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News release

New Zealander Len Lye's exhibition opens in Europe



Len Lye – Motion Composer at Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland Now – 26 January 2020

The most comprehensive exhibition of Len Lye's art to be seen in Europe has opened at the Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland. Featuring his kinetic sculptures, paintings, photograms, drawings, models and films, the exhibition occupies four large galleries, and examines in detail the full oeuvre of New Zealand's most acclaimed international artist.

The exhibition opened on 22 October 2019 to an audience of 600 people and a series of speeches from New Zealand's ambassador to Germany, Rupert Holborow, Jürg Erismann, from Museum Tinguely Board and Roche Pharmaceuticals, the principal funder of the museum, Katrin Grögel, from City of Basel Cultural Affairs, Museum Tinguely director Roland Wetzels and deputy director Andres Pardey, co-director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre Johan Lundh, and Evan Webb, Len Lye Foundation director.

The exhibition is a partnership between Museum Tinguely and the Len Lye Foundation with support from Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth District Council and Nga Taonga: Sound and Vision.

Motion Composer features a notable display of Len Lye's tangible motion sculpture including the debut of *Sky Snake*, commissioned by Museum Tinguely for the exhibition. Comprising a bead chain suspended from the ceiling that twists and turns in a sinuous dance, *Sky Snake* had its first and only public display at the Albright Knox Gallery in Buffalo, New York in 1965.

Further sculpture includes important works loaned from the Art Institute of Chicago, Albright-Knox Art Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art – all exhibited in Europe for the first time.

Director of the Len Lye Foundation, Evan Webb says: "Exhibiting Len Lye at the home of Jean Tinguely has special significance because it brings together the Len Lye Centre and the Museum Tinguely – the only two single artist museums in the world dedicated to kinetic art.

Jean Tinguely was born in Switzerland in 1925 and built many of his distinctive works in Basel. He died in 1991 and Museum Tinguely was built in 1996 to store, conserve and exhibit his extensive collection of kinetic sculptures and drawings.

"Len Lye and Jean Tinguely knew one another and this exhibition, once again, brings together their worlds. The spaces resound with the sounds of Lye's sculptures and films, and Tinguely's theatrical machines as if the two artists are in conversation," says Mr Webb.

Mr Webb says he hopes this is a conversation that will continue between the two institutions. The relationship with the Tinguely Museum is invaluable for a continued understanding of the conservation and exhibition of moving sculpture – experience that the Tinguely Museum has gained in the 23 years since its opening.

Exhibition curator Andres Pardey says: "Both Len Lye and Jean Tinguely are kind of the heroes of kinetic sculpture in the 1960s and they are very good examples of two completely diverse ways of doing kinetic sculpture."

The exhibition was accompanied by a two-day seminar organised by Museum Tinguely and the University of Basel. Invited speakers from Europe, the US, Canada and New Zealand engaged with students from the Media Studies department with talks ranging from the conservation of film to an exploration of Lye's ambitious plans for his huge outdoor works.

A three-volume catalogue also accompanies the exhibition featuring writing from Andres Pardey, Paul Brobbel, Barry Schwabsky, Wystan Curnow, Janine Randerson, Megan Tamati-Quennell, Scott Anthony, Anne Stephen and Tyler Cann. The catalogue features a volume of illustrations of all works in *Motion Composer* and a final volume with a facsimile of Len Lye's *Totem and Taboo sketchbook* (1922-1926).

Motion Composer continues at Museum Tinguely until 26 January 2020.

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Image: Len Lye's painting *Witchetty Grub* is seen through his kinetic sculpture *Fountain*, in the exhibition *Len Lye – Motion Composer* at Museum Tinguely. Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation

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About Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery is New Zealand's contemporary art museum in the coastal city of New Plymouth, Taranaki on the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. Since opening in 1970, the Gallery has dedicated itself to innovative programming, focused collection

development and audience engagement. It has earned a strong reputation nationally and internationally for its global vision and special commitment to contemporary art of the Pacific. The Govett-Brewster is also home to the collection and archive of the seminal modernist filmmaker and kinetic sculptor Len Lye (1901–1980).

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery was founded with a gift to the city of New Plymouth, from one of its greatest 'Friends' Monica Brewster (née Govett). A globetrotter before the age of air travel, Monica Brewster envisaged an art museum for her hometown that would be an international beacon for the art and ideas of the current day – the sort she had become familiar with on her global travels.

The Govett-Brewster continues in the legacy of Monica Brewster by taking on and presenting the most provocative, audacious and confident works of art in the global arts landscape.

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery re-launched on 25 July 2015 as a greatly expanded museum including the Len Lye Centre. With its curved exterior walls of mirror-like stainless steel, the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre is Aotearoa New Zealand's first example of destination architecture linked to contemporary art and its first institution dedicated to a single artist.

In 1964 Len Lye said "Great architecture goes fifty-fifty with great art". The new building is an example of innovative thinking in both engineering and architecture. The architects are Patterson Associates, one of New Zealand's most internationally recognised architectural firms.

Specialising in contemporary art from the Pacific, the Gallery also features exhibitions of Lye's work in kinetic sculpture, film, painting, drawing, photography, batik and writing, as well as related work by contemporary and historical artists.

The contemporary art museum houses a state-of-the-art 60-seat cinema – a welcoming environment for audiences to experience Len Lye's films, local and international cinema, cult, arthouse and experimental films, and regular festival programming.

The Govett-Brewster/Len Lye Centre is owned and operated by the New Plymouth District Council, which governs the museum under the terms of the founding Monica Brewster Trust Deed and manages the relationship between Council, Len Lye Foundation, and Govett-

Brewster staff.

www.govettbrewster.com

About Len Lye

A visionary New Zealander, an inspirational artist, a pioneer of film; Len Lye is one of the most important and influential artists to emerge from New Zealand.

Len Lye was an experimental filmmaker, poet, painter, kinetic sculptor and creative visionary ahead of his time. Most of his works were so revolutionary that technology literally had to catch up to him – meaning much of Lye’s work was not realised in his own lifetime.

Lye’s iconic 45-metre kinetic sculpture *Wind Wand* sways gently on New Plymouth's Coastal Walkway. The Wind Wand that glows red at night, is the first large outdoor sculpture to be built posthumously from his plans and drawings.

In 1977 Lye returned to his homeland to oversee the first New Zealand exhibition of his work at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. He called it the “swingiest art gallery of the antipodes”.

Shortly before his death in 1980, Lye and his supporters established the Len Lye Foundation, to which he gifted his entire collection. His collection was gifted on the condition that a suitable and permanent home be created in which his works could be fully realised.

About Museum Tinguely

The Museum Tinguely in Basel, Switzerland, was built directly on the Rhine river to plans by Ticinese architect Mario Botta. It houses the largest collection of works by Jean Tinguely (1925 – 1991), one of the most innovative and most important Swiss artists of the 20th century. The permanent exhibition presents an overview of four decades of his creative activity, from the artist’s early beginnings in the 1950s with motorised reliefs, through to the large-scale sculptures and mechanical sculptures of the 1980s.

With his kinetic artworks, Jean Tinguely (1925–1991) was a pioneering figure in the art of the period after 1950. Regular special exhibitions showcase a broad spectrum of artists and themes based on Tinguely’s ideas, presenting those that inspired him such as Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters, contemporaries such as Arman, Niki de Saint Phalle, Yves Klein and also current art trends. The museum’s varied programme seeks dialogue with

other artists, art forms and disciplines, promising an interactive museum experience for all of the senses.

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