



## Counter balance No. 2

Robert Adams

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**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Counter balance No. 2

**Artist/Maker:** Robert Adams

**Born:** 1955

**Object Type:** Sculpture

**Materials:** Wood

**Accession Number:** 31556

**Historic Period:** 20th century

**Production Place:** Britain, England, Europe

**Credit Line:** Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

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Composed of three intersecting pieces of wood, the dynamic structure of *Counter Balance No. 2* has energy shifting from each dimension in an elegant form suggestive of a swan. This sense of balance and movement was a key feature of many of Adams' works. Compiler of Adams' catalogue raisonné, Alastair Grieve writes that his *Counter Balance* sculptures are 'the most extreme example of Adams's delight in asymmetric balance'. [1] The extreme angles render the forms almost impossible, as they are carefully poised. In fact, Adams stated that 'I can't stand symmetry. For that reason I don't like Mondrian and the kind of geometric, balanced art that he had been responsible for.' [2] Grieve writes that this group of sculptures recall Adams' interest in dance, comparing them to ballerinas in arabesque. [3] Adams had been particularly inspired by the avant-garde ballet of Kurt Jooss.

In the 1950s, Adams was exhibiting alongside the British constructivist artists such as Anthony Hill, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin and Victor Pasmore, who made constructed works largely in Perspex or metal. Adams was unique amongst his peers in carving at this time. The artists asked critic Lawrence Alloway to write about their work for the exhibition *Nine Abstract Artists*. Alloway noted the distinction in Adams' work, saying he 'is exceptional among the younger sculptors in that he is not only an assembler (wire sculpture) and a modeller but also a carver'. [4] In his artist statement in *Nine Abstract Artists*, Adams wrote how in non-figurative art, 'The idea, the conception, and the material are so closely related, that they must be inseparable and of equal importance'. [5] The three extended forms in *Counter Balance No. 2* are emphasised by the grain of the wood, as the form follows its line. The grain of the mahogany is highlighted by the polished finish.

His carved works demonstrate the influence of Henry Moore and Constantin Brâncuși on Adams who had visited Brâncuși's studio in Paris in 1948. Four *Counter Balance* sculptures were Adams' last wood carvings and were exhibited together at Gimpels Fils in 1956. Grieve writes that with these works, 'Adams must have felt that he had reached the limits of carving'. [6] The tallest, *Counter Balance No. 1* at 61 cm tall, was much more upright, with its neck reaching vertically with the body almost at 90 degrees. The third in the series has four sections, almost as though it has two legs, one kicking out behind. Adams filled pages of sketches with studies for these works, which are in the Tate archive [TGA 8421.1.18]. They demonstrate Adams considering the form of the central section as well as the angle at which the three elements relate.

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, April 2021

[1] Alastair Grieve, *The Sculpture of Robert Adams* (London: Henry Moore Foundation and Lund Humphries, 1992), p.65.

[2] Charles Spencer, *Robert Adams* (London: Gimpels Fils, 1971), unpag.

[3] Grieve, 1992, op. cit, p.65.

[4] Lawrence Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists* (London: Tiranti, 1954), p.21.

[5] Ibid., p.15.

[6] Alastair Grieve, *Robert Adams 1917-1984: A Sculptor's Record* (London: Tate, 1992), p.16.

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## Exhibitions

'Robert Adams', Gimpels Fils, London, February 1956.

'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

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## Further Reading

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.

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## Provenance

Bought by Michael Morris from Robert Adams in 1960.

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.

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