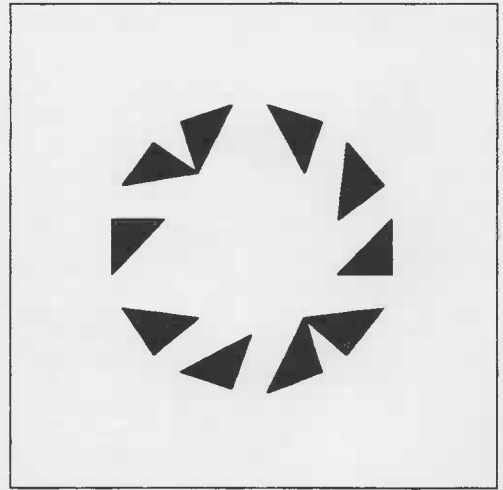
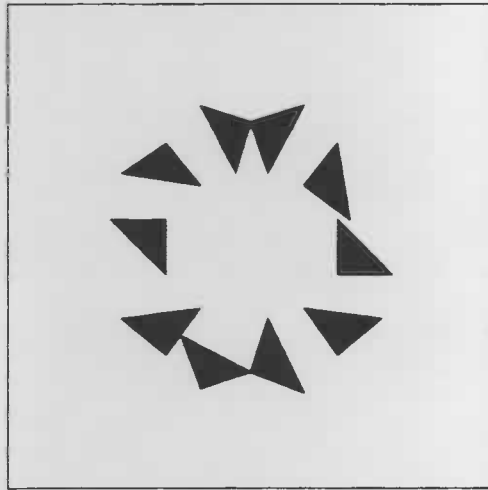
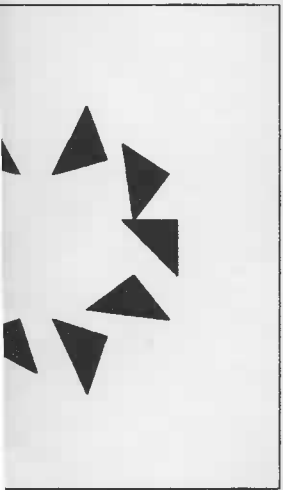


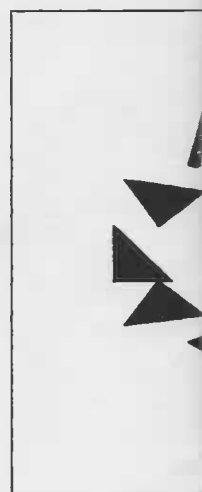
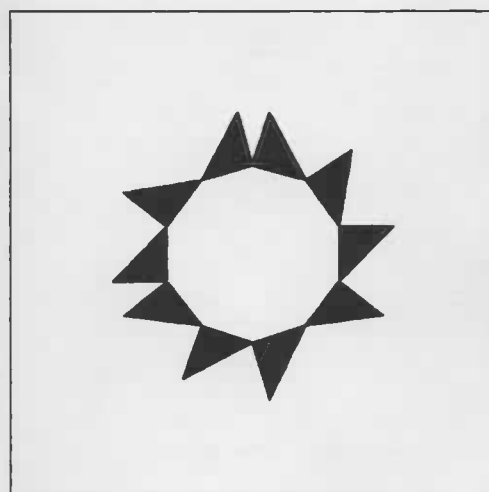
# Peter Lowe

serial drawings



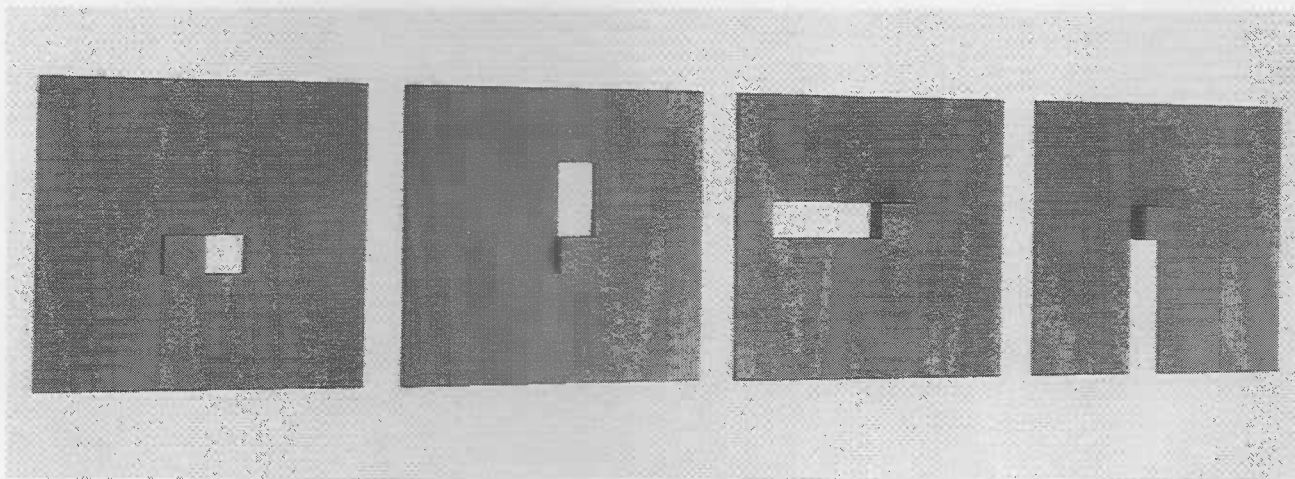
Clare Hall Gallery

1 June -15 July 1994



Clare Hall, 3 Herschel Road, Cambridge CB3 9AL

tel: (0223) 332360



Four Reliefs in Series 1977  
Painted Wood 50 x 50 x 8 cms

## The Concept of Void in Peter Lowe's Work

There are two museums in the world exclusively dedicated to abstract art. The older of the two, in Łódź, Poland, was put together by Polish artists and writers in the thirties. The newer one, in Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela, has a collection of constructive art which covers seventy years of its production. It is in this museum that I first saw a sculpture by Peter Lowe.

It consisted of sixteen loose cubic elements, which together formed a larger cube. But although the cube was their origin and their structure, the sixteen elements could be reassembled in infinite variations which the visitors of the museum were invited to do, so that every day several versions of the Lowe sculpture were on display. The unassuming power and elegance of Lowe's idea always struck me as something perfectly fitted to the time and circumstance in which it was created. What can be more cumbersome and expensive than the shipping of a heavy piece of sculpture? Lowe's piece travelled from Britain as a disembodied entity, inside an envelope in the mail, with building instructions. The technique required to materialise it was simple enough to surpass cultural and practical differences and yet at the same time, demanded creative involvement on the maker's side to produce cleaner and more precise edges than one would expect in construction materials. The piece could be placed either outdoors or indoors, to weather the worst of climactic conditions (like those beside the Orinoco) or to display its manifold potential in intimacy. Next to it was another 'manipulable' sculpture, the famous parallelogram by Sjatovlaj Richter, the metallic elements of which could be pulled out to different lengths. Although similar in principle, the two pieces operated according to a very dissimilar relation between matter and interstices: in the Richter piece, the empty spaces were strongly determined by its physical framework and the visual effect was that of a game between concavity and convexity, whereas in Lowe's Cube, the connection between the elements was purely conceptual and the results were unforeseeable. The freedom to establish the order, the size, the configurations of the interstices between the sixteen small cubes was open to the observer, who in manipulating them was in fact manipulating space and giving shape to the void. This theme is recurrent throughout Lowe's work. He uses the void to show the quality and the behaviour of the perceptible.

Focusing on the relation between fullness and void can be traced in Western abstract painting back to Malevich's *Black Square on White*. The Russian artist described painting in general as "a plane upon which an action of

some kind takes place" and that particular picture as "the first form of non-objective sensation." Its importance lay not only in the square being 'non-objective' but also, and very much so, in the minimal nature of its appearance. The observer, presented with a painting which contains just a black square on white is bound either to shift his or her observational activity from the world of visual sensations to that of perceptual problems or to dismiss the whole issue as nonsensical. It is the mind, not the eye, of the observer that is activated. A first plausible question is the position from which the icon is being looked at: is this picture to be viewed vertically or horizontally? In each case, the consequences vary. If it is to be imagined on a wall, the white area surrounding the square is a field which acts as a visual support of the black figure. If the painting can be imagined on the ground, the centre square is not displaced by gravity but held fast to the horizontal surface. The white frame becomes the figure, the square a void inside it. Or is it the other way round? The black square dense with matter is "surrounded" as Malevich wrote, "by the sensation of the desert, of non-existence." This dialectic between volume and void acquires a dynamic quality in Malevich's drawings, in which small geometrical shapes lurk at the edges of the paper, charged with energy, ready to displace themselves across the surface, where they nonetheless remain suspended by the sheer tension of their location.

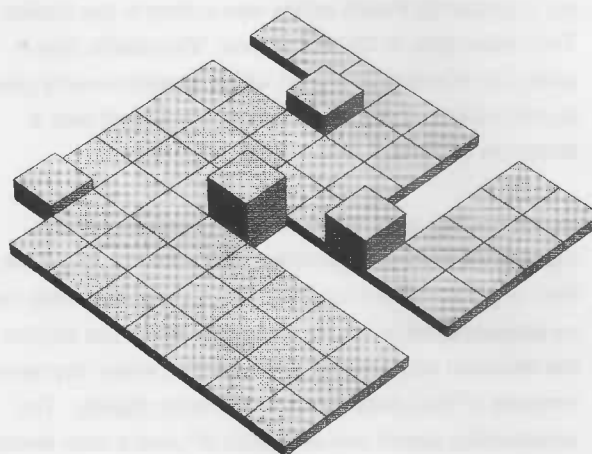
These two themes hinted at by Malevich are what we find systematically tackled and developed along the series of reliefs entitled *Volume and Void* which Lowe began in 1974. The square is the departing shape which in its zero configuration - where it is an untouched grey square - has many possible internal structures. It is the first action, the displacement of a unity on to the next one, that reveals and fixes this internal structure and all its possible activations. The emptiness functions as a reminder that an operation has taken place. As the series develops and the basic unities shift, displace their matter, and close or open the surface, the observer is confronted with the fact that the initial predictability of the proceedings has disappeared. There is one particular item in the series whose relation to the preceding items can no longer be visualised. Indeed, there are a number of such items though how many there will be depends on the imaginative capacities of the individual observer. As the empty spaces increase and their corresponding matter cumulates elsewhere, the eye perceives a progressively complex cast which the imagination cannot "run backwards" to its former position because the possibilities of combination have also increased beyond one's capacity to grasp them. The rules become polyvalent and their application produces not just one result but an assortment of them.

Eventually, there will be another item in the series in which this process is reversed and complexity decreases into simpler and simpler configurations. Which is the last possible relief, one might ask? If the first logical relief was a square where no displacement and no cumulation took place, then the last one should be complete cumulation and displacement but one: a tower of stacked unities surrounded by emptiness. Between those two moments, every other configuration has been possible and each one of them has not only revealed its quantitative essence but released a wide spectrum of forms which differ expressively because we assign to them material and physical qualities of the external world: openness, closedness, dynamism, balance, concentration, centripetal or centrifugal tension. As quantity and quality are variously interlocked in each piece, the energy of the system runs into entropy.

After the *Volume and Void* series, Lowe has embarked on an even more disembodied corpus of research. Back on the surface, with the use of a computer, he plots finite series of drawings where, departing from a geometrical relation between a base and certain units (often triangles), he explores underlying geometrical and mathematical relations. In these drawings, which constitute the totality of the Clare Hall exhibition, the structure of the connection between one configuration and the other is not evident from the initial stage and the knowledge released by the laws of association is hardly perceptible to the observer. And yet it is there and it is verifiable, a quality that many constructive artists insist their work should have.

These three chains of drawings again pose and answer questions which are partly conceptual and partly psychological. How long does it take a particular layout of triangles on a regular heptagon to go back to identity, for instance? In the series of four drawings *Four Groups of Ten Triangles 1992*, it takes precisely four steps before the initial drawing falls back into itself, after having produced its exact complementary in the last one and a symmetrical pair in the middle ones. In the other two series, eighteen steps are needed before repetition appears. And although inside each of them there is an obvious visual familiarity, no drawing can be said to "follow" from a previous one. Yet the connections exist and once found, some kind of order between the elements of the series can be established. One possible association in the series entitled *Sixteen Asymmetrical Variations B*, probably the most visual of them all, can be worked out by comparing, not the black triangles, but the white internal shape that their array fixes. By this criterion, the pair at the end (where there are three pairs of connected triangles and one loose element) are mirror-images.

Drawing for Die Treppen von Hunfeld 1986



There are two other subgroups: one formed by six drawings in which two pairs of triangles are connected. In each one of these four subgroups the shape of the internal space shares a common structure, in the sense that in each subgroup the white ground is composed of a common area joined to the external space by a determined number of single or double branches. If, inside each subgroup, all the possible combination of pairs are superimposed face to face, we find that in last set (given their symmetry) the resulting shape is always open; in the second subgroup, it may or may not be open; in the third group it is always closed.

The psychological issues come to light as the observer becomes aware of the physicality of these abstractions. Physical features such as speed of rotation and unidirectionality present a causal relation, for instance, and slowness of spin is causally related to the multidirectionality of the triangles. The two longer series, different though they look, are in fact complementary. If superimposed by pairs, they produce the same configuration of squares lying on a heptagon.

"The unknown is present in the known and familiar. Its revelation in one's own work and other people's is an incentive to make further discoveries," wrote Peter Lowe in the catalogue of the Systems Exhibition in the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1972. This statement succinctly explains the richness and importance of constructed art in this century.

Gloria Carnevali

May 1994

## Notes on Exhibited Drawings

I am told that my triangle drawings call to mind unresolved tensions and inner conflicts or the chance patterns of a kaleidoscope. To me they exemplify a rational process yet they have as much to do with mathematics as Duchamp's *Fountain* has to do with sanitary ware. That is to say the drawings owe something to mathematics but by no means everything. Matisse said that exactitude is not the truth but in reply it must be said that inexactitude isn't necessarily the truth either. It is an aesthetic imperative that the integrity of my work should not be compromised by imprecision or error. Though this happens quite often and can be amusing it is not something I have romantic thoughts about. Literary ideas did not inspire my drawings either, although a literature about triangles exists. E. A. Abbott, for instance, wrote a satirical romance entitled *Flatland*. He describes the polygonal inhabitants of a two-dimensional world in which soldiers and women are acute triangles. His book also introduces aspects of modern science such as relativity and hyperspace as well as politics and morality.

Some triangular configurations in my drawings remind me of the sharp bastions of walled defences or explosive forms like the jagged perforations of bullet holes. On the other hand they also suggest the stellar structure of flowers or the playful pushing and pulling of people dancing in a ring. Some images seem like a still from a cinematic sequence. The fact is they started out without conscious reference to appearances or flights of fancy. Triangular form is inherently sharp like a spearhead or knife but triangles can also function symbolically and perceptually as pointers directing the eye around the picture space. These journeys of the eye can take place with or without the baggage of symbolism.

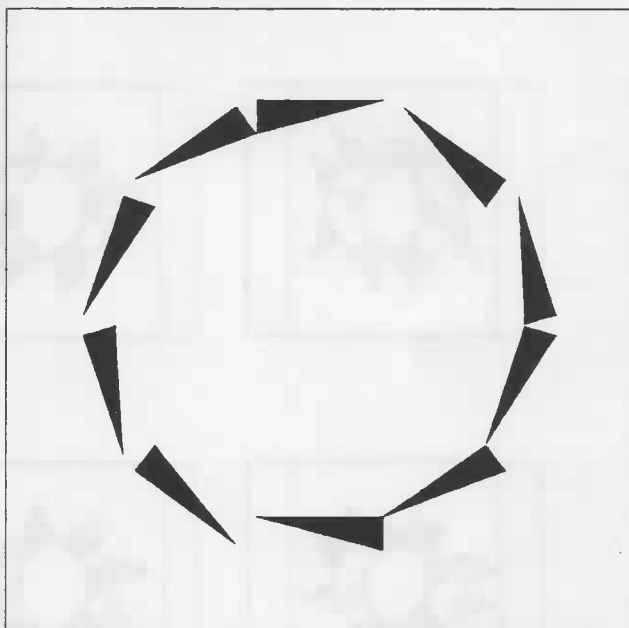
Symmetry and disruptions of symmetry are characteristic of most of my drawings. *Sixteen Asymmetrical Variations 'A'* presents all the different ways, (excluding two possible symmetrical configurations), that triangles can be placed around a regular heptagon. The triangles can face clockwise or anti-clockwise. The appearance of these forms was unforeseen and they in turn gave rise to *Sixteen Asymmetrical Variations 'B'* which are merely the original group flipped horizontally and vertically opening up the closed form. Each set complements the other because both groups combine to give a symmetrical arrangement of squares. *Four Groups of Ten Triangles* is a serial drawing. From left to right, the first group implies a circle, the next two appear to be chaotic and are not. The last is apparently structured. All are the outcome of repeated moves which, if continued, would eventually

return the group to identity. No more than four different stages of this sequence are possible given the rules and the particular starting configuration. Being privy to its rules makes it impossible to see a structure naively. Some argue that such loss of innocence spoils their enjoyment. Perhaps ignorance is bliss but knowledge can also enhance perception. Hence these notes.

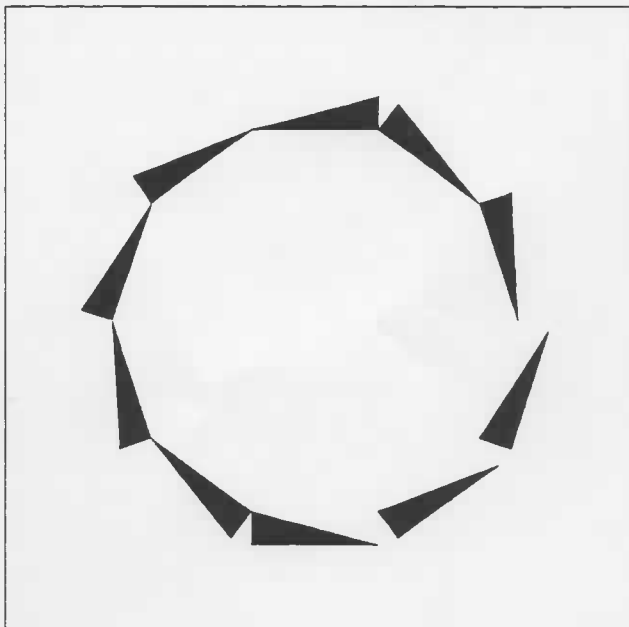
The application of rules is not the same as blindly following them. No one can be free of rules any more than one can be free of the necessities of nature. To quote William Blake: "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's."

Peter Lowe

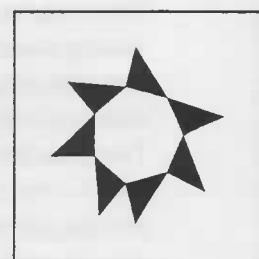
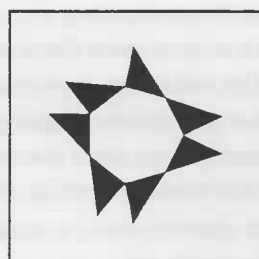
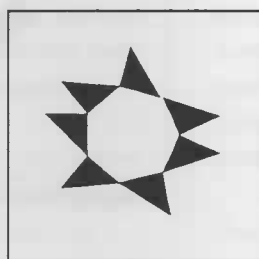
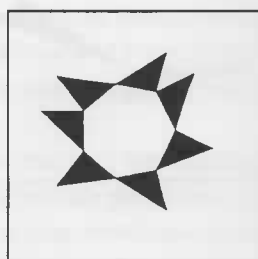
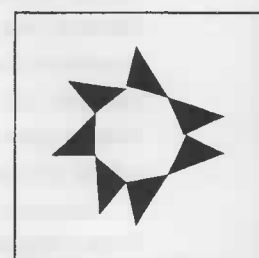
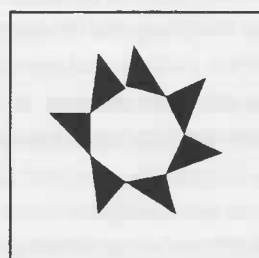
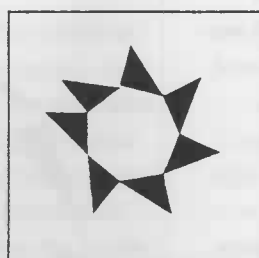
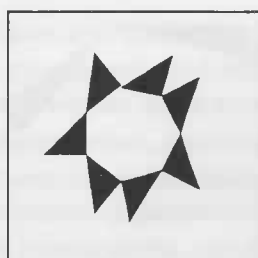
May 1994

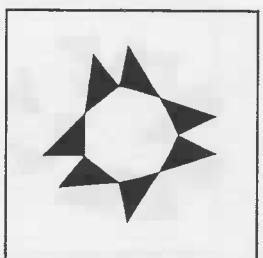
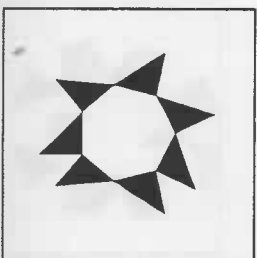
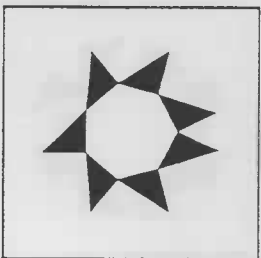
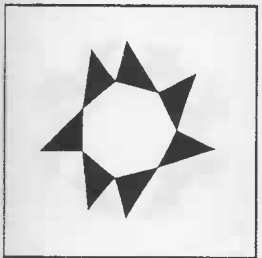
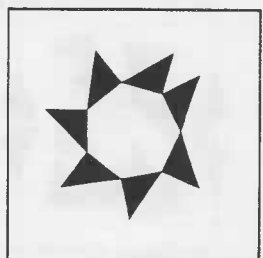
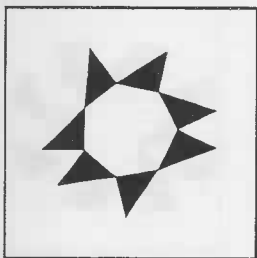
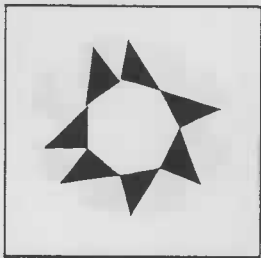
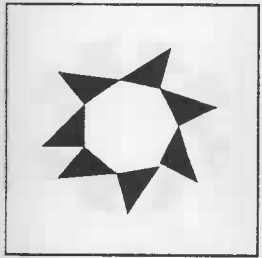


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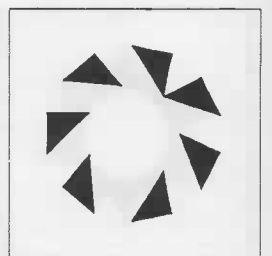
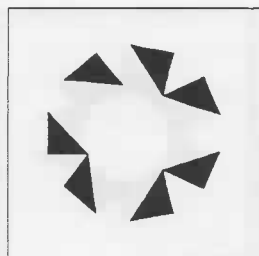
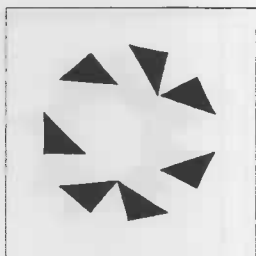
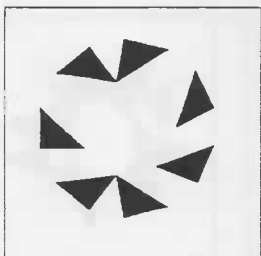
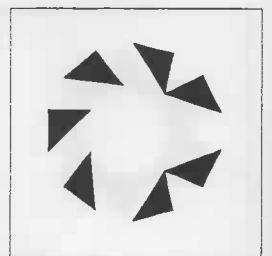
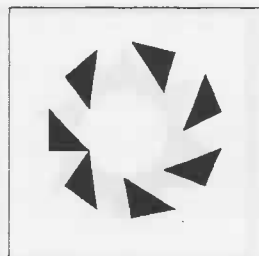
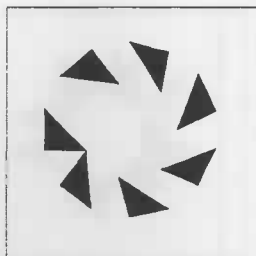
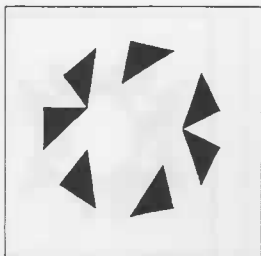


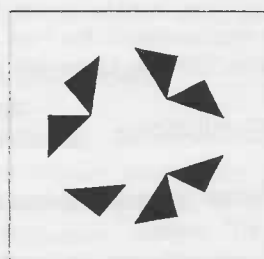
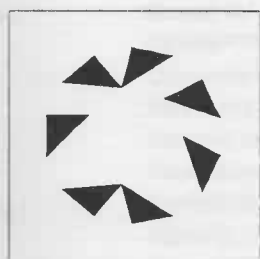
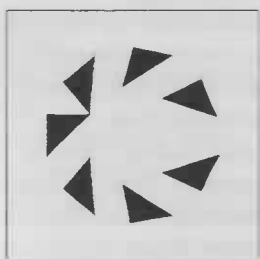
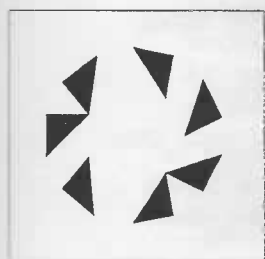
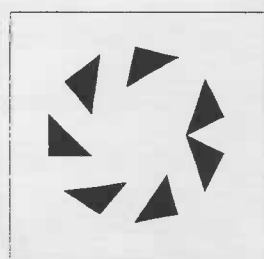
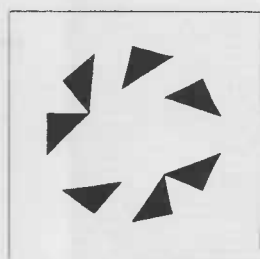
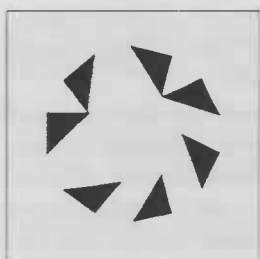
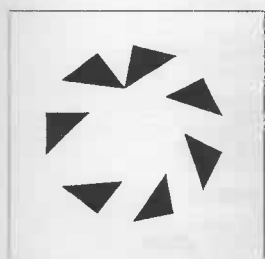
Triangring 1992, version 2













Photograph © Martyn J Edelman 1990

Peter Lowe was born in London in 1938. He lives in London and teaches in the Fine Art Department at Goldsmiths' College, University of London.

## Solo Exhibitions

- 1963 Artists' International Association, London (+ C. Jones).
- 1974 Gardner Centre, University of Sussex.  
Lucy Milton Gallery, London.
- 1975 Galleria Primo Piano, Rome (+ N. Dilworth).
- 1977 AIR Gallery London (+ N. Dilworth, J. Hellier).  
Gallery Swart, Amsterdam.
- 1980 Galeria PAVILION, Nova Huta, Kraków.  
Sally East Gallery, London.
- 1981 Galerie Jeanne Buytaert, Antwerp.  
Galerie Renée Ziegler, Zürich.  
(+ M. Hughes, A. Reynolds).
- 1984 Galerie Ornis, The Hague (+ N. Dilworth, K. Martin).
- 1987 Foranea Gallery, Studio Valcamonica, Vimerate,  
Monza.
- 1990 Arte Struktura, Volume and Void, Milan.
- 1991 Galerie Jeanne Buytaert, Antwerp.
- 1994 Clare Hall Gallery, Cambridge

## Group Exhibitions

- 1957 RBA Galleries London, Young Contemporaries.
- 1963 Drian Galleries London, Six English Painters.

- Artists' International Association, London. The Geometric Environment.
- Arts Council (touring exhibition), Construction England.
- 1966 Axiom Gallery London, Constructions.  
Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.  
(+ C. Jones, E. Gibson, A. Tilberis).
- 1967 Arts Council (touring exhibition), Unit- Series- Progression.
- 1968 Maison de la Culture, Grenoble. Cinétisme- Spectacle-Environment, travail d'équipe (+ K. Martin, P. Hodges)
- 1968 Greenwich Theatre Gallery, London.  
Constructions.  
Arts Council, Constructions from The Arts Council Collection.
- 1969 Amos Andersonin Taidemuseo, Helsinki.  
Systeemi.
- 1970 De Zonnehof, Amersfoort. Space Dimensions
- 1971 Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol. Matrix.  
Welsh Arts Council Gallery, Cardiff.
- 1972 Lucy Milton Gallery, London. Systems-Drawings- Reliefs.  
Whitechapel Gallery, London. Systems.  
Galerie Nouvelles Images, The Hague. (with Dekkers, Dilworth, Wilmink).  
Salon des Realités Nouvelles, Paris.  
Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, Constructive Art.
- 1973 Polytechnic of Central London, Systems II.
- 1974 Institute for Contemporary Arts, London.  
Basically White.  
Kultuurcentrum de Warende, Tournhout. IAFKG.  
Kultuurcentrum Waregem, IAFKG.  
Palais de l'Europe, Menton. 10em Biennale International d'Art.  
Hayward Gallery, London. British Painting '74.  
Museum der Stadt, München Gladbeck. IAFKG.
- 1975 Museum der Stadt, Gelsenkirchen. Sequenzen Zwischen Weiss und Schwarz.  
Stadt Kunstsamlungen, Gelsenkirchen.  
7 Englische Konstruktivisten.  
Welsh Arts Council, Ways of Making.  
Galerie Pa Szepan, Gelsenkirchen. Ratzionale Konzept '75.
- 1976 Southampton Art Gallery, Plus Minus, IAFKG.  
Palazzo Reale, Milan. Arte Inglese Oggi 1960-76.  
Nijmeegs Museum, Nijmegen. Rational Concepts.  
Kunstcentrum Badhuis, Gorinchem. Rational Concepts, English Drawings.  
De Volle Maan, Delft. Engelse en Nederlandse Rationale Tekeningen.  
Musée des Beaux Arts Besançon. Systèmes et Séries.  
Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam "200 x 200".
- 1977 Galerie Lydia Megert, Berne. 7 Englischer Kunstler.  
Museo Civico di la Villa Mirabello, Varese. IAFKG  
Annely Juda Fine Art, London. (+ Dilworth. Hughes and Steele)

- 1978 Museum of Art, Kemi. Maximal Minimal.  
Kunstnar Museet, Stockholm. Maximal Minimal.  
Galerie Beckman, Hamburg. Lichtbilder.  
Galerie F15, Oslo.
- 1979 Nordens Hus, Reykjavik.  
Kunstlerverein, Unna. Fourth Dimension in a  
Quadrilateral.  
Schloss Buchberg, Gars am Kamp. Pf.  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.  
Transformacije Papira.  
Palac Kultury, Warsaw. Dispositions.
- 1980 Zapiecek Gallery, Warsaw. Laski Foundation.  
Pécsi Galleria, Pécs. Drawings.  
Kunsthau Hamburg. Arbeitskreis, Constructive  
Art and Architecture.  
Hayward Gallery, London. Pier and Ocean.  
Kröller Müller Museum, Otterloo. Pier and Ocean.  
Annely Juda Fine Art, London. 8 + 8.  
Palais Lichtenstein, Vienna. Ein Künstler Ein  
Prinzip.  
Jozsefvarosi Kallito Terem Gallery, Budapest.
- 1982 Museum of Architecture, Wrocław. International  
Drawing Triennale.  
Budrem Factory, Łódź. Construction in Process.  
St Paul's Gallery, Leeds. Work from Sally East  
Gallery.  
Arterder International Exhibition of Graphics Arts,  
Bilbao.  
Pécsi Galleria, Pécs Hungary. Rajz / Drawings.  
Haags Gemeente Museum, Designs for film Plus  
Echo. Studio Scarabe.  
Galerie Ornis, The Hague. Coljé, Colombo, Lowe,  
Morellet, Van Zutphen.  
Art History Institute, University of Vienna. Ein  
Künstler Ein Prinzip.
- 1983 Kemi Kaupunki Taides Museum, Kemi.  
Nature, Structure, Construction.  
Galerie Ornis, The Hague. (+ Burman, Colombo,  
Tolman).
- 1984 Museo de Arte Moderno, Fundación Soto, Ciudad  
Bolívar. Nuevas Adquisiciones.
- 1985 Kunststation Kleinsassen, Arbeitskreis.  
Exhibiting Space, London. Arbeitskreis.  
Pécsi Galleria, Pécs. Rajz / Drawings.
- 1986 Chapelle Saint Louis de la Salpêtrière, Paris.  
Distances.  
Galerie Jeanne Buytaert, Het Hessenhuis Antwerp.  
XLII Biennale di Venezia, Arte i Scienza. Colour  
Section.  
Kunststation Kleinsassen, Arbeitskreis  
Kunstsommer.  
York University, Systematic Drawings.  
Galleria Wschodnia Łódź. Utopia and Reality.  
Galerie L'idée, Zoetermeer. Konkrete Multiples.
- 1987 Biennial of Graphic Art, Ljubljana.  
Galerie De Sluis, Leidschendam.  
York City Art Gallery, Art & Design from the  
University of East Anglia.  
Patricia Knight Fine Art, London.  
Inaugural Exhibition.
- Wright Museum of Art, Beloit College,  
Wisconsin. CRASH.
- 1988 Musée de Grenoble. Œuvres Contemporaines.  
Istituto per la Cultura, Catania. Vth International  
Graphic Exhibition.
- 1989 Ujadowska Castle, Warsaw. Eko Art '89.
- 1989 Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum, Hagen. Aus dem  
Würfel Museum.  
Centro Cultural de la Villa, Madrid. Arte  
Sistemático y Constructivo.  
Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Ferrara. Black  
and White.
- 1990 Stiftung für konstruktive und konkrete Kunst,  
Zürich. Britisch Systematisch.
- 1991 Arte Struktura, Milan. Costruttivismo, Concretismo  
e Cinevisualismo.
- 1992 The Artists' Museum, Łódź. Red Cross.  
International Art Action.  
Der Prix Ars Electronica, Linz.  
Stichting IDAC, Zoetermeer.
- 1993 LUTCHI Loughborough University, Creativity &  
Cognition.
- 1994 Cankarjev Dom, Ljubljana. Crno & Belo.

## Works in Museums and Public Collections

Arts Council Collection, London.  
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.  
University of Sussex, Brighton.  
Tate Gallery, London.  
Musée de Grenoble.  
Museo de Arte Moderno, Fundación Soto, Ciudad  
Bolívar.  
University of East Anglia, Norwich.  
Museum Sztúki, Łódź.  
National Museum, Warsaw.  
Peter Stuyvesant Foundation, Amsterdam.  
Kemin Kaupunki Taidesmuseum, Kemi.  
Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam.  
Alvar Aalto Foundation, Pino Torinesi, Turin.  
Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery.  
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs.  
Museum of Modern Art, Zagreb.  
Commanderie Sint Jan, Nijmegen.

## Commissions

- 1982 Designs for film *Plus Echo* directed by Adri Boon  
and Ralf Thunnison. Studio Scarabe, The Hague.
- 1986 *Die Treppen von Hünfeld*. Sculpture in concrete for  
Bürgerpark, Hünfeld.
- 1987 *Sculpture in Slate*, Civic Museum Gardens,  
Portofino.
- 1991 Designs for Tecno, Collezione ABV, Salone del  
Mobile Milan.