

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ACQUIRES NEW KINETIC SCULPTURE

Washington, D.C. -- An eighteen-foot-tall, kinetic sculpture by American artist George Rickey (1907- ) has been acquired by the National Gallery and installed on the east lawn of the East Building. Cluster of Four Cubes (1992) is a gift of the artist and the Patrons' Permanent Fund.

It is the second Rickey sculpture in the National Gallery's collection and the last work of art acquired during the tenure of retiring director J. Carter Brown. Rickey's Divided Square Oblique II (1981) was a fiftieth anniversary gift to the Gallery from Mr. and Mrs. William A. Nitze.

A towering, tree-like form, the stainless steel sculpture has a central post with extended "branches" terminating in four cubes. Attached by ball bearings, the thirty-six inch cubes are precisely weighted and balanced to tumble in the slightest breeze. Each turns independently, appearing to collide yet just escaping the neighboring cube, while reflecting light from its burnished surface.

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"This engaging work, an eloquent new direction in George Rickey's long and distinguished career, brings a dynamic element to the grounds of the National Gallery," said Brown. "Eventually it will join the legacy of recent sculptural acquisitions in the Gallery's planned National Sculpture Garden."

The most recent departure in Rickey's oeuvre, Cluster of Four Cubes uses volumes, rather than lines or planes, to trace conical paths of motion. Rickey's kinetic sculpture has been described as a dialogue between order and randomness, where ordered geometric shapes are set in motion by the random forces of nature. Rickey began producing movable works of art in the late 1940s. The first artist to create kinetic sculpture in the constructivist style, he has never produced a stationary sculpture.

Born in South Bend, Indiana, Rickey was raised near Glasgow, Scotland. His father, a mechanical engineer, managed the Singer sewing machine company's branch in Great Britain. Rickey read modern history at Balliol College, Oxford, took classes in drawing at the Ruskin School, then studied painting in Paris at André Lhote's academy and at the Académie Moderne with Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant.

During the 1930s he painted first in a Cézannesque style, later in a Depression-era, social realist mode. He supported himself by teaching at Groton and at a series of colleges and universities.

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In World War II Rickey served in the Army Air Corps, testing computing instruments used by bomber gunners. The work required both mechanical skill and understanding the effects of wind and gravity on ballistics, laying the foundation of his move from painting to kinetic sculpture.

Under the G.I. Bill, Rickey studied at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University and from 1948-1949 attended the Institute of Design in Chicago, an outpost of Bauhaus teaching. Intrigued by both the history of constructivist art and by the mobiles of Alexander Calder, he began creating kinetic sculpture.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Rickey developed systems of motion for his sculpture that responded to the slightest variation in air currents. Over the past three decades he has developed sculpture with parts made of lines, planes, rotors, volumes, and churns, moving in paths that change from simple oscillation to conical gyrations, describing a variety of planes or volumes.

Many works during this period have been large-scale public commissions for sites in the United States, Europe, and Japan. Rickey recently has divided his time between his home in East Chatham, New York, and studios in Berlin and Santa Barbara, California, where he vigorously continues his exploration of the articulation of motion.

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## MEDIA ADVISORY/PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

**WHAT:** A new, 18-foot-tall, kinetic sculpture by American artist George Rickey being installed on the east lawn of the National Gallery of Art. The distinguished 85-year-old artist and J. Carter Brown, Gallery director, will be present to review the installation of Cluster of Four Cubes (1992), the last work of art to be acquired during Brown's tenure.

A towering, tree-like form, the stainless steel sculpture has a central post with extended "branches" terminating in four cubes. Attached by ball bearings, the 3-foot cubes are precisely weighted and balanced to tumble in the slightest wind. Each turns independently and reflects light from its burnished surface. A gift of the artist and the Patrons' Permanent Fund, Cluster of Four Cubes will be the second Rickey sculpture in the Gallery's collection.

**WHEN:** **Wednesday, September 2, 1992 at 10:45 a.m.**  
George Rickey and J. Carter Brown will appear at approximately 10:45 a.m. as the final cubes are installed on top of the structure.

**WHERE:** **National Gallery of Art**  
Corner of Third Street at Madison Drive on the East Building's east lawn  
Washington, D.C.

**PRESS CONTACT:**  
Tina Coplan or Liz Kimball (202) 842-6359  
by 4:00 p.m. on September 1