



Chance, Order, Change - Sheaves: Commences, Becomes

Kenneth Martin

Not on display

Title/Description: Chance, Order, Change - Sheaves: Commences, Becomes

Artist/Maker: Kenneth Martin

Born: 1982

Object Type: Drawing

Materials: Gouache, Ink, Paper, Pencil

Accession Number: 31601

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.

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.’ [1]

In later works, such as *Chance, Order, Change- Sheaves: Commences, Becomes*, Martin introduced ‘Change’ into the series title. In a lecture in 1982 he clarified how the three elements of chance, order and change informed his working process: ‘Chance gives me a primary order, a number sequence. This is my ‘motif’. The order I can develop. Change is what can take place subsequently within the work.’ [2]

Lisa Newby, December 2020

[1] 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).

[2] Notes from a lecture given at the Ruskin School of Drawing, Oxford in May 1982. Reproduced in *Kenneth Martin: Chance, Order, Change*, exh. cat. (Leicester: Kimberlin Exhibition Hall, Leicester Polytechnic, 1983), unpaginated. Copy available in the Sainsbury Centre Archive.

Exhibitions

‘Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951’, Sainsbury Centre, UK, 02/10/2021 -

17/07/2022

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.
