutting entirely through the pyramid. For Chadwick, the pyramid stemmed from a series of abstractions resulting from welding metal rods together and filling them to create a solid form. Chadwick's pyramids later transformed into the heads of his figures.

Adams and Chadwick followed the tradition of using the void as a sculptural device that began in Europe with Alexander Archipenko and Constantin Brâncuși and which was developed in Britain by Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore. They used holes to create a balance of positive and negative space and ensure the sculpture is visualised fully three-dimensionally. Adams uses this in *Conic Form* by piercing the entire sculpture through both cones, which taper in opposite directions. Due to their opposing planes, each opening offers a complementary form.

Robert Adams was famously associated with Lynn Chadwick through their participation in the exhibition *Young British Sculptors* in the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1952. It was a pivotal exhibition, forever linking the artists as 'the geometry of fear' sculptors, a phrase taken from the catalogue essay. However, in the essay, writer Herbert Read highlighted Adams as distinct from the other artists, for his work being more 'architectonic'. [1] In this sense, Adams' work was closer to the artists who worked in the Constructivist tradition, who Adams exhibited alongside from the 1950s.

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, March 2021

[1] Herbert Read, 'New Aspects of British Sculpture', in *Exhibition of works by Sutherland, Wadsworth, Adams, Armitage, Butler, Chadwick, Clarke, Meadows, Moore, Paolozzi, Turnbull, organised by the British Council for the XXVI Biennale, Venice* (London: British Council, 1952), unpag.

Exhibitions

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

17/07/2022

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.38.

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.
