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Robert Breer

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View of "Robert Breer,"
2016. Photo: Aurélien Mole.

In the early 1950s, Robert Breer, at the time a geometric abstract painter living in Paris, came to the realization that his interest lay in "the process of painting rather than any fixed composition." This epiphany, which would eventually lead the artist to abandon painting altogether, inspired his first films, a tetralogy of short animations in which forms previously locked down on canvas were freed to morph and dance about the frame. Thematically bookended by *Form Phases 4*, 1954, and a 16-mm film from Breer's mature period, *Fuji*, 1974, the recent exhibition "Between Cinema and Fixed Imagery" drew attention to Breer's materials and experimental process. Featuring work made between 1953 and 2009, including handmade motoscopes, scores of drawings, and a gaggle of kinetic sculptures, this survey presented Breer's oeuvre as a multimedia exploration of the tension between stillness and motion.

Breer made *Fuji* using the standard animation technique he adopted in the 1960s, which involved making thousands of drawings (and sometimes collages) on four-by-six-inch cards, shuffling these, and then filming each one. What characterizes this particular animation—an impressionistic description of a high-speed train ride through Japan—is its varied source materials and filmic techniques. *Fuji* cuts between Super 8 footage showing a woman (the artist's first wife, Frannie Breer) in front of a train window, colorful drawings of a distant Mount Fuji, black-and-white photographs of Breer's sculptures at the 1970 Osaka world's fair (Expo '70), and rotoscope tracings of a train conductor walking through a car. The rapid-fire sequence of disparate images accompanied by a non-diegetic clickety-clack sound track is the antithesis of conventional animation, where the goal is an illusion of continuous natural motion.

For Breer, film was about tangibility, not fantasy. Providing just a glimpse of what goes into an eight-minute film, a framed grouping of fifteen original drawings, *Sequence from Fuji*, 1974, confirmed the physicality of the artist's process and materials. Elsewhere in the gallery, narrow tables displayed drawings from the slightly later films *LMNO*, 1978, and *Swiss Army Knife with Rats and Pigeons*, 1980. Having been cut, collaged, and spray-painted, these animation stills (selected posthumously for this presentation, as opposed to those the artist framed himself, which also included *Sequence from 69*, 1968; *Sequence from 77*, 1977; and *Sequence from What Goes Up*, 2003) appear even more object-like, if perhaps unduly fetishized.

Breer explored the relationship between objecthood and motion outright with his kinetic sculptures. He created one of many series of "Floats," slow-moving vaguely geometric sculptures, in 1970 in collaboration with E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology) for the Pepsi-Cola Pavilion at the Osaka world's fair. Small-scale equivalents of these monumental works roved the gallery like abstract bump-

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and-go robots thanks to hidden battery-powered motors and wheels. Made of painted Styrofoam, *Tucson #1-4*, all 2009, activated the exhibition space, alternately clustering together and disbanding to conquer various regions of the gallery on their own. Breer's films freed his paintings from a "fixed composition," and this exhibition allowed him to be appreciated as the unfixed sum of many (moving) parts.

—[Mara Hoberman](#)

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