MOTORIZED SCULPTURE

Alice Aycock
Jonathan Borofsky
Eric Orr
William Stone
Fred Tomaselli

FREEDMAN GALLERY
ALBRIGHT COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

Motorized Sculpture brings together the work of five artists for whom technology serves as a means towards expressive ends. Unlike traditional exhibitions of kinetic art, which have documented a variety of forms of movement in sculpture—including the non-technological—the exhibition assembled here focuses solely upon work that is electronically controlled. Contrary to what might be expected of such an exhibition, however, the world created hardly resembles a futuristic vision of fantastic machinery. Rather than elevate technology to the level of subject matter, these artists—Alice Aycock, Jonathan Borofsky, Eric Orr, William Stone, and Fred Tomaselli—have subordinated it to the role of subservient facilitator of some other content which, while always poetic, is often profound.

ALICE AYCOCK began incorporating electrical components into her sculptural installations during the early 1980s. Prior to that time, Aycock had established herself as a nationally prominent installation artist whose large labyrinthian architectural structures often involved audience participation. Inspired by literary and historical sources as well as personal dreams and memories, the installations were multilayered in meaning and, when actually entered, could provide viewers with experiences of trepidation, anticipation, or surprise. Desiring to heighten the emotional impact of encounters with subsequent works that could be observed but not walked through, Aycock eventually turned to electricity, something that she considers to be "a magical force" that we tend to take for granted. In a series of sculptures known as "blade machines," begun in 1982, the artist set into operation metal blades spinning at as much as 40 revolutions per minute, a movement that is at once threatening and enticing, hence suitable for symbolic expression on subjects such as mortality or the dualistic theme of aggression versus utility. Greased Lightning (1984) is among the more playful of Aycock's electronic sculptures. Composed of large spinning cones that are themselves encircled by ribbons moving in an opposite direction, the work combines Aycock's interest in movement of tornadoes with a simultaneous fascination with children's games. Based on the dreidel game, which is won when Hebrew letters on the four faces of a spinning top fall in a sequence that translates into the phrase "A Great Miracle Happened Here," Aycock's sculpture can be controlled by the viewer, with results left somewhat to chance. At the artist's invitation, we are encouraged to pull a switch that halts the spinning vortices. Our challenge, however, is to position the cones so that arrows point to the winning sequence of letters: N–S–H–G.

JONATHAN BOROFSKY views his art as an extension of self considered in relation to the universe-at-large. Obsessive in nature, Borofsky's art defies barriers among mediums and most often assumes the form of installations where walls, floors, and ceilings are densely populated with drawings, paintings, and sculptures, all interrelated fragments of the larger whole. In portraying aspects of human condition, Borofsky's universe includes a number of archetypes such as Hammering Man, Man with a Briefcase, and Chattering Man. The Hammering Man, who holds a hammer in one hand and personifies the worker, was the first of such figures to be motorized. In 1977, Borofsky conceived the idea of placing the figure's arm in movement as a means of stimulating sympathy for the plight of the worker in our mechanized world. In the early 1980s, Borofsky introduced into his lexicon The Chattering Man, whose moving jaws utter constant chatter, representing the internal workings of the human mind. Although easily suggestive of the random thinking that fills all minds, the motorized chattering is particularly self-referential. In 1969, Borofsky began a long term preoccupation with counting by filling in the squares of sheets of graph paper with an ongoing numerical sequence. After a few years, he exhibited a 4 foot high stack of these sheets under the title Counting from 1 to Infinity (begun 1969). Since the early 1970s, the counting has continued in the form of numbers placed on surfaces of drawings, paintings, sculptures, and architectural interiors. In Spinning Figure 8 with 2 Chattering Men, the artist parodies his own personal fetish,
as the Figure 8 is both a number and the symbol for infinity. On a more universal level, the work brings forth associations about the futility of idle chatter and the mindlessness of gossip, while humorously mimicking the whole activity of looking at art.

Sharing an affinity with Borofsky in terms of content, ERIC ORR has made infinity his primary subject. In contrast to Borofsky’s sometimes tongue-in-cheek approach, however, Orr’s pursuit of the eternal is always serious in tone. Associated with Southern California Light-Space artists such as Robert Irwin and James Turrell, whose art intends to alter or increase perception of phenomenological essences, Orr seeks to evoke states of ephemerality in paintings, sculptures, and installations that are based on ancient spiritual belief systems. In *Sunrise* (1976), Orr constructed a dimly lit space that was proportionately related to the King’s Chamber of the Great Pyramid. With interior walls covered in lead contributing a noticeable silence, a small channel connected to a tracking device through the building’s rooftop permitted reflected light to be charted daily from sunrise to sunset within the chamber’s interior. Interested in alchemy and shamanism, Orr began painting in 1976 with materials associated with healing rituals of primitive cultures, such as gold, meteorite dust, volcanic ash, human bone ash, and the artist’s own blood. Recent monochromatic paintings are executed on lead supports in a mixture of these substances, which have been ground with mortar and pestle and combined with liquid binder. The glowing surfaces that result from this process are thus as rich in concept as they are in lustre. *Prime Matter VII* (1987) is from an ongoing series of sculptural monuments that produce the effect of alchemical transformation through juxtaposition of natural elements. Using the format of a monolithic pillar, associated for centuries and in many cultures with sacred ritual, Orr has encased a flame of fire within a bronze shell over which flows a moving stream of water, operated by an electronic pump. As the viewer becomes optically engaged in the slow rhythms of the interaction of elements, one may experience a sense of transcendence that has art historical precedent in the paintings of Newman, Reinhardt, and Rothko.

WILLIAM STONE entered into a career as an artist through an indirect route. During the 1960s, Stone was a SoHo based writer of poems and novels who earned a living by working in real estate and constructing lofts. Immersed in a world of art and artists, he began applying his talents to the visual arts in the early 1970s and, grounded in literature, opted for a conceptual approach. In *Renaissance of the American Beaver* (1975), Stone carried out a witty plan for intervening in the daily life of beavers. Late one evening, he cut a hole in a beaver dam and placed beside it a pile of sticks that he had painted in red, white, and blue. By the next morning, the beavers had rebuilt the dam with the nearest available materials—the painted sticks. Stone documented the piece in photographs, accompanied by text that refers to the beavers as “guerilla environmental artists.” In the late 1970s, Stone decided to apply his expertise in areas such as carpentry and plumbing to making art. During the current decade, he has built a menagerie of sculptures from found objects which are recontextualized through deliberate placement and clever juxtaposition. *Relativity* (1986) functions as a visual pun on the theme of time eternal. Using an oil drum, a toy train set, and old clocks, Stone has built an assemblage where small clocks revolve around the face of a larger one, thereby enabling time to move simultaneously at different speeds. Many of Stone’s recent sculptures are immediately recognizable as familiar objects, such as beds, cabinets, and aquariums. From a distance, *Captive Stream* (1988) appears to be a telephone booth. As one near’s the work, however, it becomes apparent that it is in reality a meticulously crafted cabinet that houses a disturbingly noisy stream of water (whose sound has been amplified by a concealed microphone and speakers). Taking his cues from artists such as Duchamp, Westermann, and Beuys, Stone muses poetically on a variety of topics as he transforms everyday objects into sculptural metaphors that are
humorously provocative.

Irony and humor are also to be found in the work of FRED TOMASELLI, whose interest in scientific aspects of nature has led him to practice what he calls "bogus science," or experimentation with "the physics of light, power, and nature, with a combination of truth, fallacy, and intuition." Tomaselli views landscape as something that is constantly changing and, as an artist, probes the dynamics of its structural properties. Because scientists continue to revise and update their data, hence reinterpreting nature, Tomaselli feels justified in offering his own satirical reflection upon the way things may or may not work. In Current Theory (1984), he has toyed jokingly with the idea of simulating water from wind. Using the grid as a scheme for idealized order, a format derived from the works of artists such as Carl Andre and Sol Lewitt, Tomaselli has taped Styrofoam cups to the floor in an allower configuration. Electronic fans placed before the cups cause them to roll side by side in arc formations, a movement analogous to the white caps on ocean waves.

Although the artists in this exhibition are each in possession of a finely honed and independently conceived vision, there are a number of links that bind them. None, for example, uses motorization in every art work, but instead employs electrical means only when relevant to subject or purpose. As for reasons underlying decisions to motorize, the most prevalent appear to be a concern with heightening viewer involvement, a desire to concretize physical or metaphysical states, and a shared realization of the poetic potential of physical energy. Yet, while the technology in this exhibition is impressively sophisticated, there is little here to further scientific knowledge. In using technology to open dialectic on literary themes, universal concepts, and historical antecedents in art, architecture, science, and religion, the artists of Motorized Sculpture have performed a grand and wonderful irony, focusing attention not on the possibilities of the future, but on the richly textured realities and mysteries of the past.

David S. Rubin
Director, Freedman Gallery

NOTES:


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As a result of the consideration and generosity of several individuals, we are most fortunate to be able to present this exhibition. I am most grateful to the lenders who have kindly consented to share their personal treasures with a broader audience. Also, for aiding us in organization and installation I wish to thank: Alice Aycock and her assistants Larry King and Jesse Rosser; Bruce Gluck of the David Bermant Foundation: Color Light Motion; Paula Cooper, Jim Cohan, Hunter Reynolds, and Natasha Sigmund of Paula Cooper Gallery; Tom Cugliani; Linda Silberberg and Donald Wheeler of Scott Hanson Gallery; William Stone; Fred Tomaselli; and Fred Worden.

Here at the Freedman Gallery, Assistant Director Janice McGill Schiffman, Preparators Ted Mason and Katie Hannon, and an enthusiastic corps of student assistants have contributed invaluably to the project. Camille DeMarco, designer of the mailer and this brochure, merits special commendation for a job well done while under tight constraints of time imposed by dated material.

The Freedman Gallery program continues to benefit from the support of the Albright College Fine Arts Commission and the Friends of the Freedman Gallery; we are truly appreciative of the commitment to excellence shown by these organizations. In addition, we are strengthened by grants from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the Institute of Museum Services, a federal agency that offers general operating support to the nation's museums.

Motorized Sculpture should provide new experiences in perception and thought for all who encounter the creative visions of Aycock, Borofsky, Orr, Stone, and Tomaselli. We hope your impressions will be enlightening and lasting.

DSR
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Alice Aycock
The David Bermant Foundation: Color Light Motion, Harrison, New York
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York
Fred Tomaselli
John Weber Gallery, New York

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

ALICE AYCOCK (b. 1946, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania)
1. *Greased Lightning*, 1984
   Steel, theatrical rainbow lights, motors
   56'' x 72'' x 72''
   Courtesy of the artist and John Weber Gallery, New York

JONATHAN BOROFSKY (b. 1942, Boston, Massachusetts)
2. *Spinning Figure 8 with 2 Chattering Men*, 1986
   Figure 8: aluminum tubing, motor, cable
   96'' x 48''
   Each man: aluminum, wood, primer, bondo electric motor, speaker
   82½'' x 24'' x 13''
   Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

ERIC ORR (b. 1939, Covington, Kentucky)
   Bronze, water, fire
   114'' x 9'' x 8''
   Courtesy of the David Bermant Foundation: Color Light Motion, Harrison, New York

WILLIAM STONE (b. 1944, Newark, New Jersey)
   Steel drum, model railroad tracks, parts and engine, glass, clock parts
   36'' x 32'' x 32''
   Courtesy of Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York

FRED TOMASELLI (b. 1956, Santa Monica, California)
5. *Captive Stream*, 1988
   Maple, plywood, glass, electrical components, pump, water
   84'' x 18½'' x 18½''
   Courtesy of Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York

   Styrofoam cups, electric fans, string, tape
   16' x 12' (dimensions variable)
   Courtesy of the artist
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