



Rotation

Mary Martin

Not on display

Title/Description: Rotation

Artist/Maker: Mary Martin

Born: 1968

Object Type: Relief

Materials: Glass, Polystyrene

Measurements: h. 130 x w. 130 x d. 90 mm (from wall)

Accession Number: 31589

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Copyright: © Estate of Kenneth and Mary Martin

‘The unique object is not invalidated by the multiple. They can exist side by side.’ [1]

Mary Martin considered her unit-based constructed reliefs to be well suited to mass production and recognised that this allowed for wider engagement with the ideas that she was exploring.

Since the early 1960s, Martin’s work had been dominated by using mirrored half cubes to build up structures that she described as ‘superpatterns’. [2] This approach informed *Rotation*, a multiple edition artwork that Martin produced with the recently founded company Unlimited. In this work, four identical units have been rotated through 90 degrees and mounted on a base. The top surface of each unit is diagonally cut and mirrored, creating a dynamic sequence of reflections. *Rotation* was designed to be placed on a table or hung on a wall. [3]

The base components of *Rotation* were injection-moulded in polystyrene, which meant that high quality, multiple copies of the work could be made at relatively low cost. It was one of a series of multiple artworks produced and marketed by Unlimited, a company founded by the engineer Jeremy Fry to broaden the distribution of experimental contemporary art. An exhibition of Unlimited editions, which included *Rotation*, along with multiples by six other contemporary artists, took place at Robert Fraser Gallery in London in March 1969. [4] In the same month, Mary Martin and her husband Kenneth Martin were the leading speakers in a discussion inspired by a related exhibition of multiples at the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham. Here, Martin outlined her views on the contemporary significance of multiple artworks:

‘A construction has the possibility of being repeated in unlimited quantities with each work having the quality of the original. To some the thought of identical artworks in every home is frightening. To them I would say “Take a look around you and see what is happening”. The whole world watches the exploration of space as it is taking place. Nothing like this has ever happened before. Communication is instant and universal. What is so strange about the multiple work of art? [...] Multiples are really concerned with the dissemination of ideas, like L.P. records and paperbacks...the ideas of one’s own time.’ [5]

The Sainsbury Centre has two examples of Mary Martin’s *Rotation* in its collections: the first (31210) was purchased by Alastair Grieve from Unlimited in March 1969 for UEA’s pioneering collection of abstract and constructivist art, the second (31589) was purchased by Michael Morris from the Axiom Gallery in London in January 1970.

Lisa Newby, January 2021

[1] Mary Martin, 1968. Statement included in the marketing material produced by Unlimited for *Rotation*. Sainsbury Centre archive.

[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. For an overview of the significance of Mary Martin's use of mirrored half cube units, see Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.163-6.

[3] These directions were part of the marketing material produced by Unlimited for *Rotation*. Sainsbury Centre archive.

[4] Unlimited at the Robert Fraser Gallery, London, 19 March – 5 April, 1969. The exhibition preview card describes three groups of works: new works in Unlimited editions by Liliane Lijn and Mary Martin; a preview of future Unlimited editions by Lygia Clark, Robert Filliou, Kenneth Martin and Neal Small; and a review of current works by Takis. The Sainsbury Centre collection includes multiple works by Lygia Clark and Takis, produced by Unlimited, see 31169B, 31169C and 31234.

[5] Mary Martin 'Ideas for Sale', statement published in *Perception*, March 1969, a publication produced to accompany exhibitions at the Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham. Sainsbury Centre Archives.

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

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

Further Reading

Alastair Grieve, *Constructed Abstract Art in England: A Neglected Avant-Garde* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp.163-6.

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.97.

Helen Kaplinski, *British Modern Remade: Style. Design. Glamour. Horror* (London: Southbank Centre, 2012), pp.15-16.

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.
