

George Rickey (American, 1907 - 2002)

Peristyle-Three Lines, 1963-1964
Stainless steel



George Rickey's interest in kinetic sculpture began early in life. Born in South Bend, Indiana, in 1907, his father moved the family to Scotland in 1913. As a child, Rickey fondly recalled days spent sailing on his father's yacht—providing Rickey with a deep appreciation and understanding of natural forces like wind and water. He also developed an interest in the science of mechanics

during summer stints at the Singer Sewing Machine Company factory, where his father worked as an engineer.

Rickey grew up in Europe and studied in England and France. He returned to the United States in 1934 and taught at various institutions across the country until he was drafted into the military during World War II, where his interest in mechanical things re-awakened while working on aircraft and gunnery systems research and maintenance. This practical wartime experience provided a mechanical foundation for his later forays into lightweight, delicately balanced, wind-activated kinetic sculpture. After the war, he studied art in New York and Chicago, eventually becoming a professor of architecture.

Eventually, Rickey returned to Indiana, the state where he was born. While teaching, he met sculptor David Smith, and by the early 1950s had moved from painting to sculpture. The turn to sculpture was motivated by his fascination with movement. Unlike Alexander Calder, who paid attention to the aesthetics of movement and the forms produced by movement, Rickey was interested in the essence of movement. He was



not just interested in making his sculptures move, but in trying to use movement as an expressive tool, as a painter might use color. He started out with complicated designs, but after paring them down he arrived at simple lines. His pieces with long blades, like *Peristyle–Three Lines* at Lynden, are really just the artist’s way of using the simplest means he could find at the time for showing a kind of ordered and related set of movements.

Applying his knowledge and experience in sailing, art, engineering, and architecture, Rickey continued creating kinetic works of art. He used his knowledge of physics to control the time and limits of their movements, and created complicated mechanical systems that move in response to air currents and gravity. In their silent, graceful movements his sculptures reveal the play of natural forces, calling attention to the effects of wind, light, and the changing surroundings.

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mechanical details of *Peristyle–Three Lines*, 1963-1964



Why did Rickey choose stainless steel as a material?

What is reflected in the material of the sculpture?

Do the reflections change as the lines move?

George Rickey *Peristyle-Three Lines*, 1963-1964

How does the sculpture interact with its surroundings?

What in nature might move in a similar way?

Is this relationship to its surroundings important to the piece?

Peristyle-Three Lines was constructed towards the beginning of Rickey's career as a kinetic sculptor. According to the artist, "...the lines were an attempt to reduce the design to essentials. The line was tapered to allow for a counterweight and fulcrum near one end, with the remainder of the line sweeping in a wide, slow arc. I was aware of the precedent of a tapered line in engraving and pen strokes. I often thought of my moving lines as a limited yet indeterminate drawing in space." The motion of the lines also calls to mind the poetic notion of blades of grass in the wind.

Explore and Create

Watch George Rickey's kinetic sculptures:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDfJZP0nXOByUmEYnkCW3JQ>

Connect to Place:

Rickey carefully engineered his kinetic sculptures to move in response to the slightest movements in air currents. Close your eyes. With which of your senses can you detect the air moving around you? Can you feel it blowing on your face? What does it sound like? Can you see it causing movement across the water or in the tops of trees?

Vocabulary

Kinetic sculpture art in which movement is a basic element.

Expressive conveying thought or feeling.

Physics the branch of science concerned with the nature and properties of matter and energy.

Lever a simple machine; a beam that is free to rotate on a pivot.

Fulcrum is the pivot around which a lever turns.

Force is the push or pull on an object

Load is the force exerted on a surface

Explore and Create

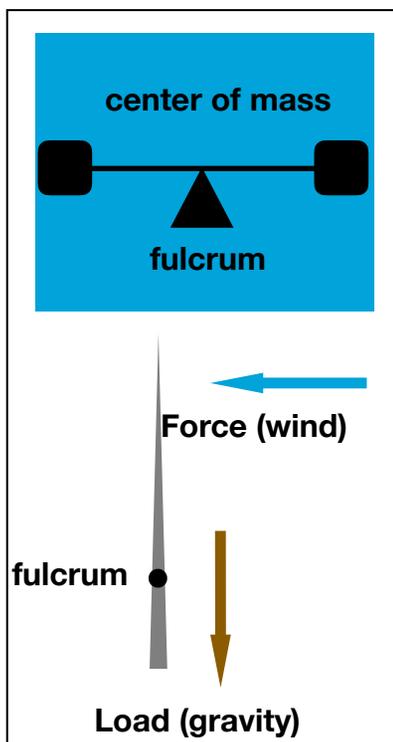
For ages 10 and up or with help from a parent.

Experiment by constructing your own kinetic sculpture with a few simple household items that will be moved by the natural forces of wind and gravity.

Understanding how to balance these forces is important in both art and engineering design. Just like Rickey, engineers must consider natural forces when designing buildings, airplanes, bridges, and dams. In *Peristyle-Three Lines*, Rickey's "lines" sway near their center of mass on a fulcrum point. Their movement is caused by the force of wind pushing against the counter weighted load (or mass). The load is pulled down due to gravity. Without the wind the counterweight would keep the lines pointing straight up to the sky.

Materials:

Recycled block of styrofoam or piece of scrap wood (to use as a base), 2 lengths of wire (8" and 10"), pliers, wooden skewers, nail, corks, tape or glue, colored paper, scissors. Optional: Aluminum foil, other found objects.



Let's experiment with finding the center of mass. Take a skewer and attach a cork to each end. Now attempt to balance this construction on the edge of a ruler. Move the skewer to the left or right until it balances in place. Congratulations, you have just created a horizontal version of the basic engineering system Rickey used vertically to make *Peristyle-Three Lines*. This construction is called a lever.

Now, imagine this construction turned vertically and take into consideration the forces of gravity and air currents. Refer to the photos to the right to make your own vertical lever. Once you understand the simple mechanics, you can continue to design and build your own kinetic sculpture.

Where do you plan to place your sculpture when it is finished? What kinds of forces will affect your sculpture or make it move?



1. Collect materials.



2. Measure 2" from the bottom of the 10" wire.



3. Wrap the wire around a nail to make a loop.



4. Bend the 8" wire into an inverted U shape. Thread the U wire through the loop .



5. Add a cork to increase load



6. Embellish with elements to catch the wind.