



TRILOGY: (OR ONE FLIP AND TWO TWISTERS)

FOUNTAIN

BLADE (on loan from the artist)

OPENS 5 MARCH 1977

GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY,  
NEW PLYMOUTH, NEW ZEALAND.







## FOREWORD

The project culminating in this exhibition was initiated by my predecessor Bob Ballard, a little before he vacated the directorship in January 1975, and nursed along by the Chairman, Dr Peter Allen. The project was to import the stainless steel, electric motors and the control gear for two of Len Lye's best known pieces, *Trilogy* and *Fountain*, to have these fabricated here to his specifications, and to bring him and Mrs Lye out so he could make the final adjustments, supervise their installation and generally authenticate them and the exhibition. The Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand agreed to subsidise the project, and it was adopted by the Gallery authority, the New Plymouth City Council, shortly before my taking office in July 1975. It was Ray Thorburn, now the Education Department's curriculum development officer for art, and author of a book on Len Lye we hope to publish, who interested Bob Ballard in the project. Ray met Len in New York when on an Arts Council travel grant connected with his representing New Zealand at the São Paulo Bienal, and in his report drew the Council's attention to the international reputation of this expatriate New Zealander. In 1974 on a Fulbright Scholarship, Ray documented Len's works. By that time here in New Plymouth the engineer/enthusiast John Matthews had been drawn into the project and, when he went to New York to discuss it with Len, it was Ray who introduced them. Without the rapport between Len, John and Ray, there would have been no project.

John Matthews flew again to New York at his own expense in November 1975, in order to buy the components and arrange their shipment. However Len was no longer content with having *Fountain* and *Trilogy* duplicated and wished us to have ones that were, in each dimension, double the size. Len being Len, John agreed.

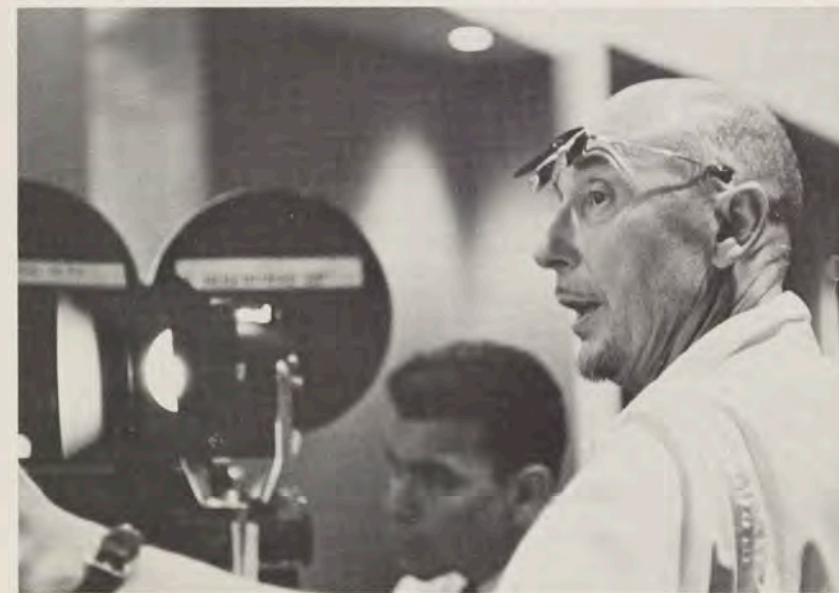
This is not the place to discuss the problems, including financial ones that stemmed from this agreement, but the engineering one must be mentioned. For John Matthews was no longer copying existing sculptures with standard components but making what from an engineering viewpoint were completely new works. Len Lye is not only a great creative artist but one who to realise his concepts, has had to have an amazing sense of materials, in this case stainless steel, and an intuitive grasp of engineering principles. Having specified the dimensions of the steel rods for *Fountain* and steel strip for *Trilogy*, he chose the motors and gear he believed would make the steel do as he wanted. There were however no mathematical solutions to the problems of making it do so, and John Matthews has spent long nights and weekends to show, for an opening delayed for a year, that Len was right. For the extra trouble and expense we have vastly more valuable works and the Gallery becomes the largest Len Lye installation anywhere. In addition, we have, on loan for a year, a third work, *Blade*. In expressing our debt to Ray Thorburn for conceiving the project and to John Matthews for so indomitably bringing it to fruition, we are expressing it to the man who inspired them, Len Lye.

Ron O'Reilly  
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery  
New Plymouth, New Zealand

31st January, 1977

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Although hardly known in the country of his birth, Len Lye is internationally recognised as a pioneer film maker, kinetic sculptor, painter, lecturer and art theorist. He was born in Christchurch in 1901 and attributes his life long interest in the composition of motion to experiences in New Zealand. In 1915 he attended evening classes at the Wellington Technical College and four years later enrolled as a student at the Canterbury College of Art in Christchurch. Between art school and his arrival in London in 1926 he further developed his theories by studying Polynesian art in Western Samoa (where he lived for two years); learning basic techniques of film animation in Sydney, as well as working at various jobs in Australia and New Zealand. He exhibited with the 7 + 5 Group (that included Frances Hodgkins) in London between 1927 and 1933. A nine-minute black and white film *Tusalava*, sponsored by the London Film Society was completed in 1928. The 13,000 animated drawings of *Tusalava* were directly influenced by Polynesian and Melanesian art. In 1935 *Colour Box*, the world's first direct film — that is, making a film without a camera, by inscribing a design directly on film — was made by Len Lye for the British Post Office Film Unit. In the next two years seven more short films were made. A *Len Lye Evening* was given by the *London Film Institute Society* (a branch of the British Film Institute) at the end of 1937. For the next twenty-two years Len Lye made short films in England and the United States where he went to live in 1946.



Len Lye film maker mid-1950's

In 1951 a selection of Len Lye's films were shown at the Venice Film Festival and in 1957 he received the New York TV Art Directors' Award for a one-minute TV commercial *Rhythm*. More than twenty years after he received a special award for *Colour Box* at the 1936 Brussel's Film Festival; he received a Silver Award for *Free Radicals* at the Brussel's World Fair International Film Festival in 1958. Simultaneously with his experimental film work, Lye was developing other ways and means to compose motion. The results, called by Lye *Tangible Motion Sculptures*, were shown to the public for the first time in *Art and Motion* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and Stockholm's

Museum of Modern Art. (A seven-foot version of *Fountain* seen in *Art and Motion* is now owned by the Whitney Museum of American Art.) In the same year there was a performance of Lye's kinetic sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Since 1961 his kinetic sculpture has been in major group exhibitions, including a definitive survey exhibition, *Directions in Kinetic Sculpture* at the University Art Museum, Berkeley, California. The Museum has a version of *Trilogy* permanently in a room of its own.

A major one man exhibition was featured at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in 1965, as part of the *Buffalo Festival of the Arts Today*. Other exhibitions include:

1964 *On the Move*, Howard Wise Gallery, New York

1965 *Boundless Steel Sculptures*, Howard Wise Gallery, New York

1965 *Kinetic Steel Sculpture*, Contemporary Arts Centre, Cincinnati, Ohio

1969-70 *Kinesthetics*, Howard Wise Gallery, New York

1976 *Two Hundred Years of American Sculpture*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Since 1966 Len Lye has devoted most of his time to developing his theory of *Art and the Genes* and in 1968 delivered a lecture on the subject at the Animal Institute of Genetics at the University of Edinburgh. This was followed by a multi-media lecture and demonstration entitled *The Absolute Truth of the Happiness Acid*, at the Cambridge Animation Festival 1968, Cambridge University.

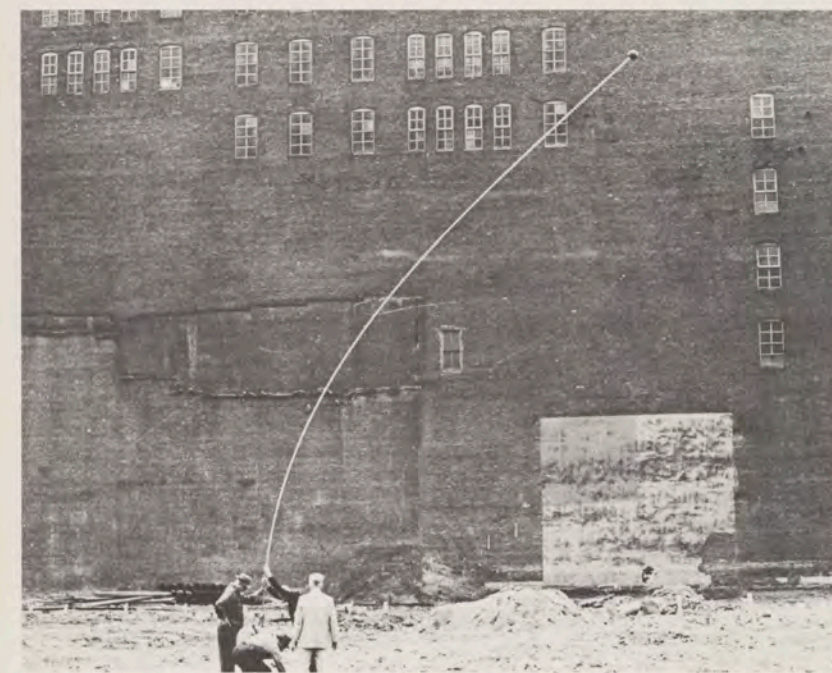
He has assembled over 5,000 slides and produced numerous tapes and papers supporting his theory that the source of art is deeply rooted in man's subconscious. Len Lye has written:

"Our body houses inherited archives of genetic information about our life span, values of survival and, for good measure, *all* evolution. These life span values of survival and evolution are transcended by their refinement into symbols and myth which last beyond our graves . . . ."

"We take our happy moments to the grave but art lives . . . ."

Len Lye still works in his West Village Studio in New York City and his home in the hills of Warwick, New York State.

— From material supplied by Ray Thorburn



Len Lye and friends testing *Wind Wand* (1962) on a vacant lot in Greenwich Village, New York

## CATALOGUE

Since compilation has preceded Len Lye's arrival and final adjustment of *Fountain* and *Trilogy*, measurements (which are of the works when stationary and in metres, height first) are in their case approximate only.

### "A" (Ground Floor) Display Area

BLADE Kinetic sculpture

2.06; 0.91 (diam.)

On loan from the Artist

FOUNTAIN Kinetic sculpture

c4.6; c4.6 (diam.). Stainless steel rods: 4.7mm. diam.

Gallery's Permanent Collection

### "D" Display Area: On view from "E" (Top) Deck

TRILOGY Kinetic sculpture

—"Flip" c4.57 by c2.7 across

—"Twisters" each c7.6

Stainless steel strip: 180mm. wide by 2.3mm. thick

Gallery's Permanent Collection

## FILM

Len Lye is an acknowledged pioneer and visionary in *direct film*. His first *direct film* — that is, making a film without a camera, by inscribing a design directly on film — was *Colour Box*. His films, some of which the Gallery hopes to screen during the exhibition, are —

TUSALAVA (1928). 9 minutes, black and white, for London Film Society.

COLOUR BOX (1935). 5 minutes, Dufaycolor, for the British Post Office (G.P.O.) Film Unit.

KALEIDOSCOPE (1935). 4 minutes, Dufaycolor, produced by Gerald Noxon and P.W.P. Productions.

THE BIRTH OF THE ROBOT (1936). 6 minutes, Gasparcolor, in collaboration with Humphrey Jennings for Shell-Mex Ltd.

RAINBOW DANCE (1936). 4 minutes, Gasparcolor, for the G.P.O. Film Unit.

TRADE TATTOO (1937). 5 minutes, Technicolor, for the G.P.O. Film Unit.

COLOUR FLIGHT (1937). 2 minutes, color, for Imperial Airways.

SWINGING THE LAMBETH WALK (1937). 4 minutes, color, for the British Ministry of Information.

NORTH OR NORTHWEST (1937). Black and white.

WHEN THE PIE WAS OPENED (1939). 10 minutes, black and white, for the British Government.

PROFILE OF BRITAIN (1939), for the March of Time.

MUSICAL POSTER No. 1 (1940). 3 minutes, Technicolor, for the British Government.

KILL OR BE KILLED (1942). 15 minutes, black and white, for the British Ministry of Information.

CAMERAMEN AT WAR (1944). 17 minutes, black and white, produced by the Realist Film Unit for the British Ministry of Information.

[Between 1944 and 1951, Lye made seven films for the March of Time.]

COLOR CRY (1952). 1 minutes, black and white, produced by Ann Zeiss.

RHYTHM (1957). 1 minute, black and white, a television commercial conceived for the Chrysler Corporation, produced by Ann Zeiss.

FREE RADICALS (1958). 5 minutes, black and white, produced by Ann Zeiss for the International Film Exposition in Brussels.

PARTICLES IN SPACE (1959). black and white.

"Len Lye has shown the way, and shown it in a masterly and brilliant fashion . . . I am perpetually amazed at the wealth of technical innovation . . . all this technical inventiveness is not just assembled in a plodding manner, but beautifully integrated into a fascinating filmic experience. The inventor in him never overwhelms the artist."

Norman McLaren, National Film  
Board of Canada, 1972



## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

### **CONSTRUCTION OF KINETIC WORKS FOR GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY**

All companies based in New Plymouth  
PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION SUPERVISION: JOHN B MATTHEWS

#### *TRILOGY or (FLIP AND and TWO TWISTERS)*

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION: FITZROY ENGINEERING LTD.  
ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION:  
CORCORAN BROS. LTD. in association with B.T. GILBERT.  
ANALYSIS OF HARMONIC CRITERIA: PROFESSOR I.D. STEVENSON,  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY, CHRISTCHURCH.

#### *FOUNTAIN*

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION: FITZROY ENGINEERING LTD;  
CAMBRIAN ENGINEERING CO. LTD; PIONEER ENGINEERING LTD.  
ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION:  
CORCORAN BROS. LTD.

#### *BLADE (ON LOAN FROM THE ARTIST)*

MODIFICATION WORK: FITZROY ENGINEERING LTD; PIONEER  
ENGINEERING LTD.; CORCORAN BROS. LTD.

## **RESEARCH AND PRODUCTION**

INITIATION OF LEN LYE PROJECT: R.H. BALLARD; FORMER DIRECTOR,  
GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY

RESEARCH ASSISTANCE: PHIL LYE, AUCKLAND; AUCKLAND CITY ART  
GALLERY; THE UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, U.S.A.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN ASHTON

EXHIBITION INSTALLATION: JOHN MAYNARD

GALLERY DIRECTOR: RON O'REILLY

GALLERY STAFF: DON DRIVER, JOHN SCHUMACHER, PETER GUILD  
AND RUTH FRANCIS

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