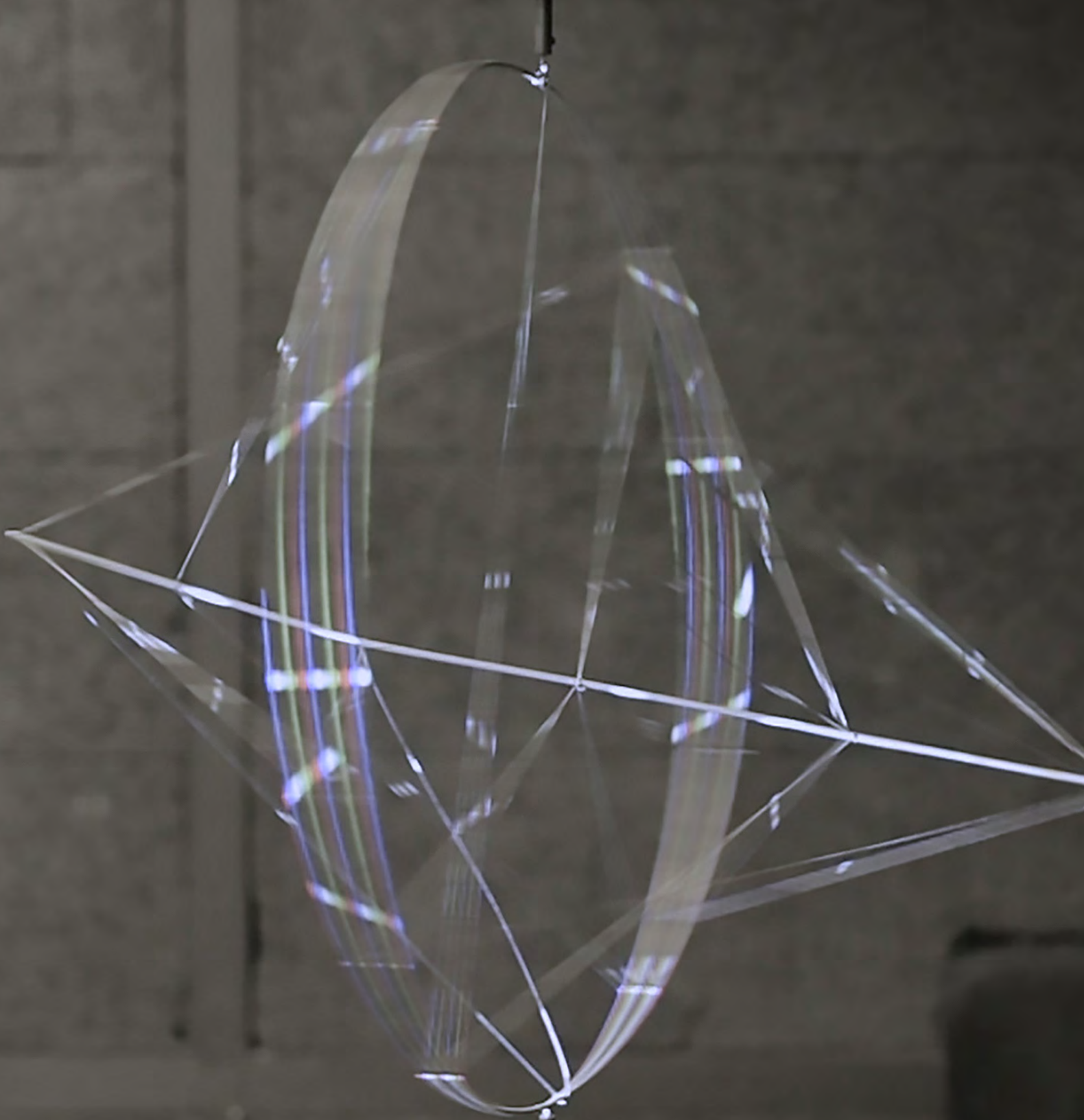


Proceedings from the meeting organized by
the Getty Conservation Institute, the ICOM-CC
Modern Materials and Contemporary Art
Working Group, and Museo del Novecento
Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy, June 30–July 2, 2016

Edited by Rachel Rivenc and Reinhard Bek

Keep It Moving? Conserving Kinetic Art



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The Getty Conservation Institute
Los Angeles

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Front and back cover: Analogue projection of Aleksandar Srnec's *Luminoplastic 1*, 1965–67. Video stills (see fig. 8.6). Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.



The Getty Conservation Institute



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13.

Kinetic Multiples: Between Industrial Vocation and Handcrafted Solutions

Isabel Plante

In the 1960s, kineticism attracted a wide audience, and exhibitions of kinetic art drew large crowds, apparently fulfilling the most ambitious objective of the avant-garde: to integrate art and life. Some kinetic objects were made in series: the idea of multiples was at the core of these artists' strategies of "demystifying" art objects by avoiding the uniqueness fetish. The idea of an industrial production of kinetic multiples made it possible to imagine the extension to a wider audience of the optically destabilizing effects of the visual artifacts. This paper analyzes kinetic multiples as an artistic production that discovered its limits and contradictions amid arguments about culture, standardization, and consumption around 1968.



In 1966, Julio Le Parc represented Argentina in the Venice Biennale (fig. 13.1) and received the international grand prize in painting. According to the reviews, his space was one of the most visited.¹ As the appeal of kinetic art continued to grow and draw crowds to museums, kinetic artworks seemed to meet the most ambitious objective of the avant-garde: to integrate art and life.

Kineticism² was an international trend composed of different groups of artists who were in contact with one another, including the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) in France, Gruppo T and Gruppo N in Italy, ZERO in Germany, Dwizjenije in Moscow, and USCO in New York. In 1964 the *Nouvelle tendance* exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, had gathered about fifty artists from eleven countries.³ In Pascal Rousseau's words, kinetic art was viewed "as a kind of Esperanto through which each individual would communicate with the world in the ecstatic intoxication of optical vibration" (Rousseau 2005:142–50).

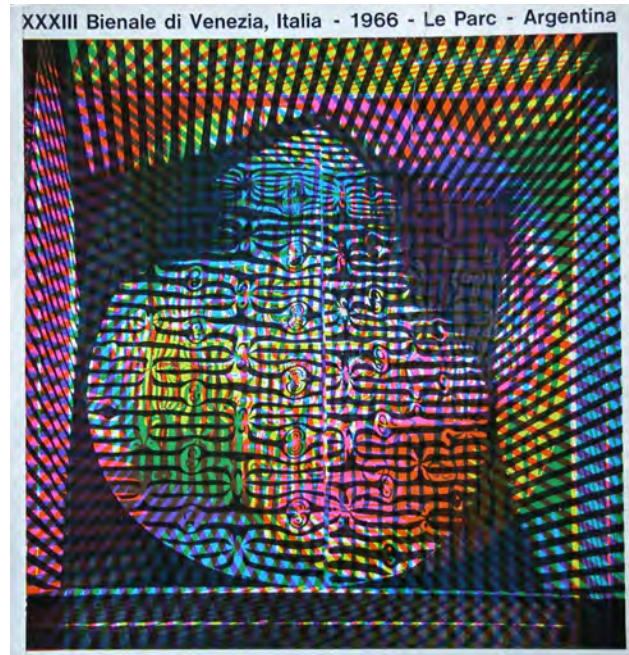


Figure 13.1. *Julio Le Parc*. Catalogue of the XXXIII Biennale di Venezia, Italia, 1966. Cover designer Rogelio Polesello overprinted a plot of colors on the black-and-white photograph of Le Parc's kinetic multiple. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes Archive, Buenos Aires.

Courtesy of Osvaldo Polesello. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

section of the Biennale) had said that Le Parc's artworks were among the public's favorites because they could be handled, and it would be a pity if the works remained nonfunctional through the rest of the show. However, because the space was open to visitors ten hours a day, it was a difficult problem logistically. Scarpa also asked if Le Parc wanted to have a Venetian put in charge of his exhibition.⁸



Figure 13.4. Cover of the catalogue for *La Inestabilidad*, the 1964 GRAV exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, illustrated with a photograph of one of Julio Le Parc's *Continuels-mobiles*. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes Archive, Buenos Aires.

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It is likely that more people visited Le Parc's space after he won the international painting prize, but it was not unusual for his shows to be very well attended. GRAV's 1964 exhibition in Buenos Aires had attracted 50,000 visitors (fig. 13.4).⁹ Two 1967 exhibitions—*Lumière et mouvement* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris,

and Le Parc's retrospective at the Instituto Torcuato di Tella's Center for the Visual Arts in Buenos Aires—attracted unprecedented crowds. More than 150,000 people viewed the retrospective over twenty days.¹⁰ The formal and material qualities of kinetic multiples also gave them wide appeal. Crowds were attracted to kinetic art exhibitions by the possibility of transforming an artwork's shape (that is, volumetry) and by the use of novel materials, including bright, translucent, or reflective surfaces such as Plexiglas and stainless steel.

After he won the prize, Le Parc took advantage of subsequent interviews to spread GRAV's tenets about kinetic productions. They were meant to be collective, multiple, and foreign to the art field:

We should tend to the collective multiple, the playroom, the public demonstration, in which every group of spectators will be simultaneously involved and each of them become actor and object of the show at the same time. These labyrinths, these playrooms, have to be set up in military barracks, and HLMs.¹¹ It is necessary to overcome the solitude of the crowds and, in a way, rediscover the conditions of participation typical of primitive societies.¹²

The multiple as it was conceived by kinetic artists in the mid-1960s converged with the conventions of engravings, in that both involved the artistic production of series rather than unique pieces. But unlike engravings, the identical and reproducible kinetic artifacts were pervaded by the tensions between their industrial vocation and their effective insertion in the exclusivist logic of the art market (figs. 13.5, 13.6): series of kinetic objects were not numbered, as print series were, because the artists did not want to control the number of works in a series (and therefore the price in the art market). They desired an industrial manufacture that, although it seemed probable in the mid-1960s, never took place.

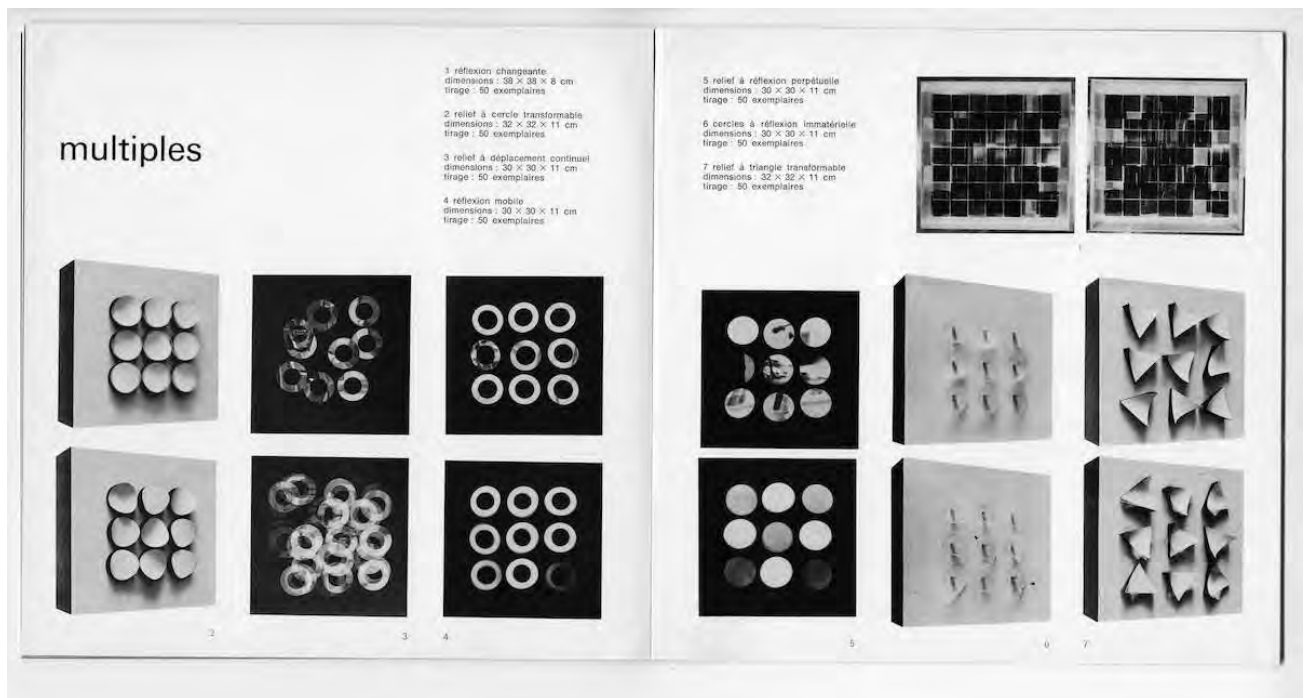
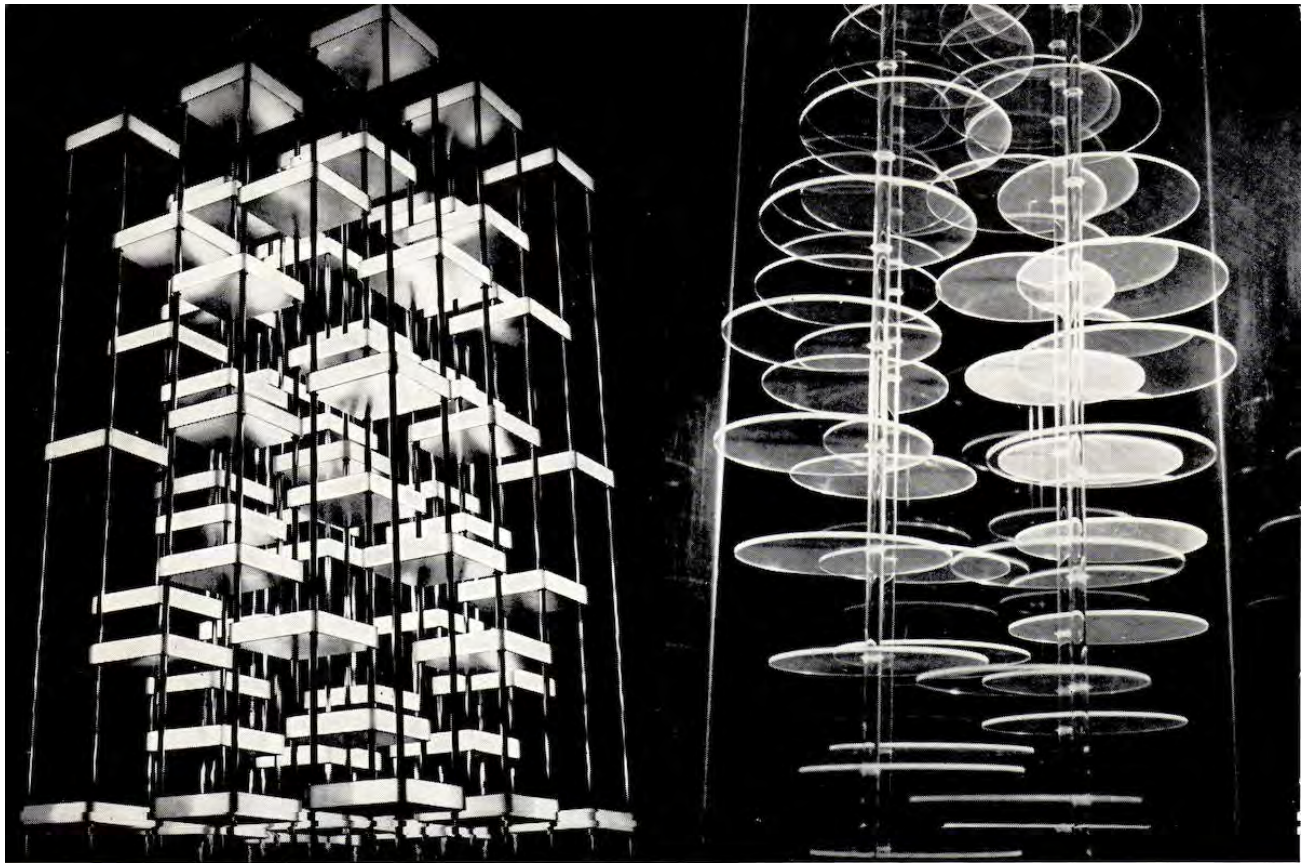


Figure 13.5. *Multiples* by Hugo Demarco, featured in the Galerie Denise René exhibition *Demarco: Dynamique de l'image* (April–May 1968) and the accompanying catalogue. The Parisian gallery supported the production of multiples and reserved a section for them in its exhibition catalogues.

From *Demarco: Dynamique de l'image, Galerie Denise René, Paris ... avril–mai 1968*. Paris: Galerie Denise René; Société Mondial d'Impression, 1968. Reproduced with permission. © Hugo Demarco.

There are precedents of multiples before GRAV; for example, Victor Vasarely and Daniel Spoerri had explored the serial production of artistic objects.¹³ In fact, in 1959 Spoerri had tried, to no avail, to acquaint the Galerie Denise René with his Edition MAT (Multiplication d'Art Transformable). For these editions, he had called on artists connected to René's gallery: Yaacov Agam, Pol Bury, Jesús Rafael Soto, Jean Tinguely, and Vasarely, as well as German

artists Heinz Mack and Dieter Roth. But René's strategy was based on the artists' proven recognition before their multiples were placed on the market. The artists recommended by Spoerri were young and not yet established, and René did not pursue his initiative. Thus, it was only around the mid-1960s that the conditions to launch this form of art seemed more suitable.



vardanega

atelier 128

escalier n° 1

21, rue de l'amiral roussin 75015 paris

martha boto

atelier 127

273-3071

Figure 13.6. A card advertising works by both Martha Boto and Gregorio Vardanega, ca. 1969. These artists were a couple and shared a workshop as well as exhibitions. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes Archive, Buenos Aires.

Courtesy of the estate of Gregorio Vardanega and Martha Boto, and Sicardi Gallery.

Le Parc's triumph in Venice provided the exposure and recognition necessary to place multiples in an art market already crammed with all kinds of artworks and reproductions. In July 1966, René opened a second gallery on the Left Bank in Paris specifically for multiples. The first exhibition focused on Vasarely; the second exhibition, *Multiples recherches*, opened in October and featured Le Parc.

Norberto Gómez, a young Argentine artist who had helped Le Parc assemble the artworks sent to the Venice Biennale, recalls that the first multiples had been handmade, but that after obtaining the prize, Le Parc and his assistants standardized the process and increased their production considerably. "After the Biennale, the sales came. They set up a large studio,"¹⁴ said Gómez. Having moved to Paris, Argentine artists Armando Durante and Gabriel Messil began to work on the production of Le

Parc's multiples commissioned by René. Antonio Seguí, another Argentine artist living in Paris, recalls that "Fatty" Durante and Messil also earned handsome sums of money.¹⁵

After 1965 an increasing number of galleries and artists produced and sold multiples to a restricted market that was quickly saturated.¹⁶ René registered the term *multiple*¹⁷ in the hope of enjoying exclusive use of it and thus asserting her long practice as an Abstract Art dealer and her close relationship with Vasarely, a pioneer in the serial production of geometric art. In late 1967 art critic Otto Hahn presented an overview of the success achieved by the multiples in Paris:

In less than a year, this trend developed and grew to the extent that the word "multiple" now sounds like "open sesame." Even lithographs use the sweet

name of "Multiples." [...] Some want to do away with the structures of art distribution; others would socialize art. In times of euphoria, confusion is inevitable.¹⁸

Prices and options varied. The Galerie Givaudan opened in 1965 and specialized in multiples, following the model of publishing houses: large-scale editions, with the same price for famous artists and newcomers. Thus Givaudan aspired to moralize an art market that grew apace with France's modernization without modifying its elitist logic (see Hahn 1968).

René opted to have the production of the works supervised by their respective creators. Unlike Le Parc and GRAV members, she disliked unlimited editions. In her

view, after 100 copies had been made, the others would be produced unsupervised by the artist, a fact that detracted from their quality. She also opposed the "demystification of art," so much discussed by GRAV members, because she felt it meant equating an art object with a mere consumer item. She maintained that "art must keep its aura and continue to be a high quality product that bears witness to a way of thinking about the world."¹⁹ Charging more accessible prices, René intended to spread modern art among social sectors whose purchasing power prevented them from buying unique works. For her, it was about democratizing access to ownership of art objects ... and increasing sales.

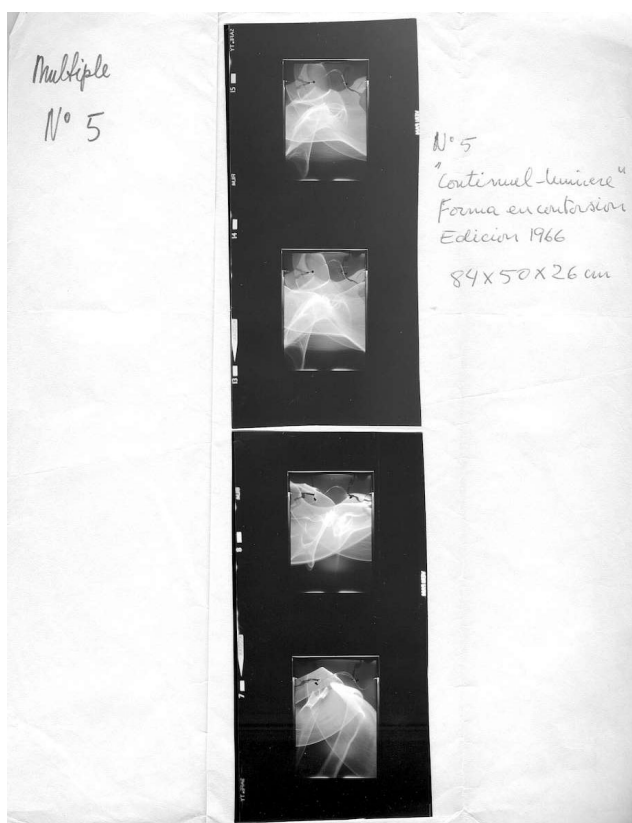


Figure 13.7. Julio Le Parc's *Multiple no. 5. Continuel-lumiere. Forma en contorsion*, 1966 edition, 84 × 50 × 23 cm. Archivos di Tella, Universidad Torcuato di Tella.

Courtesy of Archivos Di Tella, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

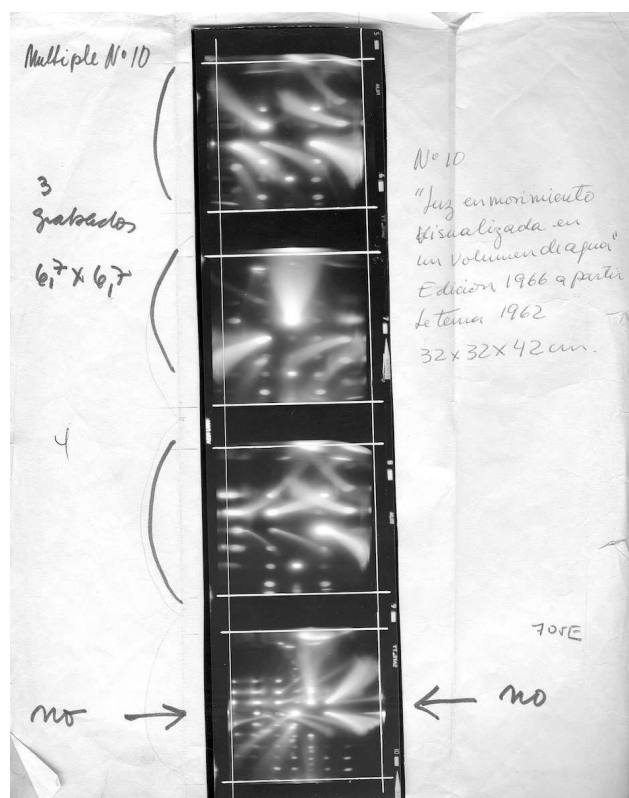


Figure 13.8. Julio Le Parc's *Multiple no. 10. Light in movement, visualized in volume of water*, edition 1966, 32 × 32 × 42 cm. These multi-schemas show how serial production of kinetic objects was projected and published. Each prototype corresponded to a series of works but was given a number rather than a title, and its visual qualities unfolded in a series of four photos. Although all multiples from the same series had to be identical, each of them was transformable. Archivos di Tella, Universidad Torcuato di Tella.

Courtesy of Archivos Di Tella, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

As Hahn pointed out, opinions about multiples varied. Blurring the work's aura and the boundaries of the traditional art market by producing serial art pieces that did not meet the requirements of "uniqueness" or manual "touch" did not necessarily coincide with the notion of turning the word *multiple* into a trademark (figs. 13.7, 13.8). Amid the confusion, a manifesto signed by Le Parc declared that multiples were developments related to geometric abstraction, and he specified their characteristics in terms of authorship and possibilities of reproduction:

Multiples have come into being thanks to the quests undertaken by geometric, optical, and kinetic art, that have never ceased to emphasize that the intervention of the hand, the gesture, and the touch are definitely of secondary importance in an art proposal. [...]

1. A Multiple is an art proposal conceived to be multiplied ad infinitum thanks to the industrial resources available. Every copy of a Multiple is identical and interchangeable with others. Each of them fully conveys the artist's original proposal.
 2. Conclusion: any work conceived as a Multiple eliminates the material notion of an original (scale model, etc. ...), which blends with the rest of the copies.
 3. The notion of an internal transformation for each of the copies accompanies that of multiplication. Each Multiple involves a limited diversity principle (through permutation) or an unlimited one (an "open" kinetic work). Though strictly identical from a material point of view, time, movement, light, etc. endow Multiples with an ever-changing appearance, which makes them look different to different viewers.
 4. To begin with, a Multiple may have a limited run. It can be gradually multiplied depending on the possibilities of the art market. However, it will be regarded as a Multiple as long as it is initially conceived as unlimited.
 5. As part of its lack of limitations, the Multiple, which underscores the triumph of the artist's thought above the dated, fetishist conception of the art piece, excludes the author's signature.
- [...]

The Multiple is located at the junction of artistic creation and industrial production. It protects the

whole of the former as it offers the possibilities of the latter. This is one of the meeting points between art and the technology of our days.²⁰

René had made reproductions, screen prints, and tapestries, but the manufacture of multiples brought new problems related to the distribution system and to the status of the artwork. From Le Parc's point of view (and judging his complicated relationship with René), his own dealer was among the many who had distorted the profound, critical meaning of the multiple. At times, René was the enemy or, quite simply, the boss.

Le Parc arrived in Paris in 1958 for an eight-month fellowship (at a modest 300 francs per month) sponsored by French government; it was extended for another eight months.²¹ In 1962 he signed his first exclusive contract with René for a similar monthly sum. It was not until the mid-1960s that Le Parc found it easier to support his family through his arrangement with his dealer, who sold editions of his multiples for \$80 to \$200.²² This does not mean that the commercialization of multiples went smoothly. Marion Hoffeldt mentions that, in a number of cases, the pieces proved too costly for the nonspecialized public and lacked exclusivity in the collectors' view.²³ Moreover, even when the prices were accessible, the works would not sell unless they were signed and numbered. The paradox about the multiple was that, while it had abandoned the original as a way of unfetishizing the art piece as a luxury consumer object, it did not abandon its artistic status and its proprietary nature.

In mid-1966 art critic Jean Clay felt optimistic about the dissemination of kineticism by means of multiples. He envisaged a near future in which gallerists would make way for "industrial-scale organizations" that would disseminate "the art product" along the same lines as music albums and books.²⁴ A couple of years later, in 1969, speaking about an initiative to sell multiples at the Fédération Nationale d'Achats (FNAC), a store that originally sold photographic and phonographic materials and equipment but was expanding its market by including other cultural items,²⁵ Clay refined his ideas by saying it would be a mistake to offer multiples in this type of venue.²⁶ In order to retain their meaningfulness, they should be exhibited in such a way that people would understand that kinetic multiples were art proposals rather than gadgets. The term *gadgets* pervaded discussions in France about culture, standardization, and consumption. In *The System of Objects* (1968), Jean Baudrillard offered a critical analysis of the multiplication phenomenon: "Nowadays objects are actors in a global process in which

man is no more than a character or a spectator” (Baudrillard 1969:62). In turn, in the balance between structural and ornamental components, a “functional aberration” resulted in a gadget, a novel utensil of questionable usefulness.

In the context of an unprecedented abundance of small, ingenious objects, the eye-catching multiple ran the risk of being mistaken for yet another gadget. Paradoxically, while kineticists’ main purpose in producing their works was to force viewers out of their passivity, those very works exhibited in a shop window could be mistaken for artifacts that, as Baudrillard pointed out, reduce the user to a mere spectator of the technical imaginary deployed by an undetermined set of consumer objects. The recreational nature of kinetic multiples revolved around this misinterpretation, for gadgets also were defined at the juncture of technology, recreation, and automation.



Acknowledgments

I thank the Biblioteca di Tella for making material available for this paper.

Notes

1. Pierre Mazars, “La peinture se meurt, la peinture est morte,” *Le Figaro littéraire*, June 23, 1966, 13.
2. I use “kineticism” rather than “kinetic art” because I am referring to an avant-garde art movement (Cubism, Dadaism, etc.) and because these artists were discussing the status of art, the traditional aura. The production of multiples was part of their strategies, as discussed in this paper.
3. Popper 1967. The first encounter of New Tendencies was held at GRAV’s studio in Paris in November 1962. It was attended by the ZERO group, Gruppo T, Gruppo N, and some critics, such as Matko Meštrović. *Nove Tendencije*, the first New Tendencies exhibition, was organized in Zagreb in 1961 by Meštrović. On kinetic art history, see also Brett 1969 and Bértola 1973.
4. Arnauld Pierre, “Accélération optiques. Le régime visuo-moteur de l’art optique et cinétique,” in Emmanuel Guignon and Arnauld Pierre, eds., *L’œil moteur: Art optique et cinétique, 1950–1975* (Strasbourg: Musée d’Art Contemporain de Strasbourg, 2005), 34.
5. Arnauld Pierre, “De l’instabilité. Perception visuelle/corporelle de l’espace dans l’environnement cinétique,” *Cahiers du Musée national d’art moderne* 78 (Winter 2001–2): 41–69.
6. Two documents offer a list of forty-one or forty-two pieces, respectively: *XXXIIIe Biennale de Venise 1966. Le Parc représente la République Argentine* (Paris: Galerie Denise René, 1966), and “Biennale de Venise,” manuscript, ca. 1966, Le Parc Archive.
7. In 1960 GRAV was established by eleven artists under the name of Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel. The foundational document announced objectives such as making collective works “to overcome the traditional behavior of the outstanding unique painter that created immortal works.” An earlier theoretical writing from 1960 declared that GRAV artists explored vision through methodical experimentation with surface, relief, volume, color, and movement. They also experimented with materials such as plastic, Plexiglas, metals, electric matter, projections, reflections, black light, etc.; and implemented methods related to the control of visual phenomena and to probability and chance applications. From April 1961, the group was composed of six members: Le Parc, Argentine García-Rossi, Francisco Sobrino, François Morellet, Joël Stein, and Jean-Pierre Yvaral. They broached recreational research from 1963, when they erected their first walkable maze at the Paris Biennale. GRAV, “Acte de fondation,” “Chronologie raisonnée des activités du GRAV,” in Aupetitallot 1998:58.
8. Alberto de Angelis, letter to Julio Le Parc, dated “Viernes 8 de 1966.” Le Parc Archive.
9. A document dated “19 de julio de 1964” gives 50,868 visitors. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes Archive.
10. The archives of the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville have no attendance records; however, the press wrote about the unprecedented number of visitors: 159,287. *Memoria y balance 1967* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Torcuato di Tella, 1968).
11. *Habitations à loyer modéré* (HLMs) are rent-controlled dwellings built by the French government.
12. Le Parc in Christiane Duparc, “Julio Le Parc: voulez-vous jouer avec lui?,” *Le nouvel Adam* (December 1966). Le Parc Archive. I translated all the citations of French newspapers from French to Spanish.
13. In his *Yellow Manifesto* (1955), Vasarely developed the notion of transformable works. In turn, Spoerri launched his first edition of multiples in 1959. See Hohlfeldt 2001.
14. Norberto Gómez, interview by the author, January 14, 2008.
15. Antonio Seguí, interview by the author, May 8, 2008.
16. René Block, Berlin; Edizioni Danese, Milan; Fluxus Editions and Multiples Inc., New York; VICE-Versand, Remscheid; Xart Collection, Zurich, etc. Artists also sent multiples by post (Karl Gerstner, Klaus Staeck), made direct sales (Robert Filliou, George Bretch), or sold them through magazines (Fluxusshops).
17. Jean Clay, “An Interview with Denise René,” *Studio International* 175, no. 899 (April 1968): 192–95. The gallery copyright number was N343383.
18. Otto Hahn, “Les multiples à Paris,” *Art International* 12, no. 1 (January 20, 1968): 47–49.
19. Hahn, “Les multiples à Paris.”
20. Julio Le Parc. “Manifeste du Multiple,” ca. 1966. In Amigo, Dolinko, and Rossi 2010:187–88. My translation from French to Spanish.
21. Juan Carlos Kreimer, “Julio Le Parc: cinetizar a las masas,” *Confirmado* (December 1, 1996): 74. See also Le Parc 1988:191.
22. S. G., “Julio Le Parc, argentino. Triunfador en Venecia: ‘Aquí se vive por reflejos,’” *Gente*, August 1, 1967.
23. Hohlfeldt 2001. According to Hahn, René’s prices ranged from 800 and 4,500 francs, while Givaudan charged between 30 and 300 francs for works in “unlimited” runs, although he also

- sold multiples of which there were no more than twelve copies at higher prices. See Hahn, "Les multiples à Paris."
24. Jean Clay, "L'art du mouvement," *Réalités* (June 1966): 90.
 25. The FNAC (Fédération Nationale d'Achats) was established in France in 1954 by André Essel and Max Théret. At the beginning, the store sold photography and cinema items. In 1969 a second store opened in Paris. "Décès de Max Théret, fondateur de la Fnac," *La Tribune*, February 25, 2009.
 26. "La fin de l'objet et du lieu culturel. Débat organisé par la revue Robho avec Jean Clay, les artistes présents et le public"; program brochure by the Noroit Cultural Center, Arràs, March 8–24, 1969. Le Parc Archive.

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