



Pierced Relief

Mary Martin

Not on display

Title/Description: Pierced Relief

Artist/Maker: Mary Martin

Born: 1959

Object Type: Relief

Materials: Perspex, Wood

Accession Number: 31562

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Copyright: © Estate of Kenneth and Mary Martin

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

Mary Martin used circular forms to pierce through the layers of a series of abstract reliefs that she made in 1959-60. [1] In *Pierced Relief* (1959), the extent to which each layer is exposed alters as you move around it, creating a dynamic relationship with the different surfaces of the relief.

Martin had developed a theory of minimal drawing in the 1950s, influenced in part by the artist Paul Klee. She highlights the significance of minimal drawing for the *Pierced Relief* series in a statement published in the journal *Studio International*, with an image of *Pierced Relief* (1959):

'The first constructed reliefs I made were based on the moving format of Cubism combined with a system of positive and negative spaces (1951-4). The positive-negative line of Paul Klee helped me to break out of this [...] I was developing a theory of minimal drawing which culminated in the arrangement of the walls in No.9 'This is Tomorrow' Whitechapel 1956. The series of *Pierced Reliefs* were also based on minimal drawing.' [2]

Michael Morris purchased *Pierced Relief* (1959) from Mary Martin in 1960, after seeing it in the exhibition *Essays in Movement: Reliefs by Mary Martin, Mobiles by Kenneth Martin* at the ICA in London. Morris also acquired a sketch by Mary Martin which shows how *Pierced Relief* was informed by Klee's use of a single line to create 'positive-negative' spaces. [3]

Lisa Newby, January 2021

[1] For an overview of Mary Martin's work and the significance of the *Pierced Relief* series, see Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.151-166.

[2] 'Statement by Mary Martin, December 1967', published in Alan Bowness 'The Constructive Art of Mary Martin', *Studio International*, 175, No. 898 (March 1968), p.121.

[3] Grieve, 2005, p.267. This sketch is in the Sainsbury Centre archive, MO160.

Exhibitions

Essays in Movement: Reliefs by Mary Martin, Mobiles by Kenneth Martin, ICA, London, 1960

Mary Martin, Tate Gallery, London, 1984

'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

'Kandinsky's Universe: Geometric Abstraction from Constructivism to Op Art', Museum Barberini, Potsdam, 15/2/2025 - 18/5/2025

Further Reading

Alan Bowness 'The Constructive Art of Mary Martin', Studio International, 175, No. 898 (March 1968), p.121.

Alastair Grieve, Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.151-166.

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951 (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.17.

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.
