

Len Lye: Motion Sketch
April 17 – June 8, 2014

Drawing Room and The Lab

Opening Reception: Wednesday, April 16, 6–8pm

For further information and images, please contact
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April 7, 2014



Len Lye, *Drawing for Head Man of the Seed World*, c. 1930s
Ink on paper, 10 3/5 x 8 2/5 inches. Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

New York – The Drawing Center presents *Len Lye: Motion Sketch*, curated by Gregory Burke, Executive Director/CEO of the Mendel Art Gallery and Remai Art Gallery of Saskatchewan, and Tyler Cann, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at the Columbus Museum of Art and Len Lye Curator-at-Large for the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. The first solo exhibition of the work of Len Lye in an American museum explores the filmmaker’s multidimensional practice specifically in relation to drawing. Lye’s kinesthetic approach to line—related to Surrealist automatism and anticipating aspects of Abstract Expressionism—also informed his practice in painting, photography, film, and sculpture. Not limited to works on paper, the exhibition will also reveal how Lye’s concept of “doodling” underpinned his approach to much of his work.

Len Lye: Motion Sketch includes a selection of paintings, drawings, and photograms, never before seen in the United States. In The Drawing Center’s Lab gallery, an extensive film program is presented on video, including such landmark films as *Tusalava*, 1929; *A Colour Box*, 1935; and *Free Radicals*, 1957/1979.

Len Lye’s career was marked by a lifelong fascination with movement and an aspiration to compose motion; the movement of the drawing hand was an important touchstone for his works in various media. In New York, Lye is now well-known for his animated experimental films. In the 1920s, however, Lye began to make what he termed “motion sketches”; abstract drawings that attempted to render the movement of his subjects, rather than their appearance. Describing his drawing practice in his own carefree prose, Lye said that doodling, “cultivates a vacuous seaweed-pod state of kelp as a skull which is attached to a pencil betwixt the arm and the fingers held doodling in turn

‘twixt you and the paper in a rather bemused, empty, harmonious state of an attitude, eyes periphering said paper.”

Len Lye: Motion Sketch builds on The Drawing Center’s history of exploring the role of drawing within the filmic medium. Most recently, *Drawing on Film* (2008), a film program curated by João Ribas that featured Len Lye, highlighted the now more than 70-year-old tradition of “direct filmmaking.” More recently, *Alexis Rockman: Drawing from Life of Pi* (2013) looked at the role artist Alexis Rockman played in developing the visual world of director Ang Lee’s feature film *Life of Pi*.

ABOUT LEN LYE

Len Lye was an expatriate New Zealand artist who migrated to England in the 1920s after sojourns in Australia and Samoa. His 1935 film *A Colour Box* pioneered the use of direct filmmaking and is generally considered to be one of the most significant works in the history of animation. His films are held in many archives, including the British Film Institute, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Pacific Film Archive at the University of California, Berkeley.

In 1943 Lye moved to New York and lived there until his death in 1980. In New York, he continued to make films but also became known for his work as a kinetic sculptor; his sculpture was linked to his films as a means of “composing motion.” Lye’s sculptures are held in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and the Berkeley Art Museum. In accordance with Lye’s wishes, after his death much of his work went to the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, one of New Zealand’s foremost public contemporary art museums, where it is managed on behalf of the Len Lye Foundation, which owns the works.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Sunday, May 11 at 11am

Walkthrough with exhibition co-curator Gregory Burke, and Brett Littman, Executive Director of The Drawing Center.

Thursday, May 22 at 6:30 pm

Writer, editor, and curator Wýstan Curnow examines the New York experience of the New Zealand-born artist Len Lye, asking whether his work belongs to the history of New Zealand art or America's or to some combination of the two.

Sunday, May 25 at Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Avenue at 2nd Street

A selection of Len Lye films will be screened to celebrate Anthology's recent acquisition his work. See anthologyfilmarchives.org for full schedule.

PUBLICATION

To accompany *Len Lye: Motion Sketch*, The Drawing Center will produce an extensively illustrated edition in the Drawing Papers series that will include an introduction by Brett Littman and an essay by Gregory Burke and Tyler Cann, as well as a text by Lye himself describing his artistic process.

CREDITS

This exhibition is presented by the Drawing Center in collaboration with the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (New Plymouth, New Zealand) and draws primarily from the Len Lye Foundation Collection.

All Souls Carnival (1957). Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation. From material preserved and made available by the New Zealand Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art. Digital version by Park Road Post Production and Weta Digital Ltd. *Tusalava*, (1929); *Rainbow Dance* (1936); *Trade Tattoo* (1937); *Colour Flight* (1938); Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation. From material preserved and made available by the New Zealand Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua. *Free Radicals* (1958/1979); *Tal Farlow* (1980); *Particles in Space* (1980). Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation. From material preserved and made available by the New Zealand Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua. Digital version by Park Road Post Production and Weta Digital Ltd. *A Colour Box* (1935). Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation. From material preserved by the BFI National Archive and made available by the New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua.

Len Lye: Motion Sketch is made possible with the support of Creative New Zealand.



ABOUT THE DRAWING CENTER

The Drawing Center is the only not-for-profit fine arts institution in the country to focus solely on the exhibition of drawings, both historical and contemporary. It was established in 1977 to provide opportunities for emerging and under-recognized artists; to demonstrate the significance and diversity of drawings throughout history; and to stimulate public dialogue on issues of art and culture.

HOURS & ACCESSIBILITY

Gallery hours are Wednesday-Sunday 12pm–6pm, Thursday, 12pm–8pm. Tickets: \$5 Adults, \$3 Students and seniors, Children under 12 are free, and free admission Thursdays 6-8pm.

The Drawing Center is wheelchair accessible.

FACEBOOK: [The Drawing Center](#)

TWITTER: twitter.com/drawingcenter

TUMBLR: the-drawing-center.tumblr.com

AT THE DRAWING CENTER

Lebbeus Woods, Architect

Len Lye: Motion Sketch

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Images Available for Reproduction

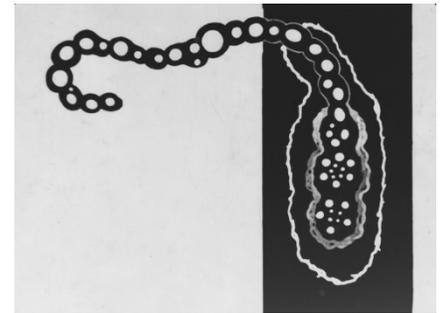
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Len Lye, *Marks and Spencer in a Japanese Garden (or Pond People)*, 1930. Photogram, 15 x 22 inches. Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.



Len Lye, *Ann Lye*, 1947. Photogram, 15 9/10 x 13 inches. Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.



Len Lye, *Tusalava*, 1929. Original: 35 mm b&w silent film. Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation, from material preserved and made available by the New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua.



Len Lye, *Untitled*, 1938. Ink on paper, 8 x 13 inches. Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.



Len Lye, *Tal Farlow*, 1980. 16 mm black-and-white sound film. Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation, from material preserved and made available by the New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua. Digital version by Park Road Post Production and Weta Digital Ltd.



Len Lye, *A Colour Box*, 1935. 35 mm color sound film. Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation, from material preserved by the BFI National Archive and made available by the New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua.