

LIGHT AS AIR

By Nancy La Mar Rodgers

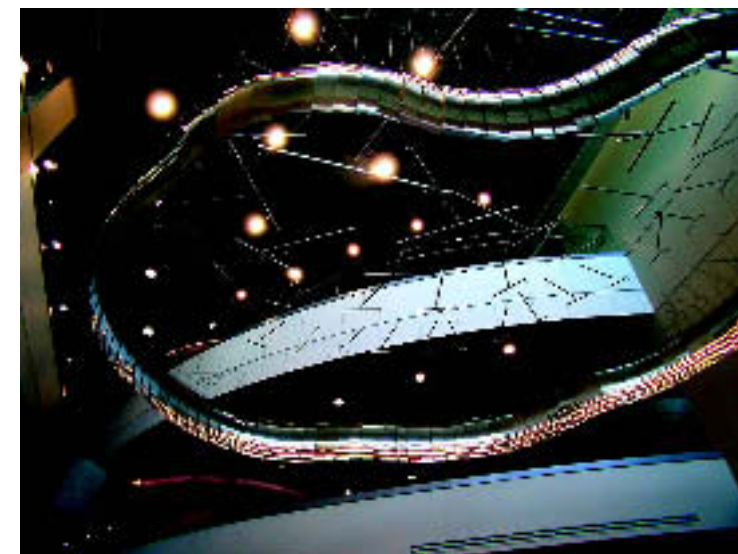
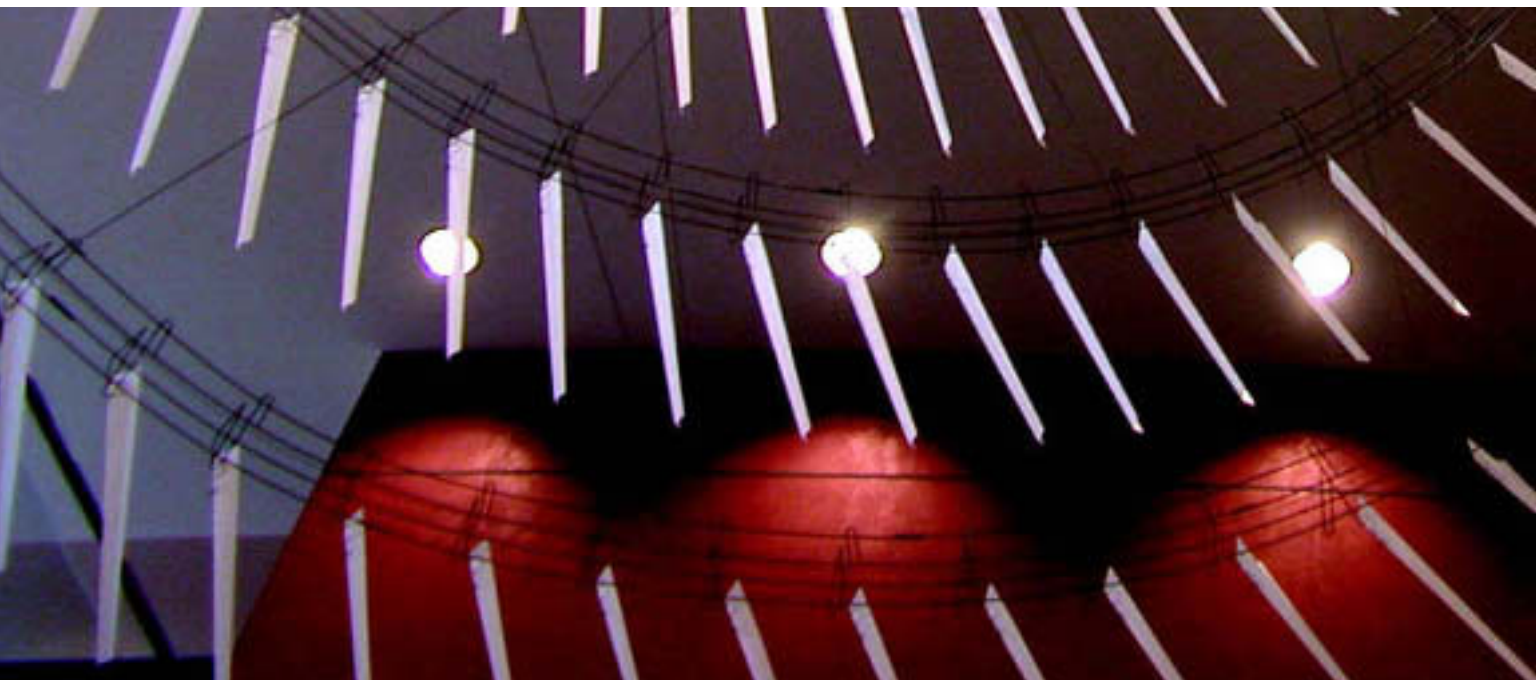
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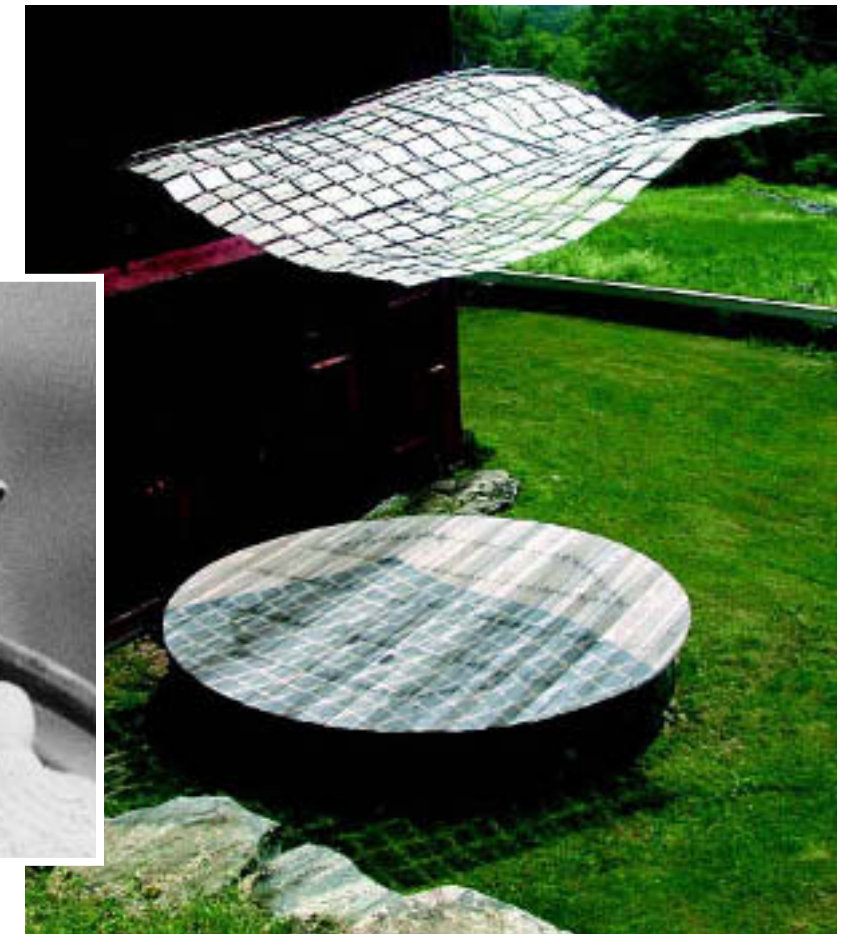
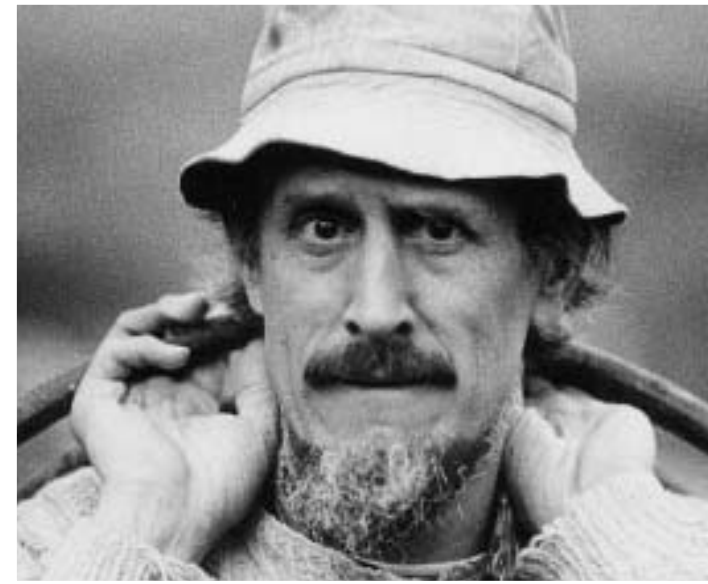
Prentice also pays tribute to George Rickey, another kinetic artist who Prentice says “demonstrated that this concept wasn’t any one man’s property and who brought to kinetic sculpture the idea of isolating movement as the subject.” At the time of this discovery however, Prentice did not consider himself an artist because, as he states, “Artists make magic,” so his practical nature took over and he decided to study architecture at Yale. Though Prentice established an award-winning architectural firm, his passion for sculpture eventually led him back to his home in Connecticut where he has worked from his studio creating his capricious masterpieces for over twenty years.

What is it about mobiles that capture our attention, whether it be as a baby in a crib or as an adult placing a garden accessory amongst the spring blossoms? Perhaps it is the illusion that reflective light and movement create, allowing our minds to transcend reality if even for just a

Or is it air as light? I’m not sure, but it’s the synergism of these forces that make kinetic sculpture so mesmerizing. Much like the willowy metal creatures that live amongst the trees on his property, sculptor Tim Prentice is at one with these elements. On this particular day, The Square Windframe has a gentle breeze blowing through it. The tone is one of gentle trickling like a sound effect that might be used to imply the movement of a babbling brook in an animated film, while patterns of dark and blindingly bright light ripple through the layered columns of aluminum. I am fixated by the power of these creations to soothe; my eyes focused on the incredible transformations of reflecting light.

The history of kinetic sculpture lies mostly in the artwork of Alexander Calder, who is credited for the creation of the mobile. For Prentice, Calder’s work is the reason he decided to try his own hand at creating sculptures whose communication relies on natural forces. “I saw my first Calder piece when I was about fifteen, and I thought I had memorized it. I didn’t catch up with that piece again for many years and though it was smaller than I had remembered, that was the piece that changed my life.”





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brief moment. Unlike sedentary sculptures, when designing for a particular space, a kinetic sculptor must take into account not just the light and the air that moves through the space but what the space is used for—the pedestrian traffic or the overall mood of the occupants.

According to Mr. Prentice, “How the air is moving is most important. That is what people can’t see, but what the function of the space is and what the proportions are all come into play. There are all different mindsets—you might have people enjoying themselves in a restaurant as opposed to those who may be moving through an airport, nervous about their flights, to a corporate dining room that some people will eat in every day for years, in which case that piece might reveal its secrets very slowly.”

What distinguishes Prentice’s work from that of his admired predecessors is his choice of materials, which are light in weight but also visually reflective and bright. These materials, which include aluminum and Lexan (which he refers to as “the champagne of plastics”), are symbols of our industrial technology—and yet they seem to almost morph into organic materials when left to play with the wind.

Prentice’s childlike awe of nature’s power is what gives his creations the freedom to amuse and perform. “The wind outside and the air inside are moving in a way that we cannot see; and that movement is more imaginative, moody, whimsical and endlessly more varied than my imagination could ever possibly be. So I figure my best position is to turn over the art to the air, and I create a machine that the wind can play with.”

Prentice has created pieces for many prestigious corporate and scholastic venues such as The American Express Headquarters in NYC, The New York Hall of Science, The National Museum of Modern Art, The Civic Center in Tottori Japan, and Connecticut’s own Bradley International Airport. Even with a resume of outstanding achievements, his creations and his outlook on life are still full of childlike wonder. As I stood in the workshop admiring two such forms that dangle from the ceiling awaiting their eventual delivery to another home, Tim’s playful nature had him blow a slight breath, no more powerful than a sigh. It reached an enormous snakelike sculpture, and I watched with pure fascination at what seemed to be heavy metal suddenly flowing and rippling as if it were the bubbles wafting from the plastic wand of a child’s toy. “You couldn’t do that with a Calder sculpture,” he explains with a slight chuckle, “would have been too heavy.”

The famed psychiatrist, Carl Jung said that, “The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.”

Like the light that dances around, the secrets that lie within these sculptures are ever-changing. Their mischievous character is a direct result of the creator’s joyous attempt to provide for audiences a playground and to make lifelike monuments that delight the child within all of us.

To learn more about Tim Prentice or to view his kinetic sculptures, you can visit his website: www.timprentice.com