

ART

by Jean Charlot



Da kine: 'Kinetics'

On the University campus, a Festival of the Arts of this Century is in full swing. For this event both departments involved, that of Music and that of Fine Arts, strike a strictly contemporary note.

The East-West Center acts as hosts.

At the Orvis Auditorium one hears percussion music. On the upper floor of Jefferson Hall one sees a show of kinetic art.

Kinetic — What is that? It was Greek to me until I opened my dictionary. Now I know it is Greek. Webster gives for the word this root — *kinetikos*, *kinein*: to move.

Objects that move in space, thus acknowledging time, are said to be kinetic.

Rembrandt's fascination with windmill wings, Don Quixote's aggressiveness towards them, now rate an up-to-date diagnosis. Rembrandt liked kinetic objects. The knight errant disliked them.

Green and greedy

When I was quite young, I cherished an unusual piggy bank. It was cast in the shape of a frog, painted green, with an enormous slit for a mouth.

To deposit a penny I pulled

a lever. The mouth opened wide, disclosing a lining of pure vermilion.

The penny in, the mandible shot up. The frog swallowed my small treasure, adding a gurgle of satisfaction as the ill-oiled iron jaws closed tight.

This animated piggy bank hypnotized me far beyond its intended purpose — that of inspiring in its owner a sense of thrift. In that it failed utterly.

Feats of kinetic magic still hold me spellbound. At Ala Moana Center I loiter, face to a shop window that features a mechanical clown.

The message

Its routine is always the same. First it crouches flat on the floor. Then with a heave-ho it uncertainly straightens itself. Lastly, chest swollen with assertiveness, it displays a sign, "Don't just stand there. Buy something."

Then it collapses and starts a repeat performance.

The mercantile slant saddens me in what otherwise would be a creditable act.

Objects that move are kinetic. But not all kinetic objects are art.

The automatic door of a supermarket obeys unaided the impulses received from

carts and customers as they hurry in and out of the store.

To speed traffic is good for business. Supermarket doors move, but they are not kinetic art.

The pause that . . .

As is true of past forms of art, viewing genuine kinetic art should induce in the spectator a sense of leisure.

It should make him pause in his hurried rounds for a meditative moment.

In the 17th century, the French classicist Poussin asserted that the sole aim of art is delectation.

Very moving

The classical touchstone holds true for the new form of art. All the more so because some kinetic art objects — made of welded metal and electrically impulsed — come perilously close to pieces of machinery.

Its very uselessness marks kinetic art as the aristocrat among machines. It functions exclusively in the empirical realm of esthetics.

And motion in others is merely an optical illusion.

A newcomer to our shores is "funk art," not unlike the "dada art" of my youth. It makes its initial bow with a construction of plexiglas and neon tubing — "Visions of a White Rabbit." Jim Hayward is the funk artist.

His work is a playful affair

from the classes of Kenneth Kingrey.

There is no slackening of quality as we go from international works to local works.

The entries are thoroughly abstract. I dare not mention to my progressive friends how I miss the frog and the clown.

The materials used are peculiar to our century. Stainless steel, plexiglas, acrylic, neon tubing, styrofoam — they all receive their esthetic baptism at the hands of the artist.

Very moving

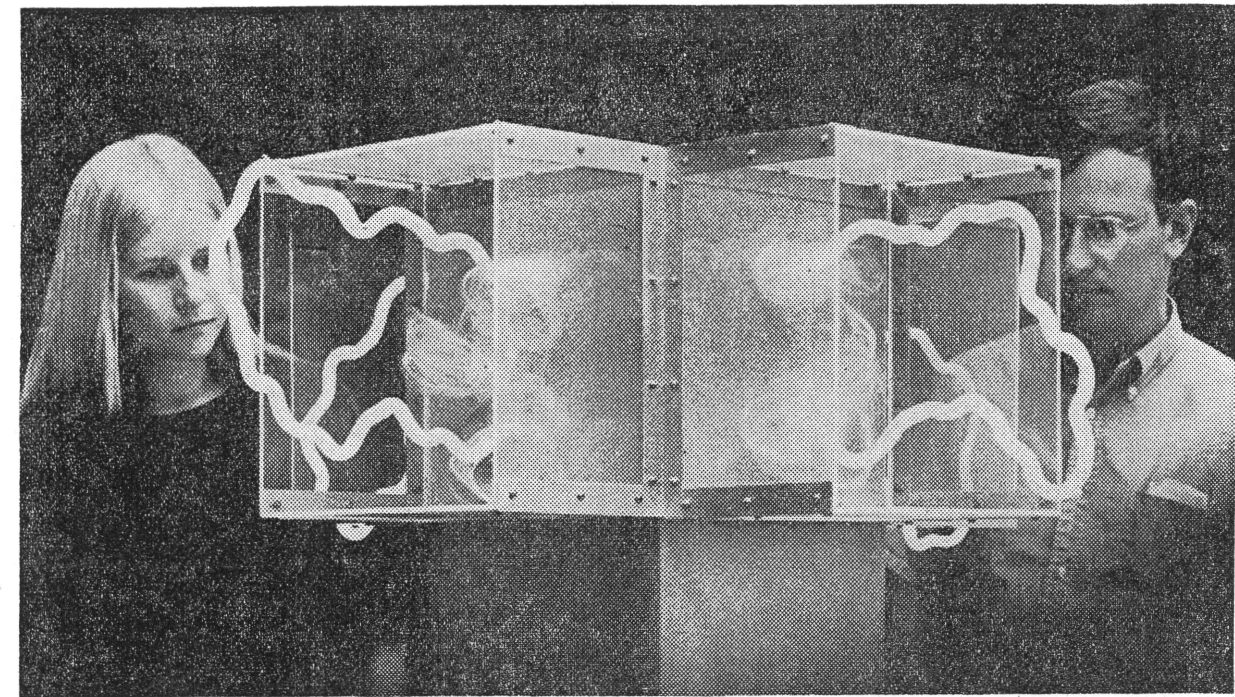
Animation is the common denominator but modes of animation vary.

Some objects go through their motions impulsed by electricity. Others obey air currents and thermostatic variations. Others again are endowed with illusive movement only as the spectator moves.

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NEON—This Jim Hayward's "Visions of a White Rabbit." Eraina and David English are the viewers.

of a most shocking pink, partly filled with a sort of super cotton candy, and afflicted with bursts of light.

It is the gayest entry in a show otherwise dominated by straight-laced esthetics.

Prime mover

The "old master" of the show is George Rickey, visiting lecturer at the Art Department this summer. He is a pioneer of kinetic art, having practiced it for a few decades.

In a form of art that does not lack its quota of exhibitionists and prankster, Rickey has managed to attain, slowly but surely a grave maturity.

His constructions do not ape nature. They are instead tuned to nature.

Rickey distrusts the mechanical impulse that sends the object through a rehearsed routine.

His delicately balanced stainless steel complexes obey instead the absolute law of gravity and, as well, the shifting laws of chance.

The least air current, a change in temperature, the shuffle of a passer-by, suffice to put in motion the sheets and rods of his metal constructions.

Gentle motions

Movement is never obvious. Little more than a heaving for breath, the bending of a grass blade with the breeze, the pulsating wings of a butterfly after landing.

An American Indian cure for despondency had the patient watch flowing waters.

In the same manner, Rickey's art takes us out of selves.

"Eeny, Meeny, Miney, Moe," by Leighton Liu, features four panels of black and white patterns distorted through thick glass, darkly.

As the spectator moves the images move.

Visually it reminds me of the reflections of passing clouds on rippling waters that so intrigued, after 1910,

the aged master Claude Monet.

Fletcher Benton clothes his subtle art in the borrowed awesomeness of science. One of his titles: "Synchronetic - C-5520-Series 2".

Sheets of plexiglas in primary colors, blue, red and yellow, overlap in motion to create secondary harmonies of green, orange and purple. Gunther Decker's "Zero

Garden" relies on the cast shadows of nails to create a design. It suggests a most ancient form of kinetic sculpture — sundials, once a must as Victorian garden accessories.

About kinetics

To what extent do kinetic paintings and sculptures spill over areas reserved for the performing arts?

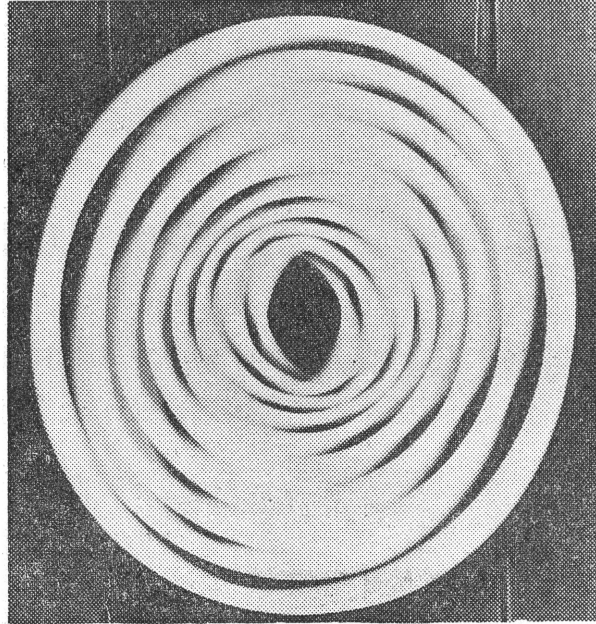
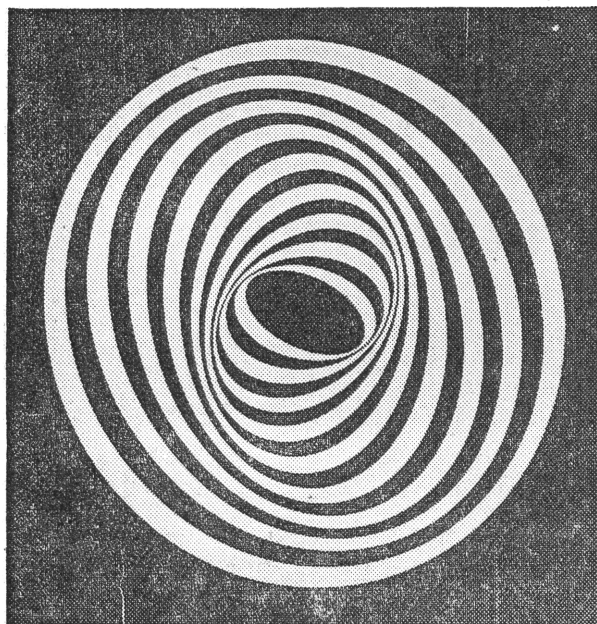
In the good old times, painting and sculpture staked once and for all what claims they had to space. Then they stayed put for what the poet claimed to be an eternity.

Kinetic art misbehaves. It rotates, creeps or crawls, forever encroaching on space, content to mark successive moments in time.

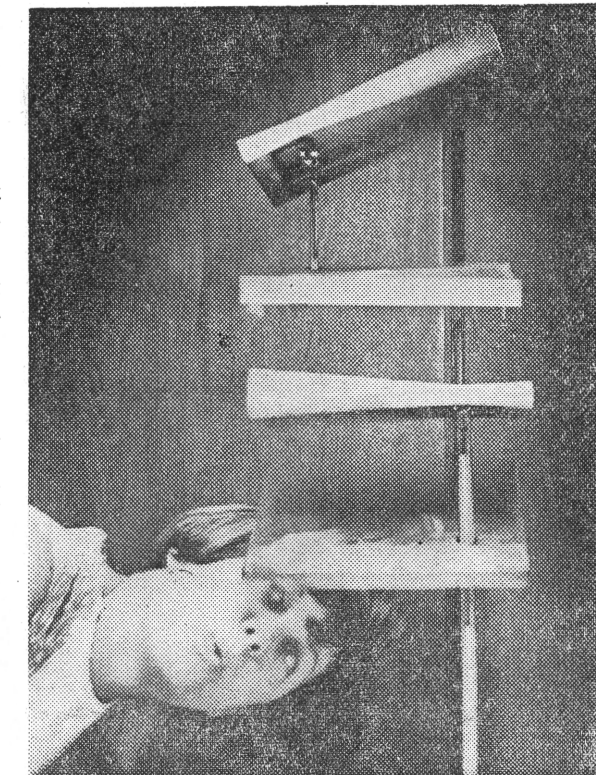
Even though no human is at first hand the performer, kinetic art objects stage a performance.

The Fine Arts descend from their pedestal of frozen immortality and mingle with the Performing Arts. A good time is had by all.

Climbing back on the pedestal may prove more of an exertion!



KINETIC—This is "Kinetic Painting No. 1" by Francis Celentano. At left, in repose, and at right, the same work in motion. Note how the center oval changes. — Star-Bulletin photos by Bob Young.



BLOW!—Sue Henderson blows softly upon "Column of Four Panes," a kinetic art display by George Rickey, and the panes flutter gently.