

Kal Spelletich

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A Gallery's Opening Movement

Jules Maeght Unveils 'Art in Motion'

By Carol Kino

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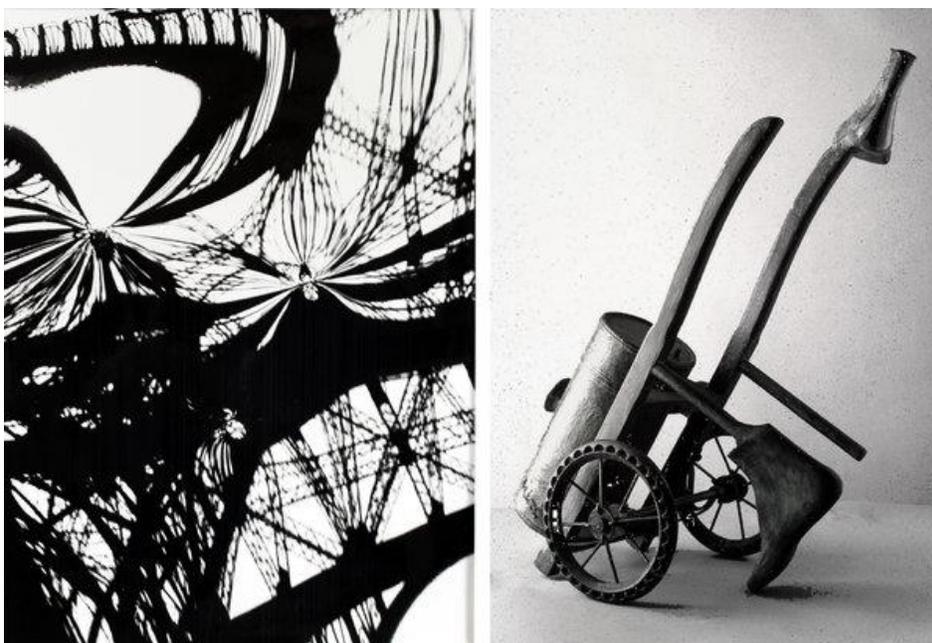
Jules Maeght, right, with Clovis Prévost, left, and the photographer Eric Alexandre at the Maeght Foundation in France.

In 1945 the dealers Aimé and Marguerite Maeght opened the first Galerie Maeght in Paris with a show of wartime drawings by Henri Matisse. It soon became a locus for the postwar avant-garde, showing everyone from Marcel Duchamp to Joan Miró and becoming so successful that, at one time or another, it had a second Paris branch, and outposts in Barcelona, New York and Zurich.

The family still runs a print shop and a publishing house for editioned prints, and its museum, the Marguerite and Aimé Maeght Foundation in St. Paul de Vence, France, has been a highlight of the Côte d'Azur since it opened in 1964. As

Miró once told The New York Times, Maeght has “a personality that will leave its mark on the artistic world of the 20th century.”

Now the couple’s grandson, the third-generation dealer Jules Maeght, hopes to make his mark on San Francisco, too. On Nov. 14, he will open the Jules Maeght Gallery, in Hayes Valley, a newly fashionable neighborhood that lies just west of the San Francisco Opera House and Twitter headquarters.



Work by Mr. Prévost (a photograph documenting “8500 Tons of Iron”), left; and Joan Miró.

The gallery’s inaugural show, “Art in Motion,” will focus on kinetic art — often described as sculpture that moves, ideally with a machinelike aesthetic. It will mix the work of European and American masters like Miró, Wassily Kandinsky and Alexander Calder with that of contemporary San Franciscans mining a similar vein, like Kal Spelletich, a pioneer of San Francisco’s machine-art scene.

Organized by Mr. Maeght and a childhood friend, Natasha Boas, a French-American curator associated with San Francisco’s so-called Mission School, the show aims to link the anarchic spirit that once animated Dada and Surrealism with that of San Francisco’s experimental art scene.

One reason Mr. Maeght wanted to open with kinetic art was that his family had embraced it since the beginning. The Paris gallery’s second show, “Le

Surréalisme,” was organized in 1947 by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, whose 1913 “Bicycle Wheel,” mounted on a stool, is generally regarded as the first kinetic artwork, as well as the first ready-made, an everyday object selected and designated as art. Mr. Maeght said he saw in the idea “a way to include every kind of media,” from drawings and videos to performance and installation.

As for Ms. Boas, who grew up in San Francisco and spent time as a teenager in the 1980s hanging out with the robot art collective Survival Research Laboratories, she felt it made perfect sense to showcase “the very strong relationship between Silicon Valley and San Francisco’s creative culture,” she said, while “opening up the aesthetic conversation around motion and kinetics and robotics.”

Underlining that connection, the gallery itself is housed in a Gough Street building thought to have once served as a studio for the San Francisco artist-inventor Rube Goldberg, known for devising wacky contraptions and machines.

The heart of the show is the 14-minute film “8500 Tonnes de Fer” (“8500 Tons of Iron”), made in 1971 by two longtime Maeght artists, the Belgian kinetic sculptor Pol Bury and the French photographer Clovis Prévost. To create it, they put a 6 1/2-foot-high fun house mirror in the elevator of the Eiffel Tower: Bury wiggled it as they rode up and down, while Mr. Prévost filmed the Industrial Revolution marvel reflected in its surface. This transforms the tower’s carefully calibrated cross-bracings and arches into mind-bending swirls.



Work by Pol Bury, left, and Kal Spelletich. Credit From left: Pol Bury/Artists Rights Society(ARS), New York; Kal Spelletich/Jules Maeght Gallery

“It’s very much a period film insofar as it’s psychedelic,” Ms. Boas said. “But there’s also this idea that they’re contorting this technologically groundbreaking machine with all these optical tricks.” It will be accompanied by about two dozen photographs by Mr. Prévost that document the production.

The show also includes machinelike sculptures by Bury and Miró, represented here by a 1974 bronze that’s part cannon, part man. Among the other kinetic “old masters,” as Mr. Maeght calls them, are a 1926 suite of geometric drawings by Kandinsky and works on paper and a rare standing mobile from Calder, made in the early 1970s when the sculptor was spending much of his time in France. (All come from the personal collections of Mr. Maeght and his father, Adrien; none have been shown in America before and about half will be for sale.)

Galerie Maeght in Paris is also sending work by the contemporary British performance artist Kirstie MacLeod: a video documenting a 2007 event in which the artist’s glamorous evening gown is gradually nailed to the floor, rendering her immobile; and photographs of another from 2009 in which she entangles herself underwater in a hand-woven web and then fights her way free.

Much of the San Francisco work is more focused on technology and multimedia. Marshall Elliott, a recent master’s graduate of the San Francisco Art Institute, will contribute three constructions that use motorized elements, as well as light and shadow, to create kinetic installations, like “Ghost Bike” (2013). A robotic bicycle that circles the gallery ceaselessly, ringing a bell at each revolution as it traces a ring and casts shadows on the floor, it suggests a homage to Duchamp.

Also in the show is work by the Oakland-based artist Tracey Snelling, whose diorama-like installations of buildings and towns are often brought to life with lights, sound and video. The largest piece she will show here is “Bridge,” a 2012 mixed-media assemblage that depicts another engineering marvel, the Golden Gate Bridge. It’s made with an inkjet print on wood, but one tower is inset with flickering video footage of the road, taken from a traveling car, which creates the illusion of depth and movement.

Then there is Mr. Spelletich, whom Ms. Boas jokingly calls the “elder statesman” of the group. In the 1990s he became known for building interactive fire-breathing

robots, made from welded metal and computer parts; he also helped found bacchanalia like the Nevada arts festival Burning Man and the annual flash mobs of naughty Santas known as Santacon. Recently, however, his work has taken a more abstract and spiritual turn, as in the two small “Locally Euclidean” constructions he will show here. Made this year from found wood and scrap metal, they bristle with rough sticks that undulate gently like tree branches when touched, “triggered by sensors that read your aura,” Mr. Spelletich said. He calls them “mystical machines.”

But Mr. Spelletich has something more chaotic in mind for the first night of the show, where he may bring out what he calls his “more celebratory” pieces, like his hugging machine or his whiskey-pouring robots. “They’re always a huge hit,” Mr. Spelletich said. “But I think it’s more appropriate to build a champagne-sabering robot and honor the French. So I’m working on that.”