

GARTH EVANS

An **Arts Council Collection** exhibition
selected by **Richard Deacon**

Longside Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park
23 March – 27 May 2013

Introduction

RICHARD DEACON

This selection of Garth Evans' work, drawn from public and private collections in the UK as well as from the artist's own collection, is a necessarily partial overview of a complex and important artist. With the exception of the group of drawings displayed in the project space, the selection represents work that Evans made in the period between the end of his studentship at the Slade in 1959-60 and his permanent departure for the United States in 1979.

The five constructions from 1959-60, were included in Evans Diploma show at the Slade School of Art. Modest in scale and constructed from squares or rectangles of wood or hardboard, they have much about them that prefigures later concerns. Despite their verticality, these are not figurative, nor are their parts elements of the standing figure (head, torso, legs etc.) such as can be seen in similarly abstract, but nonetheless figurative productions of his American contemporary David Smith. ***David Smith CUBI VI (1963)***. The complex interplay of surface and void, edge and plane in these constructions reveals preoccupations that recur throughout the works on view. In looking at these remarkably mature student works, it is worth remembering that they are almost exactly contemporaneous with a better known work of abstract sculpture, Anthony Caro's ***Twenty Four Hours***, which also dates from mid 1960. ***Anthony Caro, Twenty Four Hours (1960) Painted steel 138.4 x 223.5 x 83.8 cm.***

The other constructions and models dating from the same period - ***Four Small Models (date unknown)***, ***Model for a Multiple (c.1960/61)*** and ***Model (for unmade sculpture?) (c.1961)*** - show Evans beginning to explore issues of modularity and connection that recur in various ways throughout this twenty year period.

Three white reliefs, made circa 1960, immediately after Evans had left the Slade, seem to compress onto one plane the dialogue of parts which is evident in the slightly earlier constructions: the black line in the two larger reliefs operates



'A' Course / Locked Room Course group photograph. First 1st Year intake September 1969. Back row: Richard Deacon, Andrew Rice?, Ted Walters, Ian Kirkwood. Middle row: Gareth Jones (p/t staff), Peter Atkins (f/t staff), Peter Harvey (p/t staff), Garth Evans (p/t staff). Front row: Tim Jones, Andrzej Kilmowski, Deidre McArdle, David Millidge. Photo courtesy Deidre McArdle

in much the same way as the edge or thickness of material does in the constructions.

The three coloured reliefs from 1963 – ***Pink, Mild Green***, and ***Blue No.30*** – introduce a curved element and, by slightly shifting and tilting the embedded planes of the relief, suggest something like a fold or a transitional element in the surface, contrasted with the very flat colour. The two white reliefs from the same period have a more fractured surface. The later of the two, ***White No.34 (1964)*** in particular, has a surface that seems to have been scored by deep transverse and intersecting cuts, then slightly lifted and pleated. This fracturing seems to have a later echo in the pattern of weld lines criss-crossing the flat polythene of ***St Mary's No.1 (1978)***.

An equally slight displacement is the compositional strategy for ***White Column (1963)***. Here a single unit, inverted and



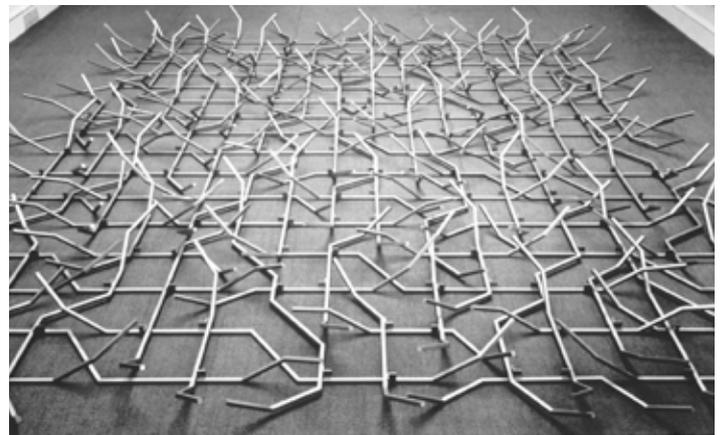
slightly displaced to one side or the other repeats to form a column. The modularity of these elements, and of the earlier smaller pieces, the devices of repetition and stacking, recall some strategies of American Minimal art from around the same period. I have in fact often thought that there were interesting overlaps between the work of Carl Andre - both in his use of modules and in his attention to horizontality - and that of Garth Evans. ***Carl Andre building Cedar Piece, 1964.***

By the late 1960s Garth Evans' work had reached an extraordinary level of refinement and technical achievement. Embracing the then somewhat novel material of fibreglass and the possibilities of bright uninflected colour, ***Untitled No.37 (1967)*** is very much of the moment. Colour is declarative and non-referential (the red/yellow/blue of the earlier three-part ***Model for a Multiple (c.1960/61)*** has a different, identifying logic for the three coloured parts). The presence of green in the larger work complicates the issue. Further, the physical scale of the sculpture means that, from some viewpoints, only three of the four elements are visible, so the colour combination changes from red/green/yellow/blue to red/yellow/blue. Green, a secondary colour, appears and disappears. Despite the apparent straightforwardness of the work, the viewer is implicated in this conjuring trick.



The monochrome ***12 Cones (white) (1968)*** is equally technically impressive: the sculpture seems to be packing itself into its own enfolding and billowing surfaces, continually tightening within its own skin, in contrast to the outward projection of ***Untitled No.37.***

In 1969 Garth Evans began a two year fellowship with the British Steel Corporation which represented something of a watershed for him. The sheer range and quantity of a single material seemed to throw him back on himself as he tried to digest what he was seeing. The black and white photographs of the 1970 publication ***Some Steel*** are a small selection of the hundreds that Evans took at various steelmaking and stockholding sites around the country. Evans' contribution to the Artist Placement Group exhibition, ***Inno 70*** at the Hayward Gallery that was held during the period of his Fellowship consisted of a selection of steel samples drawn from this huge resource and spread across the gallery floor.



Breakdown (1971), his masterly contribution to the 1971 Royal Academy sculpture exhibition (and remade for this exhibition) brings order to the chaos. It forms a complex web or net of zig-zagging and overlapping steel elements which, at the time, filled one of the Academy's galleries. Here it is seen beyond the gallery wall set against the rolling landscape of Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

Frill (1971) is an important step between ***Breakdown*** and what was to follow. The work is a perimeter, all that is left of a painstakingly constructed steel grid, which has been variously bent and twisted and finally cut away from its remaining edge.

Each one of the group of unprecedented sculptures which followed – ***Untitled No.1 (1974)***, ***Untitled No.2 (1974-75)***, ***Untitled No.3 (1975)*** – was produced by a similar process. A grid has been painstakingly constructed from linear elements; but that grid is disordered by allowing double

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lengths and three- and five-sided connections to be included and disallowing, or continually avoiding the inclusion of foursquare elements. The writhing and twisting forms result from the impossibility of the material conforming to the structural principle of the grid: materiality emerges out of the process, the different weight and springiness of plywood or rubber causing the loops and curves that one sees.

The idea that the material itself may contribute to the form of the work is a part of the strategy underpinning ***Spiral (1978-79)***. Over many weeks of going around a simple disc, gluing new accretions, the disc has become distorted and begun to draw its own shape. ***Wedge II (1979)*** was assembled from elements of a limited stock of material (the detritus from a destroyed shed). It's almost edible-looking surfaces result from the continuous effort to unite small parts into one whole.

St Mary's No.1 (1978) is a similar act of uniting and accumulating. In this case by welding polythene sheets together the artist has given to one of the most ephemeral of materials an almost mysterious visibility and density, as if the heavy scars of the welding traced across the surface held liquidity in place.

In 1979 Garth Evans left the UK permanently to take up residence in the United States. He left much work behind, carefully stored, but he took his working habits with him. The ***Yaddo Drawings (1982)***, were created during a residency at Yaddo, an artist's retreat near Saratoga Springs in New York State. They have the same quality of density as *St Mary's No.1*, achieved by their surface being built up from the accumulation of many layers of paper. On that surface black lines flicker and disintegrate, sometimes seeming to suggest residual shapes (*Frill*, for example, seems a reference in the first of these drawings and the all-over aspects of *Breakdown* in the middle group). In the final drawings of the series, something like a body emerges (even bursting out of the frame!) marking a new direction of interest for this remarkable artist.