



Structure 12 B

Stephen Gilbert

Not on display

Title/Description: Structure 12 B

Artist/Maker: Stephen Gilbert

Born: 1961

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Aluminium

Accession Number: 31558

Historic Period: 20th century

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Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

The curved, radiating planes of aluminium in this free-standing sculpture are enhanced by the ambient colour and light captured in its polished surfaces. It is one of a series of abstract structures that Stephen Gilbert began in the 1950s, exploring the dynamic relationship between colour, space and form.

Gilbert had trained and worked as a painter in the 1930s and 1940s, and in 1952 began to use large, flat, geometric forms in his paintings. In 1954 he started making freestanding constructions, using orthogonal planes of thin aluminium sheet and colour to determine space and the overall rhythm of the work. [1]

By the late 1950s Gilbert was experimenting with curvilinear forms, which he considered to be closer to the laws of nature and a universal experience of space. [2] While some of his curvilinear structures use coloured surfaces, *Structure 12B* demonstrates Gilbert's growing interest in the reflective qualities of uncoloured polished aluminium:

'This changing colour and light, by its fluidity and movement, cut across by shadows, partially masks and sometimes completely transforms the original structural elements. An extremely mobile and complex system of tonalities is built up from reflections, in the composition of which elements of colour and light are brought forward, which escape control and appear disassociated. These visual metamorphoses of the material structure multiply to infinity the means of describing space.' [3]

Gilbert had been based in Paris since 1946 but maintained a dialogue with artists associated with British Constructivism. *Structure 12B* was part of the exhibition *British Constructivist Art*, which toured to venues in the United States and Canada in 1961-2. It was also shown in the related Arts Council exhibition *Construction England*, which toured to nine UK venues in 1963. Michael Morris purchased *Structure 12B* from Gilbert in 1963 after seeing *Construction England* at Southampton Art Gallery. [4]

Lisa Newby, July 2021

[1] See 31183 and 31271 in the Sainsbury Centre collection and Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.204-9.

[2] Stephen Gilbert, 'Notes on Orthogonal and Curvilinear Space-form', *Structure*, Fifth Series, No.2, 1963, p.33.

[3] Stephen Gilbert, 'Curvilinear Space Form', *Architectural Design*, No. 4 (April 1962), p.206.

[4] *British Constructivist Art*, ICA/American Federation of Arts touring exhibition, USA and Canada, 1961-2, Cat. No. 23; *Construction England*, Arts Council touring exhibition, UK, 1963, Cat. No. 15.

Exhibitions

British Constructivist Art, ICA/American Confederation of Arts touring exhibition, USA and Canada, 1961-2

Construction England, Arts Council touring exhibition, UK, 1963

'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

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951 (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.37.

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.
