



## Kenneth Martin (1905-1984)

### Nationality

British

### Education

1927-29: Sheffield School of Art

1929-32: Royal College of Art

### Taught

1929-32: St John's Wood School of Art.

1946-67: Visiting lecturer, Goldsmiths' College of Art



### Background

Kenneth Martin is widely regarded as one of the fathers of British Constructivist Art. Having been trained in the realist tradition of Sickert, he came to abstraction in the late 1940s after working as a designer and painting naturalistic pictures for two decades.

### The artist

Martin exhibited with the A.I.A. from 1934 and with the London Group from 1936. His first one-man exhibition was held at the Leicester Galleries in 1943 and he contributed to the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. There was a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Lords Gallery 1962. He worked direct from nature until 1948, when he made his first abstract paintings 1948, and went on to make constructions in 1951. The work suggests a strong affinity for geometry and mathematical aspects, but came to focus on chance, order and aleatoricism. Martin helped to organize several exhibitions of abstract and Constructivist art after the war.

Before his death in 1984, Kenneth Martin not only sought to redefine abstract art but to align thought, feeling and imagination with the method of creating a work of art.

As his art evolved he discovered new means of inventing and manipulating basic structural elements. With his *Screw Mobile* sculptures of the early Fifties he investigated the dynamics of movement exploiting the tension or contrast between stillness and the changes caused by the functions of twist and rotation.



*Chance and Order (group)*

Towards the end of his life Kenneth Martin embarked on a series of paintings and works on paper that he called the *Chance and Order Series*. In the simplest versions, a grid was set up on paper and its points of intersection numbered. Corresponding numbers were drawn by chance. Each pair of numbers then became a line on the grid. Although the underlying structure remained the same the resulting correspondences produced a seemingly endless succession of combinations. With these works there was therefore a double invitation to explore the paintings and drawings as statements about an inventive process, and to contemplate the products that were generated by that process. The combination of randomness and definite rules left the artist free to invent in an exact sense. You can only develop order but not chance, you can only use the chance again.

Metadata: *Chance and Order I*

Accession number: N215  
Artist: Kenneth Martin  
Artwork type: screenprint  
Material: ink, paper  
Measurements: 68.6 x 68.6 cm  
Technique: serigraphy  
Date: 1971  
Rights owner: estate of the artist  
Rights status: UK HE use only  
Institution: Council for National Academic Awards/University of London

Metadata: *Chance and Order II*

Accession number: N216  
Artist: Kenneth Martin  
Artwork type: screenprint  
Material: ink, paper  
Measurements: 68.6 x 68.6 cm  
Technique: serigraphy  
Date: 1971  
Rights owner: estate of the artist  
Rights status: UK HE use only  
Institution: Council for National Academic Awards/University of London

Metadata: *Chance and Order III*

Accession number: N217  
Artist: Kenneth Martin  
Artwork type: screenprint  
Material: ink, paper  
Measurements: 68.6 x 68.6 cm  
Technique: serigraphy  
Date: 1971  
Rights owner: estate of the artist  
Rights status: UK HE use only  
Institution: Council for National Academic Awards/University of London



Metadata: *Chance and Order IV*

Accession number: N218  
Artist: Kenneth Martin  
Artwork type: screenprint  
Material: ink, paper  
Measurements: 68.6 x 68.6 cm  
Technique: serigraphy  
Date: 1971  
Rights owner: estate of the artist  
Rights status: UK HE use only  
Institution: Council for National Academic Awards/University of London

Metadata: *Chance and Order V*

Accession number: N219  
Artist: Kenneth Martin  
Artwork type: screenprint  
Material: ink, paper  
Measurements: 68.6 x 68.6 cm  
Technique: serigraphy  
Date: 1971  
Rights owner: estate of the artist  
Rights status: UK HE use only  
Institution: Council for National Academic Awards/University of London