

**Kenneth Martin & Mary Martin:
Constructed Works**

John Wells: Centenary Display

Jonty Lees: Artist in Residence

Winter 2007

6 October 2007 – 13 January 2008

Notes for Teachers

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Introduction

The Winter 2007 displays present:

Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin: Constructed Works (Gallery 1, 3, 4, and the Apse)

This exhibition shows the work of two of Britain's key post-war abstract artists, Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin. The exhibition includes nearly 50 works and focuses on Kenneth Martin's mobiles and his later *Chance and Order* series of abstract paintings, alongside Mary Martin's relief sculptures.

Modernism and St Ives from 1940 (Lower Gallery 2)

This display of artists associated with St Ives from the Tate Collection is designed to complement the Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin exhibition. It includes work by Mary Martin, Victor Pasmore, Anthony Hill and Adrian Heath alongside St Ives artists such as Peter Lanyon, Terry Frost and Ben Nicholson.

John Wells: Centenary Display (The Studio)

A small display of paintings and relief constructions by John Wells, designed to celebrate the centenary of his birth.

Bernard Leach and his Circle (Upper Gallery 2)

Ceramics by Bernard Leach and key studio potters who worked alongside him. These works form part of the Wingfield-Digby Collection, recently gifted to Tate St Ives.

Jonty Lees: Artist in Residence (Gallery 5)

New works by Jonty Lees, completed during his residency.

How to use this pack and structure your visit

The aim of this pack is to provide information about the artists whose work is exhibited, an exploration of key themes and suggested activities. Also included are information on resources and key art terms. The pack should help you create an introductory discussion about some of the issues raised by the current displays. It can be used to help focus work in small groups in the exhibition, and to allow follow-up within the classroom.

Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin: Constructed Works

This exhibition shows the work of two of Britain's key post-war abstract artists, Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin. Part of a generation of British artists who 'rediscovered' abstraction in the 1940s, the exhibition highlights the correspondences and differences between their working practices. The exhibition includes nearly 50 works and focuses on Kenneth Martin's mobiles and his later *Chance and Order* series of abstract paintings, alongside Mary Martin's relief sculptures.

This exhibition is the first joint public exhibition of their work in Britain since 1971. Living and working together, they were constantly exchanging ideas, although they rarely made direct collaborations. They had their first joint exhibition in 1954 and on only two other occasions did they collaborate - *Environment* produced with the architect John Weeks for the exhibition 'This is Tomorrow' at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956 and on the joint exhibition 'Essays in Movement' at the Institute for Contemporary Arts in 1960.

Mary Martin (1907 – 69) was born in Folkestone. She studied painting at Goldsmiths College and at the Royal College of Art where she met Kenneth. In the 1930s she focused on still-life and landscape and also worked as a textile designer teaching at Chelmsford School of Art 1941-4. She painted her first abstract picture in 1950 and made her first relief in 1951. Mary made numerous public commissions and collaborations with architects including a Wall Screen for Musgrave Hospital Belfast (1957) and Wall Construction for the University of Stirling.

Kenneth Martin (1905-84) was born in Sheffield. He studied painting at Sheffield School of Art and worked as a graphic artist in the 1920s before studying fine art at the Royal College of Art where he met Mary in 1929. Kenneth made his first abstract paintings in the late 1940s and his first three-dimensional construction in 1951. He worked primarily in three-dimensions making kinetic mobiles, constructions and public commissions until the late 1960s. He also taught at Camberwell School of Art and Goldsmiths College. In 1969 he began a group of paintings known as the *Chance and Order* series, which he worked on until his death in 1984.

Key works

Mary Martin

***Columbarium* 1951** (Gallery 1)

Plaster

Estate of Mary Martin. Courtesy of Annelly Juda Fine Art.

This was Mary's first experiment with relief. Encouraged by the sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi, Mary used a baking tin to cast a plaster relief. She then cut triangular, rectangular and square shapes into the plaster creating niches and areas of empty space. This was her first real experiment with positive and negative areas within composition and she quickly realised that plaster was an unreliable and unsuitable material for her interests. All subsequent works were constructed reliefs in the true sense of being built up from the flat picture plane (see, for example, *Spiral* 1951 close by).

In *Columbarium* you can see Mary experimenting with her characteristic 'tilt', which receives light in a very particular way and which encourages one to feel a sense of movement 'up and over'. This is the last time

Mary gave her work a title suggestive of something else. Later works have titles that provide only an objective description of the process and materials used.

First Maquette for Wall Screen, Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast 1957 (Gallery 1)

Wood, aluminium and paint

Private collection

This is one of two maquettes on display here made in relation to her first public commission to design a Wall Screen for Musgrave Park Hospital (note the first is very much a sculptor's maquette, whereas the second is for the architects). This was a collaboration with the architect John Weeks and, as the maquettes demonstrate, Mary was keen to create a work completely embedded with the building's construction. She chose to use the same materials what those used to construct the building (brick, cement and stainless steel) and the piece was actually fabricated by the site builders. The screen was therefore linked to the plan and design of the overall building but also served to direct the flow of visitors, perhaps one reason why she chose to include holes to provide views through from one side to the other. Mary said 'This is intended to be a symbol, on the personal scale, of the building, its architecture and function, and the lives of the people who work in it'.

Mary's design creates a serpentine composition and she also called it *The Waterfall* describing it as a symbol of life. The pattern of apertures and metal surfaces encourages the idea of movement or of water falling down. Despite being an example of a successful architectural collaboration, in more recent years the screen has been removed and placed as a free-standing work in the hospital grounds.

Inversion 1966 (Lower Gallery 2)

Metal, oil and wood

Tate

This large work dominates the display in Lower Gallery 2 contrasting with the works around it but also interacting with the light, shadow and space of the building and landscape beyond. This work, which is 6 foot high by 24 foot long, is made of aluminium plates mounted on hardboard on baseboards of black painted plywood. There are 96 plates in four rows of 24 and Mary has permuted the planes, which are placed in four different directions in vertical columns of four.

For the first time in her work Mary used open half cubes (only the diagonal side is used) and the play of light and reflections across the surface creates an extraordinary sense of movement and surprising partial images. She described her device as a 'moving format of cubism combined with a system of positive and negative spaces'. The 'moving format' was a geometrical device identified by J.W. Power in his book *Elements of Pictorial Construction* (1933) in which he describes the movement of a unit across a plane through a motion of sliding and rotating, with each stage determining the location of other related elements within a composition.

The grand scale of this work reflects Mary's ambition to create architectural works that interact with their environment and must be linked to her later commission to create a *Wall Construction* at the University of Stirling. Rarely shown in complete form, this work has recently been restored with the help of the Tate St Ives Members.

Kenneth Martin

Mobile Reflector 1953 (Gallery 1)

Painted and anodised aluminium and wood

For this mobile Kenneth Martin has suspended metal rods with circular coloured discs. If you stand directly below it you can see the play of colour reflections (red, blue and green) in the polished aluminium surfaces. It is an example of Kenneth's earliest mobiles, which he describes as 'lessons in balance' where he constructs using commercial materials and suspends with nylon (a new material, strong but invisible).

This mobile moves according to air temperature and movement in the room. Kenneth saw movement as a way of linking space with time. He maintained his mobiles were resolutely abstract composed of what he called 'primitive forms' such as lines, circles and ellipses. In contrast to the mobiles of Alexander Calder, who undoubtedly inspired Kenneth (they were exhibited in London in 1951), these mobiles do not directly reference nature.

Construction for the Nuffield Foundation 1967-8 (Gallery 4)

Brass

Zoological Society of London

This brass screw mobile, which is powered by a motor, creates different shapes and patterns as it slowly turns. A cage, a spiral staircase, butterfly wings are all suggested as it moves. This mobile was commissioned for the Nuffield Institute of Comparative Medicine at London Zoo. It is Kenneth's largest mobile and it took six years to complete.

Kenneth' screw mobiles were a development of his earlier reflector mobiles. He used three basic elements – the parabola, the circle and the vertical line and constructed them from mass produced brass bars, rings and rods. They were made through the ordering of fundamental movements such as rotations and twists and by using bars of various sizes he was able to programme their positions on the vertical rod. He also introduced a whole range of further permutations by having, for example, parabolas or rings related to the Fibonacci sequence.

As can be seen with this work, the position and lighting of these mobiles is important. The unpredictable play of light on the surface of the mobiles, casting dramatic shadows on the wall behind introduces an element of chance into these 'constructed' objects.

Chance and Order 23 (Yellow) 1978 (Gallery 3)

Oil on canvas

Estate of Kenneth Martin. Courtesy of Annely Juda Fine Art.

In the late 1960s Kenneth returned to using oil paint on canvas producing a series of over 40 paintings based on variations of a particular working process. Each canvas was carefully 'gridded-up' and then pairs of numbers chosen by chance were used to determine the sequence of orientation of lines corresponding to the coordinates of the grid. This process enabled Kenneth to work in a very structured way, but also a way where he could not determine or foresee the final outcome.

Here you can see how Kenneth has built up his composition using a sequence of yellow lines based on this system. The bold pure yellow pigment contrasts with the sensuous heavily worked white paint surface. The stark geometry of the lines creates a sense of space and energy within the painting; at the same time the intensely worked physical surface suggests a feeling of contained or muffled stillness.

For discussion

- How good are you at describing Kenneth's mobiles or Mary's reliefs? Explore the exhibition and find a work that catches your eye – look at it closely. Trace its shape in the air with your finger. Can you find words to describe it?
- Now glance around the whole exhibition again. What sorts of things are these artists interested in? Make a list.
- Mary and Kenneth often used sequences and permutations for the basis of their work. Can you find a work where you can see the exact permutation used? Can you 'break the code'?
- Mary often used a half cube form, which she called a 'tilt'. Can you think why?
- What colours do Mary and Kenneth prefer? Why?
- What materials and processes did they use to make their work?
- Why do you think they like reflective surfaces?
- The exhibition creates some striking 'conversations' between two and three-dimensional works. Choose two works that you feel speak to each other in some way (they might share characteristics or they might be strongly contrasting) and explain to the group why.

Key themes

Constructions

The idea of 'construction', of building forms using individual elements through the application of mathematical rules, was central to the work of both artists. Kenneth and Mary developed their constructions through relationships of simple, repeated formal forms using mathematical progression, sequences and permutations and rules of proportion.

Abstraction

Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin looked to a particular type of abstract art – they looked to the earlier proponents of pure geometric abstraction for both formal and philosophical foundations and in particular to the earlier Constructivists such as Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko. They formed a group, which included Victor Pasmore, Anthony Hill and Adrian Heath that were concerned with establishing a new wave of constructed abstract art in Britain. They used geometric forms according to proportional systems and numerical mathematical sequences, with the intention of giving a visual form to the laws and systems on which nature is founded (note: this is different to abstracting from nature).

Materials

They rejected traditional artists' materials as being too closely associated with traditional values. They turned to readily available materials such as sheet metals, hardboard, plywood, formica and perspex. They loved to experiment with the contrasting qualities of materials such as smooth versus textured, matt versus shiny and absorbing versus glowing. Their use of modern industrial materials also distanced their art from the traditional, private, unique work of art and imbued their work with a sense of optimism for the future.

Movement and stillness

In each gallery you will find works that convey an extraordinary sense of both movement and stillness – of both change and constancy. Kenneth Martin's mobiles use what he described as 'primary kinds of movement' – some sort of rhythmic sequence which may be reliant simply on air current but sometimes an actual motor. Mary Martin does not use actual movement in her relief work but it is invoked in the play of light over the projecting and reflective surfaces. You could say that the energy of the spiral was developed in planar composition by Mary but in linear composition by Kenneth.

Shadow

Consider what role shadows and reflections play in their work. The dramatic shadows cast by a spotlight in Kenneth's mobiles add another dimension and place the work in the environment around it. Shadow was the

'fifth element' according to Mary and the 'tilts' and angles of her cubes, half cubes and planes create new spaces and complexities of colour.

Chance and order, sequence and pattern

It is important to understand the role of both chance and order in their work. This is perhaps best understood in relation to Kenneth's *Chance and Order* paintings where lines were painted according to numbers that corresponded to coordinates on a grid chosen by chance. Mary described her own working method as 'nuclear building' and a logical process of growth, starting from a unit and subjecting it to a logic or sequence and accepting the result without any interference by the artist and without foreknowledge of the final outcome.

Colour

The predominance of black and white and occasionally red is noticeable in the early reliefs and constructions. It was only in the late 1950s that Mary began to add painted colours to the side surfaces of some of the reliefs, eventually experimenting with bold coloured Perspex. Kenneth Martin tended to use pure unmixed colours pitched against a deeply textured white in his later paintings.

The active line

Kenneth Martin was influenced by Paul Klee's idea of the 'active line' and the idea of 'taking a line for a walk' to describe the combination of rules and chance that underpin his drawing. For Kenneth everything began with line. His constructions and mobiles are drawings in space – their lines embody both dynamism and controlled energy.

Art of the environment

Both artists were interested in the relationship between art and architecture. They wanted their work to be fully integrated within the environment and both were involved in architectural commissions. Mary, who collaborated with the architect John Weeks on a number of occasions, argued that working in an exhibition context was only a 'makeshift for reality'. In 1958 she wrote 'is the artist to remain the 'chamber architect', a 'backroom boy' or is there a real place for the constructive artist in architecture?'

Social role of art

Mary and Kenneth's ideas about art and architecture reflect their optimism and genuine belief in a social role for art. They believed art could and should be part of the fabric of life. Such a belief was inextricably linked to a particular movement advocating for a politicised abstract art in post-war Britain and contrasts sharply with the interest in pop and commercial art that also emerged in this period. They believed their pure abstraction, based on a rigorous scientific, mathematical and systemic approach, had a moral and intellectual authority that could play a real role in the public realm. Such views must be seen in the context of a Post-War Utopianism. This after all, was the period that saw the founding of the Welfare State and the establishment of the Arts Council.

A human dimension

Despite formal systems and industrial materials Kenneth and Mary Martin's work always remains human both in terms of scale and character (note: this contrasts strongly to, for example, American Minimalism, see Glossary of art terms). They never forgot the importance of the hand-made – of making rather than simply realising a design. Within their rigorous systems is the belief that human beings live a pattern of constantly repeating sequences. Mary Martin wrote, 'the artist, a part of nature, seeks to discover and use forming principles in order that he may in his turn manifest nature. It is a forming principle that I see the idea of polarity, constancy and change'.

St Ives and abstraction

Modernism and St Ives: Constructed Form, has been selected to complement the Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin exhibition. It includes works from the Tate Collection that link to post-war British abstraction. On the one hand you will find works by artists such as Adrian Heath and Victor Pasmore who, like Kenneth and Mary, were interested in the early Russian Constructivists. On the other hand, you will find artists such as Peter Lanyon, Wilhelmina Barns Graham, Paul Feiler and Barbara Hepworth - more closely associated with St Ives

and abstraction inspired by landscape and a sense of place. Mary's work *Inversions* has been placed in the centre of the display to highlight both the similarities and differences between these artists working in the post-war period.

Abstract art and the environment today

Today a younger generation of artists such as Tomma Abts, Peter Peri and Toby Paterson are looking with fresh eyes at abstract art from the 1950s and 1960s. There has also been a revival of interest in the social utopian ideals of the immediate post war period and the debates about art and architecture in the public realm continue. Toby Patterson argues that a study of the work of Mary Martin can sharpen the way we look at both the rhythms and eccentricities of cities.

Ideas and influences

Outlined below are some of the key influences on the work of Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin.

1. **Science and mathematical models.** Kenneth Martin was known to have studied such models at the Science Museum.
2. Kenneth Martin was influenced by the work of **Paul Klee** – he saw an exhibition of his paintings at the National Gallery in 1945/6 and Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* was republished in UK in 1953.
3. Both Mary and Kenneth were acquainted with the Swiss artist/ designer **Max Bill** and former Bauhaus student who wrote *The mathematical Approach to Contemporary Art* (1949) they also knew **Theo van Doesburg**, leader of the Dutch De Stijl movement.
4. Both artists were influenced by the American artist and theorist **Charles Biederman** who advocated abstract art made from industrial materials. The source of the term Kenneth Martin used to describe their work 'Constructionist' actually came from Charles Biederman whose ideas were set out in *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge* 1948 and *Letters on New Art* 1952.
5. The **Golden Section and Fibonacci Series** was often used in their constructions. The Golden Section (See Glossary of art terms) is defined as a line divided so that the smaller part is to the larger part as the larger part is to the whole. It works out at roughly 8:13 or a bit over one third to two thirds. The Fibonacci Series is a sequence of numbers named after the Italian mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci (1175-1250). In a Fibonacci sequence each number is the sum of the two before it (0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34 ...). The Fibonacci numbers are evident in nature, for example, the number of spirals found in a sunflower seed head. For help explaining the golden section and Fibonacci series to children see the following websites, http://www.coolmath.com/reference/math-dictionary-G.html#Golden_Ratio
<http://www.amathsdictionaryforkids.com/>
6. Scientific forms such as the **Möbius strip** and the **double helix** may have had an impact on the design of Kenneth's mobiles. The Möbius is a surface with only one side and only one boundary. It has the fascinating mathematical property of being non-orientable. It was discovered independently by the German mathematicians August Ferdinand Möbius and Johann Benedict Listing in 1858. The double helix, which is a very strong shape, is most closely associated with the structure of DNA molecules that was first published by James D. Watson and Francis Crick in 1953, based on work by Rosalind Franklin.
7. Mary's preoccupation with systems of scale and proportions was influenced by **Le Corbusier's** *Le Modulor* (1948) and *Le Modulor 2* (1954). This was a measuring tool based on the proportions of the body. Le Corbusier claimed it could be used on an international scale and for the production of mass-produced manufactured articles.
8. Other key sources for both artists included, T.A. Cook *The Curves of Life*, London, 1914

D'Arcy Wentworth *Thompson On Growth and Form*, Cambridge, 1917, republished 1942
J. Hambridge *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry*, New York, 1926, reprint 1948
J.W. Power *Les Elements de la Construction Picturale*, Paris, 1932
M. Ghyka *The Geometry of Art and Life*, New York, 1946
Le Corbusier *Le Modulor*, 1950, English Edition, London, 1954.

John Wells: Centenary Display

This display offers insight into Wells' interests as an artist and marks the centenary of John Wells' birth. It includes key paintings such as *Aspiring Forms* (1950) as well as lesser known works that range from mysterious landscapes to strong geometric abstractions such as *Project 70* (1970). Also in the display is selection of archive material that includes works on paper and exhibition broadsheets.

John Wells (1907-2000) was born in London and trained as doctor. In 1928 he visited Cornwall and studied painting briefly with Stanhope Alexander Forbes in Newlyn and also met Ben and Winifred Nicholson and Christopher Wood. In 1936 Wells became a GP for the Scilly Isles, a position he held until after the Second World War. He eventually chose to pursue a career as a full-time artist settling with a studio in Newlyn. He became closely associated with the St Ives school of Moderns such as Hepworth and Nicholson and was also strongly influenced by Naum Gabo. He was a founder member of the Crypt Group in 1946 and the Penwith Society of Artists in 1949. Wells works as an assistant to Barbara Hepworth 1949-51. He exhibited widely in the 1950s and early 1960s with exhibitions in London, Paris, Sao Paulo and New York. However the critical failure of a one-man show at Waddington Gallery in London in 1964 led to a crisis in confidence. He rarely exhibited after this date although he continued to work.

Key work

***Crystals & Shells* 1946**

Oil and pencil on canvas

Private collection

This painting combines precise drawn geometric forms with more curved natural forms. It includes Wells' characteristic triangular ellipse form and it has a highly textured surface onto which the forms were drawn and painted. There are small areas of strong colour that contrast with the overall earthy colour of the ground.

This work was started on the Isles of Scilly and completed in his Newlyn studio. It was exhibited as part of the Crypt Group in 1946. The combination of crystal forms with the oval, pebble-like shapes was a device Wells used on a number of occasions. He said that the triangular ellipses had infinite potential for variation. He also talked about the idea of containment and said it was an analogy for his experience of the Isles of Scilly where the cluster of islands are surrounded and 'contained' by the sea. Wells' interest in shells and crystals can also be linked to his knowledge of Barbara Hepworth's crystal drawings, Gabo's perspex sculptures that explored internal space using transparent materials and the work of the crystallographer J.D. Bernal.

For discussion

- Describe the forms and colours in this painting.
- Can you see similar forms or colours in other paintings in the display?
- Describe the way Wells uses line in his paintings.
- Describe the texture of Wells paintings.
- Why do you think Wells was interested in crystals and shells?
- In which aspects of the landscape is Wells most interested?
- In what ways do you think his experience of being a doctor and/or living on the Isles of Scilly informed his art practice?
- Why do you think the majority of Wells paintings are small?
- Compare Wells' paintings to works by other St Ives artists such as Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Ben Nicholson and Peter Lanyon and also to the work of Mary Martin and Kenneth Martin.

Key themes

Sense of place

Although Wells' work is often abstract, he always maintained a romantic attachment to landscape. It is his deep knowledge and sense of place rather than topographical accuracy that informs his paintings. The wind, the weather, the sea birds, boats, the geology, the weathering and the history and underlying structure of the land of West Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Wells was also keen to convey a sense of movement through the landscape or as his friend, the painter Peter Lanyon, once put it 'moving in a dancing sense within a place'.

Geometry and mathematics

Wells studied geometry and mathematical systems of proportion such as the Golden Section (see Glossary of art terms). He also had knowledge of medical and navigational instruments. He used systems to divide the blank canvas into a series of lines and intersections which then formed the basic structure of his compositions and which determined the relationship between painted shapes and the drawn line. He often used intersecting lines that created triangles and parabolic curves. His friendship with Naum Gabo also encouraged him to experiment with string and relief collage to articulate space.

The constructed landscape

Wells liked to combine a formal geometric structure with more natural forms inspired by the landscape. You could say that he applied the lessons he learnt from Constructivism (see Glossary of art terms) to create 'constructed landscapes'.

Music

Wells was interested in music and musical composition and the way one can draw analogies with abstract painting. He compared the pictorial elements of line, texture, proportion and colour with the rhythm, balance, poise and tension of musical composition.

Flight and movement in space

Wells was interested in birds and planes and the articulation of abstract space through their flight patterns. He studied the birds rising and falling on air currents at the cliffs edge and their movement through the sky and across the sea. Wells was interested in aircraft and air shows and during the Second World War he was in contact with the Hurricane pilots stationed on the Isles of Scilly.

Colour and texture

A quick glance around the display reveals a generally muted palette punctuated by small areas of strong colour. Wells once described the Cornish landscape as 'Its real colour is grey, out of that these colours glow from inside' – an apt description for his paintings. Wells was known to be interested in camouflage designs (including patterns, shapes and insignia) and he must have had direct contact with both naval and air force designs while on the Isles of Scilly. He was interested in this idea of concealing forms and places within a landscape. His characteristic way of working was to slowly build up a textured background over a period of time, often scouring, scraping and incising into the surface. The final image and colours was then added more quickly, often with thinly applied washes of luminous paint.

Small scale

The majority of Wells works are small in scale. There are a number of reasons for this ranging from lack of workspace and materials during the war, the influence of the artist Paul Klee, an interest in the microscopic to a more a general deference to quieter informality. It also reflects his interest in the intensity that can be achieved through the small scale.

Science and nature

Wells had a deep interest in the scientific exploration of natural forms such as the growth of plants, the shapes of crystals or rock and the flight of birds. Perhaps stemming from his medical training and his

interest in sailing and navigation, he searched for the hidden structure beneath the surface qualities of the natural environment. Constructivism provided him with a pictorial language through which he could explore his ideas. The pebble shape, which appears again and again in his work was, for Wells, symbolic of a natural shaping process. It could also be seen as a wider metaphor for human renewal after the Second World War.

Jonty Lees: Artist in Residence

Jonty Lees is the fifth artist to partake in the Tate St Ives Artists Residency Programme at the Porthmeor Studios, St Ives. In Gallery 5 you will find a selection of work created by Jonty during his residency including video and sculpture.

Jonty Lees was born in Bangor, North Wales in 1971. He studied at University College Falmouth and the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. He lives and works in Cornwall. He has had a number of exhibitions and was included in *Art Now Cornwall* at Tate St Ives 2007. In 2003 he transformed the Newlyn Art Gallery into a spectacular velodrome for his contribution to *Transitions*, a series of exhibitions for emerging artists.

Key work

We Salute You 2007

Mixed media

Jonty has selected a range of ordinary objects such as sticks, files, scissors, a spanner, a spoon, bucket handles and paint brushes and attached them to the wall. He has also attached invisible thread to each object so that when somebody leaves through the door at the end of the gallery the objects rise up, like a group salute or cheer.

Jonty says this work is about communication or rather miscommunication. How often is it only when someone is leaving that you find the courage to say what you really want to? It is also about poor objects, about objects that lie around our homes, studios and offices that are thrown away, discarded or ignored. How do they gain our attention? And how much attention are we prepared to give them? There is the possibility that visitors may miss the salute, others may turn round just in time while other people in the gallery may get a surprise!

We smile at the comedy of the movement, the dramatic effect. This is funny but also sad – these objects, which are clearly anthropomorphic, are literally ‘poor’ – they cannot hold our attention for long. Just as people turn their heads when someone new walks into the room so they soon turn back their conversations and preoccupations.

Key themes

Daydreaming

What happens when we daydream. What insight or poetic moment can we gain if we find ways to look at the world from different viewpoints? Jonty’s strange juxtapositions and humorous transformations invite us to look again.

Poor objects

Jonty is interested in unpretentious materials and production methods. He likes everyday objects, gadgets and games. He also likes to transform objects, often in bizarre and comical ways.

Playful

These works are playful and inventive. Jonty likes things to be quick, fun and sometimes flippant. He relishes strange juxtapositions such as a BMX with hair and simple events such as dropping a board to shift leaves. Often these works explore the more eccentric sides of human behaviour and communication. The creativity of child play and childhood memories of gadgets and games are at the centre of his practice.

Making your mark

What happens when we draw a view or object in front of us on a piece of paper? What happens to scale, movement and time? What is so special about the hand of the artist? And why do so many people need to make their mark? What does it mean for an artist to sign their work or for lovers to etch their name on a tree or for the graffiti artist to spray a tag?

The studio space

The activity within the artist's studio has long been the subject for art work. Jonty has just completed a residency where he was given a historic studio in St Ives - the same studio that was once occupied by Patrick Heron and before that Ben Nicholson. While a residency offers the freedom that time, money and space can provide it also brings with it certain expectations. *Tour de Studio* perhaps hints at the weight of the task. Jonty says he could not possibly have attempted to paint in a studio space still so resonant with the marks of past artists. So what else can you do in a studio space apart from reinstate forgotten objects, ride a bicycle or invent contraptions to spread leaves? As Michael Archer says in the exhibition catalogue, Jonty has 'raised mucking about in the studio to an art form'.

Art Now

What are the concerns of artists working today? What materials and processes do they use? Use this display as a springboard to a study of contemporary art in the wider context. Look at other exhibitions such as the Turner Prize, the Venice Biennale or Documenta.

Suggested activities and discussion

Listed below are some activities/discussion points that Jonty himself has designed for school groups in relation to his exhibition.

Casio (older groups)

Make an animation:

Boy jumping

Girl waving

Tail wagging

Eyes blinking

Things that go up and down (Like the objects on the wall).

Draw your first picture, trace around it to make your second picture, making alterations where necessary.

To animate,

- a) Place one on top of the other and use a pencil to flip the first drawing over the second
- b) Stick two drawings back to back with a pencil between them. Hold the pencil between the palms of your hands and rub together, the drawings will spin and the image will change
- c) Just use two pages from your sketch pad and draw in the corner

We Salute You (older groups)

What would you say to stop someone leaving the room?

Write it down as a one-line poem.

Never show anyone.

The leaves (older groups)

What would you like to happen over and over again?

Would that be a good or bad thing?

Finger tracing (all ages)

- 1) Go into the Kenneth and Mary Martin exhibition and use your finger to trace around their sculptures. Imagine what those lines would look like if you really drew them.

- 2) Look through the window onto the beach in Lower Gallery 2. Follow the surfers with your finger. Knock one off into the water.

Tour de studio (all ages)

Imagine riding a bike in your classroom.

Sailing a yacht down a cul-de-sac.

Flying a helicopter in the Town Hall.

How would you like to travel in the Gallery?

Draw a picture.

BMX with Hair (all ages)

- 1) Think of two words that don't usually go together.

Jam > Garden

Carpet > Tree

Water > Spike

Door > Plane

Think of better ones. Imagine what they'd look like and draw them.

- 2) Find a partner. Fold a piece of paper. One person draws something on the top and the other person draws something on the bottom. Draw animals or people.
- 3) Draw random things (skateboards, teapots, televisions) and then add interesting haircuts or beards. A toaster with a fantastic moustache.

Bernard Leach and his Circle

Ceramics by Bernard Leach and key studio potters who worked alongside him can be seen in upper-gallery two. These works form part of the Wingfield-Digby Collection, recently bequeathed to Tate St Ives.

Key work

Tile c. 1925 23 cm square, 2 cm thick
Wingfield-Digby Collection

This stoneware tile has the design of a bird feeding its young painted in iron. It has sgraffito detailing where Leach scratched through the wet clay slip before firing. It is an excellent example of Leach's commitment to quiet, contemplative forms with soft, muted colours derived from the earth. It also shows his powerful sense of composition.

Leach would sketch his ideas before decorating his ceramics. He was an expert at combining pattern and motif with the colour and shape of each work. He had his own favourite decorations such as birds, horses and griffins and he often combined animals and plants with simple patterns and marks. Look here how he fits the curved design with the shape of the square tile. The drawing has a lightness to it that is both playful and energetic. This tile has the St Ives pottery stamp and another illegible signature in the lower corners and there are eight St Ives seals impressed on the back.

Leach set up the St Ives pottery in 1920 with fellow potter Shoji Hamada. With a team of workers and students, Leach made a range of ware that included decorative raku, and functional tableware, souvenirs and large earthenware dishes. He also produced individual pieces in stoneware such as this tile.

Bernard Leach (1887-1979). Leach spent the first ten years of his life in Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan before going to school in Britain in 1897. He studied at the Slade School of Art and in 1909 returned to Japan where he studied traditional Japanese pottery. His experience of both the East and the West meant his work included ideas, aesthetics and stylistic influences of contrasting cultures. Leach was passionate in his desire to introduce to Britain a feeling for harmony in pottery that he had learned in the Far East. At St Ives he and Hamada built the first oriental climbing kiln in the West. His sources of inspiration were wide; he studied Medieval British and Staffordshire pottery as well as Chinese, Korean and Japanese ceramics. Leach travelled extensively throughout his life and in 1940 he published his influential *A Potter's Book* outlining his philosophy and methods. He is often described as the 'father of the modern studio ceramic movement' inspiring people all over the world to value handcrafted work. Leach coined the term 'head, hand and heart' to express the sense of equilibrium and wholeness that he believed industrial societies needed to regain.

For discussion

- There has been much discussion in recent years as to whether ceramics is an art or a craft. Leach insisted that he was an 'artist-potter' and he always regarded his individual pots as objects of art rather than craft.
- Why do you think he considered these pots more important than the standard ware (tableware)?
- What do you think the display at Tate St Ives says about the status of these objects? Are they sculptures or domestic objects?
- The Japanese critic Soetsu Yanagi complimented Leach by describing his earthenware as 'born not made'. What do you think he meant by this?

- Leach said he wanted his pots to have 'vitality' – to capture a sense of energy and life. Can you find examples that you feel have this quality?
- The simplified motif of a bird was a favourite for Leach. He considered it a symbol of freedom and peace. Can you find other motifs in his work and what do you think they symbolise?

Ways of Looking

Questions to ask of any work

Personal responses – what do you bring to the artwork?

What are your first reactions to the work?
What is the first word that came into your head when you saw it?
What do you notice first?
Does it remind you of anything?
What do you think the artist wants to communicate?

Looking at the artwork – what can you see?

What materials and processes has the artist used to make the artwork?
What is it? (Is it a film, photograph, drawing, sculpture, installation, performance etc?)
Where is it? Describe the space. Does it link with other artworks in the exhibition?
How big is the artwork? What effect does scale have on the artwork and our relationship to it?
Is it time-based? If so, describe what happened and how long it took. Is it repeated?

Subject and meaning – what is it about?

Is the artwork about a subject, issue or theme?
Is it about real life?
Could the work have a symbolic, moral or political meaning?
Is there a story or narrative within the work?
How does the work make you think about time?
Does it make you consider aspects of life or art in a new way?
Does the work have a title? Does this affect the way you see it?
What information is available in the gallery (e.g wall text or caption)? Does this information affect or change the way you see it?

Art in Context – influences which shape the creation and reading of a work

Who is the artist? Do you think the background of the artist can inform us about why or how it was created, or what it might be about?
Was the artwork made for a particular location or event?
Does the artwork link to other works made by the artist?
How does the artwork link to work by other contemporary artists?
Does it connect to any art of the past?
What does the artwork tell us about the ideas and values of today's world?
How does it link or comment on contemporary social, cultural and political issues such as consumerism, globalisation and multi-culturalism?
Does the work make use of modern materials and technology or perhaps it re-invents age-old processes?

Suggested activities

Listed below are some suggested activities. Please note that only pencils and paper are allowed in the gallery.

Quick/ simple activities

Grids, patterns and systems. Use simple geometric forms such as wooden blocks or card to explore systems and sequences to create patterns. Use graph paper and plot coordinates chosen by chance to understand how Kenneth Martin created his Chance and Order paintings. Experiment with bright/primary colours and use sticky pads and/or blue tac to create a raised surface that reflects the underside colours.

Möbius strips. Take a strip of paper and turn it once before joining the ends. Cut the loop that it makes into two, making two loops, one will be inside the other. You can then repeat the process on one of the remaining loops. This activity is full of surprise and encourages curiosity – it shows how we categorised two and three-dimensional objects before we have any real experience of them.

Parabolas. A parabola can be defined as the set of all points in the plane equidistant from a give line and a given point. Use graph paper to plot parabolas to demonstrate how Kenneth Martin created his mobiles.

Colour and/or numerical sequencing. Encourage children to experiment with colour and number sequences. Use graph paper and coloured pencils or experiment with coloured card, paper or three-dimensional shapes such as cubes and play blocks with different coloured faces. Challenge each other to 'break the code' and discover the sequence used. Children could also experiment with Fibonacci numbers to understand the Fibonacci spiral.

Magic mobiles. Ideas about balance, pivot points, light and shadow can be explored simply using your finger and a pencil. 'Magic' mobiles can be created using easily available materials such as painted paper shapes, nylon thread, straws, a hole puncher and a torch.

Take a line for a walk. This is a good sketchbook activity. Encourage students to look around the gallery or classroom and then draw what they see without taking their pencil from the paper. They can go over the line they draw as many times as they like but the challenge is not to take their pencil off the paper.

Extended activities and projects

Systems, grids and chance environments. Explore Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin's use of systems and grids within their two and three-dimensional work. Students could explore a landscape or building using a system or grid as the starting point. For example, students could grid up a plan of the school and then select coordinates by chance within the grid. The points selected could then be recorded, perhaps through photography or painting. This activity could extend to outdoor landscapes/ environments beyond the school.

Pathway through a landscape. Similar to the activity above, students could take a geometric shape such as a cube or half cube and sequence it in some way (by rotation, flipping, numerical series etc.) to create a path or pattern through the landscape. This would work well on a large scale and as a group activity.

Computer patterns and sequencing. What happens when a coloured shape is flipped, rotated and layered? What would happen if a relief by Mary Martin is translated into a computer design? This is an opportunity to create both hand-made and computer generated design – perhaps as a diptych or combined piece of work in some way to contrast the qualities of each.

Reliefs. Use found or recycled materials and glue to develop relief collages. Encourage students to experiment with shapes that have a relationship with each other. For example, they could use the golden section or number sequences or experiment with rotating and 'tilting' half cubes. Alternatively, contrast geometric shapes with more natural shapes. Combine sharp lines (perhaps use string and pins) and pure colours with curved shapes and mixed colours.

Materials. Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin chose to use modern, often industrial, materials in ways that had not previously been associated with art works. What materials are considered 'modern' today? Experiment with new materials (such as recycled plastics and papers) available today and find unusual or different ways to use them.

Mobiles & kinetic sculpture. Use wire, cotton, fishing line, nylon and/or withies to create more elaborate mobiles. Use a range of materials (including miscellaneous objects), colours and reflective surfaces to experiment with balance, colour, shape, light and shadow. Think about weight and position and how high or low to hang the mobile. Could the mobile be re-made in a slightly different shape or form? Shine a torch or direct light onto the mobile to create dramatic shadows. Depending on resources, extend to kinetic sculpture through the use of heat convectors and even simple motors.

Structured versus natural compositions. Start by preparing a textured coloured ground on canvas, card or paper. Develop a composition on this ground, by first creating a strong geometric structure using intersecting lines, geometric shapes such as triangles, ellipses and curves, perhaps based on a grid system or the golden section. Add to this a series of more organic or natural forms that seem to fit the structure – this could be done by simply taking a line for a walk (see Quick and Simple activities above) across the composition. Finally add small touches of bright colour.

Insignificant objects. Look at the objects around you in the classroom/ your home or here at the gallery. Compare your thoughts as to which objects are more important than others and why. Can a collection of everyday objects tell us something about a person? Younger children could create a box/bag/table with objects relating to a person and then guess who they might be. Older students could explore the idea of transforming ordinary or 'poor' objects.

Tate Resources

There is an **Exhibition Study Point** on Level three that has a selection of books relating to the exhibitions.

The **Tate Shop** has a selection of books, catalogues, postcards and related materials.

Visit www.tate.org.uk/schoolsteachers for up-to-date listings on CPD opportunities and to download resources – including this one – for free.

Websites

Tate online www.tate.org.uk

Tate E-Learning www.tate.org.uk/learnonline

Tate resources for schools and teachers www.tate.org.uk/schoolsteachers

Contacts

General enquires and group bookings

+ 44 (0) 1736 796226 education.stives@tate.org.uk

Susan Lamb, Head of Learning

+44 (0) 1736 791116 susan.lamb@tate.org.uk

Kerry Rice, Learning Curator: Schools & Teachers

+44 (0) 1736 791114 kerry.rice@tate.org.uk

Tate publications have produced a series of **Key Work Cards for Teachers** including *Landscape & Environment*, *Portrait & Identity*, and *Sculpture & Installation*. For an order form call 01736 791114

The **St Ives Archive Study Centre** holds a range of material about artists associated with St Ives.

Tel: +44 (0) 1736 796408, e-mail: archive@stivestrust.co.uk www.stivestrust.co.uk/archivesite

Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden

Tel: +44 (0) 1736 796226

Barnoon Hill, St Ives, Cornwall, TR26 1AD

+ 44 (0) 1736 796226 visiting.stives@tate.org.uk

Further reading / resources

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Bernard Leach, Hamada and Their Circle from the Wingfield Digby Collection, Marston House, 1992

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www.e-yakimono.net - Information on Japanese Pottery
www.craftscouncil.org.uk Crafts Council
www.british-museum.ac.uk British Museum
www.caa.org.uk Contemporary Applied Arts

Jonty Lees

Jonty Lees: Artist in Residence, Tate St Ives, 2007
Art Now Cornwall, exhibition catalogue, Tate St Ives, 2007
www.documenta12.de Documenta 2007
www.jontylees.co.uk Jonty Lees
www.labiennale.org Venice Biennale 2007
www.projectbase.org.uk Project Base
www.tate.org.uk Information on the Turner Prize & Tate Triennial etc.

Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin

Kenneth Martin and Mary Martin: Constructed Works Camden Arts Centre 2007
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The St Ives Artists Series, Tate Publishing includes: *Terry Frost, Barbara Hepworth, Patrick Heron, Roger Hilton, Bernard Leach, Janet Leach, Alfred Wallis, Bryan Wynter and Christopher Wood.*

Key art terms (from Tate glossary www.tate.org.uk/collection)

Abstract art

The word abstract strictly speaking means to separate or withdraw something from something else. In that sense applies to art in which the artist has started with some visible object and abstracted elements from it to arrive at a more or less simplified or schematised form. Term also applied to art using forms that have no source at all in external reality. These forms are often, but not necessarily, geometric. Some artists of this tendency have preferred terms such as Concrete art or non-objective art, but in practice the word abstract is used across the board and the distinction between the two is anyway not always obvious. A cluster of theoretical ideas lies behind abstract art. The idea of art for art's sake - that art should be purely about the creation of beautiful effects. The idea that art can or should be like music - that just as music is patterns of sound, art's effects should be created by pure patterns of form, colour and line. The idea, derived from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, that the highest form of beauty lies not in the forms of the real world but in geometry. The idea that abstract art, to the extent that it does not represent the material world, can be seen to represent the spiritual. In general abstract art is seen as carrying a moral dimension, in that it can be seen to stand for virtues such as order, purity, simplicity and spirituality. Pioneers of abstract painting were Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian from about 1910-20. A pioneer of abstract sculpture was the Russian Constructivist Naum Gabo. Since then abstract art has formed a central stream of modern art.

Constructionism

An extension of Constructivism in Britain from about 1950 in the work of Victor Pasmore, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin and Anthony Hill. Naturally occurring proportional systems and rhythms underpinned their geometrical art. They were inspired by the theories of the American artist Charles Biederman and explored the legacy of the 'Constructive art' made in the 1930s by Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and Naum Gabo, whose contribution to the Russian Constructivism was exemplary. Hill insisted on using the term Constructionism for the British phenomenon, but Constructivism is more commonly found.

Constructivism

Particularly austere branch of abstract art founded by Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko in Russia around 1915. The constructivists believed art should directly reflect the modern industrial world. Tatlin was crucially influenced by Picasso's Cubist constructions (Construction 1914) which he saw in Picasso's studio in Paris in 1913. These were three-dimensional still lifes made of scrap materials. Tatlin began to make his own but they were completely abstract and made of industrial materials. By 1921 Russian artists who followed Tatlin's ideas were calling themselves Constructivists and in 1923 a manifesto was published in their magazine Lef: 'The material formation of the object is to be substituted for its aesthetic combination. The object is to be treated as a whole and thus will be of no discernible 'style' but simply a product of an industrial order like a car, an aeroplane and such like. Constructivism is a purely technical mastery and organisation of materials.' Constructivism was suppressed in Russia in the 1920s but was brought to the West by Naum Gabo and his brother Antoine Pevsner and has been a major influence on modern sculpture.

Cubism

Cubism was a new way of representing reality in art invented by Picasso and Braque from 1907-8. A third core Cubist was Juan Gris. The generally agreed beginning of Cubism was Picasso's celebrated *Demaiselles D'Avignon* of 1907. The name seems to have derived from the comment of the critic Louis Vauxcelles that some of Braque's paintings exhibited in Paris in 1908 showed everything reduced to 'geometric outlines, to cubes'. Cubism was partly influenced by the late work of Cézanne in which he can be seen to be painting things from slightly different points of view. Picasso was also influenced by African tribal masks which are highly stylised, or non-naturalistic, but nevertheless present a vivid human image. In their Cubist paintings Braque and Picasso began to bring different views of the object together on the picture surface. 'A head', said Picasso, 'is a matter of eyes, nose, mouth, which can be

distributed in any way you like. The head remains a head.' In practice however, the object became increasingly fragmented and the paintings became increasingly abstract. They countered this by incorporating words, and then real elements, such as newspapers, to represent themselves. This was Cubist collage, soon extended into three dimensions in Cubist constructions. This was the start of one of the most important ideas in modern art, that you can use real things directly in art. Cubism was the starting point for much abstract art including Constructivism and Neo-Plasticism. It also however, opened up almost infinite new possibilities for the treatment of reality in art.

Minimalism

Minimalism or Minimal art is an extreme form of abstract art that developed in the USA in the second half of the 1960s. It can be seen as extending the abstract idea that art should have its own reality and not be an imitation of some other thing. It picked up too on the Constructivist idea that art should be made of modern, industrial materials. Minimal artists typically made works in very simple geometric shapes based on the square and the rectangle. Many Minimal works explore the properties of their materials. Minimal art was mostly three-dimensional but the painter Frank Stella was an important Minimalist. The other principal artists were Andre, Flavin, Judd, Lewitt, Morris, and Serra. There are strong links between Minimal and Conceptual art. Aesthetically, Minimal art offers a highly purified form of beauty. It can also be seen as representing such qualities as truth (because it does not pretend to be anything other than what it is), order, simplicity, harmony.

Proportion

Proportion is the relationship of one part of a whole to other parts. In art it has usually meant a preoccupation of artists with finding a mathematical formula for the perfect human body. At the time of the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer attempted to find a formula that would enable the body to be exactly inscribed in a square or a circle. Their system seems to have been to first make the height the same as the full width of the outstretched arms, and then to add to the height so that the total height was equal to eight heads. Renaissance researches into proportion were inspired by the ancient Roman writer of a treatise on architecture, Vitruvius. A more general formula for perfect proportion is the **Golden Section** or Golden Mean. This is defined as a line divided so that the smaller part is to the larger part as the larger part is to the whole. It works out at roughly 8:13 or a bit over one third to two thirds. In one way or another the Golden Section can be detected in most works of art. It so named because it was considered to have some special aesthetic virtue in itself.

Kinetic art

The word kinetic means relating to motion. Kinetic art is art that depends on motion for its effects. Since the early twentieth century artists have been incorporating movement into art. This has been partly to explore the possibilities of movement, partly to introduce the element of time, partly to reflect the importance of the machine and technology in the modern world, partly to explore the nature of vision. Movement has either been produced mechanically by motors or by exploiting the natural movement of air in a space. Works of this latter kind are called mobiles. A pioneer of Kinetic art was Naum Gabo with his motorised Standing Wave of 1919-20. Mobiles were pioneered by Alexander Calder from about 1930. Kinetic art became a major phenomenon of the late 1950s and the 1960s.

Relief

A relief is a wall mounted sculpture in which the three dimensional elements are raised from a flat base. Any three dimensional element attached to a basically flat wall mounted work of art is said to be in relief or a relief element.

For definitions of key art historical terms and movements such as these please refer to the Tate Glossary at www.tate.org.uk/collection