

**GEORGE RICKEY**

SCULPTURES



**GALERIE THOMAS**

# GEORGE RICKEY

South Bend 1907 – 2002 Saint Paul

Painter and draftsman George Rickey began sculpting relatively late. Inspired by the early sculptures of Alexander Calder, Rickey quickly became one of the most important representatives of kinetic art. His often large, but always filigree stainless steel sculptures stand out for their precise, sober and laconic formal language. Rickey constructs fine curved or geometrically rectangular lines and surfaces in a precisely balanced relationship to one another in such a way that there is never anything completely random or disorganised about the individual movements at the joints of the elements. Rickey's sculptures rather reveal a harmonious choreography, which not only plays with the work's own appearance, but also gains power from the contrast between material, form, size and an apparent lightness, even weightlessness of movement. Rickey describes his fascination with the movement triggered primarily by the air, the vitality and temporality of it, but also its special aesthetic quality, as follows:

"The types of movement available to me are, for the most part, observed every day in our natural environment. In clouds, the sea, falling leaves, blowing grass, sails, soaring birds and flying fish, slamming doors and shutters, hurricanes, whirlwinds and sandstorms, sometimes silent, sometimes shuddering or roaring, sometimes as music and sounds streaming through lips, reeds or pipes, the air moves on."

Moreover, Rickey's works succeed in integrating the space surrounding them into their play of movement and thus redefine it, for the viewer's perception of the space is now only possible in relation to the interaction with Rickey's sculpture. This way, Rickey not only anticipates contemporary developments such as minimal or concept art, but already refers to later time-based and virtual art forms.

Works by George Rickey, who participated in the documenta several times, can be found in many public places and in numerous museum collections around the world.

In a studio exhibition, Galerie Thomas presents a group of Rickey's smaller, signature works that allow a focused look at his art, which is as fascinating as it is distinctive.

"I'm convinced that, in the end,  
art is not for the artist  
but for their fellow man."





## LITTLE VINE WITH COPPER

stainless steel and copper  
c. 1959  
44.5 cm / 17 1/2 in.

Provenance  
- Studio of the artist  
- Private collection, USA

At the beginning of the 1960ies, Rickey had moved away from the hanging mobile type of work, concentrating on standing sculptures that combine balance and movement. By the late 1950s, Rickey was insisting that the new term 'kinetic sculpture', rather than mobiles, be used to describe his work. So, his first sculptures developed his later-on signature language using almost mathematical steel lines and planes to compose his works. But from the beginning, Rickey was referring to natural forms and movements, an approach clearly different from Calder's formal idea. Rickey described his interest in natural forms, and even more natural movements, as follows: "Types of motion available to me are, mostly, observable every day in our natural environment. In clouds, sea, falling leaves, waving grass, kits, sails, soaring birds, and

flying fish, slamming doors and shutters, hurricanes, whirlwinds and sandstorms, sometimes silent, sometimes shuddering or roaring, sometimes passing through lips, reeds, or pipes as music, air moves on." In *Little Vine with Copper*, reference to nature in form and title, in the movement of the leaves, is as visible as a still close relationship to Calder's stabile-mobiles. But George Rickey already moves away from symbolic representation to an idea of the movement and its spirit being the essence of his sculpture. Rickey made this very clear in a statement from 1963: "The artist finds waiting for him, as subject, not the trees, not the flowers, not the landscape, but the waving of branches and the trembling of stems, the piling up or scudding of clouds, the rising and setting and waxing and waning of heavenly bodies."







"Since the design of the movement is paramount,  
shape, for me, should have no significance of itself;  
it merely makes movement evident.  
Therefore, the simplest, most customary,  
most unobtrusive forms suffice."

## TWO LINES OBLIQUE DOWN II

stainless steel  
1970  
height 119.4 cm / 47 in.  
with signature and dated on the base

### Provenance

- The Estate of George Rickey
- Marlborough Gallery (2014)
- Samuel Vanhoegaerden Gallery, Belgium
- Private collection, Brussels

### Exhibited

- Bernice Steinbaum Gallery. Elders of the Tribe. New York 1986-1988
- Snite Museum. University of Notre Dame. Notre Dame, Indiana. 1997
- SOMA Museum of Art/Laurence Geoffrey's Ltd. Seoul, South Korea. 8808 Outside In. Drawings and Sculpture. Seoul 2009-2010
- Marianne Friedland Gallery. Naples, Florida. The Road Not Taken: A 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition with contributions from The Estate of George Rickey/Marlborough Gallery. Naples 2011







"I like the movement to be slow,  
so that one has to wait for its emergence  
and marvel at its slowness."

## FOUR RECTANGLES ONE SQUARE

stainless steel  
1979  
height 31 cm / 12 1/4 in.  
with signature, dated and numbered 1/3 on the base  
edition of 3

Provenance  
- Maxwell Davidson Gallery, New York  
- Private Collection (acquired from the above)  
- Private Collection, Belgium

Auction History  
- Christie's Online, October 7, 2022, lot 235









"It is not by imitating its appearances that kinetic art draws on 'nature', but rather by identifying its laws, recognizing analogies and adapting them to the comprehensive repertoire of motion and space."

## DOUBLE L EXCENTRIC GYRATORY II

stainless steel  
1981  
160 x 78.7 x 30.5 cm / 63 x 31 x 12 in.  
with signature, dated and numbered 1/3 on the base  
edition of 3

Provenance  
- Collection of Arthur and Sara Jo Kobacker, Florida  
- Private Collection

Auction History  
- Sotheby's New York, December 6, 2019, lot 124

Exhibited  
- Asher/Faure Gallery. George Rickey. Los Angeles 1984  
- Art Center of South Bend. Saint Mary's College and the Snite Museum of Art University of Notre Dame.  
George Rickey in South Bend. South Bend 1985





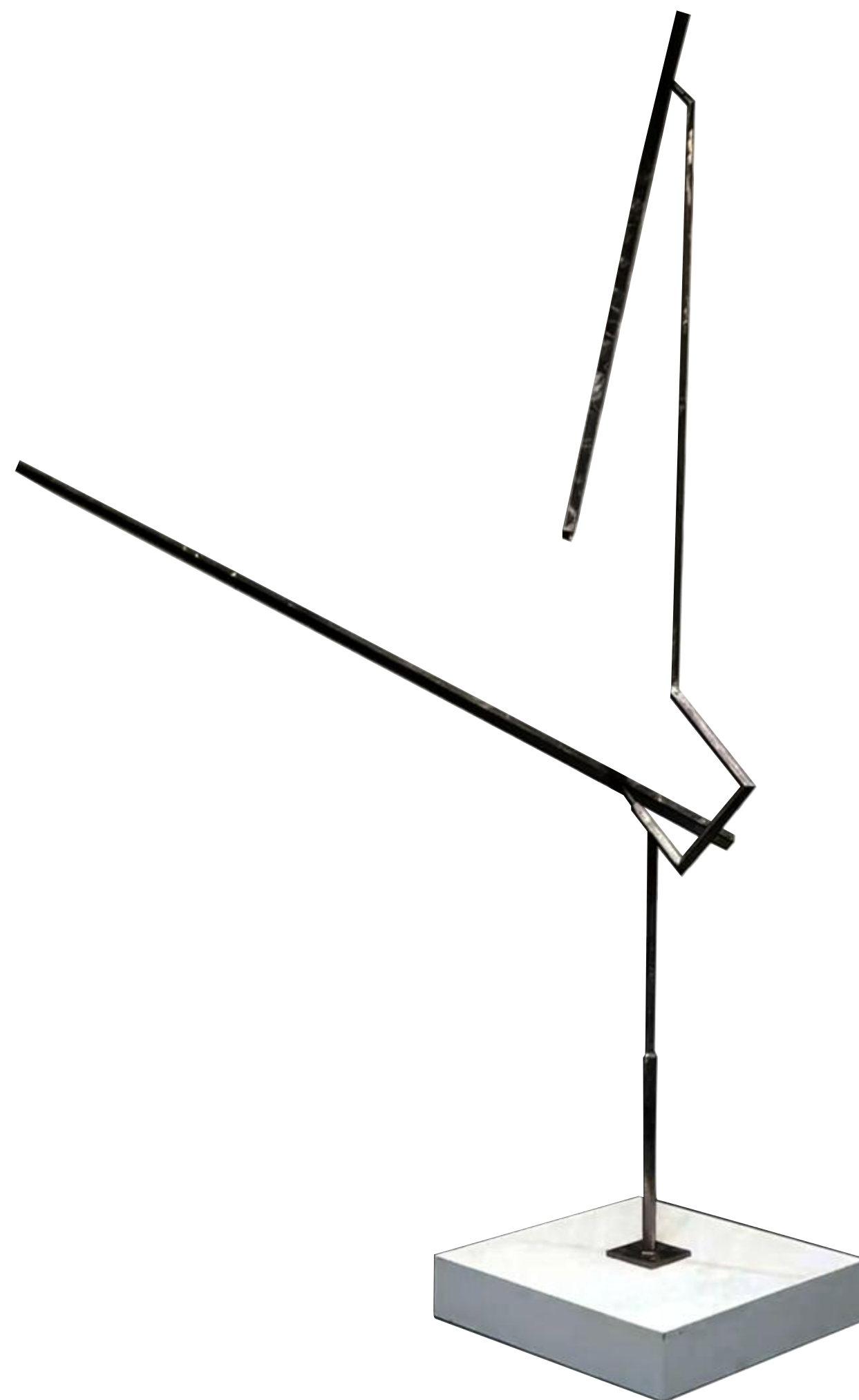


## ONE UP ONE DOWN EXCENTRIC V

stainless steel  
1983  
height 321.3 cm / 126 1/2 in.  
with signature, dated and numbered 3/3 on the base  
edition of 3

Provenance  
- Studio of the artist  
- Private Collection (acquired directly from the above)  
- Private Collection, Europe

Auction History  
- Sotheby's New York, December 15, 2022, lot 8











## THREE SQUARES VERTICAL DIAGONAL II

stainless steel

1986

height 129 cm / 51 in.

each square 91.5 x 91.5 cm / 36 x 36 in.

numbered 1/3

only 2 sculptures were executed

The George Rickey Workshop and the archive of the estate have certified the authenticity of the work and the provenance in writing.

In 1960 Rickey moved into his studio in East Chatham, New York. Rickey's outdoor studio – the woods – just across the street from his home – over the years became populated with variants of his creations. The work *Three Squares Vertical Diagonal II* was part of the artist's own sculpture garden.

Originally intended to be an edition of 3, but only two were executed. No. 1/3 was finished in 1986, no. 2/3 in 1988. 3/3 was never executed and according to Rickey's wishes never will be, since no sculptures can be made after his death. There are two versions: *Three*

Provenance

- Studio of the artist

- Private collection (1986, acquired directly from the artist)

Exhibited

- Sculpture Garden Schlossgut Schwante 2020/21.

Sculpture & Nature

Literature (other version):

- Art Center of South Bend. George Rickey in South Bend. South Bend 1985, p. 13, Abb.

- Merkert, Jörn / Prinz, Ursula.

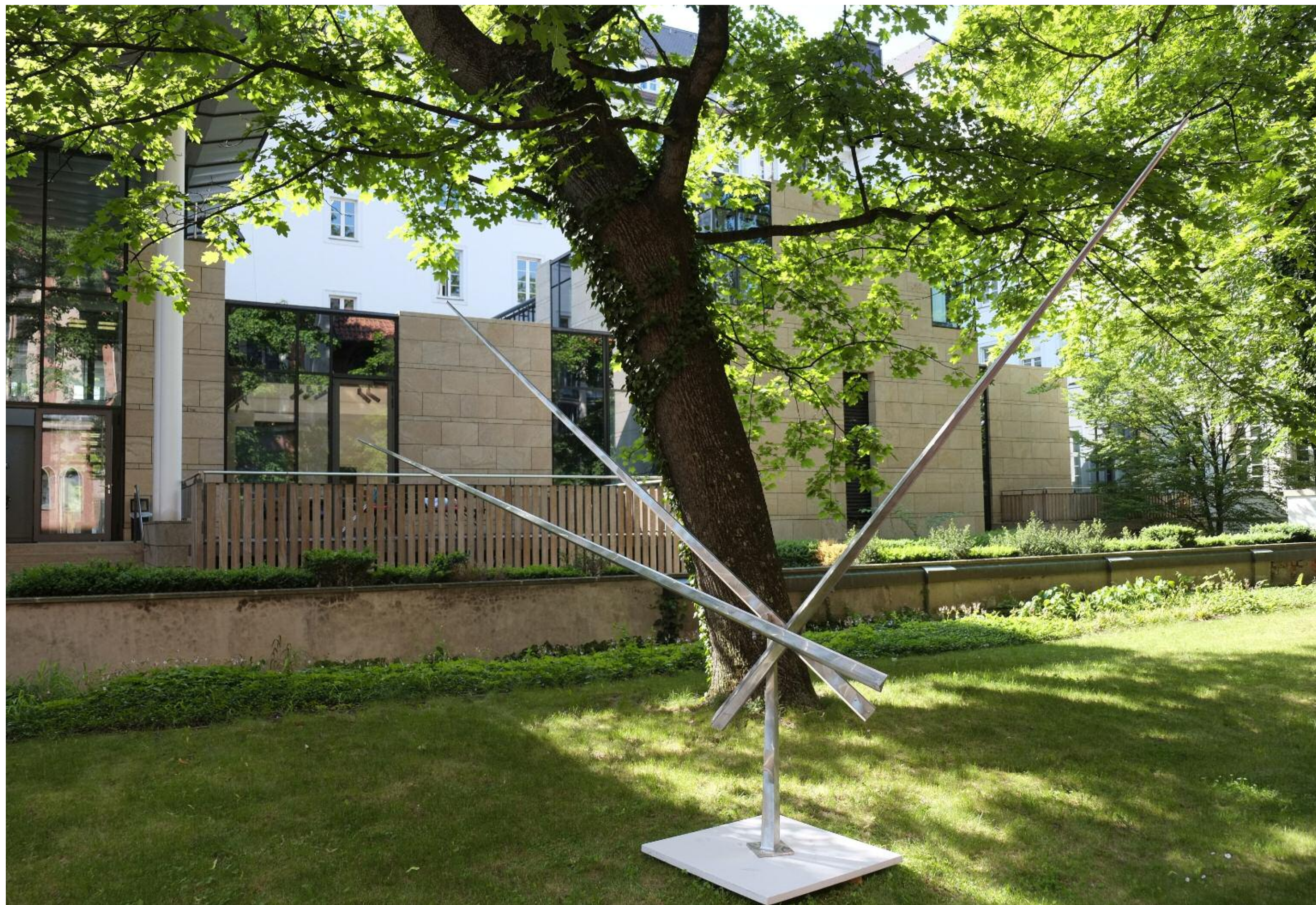
George Rickey in Berlin 1967-1992, Die Sammlung der Berlinischen Galerie. Berlin 1992, p. 14, Abb.

*Squares Vertical Diagonal*, 1978 and *Three Squares Vertical Diagonal II*, 1986 (the present sculpture). They differ in the dimensions: the squares of the earlier version measure 60 in./152.4 cm, those of the second version 36 in./91.4 cm.

Of the larger version, no. 2/3 is in East Chatham Estate, the artist's former studio. Another example of this large version has been at the Benesse Art Site in Naoshima, Japan since 1989. No. 2/3 of the smaller version is in a private collection.











## THREE LINES – TEN FEET

stainless steel  
 1995  
 370.5 x 330 cm / 145 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 130 in.  
 with signature, dated and numbered '2/3'

Provenance  
 - Studio of the artist  
 - Galerie Thomas, Munich (acquired from the artist in the 1990s)





## BIOGRAPHY



George and Edie Rickey

George Rickey was born on June 6, 1907 in South Bend, Indiana.

Before the age of six, the family moved to Scotland, where his father ran Europe's largest factory of Singer sewing machines. Rickey grew up in Helensburgh in an affluent neighborhood and attended Glenalmond College there.

Ricky studied from 1926 to 1929, graduating in history from Balliol College, Oxford. After that he travelled around Europe and studied for a short time in Paris at André Lhote's art school (where he became familiar with Cubism) and at the Académie Moderne with Léger and Ozenfant.

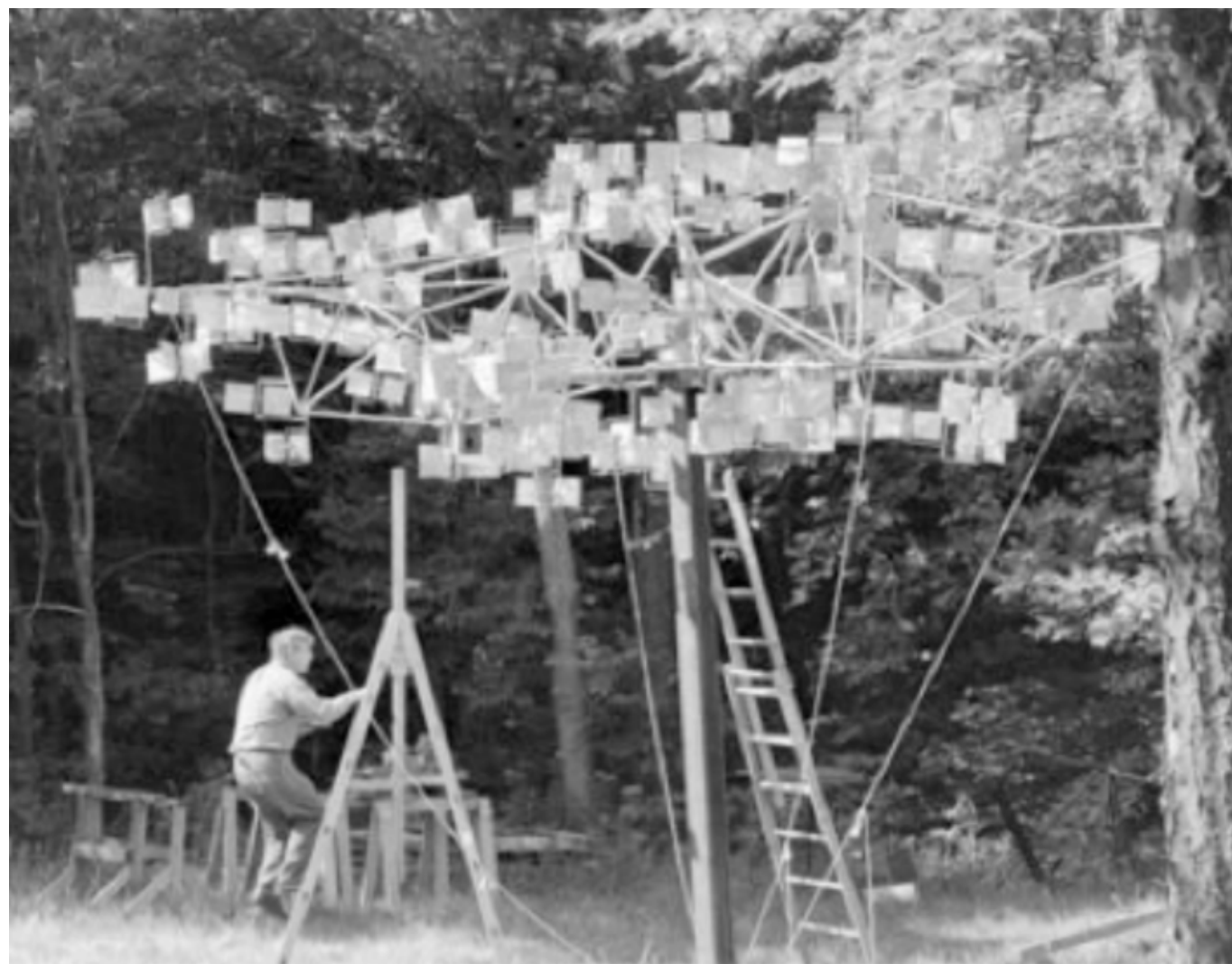
In 1930, a teaching position brought him back to the United States, where Ricky taught English and history at the Groton School in Boston. Throughout the 1930s and

1940s, he continued to paint while earning a living as an editor and as a teacher of art and design at various colleges and universities.

In 1942, Ricky was drafted into the Army Air Corps, where he discovered his technical skills while maintaining instruments in B-29 bombers. While handling the planes, he also learned to understand the effects of wind and gravity.

After his discharge from the army, Ricky studied art history at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University and the Chicago Institute of Design. He went to Indiana University, where he met David Smith, whose work influenced him.

In his compact but graceful 'Cubi' sculptures, Rickey combined his affinity for technical-mechanical tinkering with Smith's formal language and with the concept of



kinetic, moving sculptures that Calder had developed in his 'Mobiles'. Rickey was adept at creating works that, despite their heavy weight, are themselves set into random movement by the lightest of air movements, but controlled by the construction.

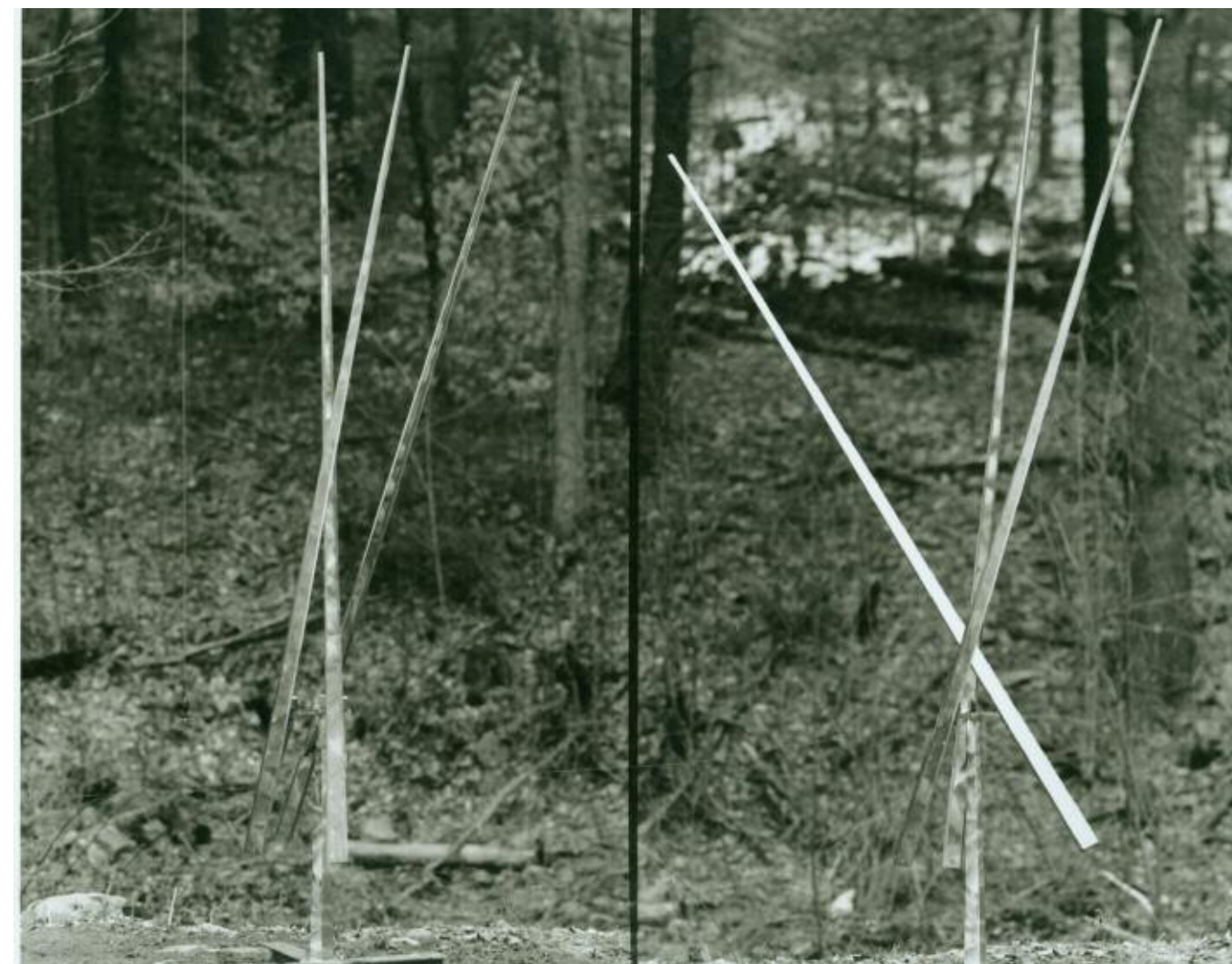
The first mobiles, which were still very similar to Calder's, were created in 1945. Through the renewal of Alexander Calder's idea of the mobile, George Rickey's consistent turn towards kinetic sculpture took place. The stylistically diverse and significant oeuvre of Rickey, theoretician and historian of Constructivism, is rooted in these first sculptural experiments, but he soon found his very own formal language.

At the beginning of the 1950s he finally turned exclusively to sculpture.

In 1964, Rickey was a participant in documenta 3 in Kassel, and he was also represented at documenta 4 and 6 in 1968 and 1977.

In both 1968 and 1969, Rickey was a scholarship holder of the German Academic Exchange Service West Berlin, hence several of his artworks can be seen in Berlin. He subsequently commuted between America and Europe although New York remained the centre of his life and work. In 1972, he received the Fine Arts Award from the American Institute of Architects.

The public outrage in 1973 created high waves when the city of Münster wanted to buy Rickey's sculpture *Three Rotating Squares* for 130,000 DM, which at that time stood in the sculpture garden of the National Gallery in West Berlin. Finally, in 1975, the Westdeutsche Landesbank acquired the sculpture and donated it to the city of Münster. On July 30, 1975, the 750-kilogram piece with the 3.45-metre-high central column was erected at the Engelschanze. The fact that George Rickey was not only present at the installation but also helped to clean the sculpture himself caused a sensation among passers-by and the press.



*Three Lines - Ten Feet* 1995

In 1974, Rickey was inducted into the American Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1986, he was awarded the New York State Governor's Award, Albany. The following year, he was admitted to the Academy of Arts (Akademie der Künste) in Berlin.

For his art, he used natural laws such as gravity and made them an essential component of his art works. For his mobiles, he copied movement from nature. In this sense, Rickey perfected kinetic art.

He realised the mobiles as hanging and standing works. The principle of the pendulum movement is transferred to the surrounding space.

With his concept, Rickey differs from the movement plays of French artist Marcel Duchamp or Swiss artist Jean Tinguely. They built auxiliary motors into their fragile mobiles that helped the works of art to move.

Rickey gave his mobiles names like *Two lines in*, *Two lines out* or *Six horizontal lines*. They thus refer to the simple construction, which is, however, executed with scientific exactness.

Rickey spent his last years in California in East Chatham near Santa Barbara and in Saint Paul (Minnesota). He died in Saint Paul on July 17, 2002.

Numerous mobiles by Rickey are set up in public spaces in Germany. One free-standing sculpture has stood for many years on the grounds of the University of Applied Sciences in Fulda, others in Frankfurt, Frankfurt-Bockenheim, Cologne, Munich-Neuperlach, Duisburg, Dortmund, Bochum, Ludwigshafen, Ulm and in the sculpture garden of the National Gallery, Berlin.

GEORGE RICKEY

WORKS IN PUBLIC SPACE (SELECTION)

Berlin  
Bonn  
Dallas  
Dortmund  
Düsseldorf  
Frankfurt am Main  
Kiel  
Cologne  
Ludwigshafen am Rhein  
Munich  
Münster  
Naoshima  
Oakland  
Pasadena  
Rotterdam  
San Francisco  
Vienna

WORKS IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS (SELECTION)

Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie  
Bielefeld, Kunsthalle  
Bloomington, Eskenazi Museum of Art at Indiana University  
Chemnitz, Museum Gunzenhauser  
Emden, Kunsthalle  
Frankfurt, Städelmuseum  
Grand Rapids, Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park  
Grenoble, Musée des Beaux Arts  
Honolulu, Museum of Art  
Long Beach, Museum of Art  
New York, Guggenheim Museum  
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art  
Otterloo, Kröller Müller Museum  
San Diego, Museum of Art  
Santa Barbara, Museum of Art  
St. Louis, Laumeier Sculpture Park  
Vero Beach, Museum of Art  
Washington, National Gallery of Art  
Washington, Hirshhorn Museum  
Wilmington, Delaware Art Museum

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