



LIN EMERY

*A Movement, 1957-2017*

HILLIA



Lin Emery. *Leaf Play*, 1968. Brazen brass, magnets, motor.

# LIN EMERY

## AND THE KINETIC ART MOVEMENT

Running in tandem with the Hilliard University Art Museum's group exhibition *Tina Freeman: Artist Spaces* — which includes the work of artist Lin Emery — the solo exhibition *Lin Emery: A Movement, 1957-2017* offers a deeper look at the methods of production in her studio. Featuring her latest creations in polished aluminum, it showcases early bronze works, as well as Emery's paper models and cutout patterns for selected large-scale public art commissions. These materials provide a rare glimpse into the artist's imagination, and her process of engineering the elegant sculptures for which she is best known.

Emery's practice has laid important groundwork in New Orleans for the contemporary scene, and ushered in public acceptance of time-based visual art forms — as evidenced by prominent outdoor placements of her kinetic art throughout the region. In 1956 she was a charter member of the Orleans Gallery, located at 527 Royal Street, which was the city's first collective artist-run and operated contemporary art space<sup>1</sup>. Six years later she opened a cooperatively run foundry, the Orleans Workshop. In the 1980s Emery worked with composer James Drew on multiple projects, which pushed her

experimentations further, and included an installation presented at the Max Hutchinson Gallery in the SoHo neighborhood of New York<sup>2</sup>. These collaborations, and Emery's multidisciplinary approach to art in general, are seminal precursors to the current local scene in today's Bywater neighborhood — which features widespread studio spaces, artist-run galleries, and innovative performance venues such as the Music Box Village.

The first usage of the term “kinetic” in relationship to visual art appeared in “The Realistic Manifesto”<sup>3</sup>, written in 1920 by sculptors Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, key figures of the Russian Constructivist art movement: *We renounce the thousand-year-old delusion in art that held the static rhythms as the only elements of the plastic and pictorial arts. We affirm in these arts a new element the kinetic rhythms as the basic forms of our perception of real time... Art should attend us everywhere that life flows and acts.*

Many artists of the past have made works inspired by universal notions of time and motion, as well as the fusion of art and science — from Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of flying machines in 1480s, to the Futurist paintings of



Lin Emery. *Morrison Memorial*, 1966. Cast nickel-silver, water pumps; in five sections. New Orleans Civic Center, New Orleans LA.

Giacomo Balla in the 1910s, or Marcel Duchamp's 1920 *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)*. Emery's development as an artist, however, paralleled the international establishment of kinetic art as a genre. Emery's studies of sculpture began in 1949–50 in the Paris studio of Russian artist Ossip Zadkine, who taught clay hand-building techniques. Her training continued in 1951–52 at the New York Sculpture Center, which, during those days, offered classes on 69th Street in Manhattan. There, she learned welding and casting, while also working in pewter and clay alongside Louise Nevelson and Dorothy Dehner<sup>4</sup>. By the time she completed this training, her work was included in group exhibitions with Herbert Ferber, David Hare, Seymour Lipton, and David Smith.

Between 1955 and 1970, Emery's work entered into wide national circulation. Simultaneously, many landmark exhibitions for kinetic and new media art forms were presented around the globe. For example, in 1955, curator K.G. Pontus Hulten organized *Le Mouvement*, a legendary exhibition at the Galerie Denise René in Paris, and suggested four principles of kinetic sculpture: color,

light, motion, and time. In 1961, Hulten organized an even more ambitious show on the same topic, *Bewogen Bewegung (Moving Movement)*, which toured Europe and inspired another exhibition of its kind in the US<sup>5</sup>. During this period, the evolution of Emery's practice expanded to include magnets and *Aquamobiles*, a series of works that used water as a source of kinetic motion. She also developed the core philosophies of her practice, shared skills with other artists, and received her first major public fountain commissions.

In a recent monograph on Emery, art historian Philip Palmedo points out that by 1972, all of her projects were kinetic and activated by systems that used water, magnets, wind or motors<sup>6</sup>. The timing of her industrial studio discoveries runs parallel to the global establishment of a technological avant-garde in the arts, in the decades following World War II. Emery's contemporaries in this movement include members of the ZERO group and Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) in Europe, as well as those affiliated with Black Mountain College, MIT's Center for Advanced Visual

Studies (CAVS) and Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) in New York. Taken as a whole, these networks of tech-savvy visual artists were driven by the possibility of social change and innovation, as well as an interest in the temporal structures of live performance, including chance operations.

Throughout multiple work phases, Emery's subject matter has drawn upon natural forces, figures, and writing systems. On the occasion of her 1991 exhibition at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas, arts writer D. Eric Bookhart made the following observation: *Clearly, neither nature nor technology exclusively manifests the essence of Emery's sculpture. Instead, clues to that elusive essentiality may be found on the margins between nature and technology. So these works must be regarded as dualistic, even dialectical – for in them we find a dialog of often contradictory forces. Individually iconic, they are suggestive of the linguistic as well... Imagining these sculptural elements as markings on a flat surface, we may be reminded of Asian or Middle Eastern calligraphy... Viewed as calligraphic iconography, these forms seem to signify nature once again. Thus, their recirculating shapes engage us in dialog, kaleidoscopically reflecting man and nature, intellect and psyche, time and space: a conceptual circle that remains, ultimately, infinite and unbroken.*

Her innate curiosity for language and travel, particularly in Asia, has shaped Emery's execution of public artworks abroad. Relationships with other artists have also impacted the distribution and reception of her art. "My close friend and mentor was Isamu Noguchi," recalled Emery. "We spent time together in New York and New Orleans, and at several sculpture conferences. He even introduced me to his special hotel in Tokyo when I was working in Japan."<sup>7</sup>

Emery is an autodidact who has engineered success on her own terms, while inventing new modes of production and visual expression. Even by the age of sixteen, Emery legally changed her first name from "Leonor" to "Lin" so that her identity in the humanities wasn't locked into a specific gender or ethnicity. Although it may seem contradictory, she has also maintained a distance from the feminist art movement, and has explained that since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city of New Orleans has favored women sculptors<sup>8</sup>.



Lin Emery. *St. Scholastica*, 1956. Castcement and welded bronze. St. Scholastica School, Covington LA.

Starting with her first visit to Asia in 1962 to accompany a traveling exhibition, the cultural context for Emery's art has shifted with our world. Three international expositions have included her sculptures: The 1964 New York World's Fair, 1984 New Orleans World's Fair and the Australian World Expo '88 in Brisbane<sup>10</sup>. A complete account of Emery's international engagement in the arts is substantial. Highlights include her 30-foot public works in Singapore and Osaka; as well as a commission in the Middle East for a telecommunications building in Abu Dhabi<sup>11</sup>. Her work has been exhibited in Kyoto; and at the Wuhu Sculpture Park in China; the Izumisano Hospital and the Fujisankei Biennial in Japan. As of this writing, her display for the Second International Kinetic exhibition in Tsinghua University, Changchun, China, is presently being planned, in addition to her installation of *Triad*, a new commission for the Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City.

Emery's compositions are generative, and in any local community they signify a public space for reflection and natural wonder. As art, her pieces awaken one's senses by creating an energetic zone of play. Such an experience is inherently ephemeral, personalized, and challenging to document; but Emery's work is well worth the effort of study. This exhibition aims to trace one historical trajectory to provide insight on her innovative use of materials and motion. In the months to come, two live performances in the gallery, one with dancers and another featuring musicians, will further our understanding of Emery's dynamic practice and improvisational structures.

Laura Blereau  
Curator, Hilliard University Art Museum  
University of Louisiana at Lafayette  
September 2017

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> William Fagaly, "Personal Recollections: Contemporary Art in New Orleans", appearing in *Pride of Place: The Making of Contemporary Art in New Orleans* published by the New Orleans Museum of Art, 2017, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> In a review dated Dec 21, 1984, critic Grace Glueck for *The New York Times* described Emery's work as follows: *Now here's a stage set. With the collaboration of James Drew, a composer, the sculptor Lin Emery has created a remarkable audio-kinetic installation that recreates the murder of Thomas Becket, the 12th-century Archbishop of Canterbury, by four knights in his cathedral. In an ingeniously basilican construction, with vaulting ribs of metal slats that move and an altarlike scrim at one end, four black knights and a white Becket, fanciful birdlike puppets, are perched on rods. A pushbutton activates the tableau, and its dirgelike accompanying music. The knights, their dancing shapes conveyed in shadow play on the scrim, glide on rails from behind it to the wheeling, flapping Becket up front, knock him dead, so to speak, and silently return behind the altar. A piece of Expressionist theater in Bauhaus garb, it achieves a brilliant synthesis of space and movement. See it.*

<sup>3</sup> Edward A. Shanken. *Art and Electronic Media* published by Phaidon, 2009, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Palmedo, *Lin Emery* published by Hudson Hills Press, 2012, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> Originating at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, *Bewogen Beweging* traveled to the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and the Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen. Described as an "international exhibition of art in motion," it preceded K.G. Hulten's major American exhibition of kinetic art, *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1968.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Palmedo, *Lin Emery* published by Hudson Hills Press, 2012, p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> Lin Emery, as quoted in correspondence with the author on July 13, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> In correspondence July 13, 2017, the artist stated: *New Orleans' history has favored women artists. Traditionally, art was the prerogative of women. Newcomb College's Department of Art was exclusively for women. [Also] Angela Gregory, a local artist who studied in Paris, had been commissioned by the city to produce a monument to Bienville — so it was easy for me to succeed.*

<sup>9</sup> In 1962, Emery visited Tokyo, Hong Kong and Manila to accompany a traveling exhibition organized by the Orleans Gallery and supported by the US Information Agency.

<sup>10</sup> The 1964 New York World's Fair included Emery in a contemporary sculpture display at the American-Israel pavilion. Her expertise was tapped again for the 1984 New Orleans World's Fair, where she presented a solo exhibition. Four years later, her work traveled to Brisbane.

<sup>11</sup> *Deva*, 1968 at the Marina Centre Holdings Pte Ltd. in Singapore; *Honoo No Ki (Dance of the Tree)*, 1998, at Osaka Dome in Japan; and 1990 Abu Dhabi sculpture commission.

Cover Image: Lin Emery welding at the Sculpture Center in New York, as photographed for the *Sun Times*, "The Sparks Fly", May 30, 1954.

All photos courtesy of the artist and Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans.



Lin Emery. *Leaf Play*, 1968. Brazen brass, magnets, motor.

## LIN EMERY: A MOVEMENT, 1957-2017

HILLIARD UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE

OCTOBER 7, 2017 – JANUARY 27, 2018

### CHECKLIST OF WORKS BY LIN EMERY

*Archangel Michael*, 1957

Magnesite and steel armature  
Loaned by the New Orleans Museum of Art  
Gift of Mrs. Mary Persia Davis, 78.199

*Ashtray*, 1958

Bronze  
Loaned by the artist

*Flight*, 1961

Bronze with stone base  
Loaned by the artist

*Futile Cloak*, 1964

Loaned by the New Orleans Museum of Art  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Clemmer, 94.204

*Calligraphy*, c. 1970

Cast aluminum on wood base  
Loaned by the New Orleans Museum of Art  
Bequest of Carmen Donaldson, 99.109.30

*Lily Flower (Small)*, 2010

Polished marine aluminum, stainless steel  
assemblies  
Loaned by the artist

*Palm*, 2013-15

Polished marine aluminum, stainless steel  
assemblies  
Loaned by Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans

*Splay (Large)*, 2013-15

Polished marine aluminum, stainless steel  
assemblies  
Loaned by John Cleveland,  
New Orleans

*Umbrella Tree*, 2014

Polished marine aluminum, stainless steel  
assemblies  
Loaned by Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans

*Return (Large)*, 2015

Polished marine aluminum, stainless steel  
assemblies  
Loaned by Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans

*Bower*, 2017

Polished marine aluminum, stainless steel  
assemblies  
Loaned by the artist

*Twirl*, 2017

Polished and painted marine aluminum, stainless  
steel assemblies  
Loaned by the artist

*Spire (Small)*, 2017

Polished and painted marine aluminum, stainless  
steel assemblies  
Loaned by the artist

*Sketch for Anthem*, 1982

Paper, plastic straws, cardboard, hot glue  
Loaned by the artist

*Sketch for Pastoral*, 2011

Paper, plastic straws, cardboard, hot glue  
Loaned by the artist

*Sketch for Triad*, 2017

Paper, plastic straws, cardboard, metallic paint,  
hot glue  
Loaned by the artist

Various paper pattern cutouts for multiple projects

Paper, pencil, marker, masking tape, string  
Loaned by the artist

*Lin Emery Studio Visit*, 2009

Digital video, sound  
5 min, 15 sec  
Courtesy Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans

*Louisiana Artist: Lin Emery*, June 2005

89.9 WWNO interview with Jacqueline Bishop  
Archived radio interview and digital slideshow  
Digital video, sound  
9 min, 39 sec  
Courtesy Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans

### RELATED PROGRAMMING

**6:00 PM | Wednesday, November 1, 2017**

**Museum in Motion**

**Featuring the UL Lafayette Dance Department**

A showcase of solos and duets performed live by students in the museum's galleries as a response to the current exhibitions. Hosted in partnership with the UL Lafayette's School of Performing Arts. Organized by Marie Broussard, Instructor of Dance and Kenneth Jenkins, Assistant Professor of Dance.

**6:00 PM | Wednesday, November 15, 2017**

**Live Music with the UL School of Music**

Enjoy an evening of live music in the galleries, performed by UL Lafayette School of Music faculty and students in response to the current Lin Emery exhibition. Organized by Dr. Jeffrey George, Professor of Guitar Studies.

**6:00 PM | Wednesday, January 17, 2018**

**Lecture on the Practice of Sculptor Lin Emery by Art Historian & Physicist Philip Palmedo**

Closing event and book signing, featuring a slide lecture by Lin Emery expert Philip Palmedo. The author will share his research on Emery's 2012 monograph as well as his 2015 survey book, *The Experience of Modern Sculpture*.

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