MOVING IN A NEW DIRECTION:
AN EXPLORATION IN KINETICS

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Movement, whether conveyed through an actual motion or a gestured implication, remains an underlying theme in my creative process that started with my earliest works. I explored different aspects of kinetic sculpture, because I am seeking new ways to create motion such as experimenting with circulating air, wind, and the use of water features. I created a series consisting of three to five kinetic sculptures which do not rely on sound or direct viewer manipulation.
INTRODUCTION

I have always been interested in the expression of motion in my art. Movement, whether conveyed through an actual motion or a gestured implication, remains an underlying theme in my creative process that started with my earliest works.

After exhausting the earlier concept of implied movement within my sculptures, my work developed into truly kinetic pieces. I became interested in exploring the correlation between audience interaction and kinesis—the effect of direct viewer manipulation in order to create movement in my works.

In conjunction with this audience dependent kinesis, these works included means of auditory stimulation (noise is created when viewers manipulate the pieces). I intend to pursue the exploration of different aspects of kinetic sculpture.

Statement of Problem

My current interest lies in the pursuit of exploring a kinesis which relies not on audience interaction and sound stimulus, but is instead dependent upon elemental forces such as circulating air, wind, or running water. The audience will play a more neutral role as a viewer—not as the creator of noise and movement, but as the observer of an independently moving sculpture.

Questions

1. What forms of kinesis do not require viewer manipulation, and how can they be employed within my sculptural production?

2. Can my works transcend from kinesis that is dependent on viewer manipulation to a less direct form of kinetic energy?

3. How will the deletion of auditory stimulation affect the pieces?
METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the proposed questions I intend to create a series consisting of three to five kinetic sculptures which do not rely on sound and direct viewer manipulation (i.e., pulling cranks, handles, and levers, etc.). I am seeking new ways to create motion such as experimenting with circulating air and the use of water features as sources of kinesis.
RESULTS

Five three dimensional pieces were successfully completed in order to solve the proposed problems. The works were made from steel and stainless steel and combined with a variety of media. Two models and three large-scale sculptures were created and exhibited in the Cora Stafford Gallery from June 28 through July 2, 2004. The pair of maquettes served as scale models for the first two larger pieces, and the final large piece was created independently. The creation and completion of the works provided excellent results for each of the questions posed.

The first questions were asked in order to discover forms of kinesis which do not require viewer manipulation and how they might be implemented in the sculptures. Each of the kinetic sculptures is non-reliant to human touch and moves via a different form of kinesis, therefore demonstrating positive outcomes to the questions. All three sculptures carry an underlying theme of movement, yet their motion occurs without direct action from the audience. Wind and water are reliable sources of kinesis and successfully provide the energy needed for the mobile parts of each piece. It is through the use of these kinetic energy sources that each of the sculptures is able to successfully transcend into artwork that creates movement independent from the viewer.

The first piece utilizes water as well as the force of gravity to generate an undulating and cyclic rhythm. The horizontal extension on top of the sculpture, counterbalanced on a vertical foundation, fills expectantly with water and finally, too full under its own weight, pours out. An unseen re-circulating pump evokes the presence of an invisible water source as the motion repeats again, evoking an action reminiscent of a teetering see-saw. With works created prior to this method of kinetic exploration, the viewer, as
the direct generator of kinesis, became an extension of the piece. With this sculpture, however, the water itself becomes an extension of the artwork, assuming the role previously carried out by the audience.

After executing the two small models and finalizing the first large piece, the exploration process developed into the construction of the next large stainless steel sculpture and was finished with the completion of third steel piece.

The second and third pieces, using wind, also successfully employ kinesis without requiring the audience to directly generate action. Although these two works vary in size and materials, they share the same elemental force as a power source to generate motion. Wind is the catalyst that allows these pieces to transcend to a kinetic level devoid of actual human touch. Both works, when sited outdoors, use wind power to rotate. Centrally placed vertical axes radiate in a centrifugal motion, while angular shapes of metal attached to the central axes offer wind resistance and act as sails so the pieces turn slowly. Even though these two pieces require strong wind in order to facilitate the onset of motion, the results to the first questions are positive. These creations, though large and heavy, are able to utilize non-manipulative forms of kinesis to achieve movement without relying on direct audience interaction.

The final question was posed in order to determine the effect of deleting auditory stimulation on these works. The answers to this question differ with each of the sculptures. Works created prior to the exploration process dealt with sound stimulus by purposely creating very loud, startling noises when viewers assumed the role as the source of kinesis. The audience interaction required to initiate movement also created noise, providing another dimension to the dialog sparked between the art and the
observer. The first sculpture does not completely lack sound stimulus due to the pouring of water, but the viewer is no longer in control of what is being seen or heard. The dialog between observer and art is imbued with a more subtle sense of interaction. The exploration process also revealed a new sensory aspect not found in previous works. The more neutralized role of the viewer as an observer promotes a sense of visual and auditory anticipation while waiting for the sculpture to spill water. This type of interfacing is not evident in artworks where viewers assume a more controlling role as the catalyst of sound and motion.

The final two sculptures are successful even with the deletion of controlled auditory stimulation. There is, however, not a complete deletion of all sound. Even though the viewer has no direct control over their sound or movement, the pieces are not noiseless when they are mobile. The sounds of strong winds whistling through negative spaces serve to act as an auditory reminder of air as a kinetic energy source. This successfully reinforces the theme of a kinetic energy not reliant on direct viewer interaction.
CONCLUSION

The results to the proposed questions were positively answered. Five pieces were successfully completed in order to solve the proposed problems. The works were made from steel and stainless steel and combined with a variety of media. Each of the kinetic sculptures is non-reliant to human touch and moves via a different form of kinesis, therefore demonstrating positive outcomes to the questions. All three sculptures carry an underlying theme of movement, yet their motion occurs without direct action from the audience. Deletion of controlled sound stimulus had surprisingly interesting results which fostered a new dimension of sensory anticipation. The creation and completion of these works provided excellent results for each of the questions posed.