

Robert Mangold

Art Experience
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By Tracey Hawkins

Robert Mangold can be classified as a true master among a very exclusive group of sculptors working with a kinetic vocabulary. Kinetic art, an art style found in sculpture that involves moveable parts, sometimes motorized pieces, shifting lights, sounds, etc., was promoted by a small group of avant-garde artists in the post-World War II period. Mangold was inspired by the first generation of these kinetic sculptors including Naum Gabo (whose Realistic Manifesto of 1920 made him a foremost influence on sculptors who followed), Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (who published *Vision in Motion* in 1947 at the Institute of Design in Chicago), and Alexander Calder (whose biomorphic mobiles of the 1930s and 40s had a tremendous impact on sculptural design).

Mangold himself first began developing wind-driven sculptures around 1958, and he has added a truly unique chapter to the unfolding history of kinetic sculpture. All kinetic sculpture embodies, as part of its purpose, the desire to involve the viewer, but Mangold has advanced this idea one step further by creating "implied kinesis" (or virtual movement).

Mangold's interest in kinetic sculpture can be traced all the way back to his days as a student at Indiana University (I.U.) in the late 1950s. In his design class in 1958, a competition was held to create a sculptural work for the Art Department. Mangold won the competition with a colorful, polychromed sculpture sporting turning rotors atop a twenty-seven foot tall tower all supported by a tetrahedral cable support system. This sculpture formed the basis for the design and technical principles Mangold would later use to create the "Anemotive" wind-turned sculptures that have remained his signature interest and theme throughout his career.

Mangold continued to experiment with kinetic sculptural ideas even as he was doing other works of a more figurative nature; however, shortly after he moved to Denver in 1960 to teach design and sculpture at Denver University, he committed to kinetic sculpture and created a series of kinetic "tower" pieces. He received his first one-person exhibits in the early 1960s at Denver University (1962), The Gallery (Denver, 1963), and the Barn Gallery (Santa Fe, 1963). In 1964 he took a one-year sabbatical from teaching to work on his own sculptures but returned to teaching at Metropolitan State College in Denver (and remained there until 1995) where he was offered the chance to develop his own program. By 1967, he had created a series of motorized sculptures that he exhibited in a show at The Gallery, a commercial cooperative of local avant-garde artists, and he helped start Friends of Contemporary Art (FOCA), an anti-museum group of artists reacting to the Denver Art Museum's refusal to increase their number of shows of local and contemporary artists.



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Mangold exhibited actively throughout the late 1960s and 70s in Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Utah and Nebraska. He continued throughout the 70s and 80s to develop new variations on his kinetic sculptural theme, including his *I-Beam* series, in which he explored space rather than movement, and his *Tetrahedralhypersphere* series, exploring his interest in the tetrahedron shape and R. Buckminster Fuller's tetrahedral cable system.

Recently, Mangold has developed a series he calls his *PTTSAAES*. The title is an anagram for "a Point Traveling Through Space At An Erratic Speed." In this series of sculptures, Mangold is exploring the concept of "implied kinesis" -virtual movement that involves the viewer. The viewer, in contemplating one of these sculptures, should permit a transformation to occur by adding unseen forces to the seen material of the sculpture in order to energize the piece into a kinetic state. The *PTTSAAES* are constructed of industrial stainless steel brass, or aluminum piping. Mangold makes no preliminary drawings for these works but, rather, has a general idea for each sculpture in mind when he begins forming it and permits the piece to evolve in process; he hopes each viewer will parallel this process in contemplating the work.

Despite his unique contributions to the history of sculpture, Mangold's work has received international recognition only within the last two decades. This is partially attributable to his choice to remain living and working in Denver, Colorado, far removed from the art world hubs of New York City and Los Angeles. He is best known, even today, in Europe and Japan (where he was awarded the Superior Prize at the prestigious Henry Moore Grand Prize Exhibition in Tokyo in 1989).