

Rein Triefeldt's Solar Vision

This fall, kinetic sculptor Rein Triefeldt and Hoekstra Solar company (of the Netherlands) formally announced a partnership with the potential to develop a powerful new direction for public art. The partnership will examine the feasibility of a public artwork that also functions as a solar energy-producing device. Such a work could pay for itself in time and possibly become profitable for the owner via the sale of excess energy. This functional aspect is to be fused with Triefeldt's aesthetic vision in working with the materials.

An MFA graduate of the University of Windsor (Canada), Triefeldt has worked as a kinetic sculptor since 1986. He has installed commissions in North America, Europe, and Asia—including at the Bos van Ypeij sculpture park in the Netherlands (2003), in conjunction with the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, and at Grounds For Sculpture in 2000. He also has a work traveling with the Cirque du Soleil in North America, exhibited in a VIP tent.

I interviewed Triefeldt on the occasion of his visit to the Netherlands during the "Art in Motion" biennial exhibition at Bos van Ypeij, curated by Cor Wetting.



Robert Preece: *What do you see as your artistic influences?*

Rein Triefeldt: My work is primarily about fun. I prefer universal themes: things that people can understand—and will put a smile on their faces—rhythm, balance, motion, emotion. I also feel strongly that it's better to allow viewers to bring their experiences to the work. I like Joel Shapiro's work—for the gestures and the subtle textures. Mostly, the artists I like are people I've met, it's often about personalities. I met George Rickey about five years ago. That's when I started to look at how his work went together—and I like the wind motion. The Pop artists in general, because that's about fun. I was looking at African art for a period of time. Alexander Calder. So, I take a little bit from here and there.

RP: *How do you juggle your interest in movement and balance?*

RT: The key to my kinetic sculptures is that for every weight, there is a counterweight. Otherwise, it just doesn't rotate, especially in the wind. It doesn't matter if it is vertical or horizontal—it has to be weightless. You don't need to use a light material like aluminum. You can still use bronze. The key thing is that it is balanced. That's how you can make things appear very light in the wind.

RP: *Could you tell me about the solar works?*



Clockwise from above: *Solar*, 2003. Solar panels, polychromed steel, and electric motor, 100 x 80 x 80 in. *Olympic High Flyer*, 1993. Bronze, 38 x 7 x 18 in. *Russian Swing*, 2002. Bronze, 18 x 14 x 6 in.

Let's say, for example, that I made a dome or a sphere, say 10 meters high. In practical terms it could produce an awful lot of energy, and I thought that a sculpture could produce energy for a sculpture park. You could hook it up to the main grid, and you're selling power back to the power company by day and at night you're using it. Your electricity expenses become zero.

RP: *Is there potential for this to become much bigger? Could you have an income-producing public artwork?*

RT: That's what I'm discussing with Hoekstra Solar and Cor Wetting now. I've heard that solar panels can be produced in any shape. This opens up a new world for what I can do visually.

RP: *Do you have a specific artistic dream?*

RT: My dream is the solar dream—and it's getting stronger.

RP: *Could you explain your process?*

RT: Each piece is different—some pieces are more challenging. For instance, for *Russian Swing* (2002), I saw the Russian swing perfor-



RUSSIAN SWING: RICARDO BARROS.COM / OLYMPIC: WOJTEK NACZAS

mance at the *Varekai* [circus] and I knew right then—in my mind—that was my sculpture. I went to the studio, and a week later I had the bronze already assembled.

With commissioned works, as I found out this summer, sometimes you have to spend more time communicating your vision to someone else. You may need to educate them about the process. I created a Web site so that a client would be able to follow the progress of the sculpture. I started to make very small wire maquettes with construction wire (used in concrete work). I use polymer clay because you can bulk it out with aluminum foil and then bake it in your oven. In 15 minutes, you have something hard like plaster. And it can also be changed because polymer clay is easy to work with.

So, I can work quickly. I take digital pictures. Clients go onto the

Web site and access a personalized page with a private address. We then discuss the photographs and go from there. Once you get the direction of the commission, it's really easy. Then, it's just a production process.

RP: *How would you position your work in terms of kinetic sculpture developments?*

RT: I think I am a second-generation kinetic artist, after Calder and Rieck. I feel very at home with the artists in the "Art in Motion" show. Three of us started a kinetic art organization, Kineticus (<www.kineticus.com> for the European version; <www.kinetic-art.org> for the American). We aim to raise awareness of kinetic art. There are over 300 members in 75 countries.

RP: *What material particularly fascinates you and which is your least favorite?*

RT: I primarily work with bronze, stainless steel, and solar materials. I hate fiberglass. I had a toxic relationship with this stuff. In graduate school, I did a cast in fiberglass and a thing grew on the side of my neck. But it went away on its own. The doctor couldn't explain it—perhaps the gland absorbed the poison. So, I don't like resin as a material. For me, it's difficult to argue against bronze. It's easy to cast—and easy to work with after it's cast. It's easy to fabricate. You can carve into it after it's cast—or after you've fabricated something. The attractive thing for me is that bronze will last outdoors, while steel will rust away in 30 years, and aluminum has its problems.

RP: *What is your most significant artistic experience to date?*

RT: The "Art in Motion" exhibition is the most significant—and also

exhibiting at the Canada Olympic House at the Atlanta Olympics. I was only one of two Americans invited to "Art in Motion." There were a lot of firsts here, including a solar kinetic sculpture.

RP: *What aspect of the public art process is the most challenging for you?*

RT: The most challenging part for me is political—getting through all the bullshit to be awarded the contract. It's a lot easier if there's one person instead of a committee. I've had more success dealing with one decision-maker. It's difficult for a committee to agree. In my experience, a committee will always take a long time to make a decision, because the greatest fear the committee has is making the wrong decision—and being blamed for it. So, they will wait until the deadline every single time.

—Robert Preece

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