Len Lye
Born Christchurch, New Zealand, 1901
Resident New York City

Len Lye arrived in Los Angeles on August 20, 1968 to tour Kaiser Steel Corporation in Fontana. The artist described three pieces he wanted to execute, and drew a rough sketch of each. Gail Scott described his plans in a memo at that time:

Gateway to the Universe: is ideally conceived as an oval structure of steel resting on a large base. The dimensions of the oval would be ninety feet long, sixty feet high, twelve feet thick, but a more feasible scale for our exhibition would be thirty by twenty by six feet. The exact dimensions would depend on technical calculations, permanent and temporary exhibition sites, and transportability. The entire structure would oscillate back and forth in a rolling motion, controlled by an electro-magnetic device, attached at two points at the base of the piece. In its ultimate situation, *Gateway* would be the entrance to a whole complex of kinetic objects in a total environment, but obviously this is outside the range of possibility for A & T. He describes *Gateway* as: the nearest I can see it is a great elephant reincarnated as an ebb tide at Big River where the meeting of the tides creates a rolling whirlpool action. He has a nine foot model in his New York studio which he would advise having the engineer assigned to the project look at. There are several structural problems which need to be worked out: type of base; securing the oval to the base, finding a type of steel which would not bend at the top of such a large oval shape; programming the electro-magnetic device.

Blade: is a sheet about twelve feet high, twenty-two inches wide, made of 3/64" thick steel, standing upright with a striker device to one side, consisting of a steel ball on a pipe. The sheet steel would be programmed to oscillate in a waving motion creating double and at times triple harmonic sounds. When the movements reach a certain curvature, the striker would then hit the sheet with a bonging sound. The entire structure, striker and all, would then rotate on its axis, shimmering and reflecting light projected onto it. A composer, perhaps in percussion, would program the reciprocating device. Lighting would be coordinated into the motor stepping.

Storm King: is a sheet of steel, sixteen feet long made of 3/64" thick steel with two brass curved arms extruding from one side. The whole structure would oscillate, creating storm sounds and reflecting light projected onto it. This piece would be placed against a long sheet of brass which is also programmed to move in a waving motion. The piece would be suspended from the ceiling with a small reciprocator at the top.

Len Lye wrote MT on August 26,

Oom. Seeing you at the helm prowing the art and technology seas was wow fore and aft.

The fly in the kiss me quick of my unto consists of motion comp as the end of the fabricating trip and what that's to be I alone decide so the trick is knowing when the goal is getting off course.

Attached is what it takes for that and a few other tacks.

Along the way there's the listed kind of squalls and all of us learning to keep our seats dry but if the ancients could deliver Stonehenge, the Nile temples even unto those Aztecs and Tolmecs with a lot of heave ho why can't we and we with the plan you've got can.

As you know I'm up to my eyebrows but while passing through I'll give it a go, otherwise it's no skin off my bowspit if the conditions listed can't be met.

Could you let me know a final reaction as soon as poss.? I don't want to back and forth at all with skidding verbiage. What happens will affect my next lot of doings including something for next all summer I'm about to sign but if we go ahead, then I'll ask for spare time to keep in touch from Japan where we'll be 1969 with Ann and a job and maybe Garrett have a private plane or space suit outfit to get the to and fro done.
Once again for your efficient smoothing and understanding of all the aspects of which I know I'm but one. Last but almost the most the perfect hospitality of your friends. It was all magnificient.

Oom . . . thanks

*Points which must be agreed to by both the Museum and the donor manufacturing corporation:

(1) Whatever work may be chosen by the manufacturing corporation, I would expect a second model be made for me not to be used for public display. This version should not be in any way inferior to the one they build for themselves. If any improvements were made which could not be repeated on my model, then, rather than accept the first, I would require a new version.

Four works, *Sky King, Universe, Blade,* and *Moon Bead,* [a sculpture he had only mentioned in passing] are now being considered for construction. I realize the right of the corporation to retain copies of the works promoted by the museum, but, should they

construct all four, it would be unfair to me, the artist, that I should be deprived of future commissions on these pieces because they already exist in a public collection. Therefore, for this and other reasons I will only allow two works of the four to be copies.

(2) Len Lye, the artist, would retain the authority to cancel and have destroyed either work in progress or work completed if he sees it becoming somebody else's thing. This means that he, or his assistant, would have to be kept in constant touch with stages of appreciable development of a piece and approve of them. If unable to visit the shop, he would want to see decipherable drawings.

(3) Whatever work chosen by the fabricator, and built, should not be exploited commercially (such as a roadsign type of role), nor subverted to a gimmick type attraction (such as being lit up in garish colors), but rather it should be set in surroundings which enhance it. To this end I would like some authoritative say in its exhibition. I would also, therefore, have approval of any ultimate disposition of the work, that is after it leaves the museum.

(4) When the exhibition is finished at the museum, my work is to be immediately crated and shipped to a given destination, possibly overseas.

(5) I retain full copyright of the start and end design and a blue print copy of all mechanisms and wiring schematics.

Lye had outlined several other definite requirements for the works: *Blade* and *Storm King* had to be fully programmed, and a type of steel must be used which was both resilient and would produce a proper tone when struck; *Gateway,* as an outdoor piece, had to be weatherized; *Storm King* and *Blade* would have to be placed in a soundproofed area in an installation; all three required secure bases to withstand constant vibrations.

The major drawback, as the Kaiser engineers pointed out, was that the company does not manufacture either spring steel or stainless steel, both of which are sufficiently ductile materials for kinetic sculptures. Kaiser produces structural steel which is strong, flexible and brittle, for architectural purposes and bridge building—I-beams, H-beams, piping, etc. The other difficulty was in programming the works; Kaiser has no electronic facilities to devise a control system.

Lye had also toured the Garrett Corporation and delivered the same proposals. Garrett had agreed to survey its various divisions to determine the capabilities for execution. Both Kaiser and Garrett eventually declined to take on the project.