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Blowing in the Wind

Kinetic sculptures take Kansas City by storm.

Perhaps you remember the whirligig, that whimsical spinning toy of a long-forgotten youth. Purchased at the five-and-dime with a hard-earned allowance, the brightly colored pinwheel was easily powered by a couple of strong breaths, a turn of the hand or a breeze to set it in motion. Modern whirligigs are often found as structures incorporated into gardens to deter birds or pests, as decorative yard folk art and as objects that both museums and art aficionados add to their collections.

Kinetic sculpture is defined as dimensional art that contains moving parts or depends on motion for its soothing effects and is a feat of both art and math. The art form was an international phenomenon with roots primarily in Europe in the late 1950s through the 1960s but most likely had its origin in ancient Egypt.

Kansas City art collectors have discovered a resurgence in kinetic sculpture thanks in large part to Paul Dorrell, founder and owner of Leopold Gallery in Brookside, and his eagle eye for interesting art. While strolling through Santa Fe last year, he became enchanted by a kinetic sculpture he encountered in a gallery located off the famous Canyon Road Arts district. Upon inquiry, he was introduced to Lyman Whitaker's Wind Sculpture work, innovative and artistic pieces that are not only beautiful but that also implement a high degree of mechanical integrity.

Immediately drawn to the combination of mathematics, engineering and aesthetics that comprise Lyman's stunning work, Paul knew this was an art form he wanted to include in his 3,200-square-foot gallery. "Some people who attempt kinetic sculpture wind up producing pieces that lack inspiration or grace," he explains. "Lyman understands all three elements, that each must be acute to form the whole."

His sculptures have both an organic and mystical theme that expresses his concern for the survival of the planet, and they're intended to be installed in settings dependent on natural surroundings for their elegant movement.

Leopold Gallery primarily showcases regional artists, but Paul occasionally makes exceptions to that, including a decision to feature the Utah-based artist's work. "Lyman is the rock star in the kinetic world," Paul says. "It's a process that takes years to refine."

Lyman's kinetic works are or have been displayed in several public venues throughout Kansas City, including the Overland Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, on the streetscape outside Leopold Gallery, at the Country Club Plaza Starbucks and in front of The Roasterie Café in Brookside. Paul says his gallery receives 10 to 20 inquiries per day from people who appreciate the aesthetic.

The sculptures are fabricated from copper, steel and stainless steel; each is secured against theft and rests on a

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sealed ball bearing at the top of a vertical rod. They also come with a steel ground mount for simple installation, and concrete bases are available for smaller pieces. Lyman's designs permit the sculpture to be responsive to the currents of the wind, allowing changing forms to emerge in a slight breeze yet balance in high winds.

Lyman originally utilized his carpentry skills to support his art. Now 67 years old, the prolific artist has always gravitated toward the wind's mysterious force. "My early work was significantly more representational, with a wonderful mix from traditional bronzes to small mobiles, and also included several public fountains," he says. "I believe that there is a variety of ways to accomplish anything, so my process has continued to evolve and maintain originality."

Currently, he's going back to what he loves best: combining a broad range of materials and techniques to freely create movement and form. His works exist in public and private

installations throughout Canada, Europe, Australia, and in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Bennington Center for the Arts in Bennington, Vt. There's even one of his pieces at the South Pole Station, installed in 1976, to demonstrate its ability to weather any climate.

Lyman chooses a weathered color palette for his sculptures that correspond extremely well with a variety of locales; the rust, brown, tan and green are all elements of the applied patina. The copper and stainless steel elements have a glistening effect as they move in the sun, and low lighting enhances the evening appeal. The kinetic sculptures are intriguing when caught in one's peripheral vision for a second, but not a diversion; up close, the experience is compelling and interactive.

The artist's bold and distinctive pieces begin at \$575, range in height from 5 to 27 feet and are especially dynamic when placed in groupings. "They exude a type of Zen feeling," Paul says. "People are drawn to them for various reasons, but a common explanation offered is the serenity invoked when observing the sculptures."

Melissa and Jim Carnes of Mission Hills began collecting regional art with Paul's help and admired Lyman's sculptures when they viewed them at Leopold Gallery. "I was planning to give Jim one for our 11th wedding anniversary," Melissa says. "I came home one day and there was one of Lyman's large sculptures in our garden. I asked Jim how he liked his gift and he said 'I bought that for you.' We both had the same idea."

Melissa says the sculpture, which is visible from the home's hearth room and kitchen, is situated in a pastoral setting, just as Lyman imagined it, surrounded by trees and a vintage wooden swing. "Paul helped Jim find the perfect spot on our property for maximum enjoyment of the art," she says. "I get lost in its motion."





People appreciate Lyman's kinetic sculptures
for their simplicity and complexity.