

*Paradise Place* CENTRAL CITY

*Birmingham Central Reference Library, rear exterior wall facing Congreve Passage*

*Cader Idris, Wales*

**David Patten**

1990

Coloured strips of steel  
200cm high × 3000cm wide

Inscribed on accompanying plaque:

Descending a hill of eminence, I had a full view, under a bright sun, of Cader Idris. If I was asked what length would be a line drawn from the eye to the summit? I should answer, 'To the best of my judgement one mile.' I believe the space is more than five; so fallacious is the vision when it takes in only one object, and that elevated. William Hutton 1803.

Status: not listed

Condition: good

Owned by: City of Birmingham

This piece was a direct outcome of a show at the Ikon Gallery in 1989, which was to mark Birmingham's centenary. The choice of subject matter came from the exhibition of a William Ellis painting of Cader Idris at the RBSA in 1889, which was included in the Ikon show.<sup>1</sup> In Patten's piece, the low relief of abstract coloured shapes of steel evokes the landscape around Cader Idris in Wales, with its peaks, valleys, lakes, greenery and rock. Lightening up what would otherwise be a dull façade of the library, Patten's shapes conjure up a space without perspective, particularly apt in relation to William Hutton's quote which is mounted on a plaque nearby.

One of the city's first local historians, Hutton (1723–1815) was a promoter of the industrial landscape of Birmingham, which

contrasts with the landscape of north Wales, a popular destination in the 19th century for Birmingham tourists. Artists, too, often sought inspiration not from their immediate city environment but from the romantic landscapes of Wales. Patten's piece similarly derives inspiration from a source removed from his immediate environment, a drawing by the abstract expressionist Willem de Kooning, *Woman* (1963), which forms the basis for his deconstruction of the Cader Idris landscape. Patten said of this piece, 'It aims to provide an image, which, through its colour and gestural form, creates a counterpoint to most city centre images'.<sup>2</sup> As with many public art schemes in Birmingham, this one has had its share of controversy, accused by some of resembling graffiti.<sup>3</sup>

1. Letter and CV from the artist, 29th January 1996;

2. D. Vickeman, *Post*, 2nd February 1990; 3. *Express and Star*, 2nd February 1990; *Mail*, 29th March 1990.