

17 Nov – 31 Mar

2018 – 19

Group Therapy



Govett-
Brewster
Art
Gallery

Len Lye
Centre

Group Therapy

THE LEN LYE FOUNDATION *Len Lye*

TEAM
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Internationally acclaimed for his pioneering experimental films, Aotearoa New Zealand-born artist Len Lye (1901-1980) is celebrated in his homeland for a wide-ranging practice crowned by his exhilarating kinetic sculpture. Self-described as a “composer of motion” and a “maverick” artist, Lye made a mark on the art world with a body of work inspired by movement and culminating at the vanguard of the 1960s kinetic art movement in the United States. For Lye the real thrill in making art that moves was to focus “on motion rather than on the object describing it”. In this way he came to call his sculptural works “tangible motion sculpture”.

Group Therapy is a brief snapshot of Lye’s practice through a series of works demonstrating innovation around a simple kinetic theme. *Rotating Harmonic* leads the way as the quintessential Len Lye tangible – one of the purest expressions of Lye’s kinetic vision through the exploration and excitation of harmonic frequencies on Lye’s chosen material. The resulting choreography and performance of Lye’s “figures of motion” are at the heart of this unique sculptural practice.

Rotating Harmonic is joined by the ever-popular *Zebra* and the newly reconstructed *Watusi* – two works that take Lye’s figures of motion into different sensual realms.

Curated by Paul Brobbel and Emma Glucina



Rotating Harmonic, 1959 (2010 reconstruction)
fibreglass, electric motor, copper and wooden base

Also known as *Simple Harmonic* or *Original Harmonic*, this work is among Len Lye’s earliest kinetic sculptures and demonstrates the fundamental ideas at play in his “tangible motion sculpture”. Like many of Lye’s works, *Rotating Harmonic* involves a reciprocating mechanism shaking a rod, which then forms a simple curve. The introduction of rotary motion creates the illusion of volume in space. By changing the force of motion applied to the base of the rod, Lye could choreograph a series of harmonic curves reminiscent of “a fish standing on its nose”. The principles explored with *Rotating Harmonic* provide the basis for many of Lye’s tangibles.



Zebra, 1965 (2009 reconstruction)
fibreglass, electric motor, wooden base

Developed several years after *Rotating Harmonic*, *Zebra* is one of Lye’s most captivating works. The striped pattern of *Zebra*’s wand adds a striking optical addition to the figures of motion familiar to us from Lye’s other tangibles. Although similar in many ways to *Rotating Harmonic*, *Zebra* involves several important differences. Rather than shaking a rod or wand back and forth, Lye employed a spinning motion with *Zebra*, adding an element of imbalance with the addition of a ball at the top of the wand.



Watusi 1960 (2018 reconstruction)
spring steel, plastic, rice, electric motor, wooden base

Like *Rotating Harmonic*, this work dates to the very earliest batch of tangibles developed by Lye and demonstrates bodily movement, particularly dance, was at the heart of Lye’s interests in motion. Taking its name from a popular dance in the United States during the 1960s, *Watusi* is one of several of Lye’s anthropomorphic works – suggesting human form. Emphasizing the rhythms that drive us to dance, Lye incorporated percussive elements to *Watusi* with several spinning shakers filled with rice.

Using the original work in the Len Lye Foundation collection and materials from the Foundation’s archive, the Len Lye Foundation has reconstructed *Watusi* for this exhibition – the first exhibition of the work in nearly 60 years.