



Balanced Forms 3

Robert Adams

Not on display

Title/Description: Balanced Forms 3

Artist/Maker: Robert Adams

Born: 1959

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Steel

Accession Number: 31575

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

Perched on a cross-shaped rod is a curving plane of steel next to a vertical flat plane, echoing the lines of the stand. The contrasting directions in *Balanced Forms 3* give the sculpture a gentle energy. Adams was interested in balance and the suggestion of energy or movement through asymmetry: 'I am concerned with energy, a physical property inherent in metal. A major aim I would say, is movement, which I seem to get through asymmetry.' [1]

All of Adams' *Balanced Form* sculptures from this period have a combination of flat and curved planes balancing on a cross shaped rod. The cross may be subtly indicative of a cross from Christian imagery, as Adams made a handful of works for church settings from 1952 onwards including a crucifix for the Bishop of Coventry (1955) and a sculpture titled *The Thorns* (1958) for a touring exhibition in America.

The sculpture is made from welded rods and sheet steel. In Paris from 1948 onwards, Adams had seen the work of Spanish sculptor Julio González, who pioneered welded sculpture. In Britain, Adams' contemporaries Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick and Geoffrey Clarke all welded sculpture, having learnt the technique on a course with the British Oxygen Company in 1950. The technique was new to sculpture, which was why they partook in the industrial course. In a catalogue about British sculpture from this period, *Exorcising the Fear*, Gallery Director Polly Bielecka explains how advances in technology in the 1940s and '50s meant the processes were available to sculptors in terms of efficiency and economy. [2] Whilst Butler, Chadwick and Clarke remained committed to figuration through their welded sculptures, Adams was alone in creating purely abstract forms through welding.

Adams welded the sheets of steel together before the sculpture was covered with a layer of bronze at a workshop where the surface was mechanically cleaned, in a process known as shot blasting, before being sprayed with molten zinc and then bronze. To make it look like steel again, Adams treated the surface with a chemical solution to give the dark colour of steel, rather than the orange of bronze.

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, May 2021

[1] Alastair Grieve, *The Sculpture of Robert Adams* (London: Lund Humphries, 1992), p.76.

[2] Polly Bielecka, *Exorcising the Fear* (London: Pangolin London, 2012), p.11.

Further Reading

Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005)

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.
