

This Glossary of George Rickey terminology is intended to provide deeper insight into the creative explorations and technical methods that George used to conceptualize, create, and identify his works.

The research and interpretive content of the Glossary was created with the able assistance of the staff of the George Rickey Foundation, including Birgit Mieschonz, Mark Pollock, Maria Lizzi, and Foundation President, Philip Rickey.



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Ball Bearings

The type of bearings typically used on all outdoor Rickey sculptures after the mid 1960s. They were more precise and secure in outdoor conditions, where wind & weather can play havoc on delicately balanced sculpture. They also allowed for a more varied movement, both planar and excentric. Unlike a knife edge, ball bearings permitted a full 360 degrees of rotation, thus expanding the aesthetic possibilities.

“With ball bearings I can attempt devices which would have moved clumsily on simpler knife edge bearings.”

(“Technology,” George Rickey: Skulpturen, Material, Technik, Amerika Hause Berlin, 1979, p. 37)

Bearing Housing

The machined support holding the ball or roller bearings.

Bearing, Knife-Edge

The same kind of bearing used to support the pendulum in a grandfather's clock - a sharp knife edge of steel rides in a hardened yoke. The pendulum or element being supported hangs between the bearing points. It is very responsive to gentle indoor air currents but less suited to outdoor wind conditions. Typically, a knife edge bearing would allow for an arc of only 90 degrees.

“My most sensitive bearing is still the polished knife edge, which has been known for centuries.”

(“Technology,” George Rickey: Skulpturen, Material, Technik, Amerika Hause Berlin, 1979, p. 37)

Bearing, Opposing Knife-Edge

Devised by Rickey, this allowed the moving element to be placed on one side of the support bearing, thus expanding the aesthetic possibilities. The knife edge on the outside

faced up and the one on the inside nearest the line faced down.

Blade

A blade is the single element in the Rickey category of works with 'lines' in the title. He first started to make blades in the early 60s, a simplification of his more organic 'sedge' elements. Blades were used singly or in pairs and in 'N' groupings denoting many.

"I have been using simple linear forms - 'blades' - since 1961. These lines permit the most economical manifestation that I have found, a kinetic line drawing in space. The taper from thick to thin is my equivalent to the line drawn with a pen, or engraved with a burin."

("Construction of a Blade," George Rickey: Skulpturen, Material, Technik, Amerika Hause Berlin, 1979, p. 42)

Conical Movement

The movement created by sculpture elements set at a 45 degree angle to the support post – the same as excentric movement

"Balancing a structure on a single pivot point or on gimbals permits the complex movements of a tightrope walker. If a wheel turns on a shaft not at 90 degrees it develops a disturbing wobble... The path of such movement is not through a plane, but through a cone. When these movements are regular the paths can be easily represented by paper cones."

("Conical Movement," George Rickey: Skulpturen, Material, Technik, Amerika Hause Berlin, 1979, p. 54)

Conical Segment

After Rickey began exploring excentric movement, he created sculptures with opposing elements comprising sectional conical forms.

"I had already explored the conical movement of a line. With (these pieces) I made the line describe a surface."

("Two Conical Segments, 1978-79," George Rickey in Berlin, Berlinische Galerie, 1992, p.233)

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Counterweight

The weight below the pivot point fulcrum which balances the weight above the pivot point.

Excentric

The moving elements have their pivoting shaft set at 45 degrees to the moving elements. The movement of the sculptural parts describe a conical arc through space, rather than a simple planar movement. This lends an inherent visual tension, as the elements sweep widely away, then return on a near collision course to the apex of their swing.

Excentric Gyrotory

Combines both the excentric and gyrotory movements in a sculpture.

Gimbal

A set of two pairs of knifed edge bearings perpendicular to each other which together allow very free movement of the sculpture suspended between them. Derived from a gimbal that supports a compass or lantern on a boat, keeping it level despite the rolling motion of the ship on the sea.

“The essentials of a gimbal are a pair of bearings mounted within another pair, with the axes of these two pairs at 90 degrees to each other. Each set of paired bearings permits movements through an arc in a plane.”

(“Gimbals,” George Rickey: Skulpturen, Material, Technik, Amerika Hause Berlin, 1979, p. 46)

Grinding Pattern

Whereas other artists have used stainless steel grinding patterns in a more deliberate, calligraphic style, GR settled on a more random pattern in which light & reflection

took precedence over the artists' 'brushwork'. These grinding patterns can give a 3-dimensional effect to a flat surface.

Gyratory

The moving elements (blades, lines, rectangles, squares, etc.) can revolve 360 degrees around their central post support.

Jointed

One or more elements are joined sequentially, each allowed to move independently, and in unison with each other.

"I decided to combine two phenomena: first, pairs of linked components; then these mounted so that the movement of each in relation to the other was through a non-planar path. This produced a controlled, yet apparently random path, a sort of organized disorder."

("Reflections while Building a Sculpture for Berlin," George Rickey in Berlin, Berlinische Galerie, 1992, p.338)

Line

The simplest element employed by Rickey. Used in sculptures singly and with many, as in "N – Lines ...".

Open

A rectangle, triangle, square or circle, etc. where the sculptural element is an open frame instead of a closed plane or solid.

Pendulum, Simple

Like a clock pendulum, which pivots from two knife edge bearing support points at its top.

"All of the sculptures here make use, in some form, of the principle of the pendulum, which, in a clock, consists of a fulcrum, a stiff rod, and a lead weight."

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The principle is less obvious in a large blade swinging in the wind outdoors; but that also has a fulcrum (the shaft) and a counterweight (the lead) while the stiff blade itself functions on the rod... The time of the swing is constant."

("Pendulum," George Rickey: Skulpturen, Material, Technik, Amerika Hause Berlin, 1979, p. 39)

Pendulum, Compound

The type used by Rickey: the pivot point is often one sixth of the distance from the bottom to the top. There is lead counterweight below the pivot point/bearing (center of gravity) which balances the rest of the length (weight) above the pivot point. The resulting element is just at the point of instability, making it very sensitive to light air currents. The pendulum is the basis of all of Rickey's movement, regardless of the configuration of elements, or type of movement employed.

"When some of the weight is above (the fulcrum)—A "compound" pendulum—the rules change; time becomes then a function between the "moments" (weight x distance) above and below the fulcrum. As this difference decreases the time of the pendulum swing increases. When the moments are equal the system is unstable; either end can go up. I work on the threshold of this instability by controlling the relation of the upper and lower weights."

("Pendulum," George Rickey: Skulpturen, Material, Technik, Amerika Hause Berlin, 1979, p. 39-41)

Plane

A closed square; e.g. "Two Planes Vertical, Horizontal".

"A plane pushed through space may describe a volume."

("Surfaces and Volumes," George Rickey in Berlin, Berlinische Galerie, 1992, p.166)

Post

A vertical support shaft to which the moving elements are attached. In small indoor works, this is attached to a wood, stone or stainless steel base. In large outdoor works it is anchored to a concrete or steel plate support.

Position at Rest

Each element in a Rickey sculpture is carefully balanced to return to a specific position as motion slows or ceases.

Posture

The position of one or more sculptural elements respective to each other, or to a vertical post.

Rotor

Rickey made hundreds of sculptures which were comprised of rotors (4-finned or multi-finned) elements with a double pointed post (pin) at their center which could move freely in a holder: any small or large element which spins around a central axis.

Shaft

The part of the bearing assembly inserted into the bearing, to which is attached each sculpture element; blade, line, rectangle, square, circle, etc.

Shock Absorber

The mechanism that slows and cushions a blade (or lines), stopping it gently when it reaches the end of its designated movement.

“If the design (of a sculpture) does not permit it to move in free full revolution (360 degrees), the movement must be stopped or dampened gently to prevent damage...I had to rebuild (automotive) shock absorbers so that

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they cushioned while lengthening—‘in extension’—and returned automatically to their starting position. ‘Single action in extension, automatic in return.’”

(“Shock Absorbers,” George Rickey: Skulpturen, Material, Technik, Amerika Hause Berlin, 1979, p. 44)

Square Section

Same as triangular section, but utilizing four sheets with folded flanges, each flange spot welded together forming a strong, light sculptural element.

Spiral

Rickey began making thin wire sculptures from stainless steel welding wire in 1971. The spiral formed in the wire served as a counterweight for these works.

“How could I attach a counterweight (to these wire sculptures)? I did not attach it; I wound the wire itself, as compactly, as tightly as I could around a narrow smooth core of steel about a centimeter wide, perhaps 20 turns of 1 mm wire. Then I pulled out the core and something unexpected happened. The wire had been soft steel but, in winding it tightly, each turn was work-hardened and stretched. There was now inherent tension at each U corner. When I pulled out the core, each turn sprang open a little and the 20 turns formed a tight, condensed spiral, which was now my counterweight.”

(“Group of Four Triangles with Spirals, 1971,” George Rickey in Berlin, Berlinische Galerie, 1992, p.195)

Triangular section

All of Rickey's small blades (lines) are made constructed from a folded, tapered length of stainless steel, bronze or copper. This tapered form provides strength and creates a receptacle below the pivot point for a lead counterweight.

In many of Rickey's outdoor sculptures, various elements – blades (lines) open rectangle, Ls, circles, were fabricated from

sheet metal forming a triangle shaped box with flanges. The flanges were spot-welded together resulting in a lightweight and very strong member. This method of construction was used in his earliest line works like Two Red Lines or Two Lines Temporal, and throughout his career.

Timing

A factor of speed, resistance, and distance of travel, giving Rickey sculptures a gentle movement.

“Timing is an aesthetic decision. .” (“Technology,” George Rickey: Skulpturen, Material, Technik, Amerika Hause Berlin, 1979, p. 2.5)

Wire Sculptures

Works formed from stainless steel or silver wire. These works were often gilded.

“I tried to find ways of coiling wire to make a compact counterweight, of bending and hammering knife edges to swing on, and of flattening the end of a wire as a sail—thus obtaining the essentials of my blade sculptures. Everything had four principle parts; an extended form—linear or planar—an attached counterweight, so that the point of balance came close to one end, a pair of knife edge bearings, riding on a pair of matching polished notches, as close to frictionless as I could get, on a support...”

(“Group of Four Triangles with Spirals, 1971,” George Rickey in Berlin, Berlinische Galerie, 1992, p.193)