



Chance and Order III

Kenneth Martin

Not on display

Title/Description: Chance and Order III

Artist/Maker: Kenneth Martin

Born: 1972

Object Type: Print

Materials: Paper

Accession Number: 31567

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

In 1969 Kenneth Martin began working on a series of drawings, prints and paintings which he titled *Chance and Order*. In these works, Martin began by marking out a grid of squares and a set of rules for connecting the intersecting points, which were determined by randomly selected cards. Martin was fascinated by the unpredictable activity set in motion by these guiding rules and the tension between chance and order in the artworks that they generated.

Chance and Order III is one of five related screen prints that Martin produced in 1971-2. One of the original drawings for this series clearly marks out the sequence of connecting points. [1] For example, the single line triangle that dominates the right-hand side of this print is based on the first set of connections, and the zig-zag of double lines in the top left hand quarter is based on the second. As *Chance and Order III* demonstrates, the sequences suggested by Martin's initial drawings were used to develop complex and visually striking prints and paintings.

Martin wrote and lectured about the *Chance and Order* series in the 1970s and early 1980s and the works were the focus of his exhibitions in the final years of his life. He described his process of constructing the *Chance and Order* works in detail in 1973:

'Recently I have made works which combine chance and programming in the time sequence of activity. The drawings and their resulting paintings and prints I have called *Chance and order*. Not only does chance define position, it gives sequence also. The points of intersection on a grid of squares are numbered and the numbers are written on small cards and then picked at random. A line is made between each successive pair of numbers as they are picked out. In early drawings, to show and use the fact that each direction was drawn in sequence, a system of parallel lines was invented. They were always on the same side of the direction throughout a work. Chance determined the sequence and also the number of parallel lines to each. 1 line would serve for the first drawn, 2 for the second, 3 for the third and so on. Each block of lines and spaces was drawn underneath the preceding ones and did not pass through them.' [2]

Lisa Newby, November 2020

[1] See Drawing 3, Group VIII and Drawing 10, Group VIII in *Chance and Order: Drawings by Kenneth Martin*, (London: Waddington Galleries, 1973), p.55 and p.59. Copy available in the Sainsbury Centre archive.

[2] Kenneth Martin, 'Chance and Order', *One*, October 1973. The article is reproduced in *Kenneth Martin*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1975), pp.45-6 (p.46). A version of *Chance and Order III* was included in the exhibition (Cat. No.113) and is illustrated in the catalogue front piece.

Exhibitions

'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.25.

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.
