

# Artist Transforms Zoetropes From Retro Visuals To The Stuff Of Fine Art

The Huffington Post | By [Priscilla Frank](#)

Posted: 02/20/2015 8:13 am EST

Remember zoetropes? They may be a bit before your time. The zoetrope, derived from the Greek root words for "life" and "turning," is an optical toy invented before the days of film and cinema. The tool displays a progressive sequence of drawings or photographs, thus creating the illusion of motion. Most often the images are arranged on a cylinder which then spins, setting the pictures spinning.

While zoetropes experienced their heyday before the dawn of motion picture technology, one contemporary artist is bringing the retro medium back in a radical new way. Meet [Eric Dyer](#), the modern master of the zoetrope.



"To me, zoetropes are like time sculptures -- film and animation all contained within a single object," Dyer explains in a video profile made by Creative Capital. Using simple materials and somewhat bizarre subject matter, Dyer crafts hypnotic objects that seem to spring to life before your eyes, the happy marriage of an Eadweard Muybridge motion study and a carnival carousel. "This is sculpture come to life," the artist continues.

Before working with zoetropes, Dyer worked in television, film and as an experimental animator. Yet there was something about the tangible<sup>thing</sup>-ness of a zoetrope that captivated the artist, something so contrary with the slick screens and touch pads we're so accustomed to.



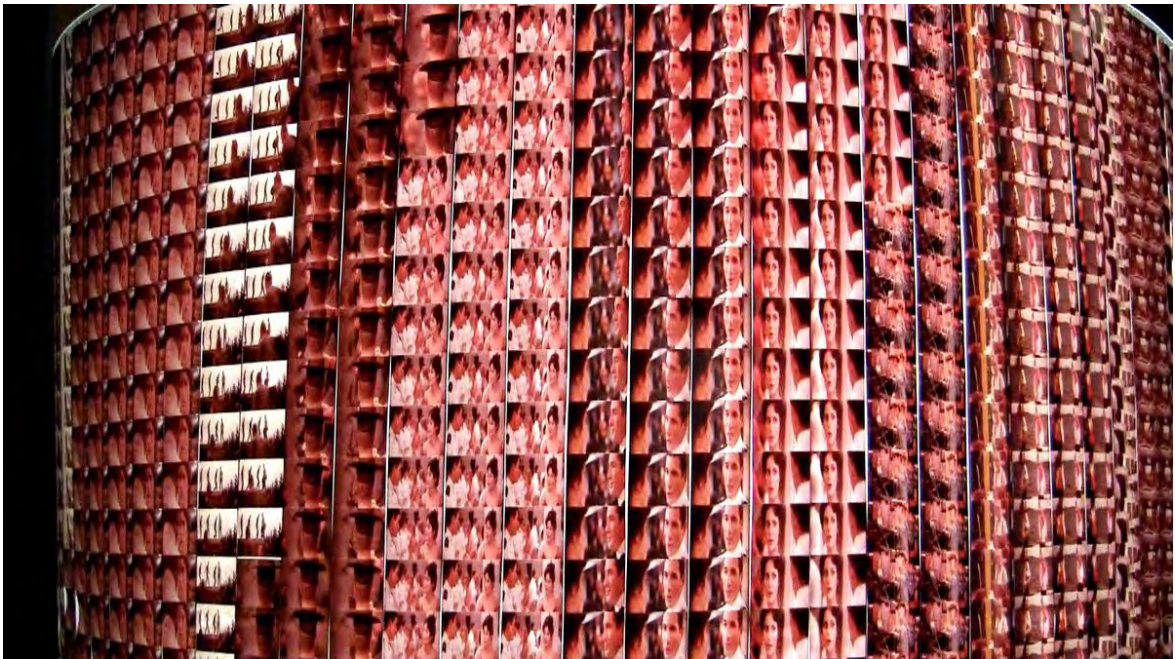
Dyer's newest artistic endeavor turns the tactile joys of the zoetrope into a fully immersive experience. He's crafted a Zoetrope Tunnel, a three-dimensional spinning space that allows an animated vision to swallow the viewer whole. Participants enter the space with a flashlight in hand, and proceed to shine a light on a constantly shifting visual environment. You're "essentially moving through the sculptural film," Dyer explains in the video below. Check it out to learn more about his background and upcoming project.

Eric Dyer, Modern Master of the Zoetrope from Creative Capital on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/114912808>

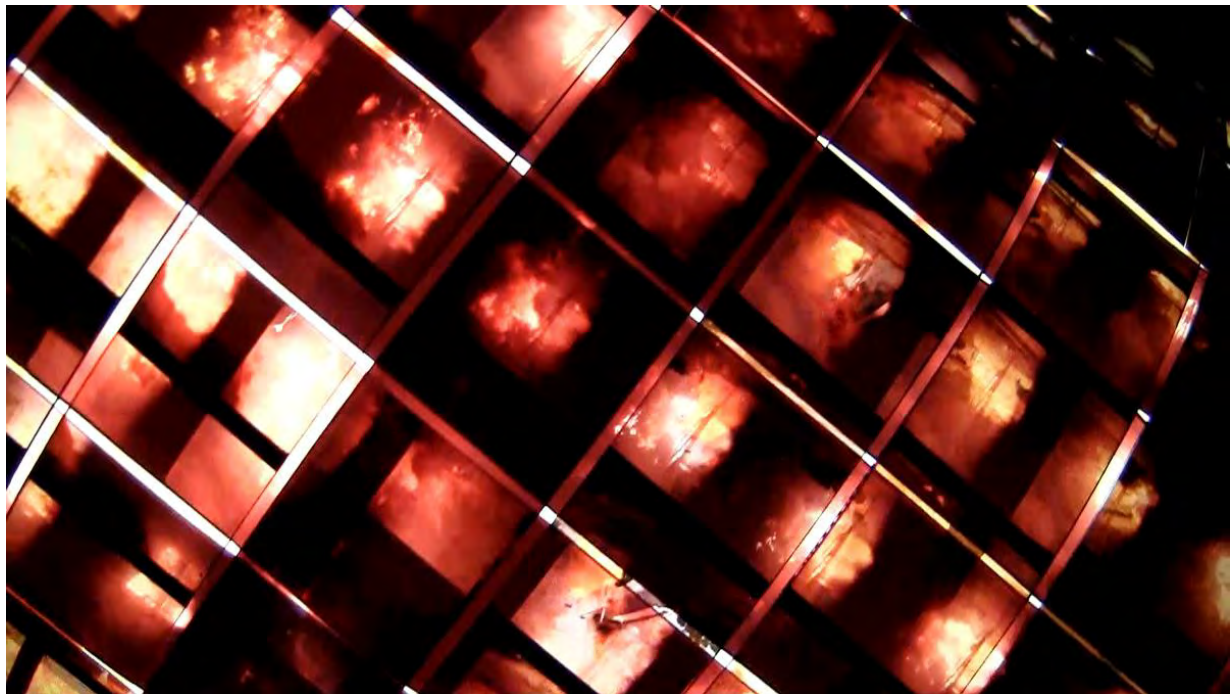
Take a look at stills of Dyer's work below and stay tuned for more information on the Zoetrope Tunnel, seeking museum and institutional partners, to come.



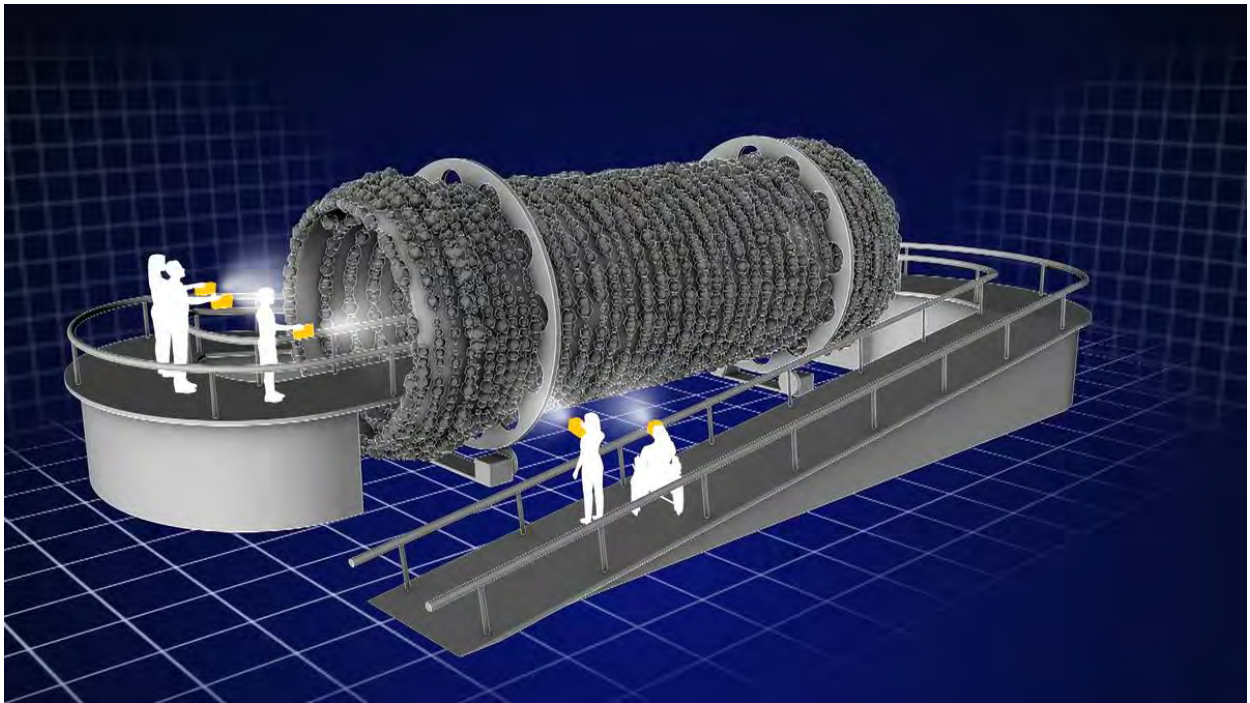




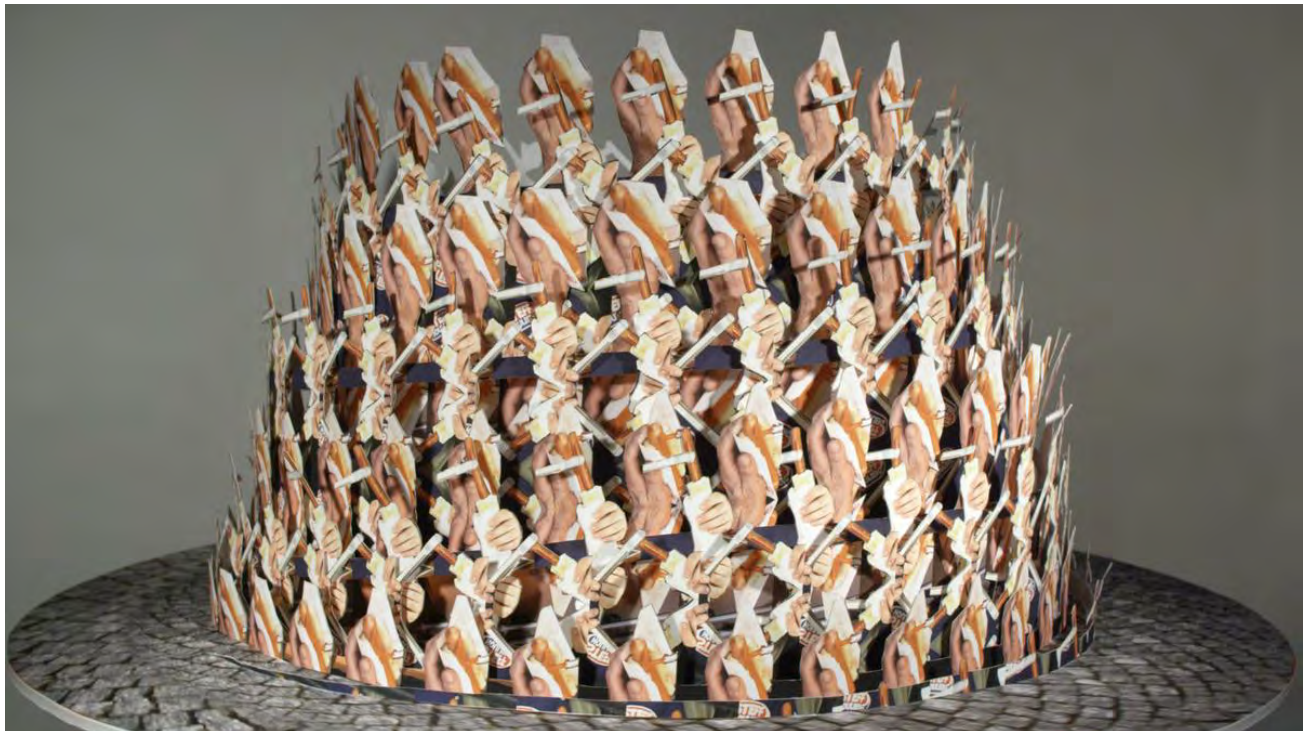


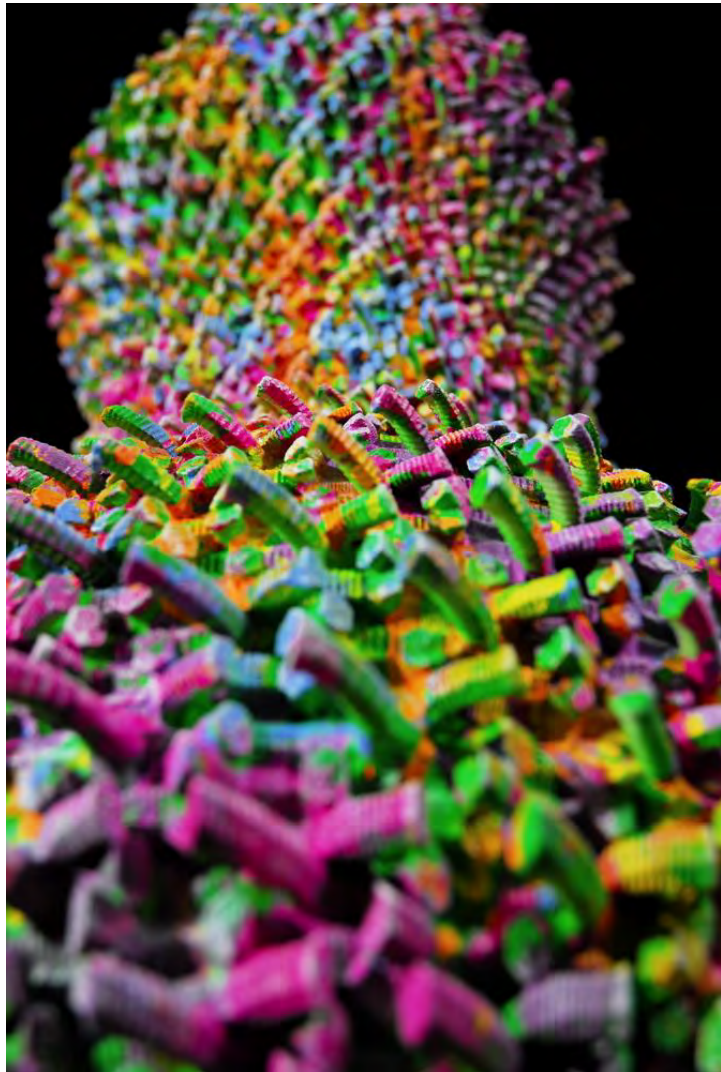








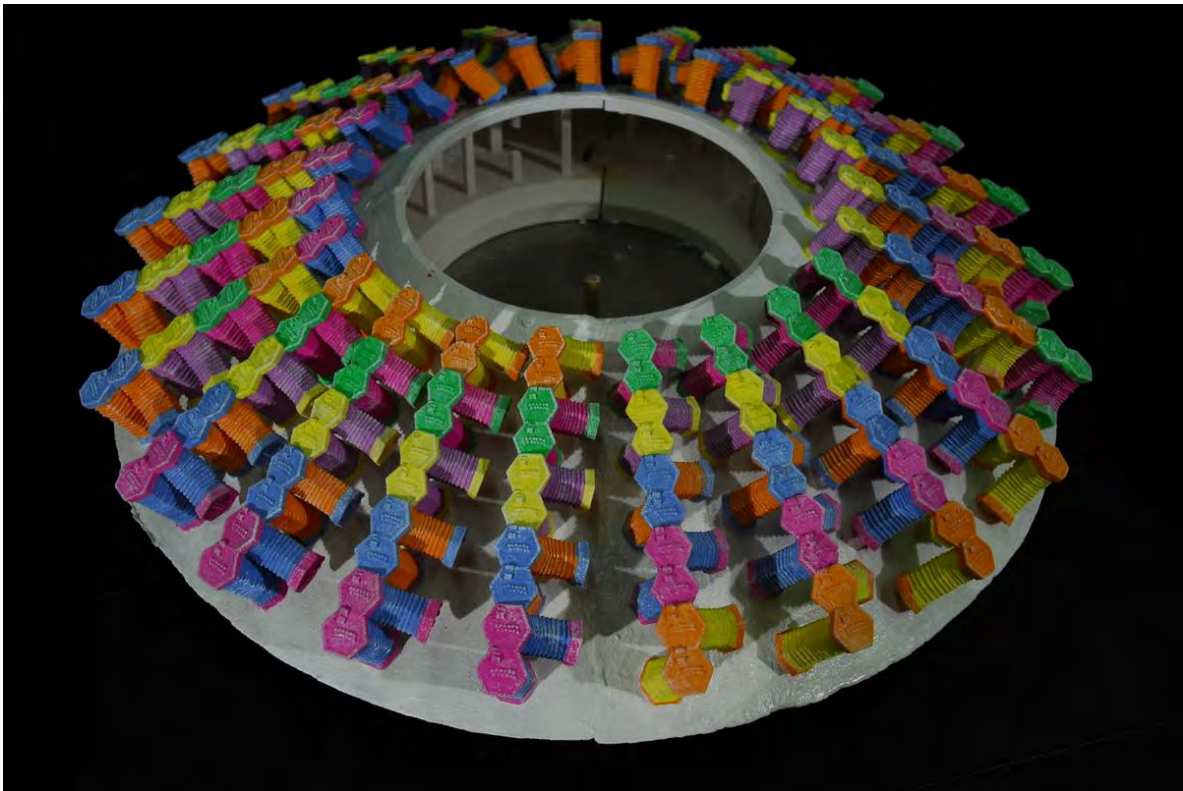






















Gray Stites, Alice. "My Highlights from Moving Image New York 2015." Artsy, March 7, 2015.  
[https://www.artsy.net/post/alice\\_gray\\_stites-my-highlights-from-moving-image-new-york](https://www.artsy.net/post/alice_gray_stites-my-highlights-from-moving-image-new-york)

FEATURED BY ARTSY

# My Highlights from Moving Image New York 2015

ALICE GRAY STITES

MARCH 7, 2015

*My Selection:*



Ranu Mukherjee  
*Home and the World*, 2015  
Gallery Wendi Norris

**Ranu Mukherjee**, *Home and the World*, 2015, at Gallery Wendi Norris

The evolution of the notion of home, as site and symbol, shapes the narrative of several intriguing works being featured at Moving Image New York 2015. Ranu Mukherjee's *Home and the World* is a hybrid film about hybrid conditions: being real and virtual, rooted and homeless, bound by the past and



present, between life and death and nature and artifice. The animated forms of a porch railing fall, dissolving into leaf forms, while shadowy figures emerge and disappear, like ghosts leaving or living in this place. Mukherjee's film includes elements from *Ghare-Baire*(1984), a noted Indian film about female independence, further emphasizing transformation—of identity, of relationships, of the built and natural environment—as a central theme.



Héctor Zamora  
*O Abuso da História*, 2014  
Luciana Brito Galeria

**Hector Zamora**, *O Abuso da História*, 2014, at Luciana Brito Galeria

Known for his often performative explorations of the contemporary urban experience, Hector Zamora's *O Abuso da História* takes place in the barren courtyard of a colonial-era house, where potted palm fronds and other houseplants fly through the open windows (at first seemingly on their own; later, figures are seen heaving the plants out), thudding on the stone ground like bodies. As the courtyard is replenished with the leafy greens that once grew from the ground, Zamora's vision acknowledges the cycles of nature and culture, growth and decay, creation and destruction, in which the central role is humanity's treatment of our world and each other.



**IC-98**

*A View from the Other Side / Näkymä vastarannalta*, 2011

AV-arkki

\$85,000

**IC-98**, *A View from the Other Side / Näkymä vastarannalta*, 2011, at [AV-arkki](#)

IC-98's *A View from the Other Side / Näkymä vastarannalta* is a meticulous hand-drawn HD-animation that brings to life the transformation of a 19th-century public building in Turku, Finland. Seen from the opposing shoreline, a boat passes below the classical, columned structure, invoking the slow, inexorable ravages of years and use. As the lines of the building and its surroundings intertwine and change, the film draws a lyrical, mysterious meditation on time.





**Eric Dyer**  
*Copenhagen Cycles Journey*, 2015  
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

**Eric Dyer**, *Copenhagen Cycles Journey*, 2015, at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

The impact of technology on perception—how what we see changes because of how we see—is the subject of works by artists exploring past and present innovations. Eric Dyer builds contemporary zoetropes, then films these arrangements of tiny, spinning objects, creating dazzling displays of imagery that pay homage to this early form of animation while referencing the exponential onslaught of visual stimulation we experience daily.



**Katia Maciel**  
*Desarvorando [Unfolding Trees]*, 2006/2015  
Zipper Galeria  
\$2,500 - 5,000

**Katia Maciel**, *Desarvorando [Unfolding Trees]*, 2014, at Zipper Galeria

This is a view of a palmtree-topped landscape seen through a multi-paneled window, which slowly shifts its legibility until the treetops and bushes are reconfigured. The window becomes screens within a screen, moving like puzzle pieces, and enacting the manipulation of virtual and physical perception.

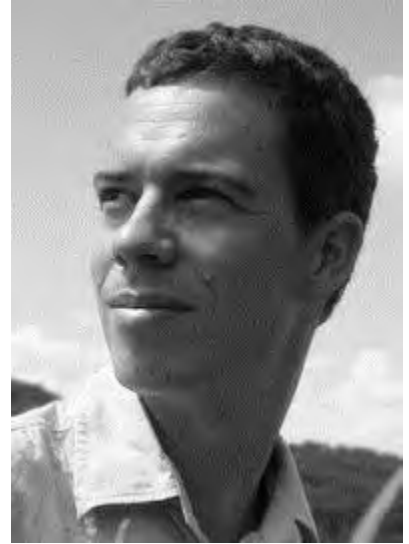


## Moving Pictures:

### An Interview with Eric Dyer

by Jane Blaus, Jason Egner, & Karen Holloway

Upon first glance, you may realize that there is something inherently different about Eric Dyer's animations. It's not quite clay animation, yet not quite digital animation, either. So what is it? Rarely does an artist present a new medium quite like Dyer. His work aims to explore the animation styles developed before the invention of film. Using a zoetrope, a cylindrical device of rotating static images, Dyer brings his sculptures and images to life. Upon exploring his installations and videos, you will come across a word you can't Google: *cinetropole*. Eric's unique way of blending antiquated technology with 3D printing and handmade 2D paper cut-outs spawned a new film medium; a sculpture/machine he calls the "cinetropole."



In this interview, Dyer discusses his drive to work with old cinematic technology, as a way to "reclaim 'trash' and to memorialize a disappearing medium." He also explains the active role of the viewer in his animations, sheds light on the music composition side of his work, and reveals how he pushed through waves of uncertainty and setbacks to bring us something truly innovative.

**Glassworks:** Glassworks is attracted to your work because it is innovative in pushing the boundaries of animation farther than its current static, all-digital state, bringing it back into the realm of the physical and tangible. For our audience, who may be unfamiliar, can you explain the origins and uses of the zoetrope? Also, what attracted you to this art form and lead to the creation of the cinetropole?

**Eric Dyer:** The zoetrope is a pre-cinema optical toy -- a slitted drum with a sequence of animations drawn on its interior. Spin the drum, look through the slits, and the animation pops to life. After many years of working as a freelance animator, music video director, and experimental filmmaker, I ached to get away from the computer screen and get my work off of the TV or cinema screen and into physical spaces. When progressive-scan digital video cameras came out, I discovered that using a fast shutter-speed acts like the zoetrope slits. This allowed me to make films (videos) from drum-less zoetrope-like sculptures. Because I use them to make films, I dub the sculptures "cinetropes".

**GW:** Many of your films center around a cyclical motif, speaking to both the imagery presented, and the cinetropes shape and rotation. How does this theme, along with other interests and outside stimuli, influence and inspire you as an artist?



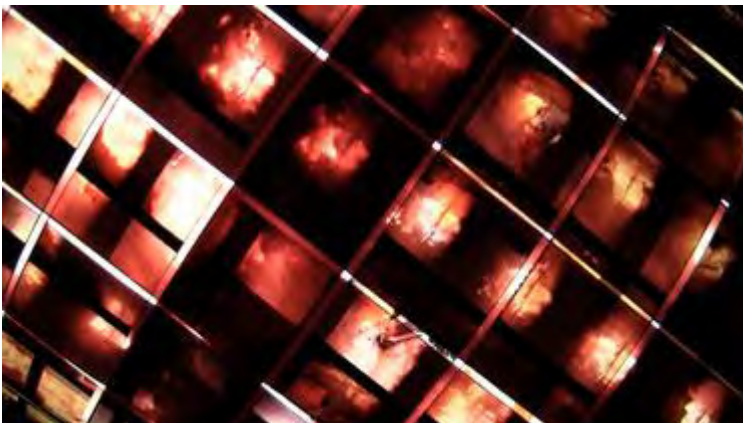
**ED:** Inspiration often comes from living the journey of project production. For example, while making *Copenhagen Cycles*, my family and I took a train trip south through parts of Europe. Berlin holds both monuments from a dark past, like the bombed out cathedral nicknamed the Broken Tooth, and richly creative present. Having the loops of Copenhagen kinetic woven into my thoughts, I naturally considered the destroy-create-destroy cycle humans find themselves continuously reliving. These thoughts, along with the desire to move my process into 3D printing, lead to *The Bellows March*.

**GW:** Your exhibits of works such as *The Bellows March* concurrently display both the physical cinetropes, viewable with the use of shutter-glasses, and the same animations, filmed and shown on screen. How do you feel an audience experiences each type of these animations? What are your desired reactions to each?

**ED:** When I first started making cinetropes, they were a means to the end of making a film. At festivals, audiences were fascinated by the process and wanted to see the sculptures that created what they saw on the screen. This led me to present the project as both a loop of the film and an installation of the cinetropes-- the installations were an exposé of the filmmaking process. Having witnessed audience's reactions to string the animation pop to life on the sculptures, along with loving the intriguing notion of how visitor's explore the work non-linearly and at their own pace has me now starting with the installation and allowing the film to follow at a later production stage. It's been exciting to create the installations for their own sake and also to make films that don't begin with cinema's language as the starting point. I hope I can continue to break new ground in filmmaking by following such unusual creative paths.

**GW:** While we are on the subject of breaking ground, your film, *Copenhagen Cycles*, screened at the Sundance Film Festival as a New Frontier piece in 2007. What was it like for you as an

experimental artist to have your work presented at Sundance?



**ED:** Sundance's roots are in daring indie works, but the festival has become increasingly commercialized by the outside world. New Frontier is a gallery-based section that aims to put an edge back on the festival.



That exhibition lead to unparalleled exposure for my work, and the film-savvy audience really connected with my pre-cinema-based process.

**GW:** Your piece, *Media Archaeology 2110* incorporates 35mm film. In this digital age, it is rare for independent and experimental artists to work with such a time-consuming and expensive medium. What inspired the piece's message and what influenced you to work with this outdated, chemical medium?

**ED:** That film was a commission for the Animasivo festival and conference in Mexico. I'm by no means a purist, but the loss of tactility we're now experiencing with cinemas switching to digital projection weighs on my soul a bit. I visited a friend and fellow filmmaker who owned the wonderful Charles Theater here in Baltimore-- he took me to the projection booths and a storage 'cavern' that was filled with 35mm film trailers. Juxtapose that sight with today's modern, clinical, humanless projection systems and you may well feel the same profound sense of loss I felt. So, the theme for the commissioned works was "Life in the Year 2110". I imagined an Earth flooded by melted icecaps (Waterworldesque, sans Kevin Costner) and scuba-diving archeologists uncovering reels of celluloid-- old 35mm films. The archeologists got their histories mixed up a bit and attempted to view the prints as zoetropes. That's the ambiguous premise for the film-- we are seeing their 35mm film zoetropes, assembled in a variety of ways. It also served as a way to reclaim this 'trash' and to memorialize a disappearing medium.

**GW:** A careful combination of digital technology and handcrafted paper are what set your work apart from the increasingly all-digital norm of animation. Overall, how long does it take to produce one cinetropes animation? What is the most difficult aspect of the process?

**ED:** Because the process involves so many layers of work it's tough to put a time on each cinetropes, but to give you an idea-- 25 cut-paper cinetropes were created for *Copenhagen Cycles* and the project took 18 months. *The Bellows March* is made from 18 3D-printed hand-painted cinetropes-- that project took 3 years. Maintaining a sense of play while piecing together a cohesive concept is the hardest part of every project-- trusting oneself and enduring through stretches of uncertainty are challenges that will never go away.



**GW:** Your film, *The Bellows March*, and the upcoming interactive installation *Short Ride* incorporate 3D printing. These works seem quite different, one being a film and the other involving entry into a rotating tunnel. Can you talk a little about your decision to use this technology for both of these mediums? What are some of the advantages of using 3D printing for this art?

**ED:** Straddling the worlds of installation and film, which have very different languages, I hope is leading to unique results. One incredible aspect of the 3D-printed cinetropes is the bridge that is

created between digital and physical worlds, allowing for art that in many ways reflects the increasingly blurry boarder between virtual and real in the human experience.

**GW:** Now that we know more about your creative thought processes, tell us a bit about who inspires you and why.

**ED:** Paul DeMarinis and Chris Burden for their playfulness and ability to join content and form into an elegant whole. Gregory Barsamian because of his incredibly crafted and artful sculptural zoetropes. Oskar Fischinger because of his excitement about experimental processes in animation.

**GW:** In speaking of playfulness in art, we are reminded of your piece, *Coversong*, which features photography of manhole covers from around the world. Can you tell us what initiated the concept for this work, what kind of manipulation was involved, and how the process differed from your 3D cinetropes?

**ED:** I was teaching a workshop at Connecticut College. The students used a *Copenhagen Cycles*-like process (collaged cut-inkjet-paper cinetropes using video and photos as source material) to represent their town New London. One concept I discussed was 'pre-existing radial and non-radial patterns' -- that is, finding objects that contained patterns that might produce interesting kinetics when spun and shot. They ran with this idea, and I was transfixed by the motion that resulted from a couple manhole covers they shot. Over the next few years I collected photos of manhole covers, and when friends got wind of the project, they sent me photos from their travels. The final process was all digital-- I spun the photos in Adobe AfterEffects at various rates. I liken the film to my 2002 short *Kinetic Sandwich*-- both films reveal secret motion hidden in inanimate objects.

**GW:** We want to ask about your work as professor at University of Maryland Baltimore County. You bring students and symphony orchestras, such as the Brooklyn Philharmonic, together to create music visualizations with animation performances. Can you tell us about the kind of role music plays in working with your students and with your own work? What attracts you to the music selected in your work?

**ED:** Nearly every animator I meet is also a music composer. There's a connection between these practices-- control over tempo, manipulation of each fraction of a second, constructing a work of art from tiny building blocks. The student-symphony collaborative projects have always felt very natural because of this similarity, I believe. The music has always been provided by the orchestra--resulting in a playful experience for the animators. Music selection in my own work varies quite a bit. With *Copenhagen Cycles*, John Adams' Phrygian Gates popped up randomly while I was shooting early tests-- it was perfect... I couldn't escape it... cyclical, minimal, progressive but non-narrative. All the characters and objects in *The Bellows March* are made from concertinas, so I worked with a composer, Nik Phelps, to create a soundtrack that felt like it was emanating directly from the action on the screen. *Coversong* was similar to that-- I wanted the sound to feel like it was being generated by the kinetic forms. We were moving to Los Angeles for my sabbatical year at CalArts. During the stress of packing, my 7-year-old daughter was bored, so I handed her my iPod



and asked her to go around and record sounds she could make with any kind of metal. She did a brilliant job, and I layered and cycled those recording to create the film's soundtrack.

**GW:** As an instructor, what have you learned from your students and colleagues that has influenced or changed your work?

**ED:** One of the most wonderful things about teaching is being constantly immersed in a creative environment with eager enthusiasm about the art form-- it keeps one from ever creating in a bubble, and energizes one's own practice.

Eric Dyer is an award-winning artist, filmmaker, experimental animator, and educator. For more, see [www.ericdyer.com](http://www.ericdyer.com).



Corcoran, Heather. "Spin City: Eric Dyer's Dizzying Portrait of Copenhagen." *Artsy*, September 19, 2014.  
<https://artsy.net/post/editorial-spin-city-eric-dyers-dizzying-portrait-of>

FEATURED BY ARTSY

## Spin City: Eric Dyer's Dizzying Portrait of Copenhagen



In some ways, Eric Dyer's work is unlike anything else on the gallery scene today. In his latest exhibition, "Copenhagen Cycles," at New York's Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, the artist marries some of the art world's most *au courant* practices with a throwback to the 19th century, creating an immersive portrait of a city that is entirely Dyer's own.

The exhibition consists of three main components. The first is a dizzying room of projected videos collaged from the streets of Copenhagen. A street vendor's hand places a sausage in and out of a bun in an endless cycle; couples bike hand-in-hand through spring gardens; and abstracted bicycle wheels swirl like pinwheels.

It is only upon entering the gallery's second space that the source of these images become clear. While kaleidoscopic photographs from the city line the walls, 10 unusual devices sit on pedestals in the



center, each individually lit and featuring its own pair of blinking 3D glasses. What at first appear to be tiny dioramas in the round, are actually an updated take on the pre-cinematic device of the zoetrope, a spinning optical toy once known as the “Wheel of the Devil” that allowed photographs to be transformed into moving images.

The viewer is invited to press a button and put on the glasses and suddenly the exhibition comes alive. As the platters on which Dyer’s elaborate, handmade photo-collage zoetropes (made from intricately cut inkjet prints pasted to foamboard) begin to speed up, a three-dimensional image comes forward, in which bicyclists appear to be riding down city streets and wind turbines swirl—the very images projected in the previous room, created this time to be viewed in a personal screening for the viewer’s eyes only.

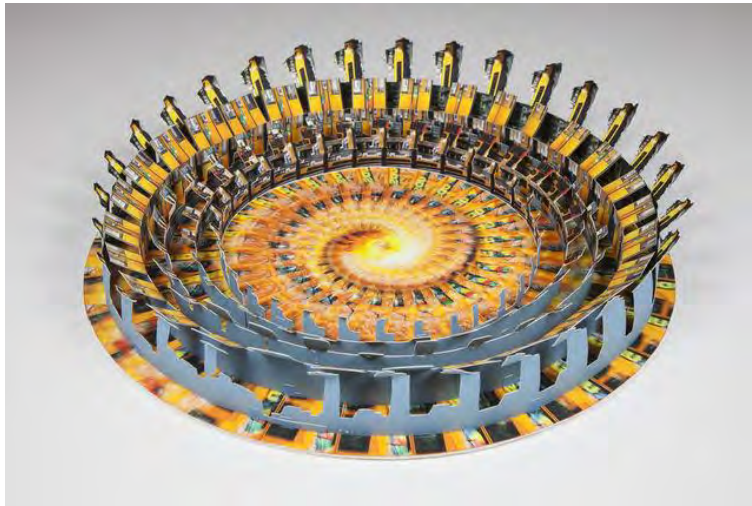
The series began in 2006, when Dyer began riding his bicycle around the city, learning its nooks and crannies by taking videos over the course of eight months. It was originally shown as a film, but it is the zoetrope works that present an immersive vision of the city—and a peek into the filmmaker’s toolbox created by looking back to a largely forgotten technique.

—Heather Corcoran

“Copenhagen Cycles” is on view at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, through Oct. 11th, 2014.



**Eric Dyer**  
*CityBikes (Vertical)*, 2014  
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts  
Contact For Price



**Eric Dyer**  
*Movia*, 2014  
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts  
Contact For Price



**Eric Dyer**  
*Kanaler*, 2014  
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts  
Contact For Price





**Eric Dyer**  
*Swan Spirals*, 2014  
 Ronald Feldman Fine Arts  
 Contact For Price



**Eric Dyer**  
*Movia (Horizontal)*, 2014  
 Ronald Feldman Fine Arts  
 Contact For Price

# PERVASIVE ANIMATION



EDITED BY  
SUZANNE BUCHAN



eric dyer: bicycling futurist, cinetropist, pixellator

Animation festival audiences were startled in 2006 by *Copenhagen Cycles* (2006), a film that re-animates footage shot from a bicycle along the baroque streets and canals of Copenhagen. This is no ordinary 'rotoscope trope', one of myriad techniques which can translate live-action into frame-by-frame animation. Nor is it a photocopied time collage like Virgil Widrich's *Fast Film* (2003). Dyer has printed, cut-out, and mounted his captured frames to build elaborate multiplane zoetropes which he then re-constitutes in real time by shooting continuously through the shutter slits. The result has a dizzy push-pull effect, sandwiching the animator's obsessive concern for that privileged instance between video's dogged pursuit of real-time documentation. It is a beautiful, multilayered tone poem that sways in and out of abstraction. The film is a mesmerizing, well-edited, satisfying work, complemented by composer John Adams's *Phrygian Gates* (1977). Dyer cut his teeth in the world of music video, TV, and experimental film<sup>11</sup> before embarking on the meta-cinematricks of *Copenhagen*. At the Platform Festival of 2007 in Portland, Oregon, he installed three of

the “cine-tropes,”<sup>12</sup> with simultaneous live video feeds projected on screens, which surrounded the viewer within a 270-degree cyclorama. By displaying the concrete machinery of illusion, simultaneously driving an environmental, cinematic experience Dyer fundamentally advances the staid gallery practice of video installation. Instead of a black box presentation he creates a performance which delightfully joins the nineteenth century to the twenty-first, and lets the viewer compare self-contained zoetrope space with a video surround.<sup>13</sup>

The title of Dyer’s latest completed work, *The Bellows March* (2009), suggests the energy-sustaining power of injected air (See Figure 11.2). It uses an array of high-tech processes to ratchet up animation engineering and perception into a scientific fantasy on morphology. First, he designs and animates CGI figures which wiggle and contort through evolutionary and scalar phases. Many are designed using an accordion motif recalling a Slinky,<sup>14</sup> the perpetually loping children’s toy. These shapes are sculpted by 3D laser-cutting printers<sup>15</sup> to achieve an exacting microminiaturization, then are hand-painted to achieve chromatic transformations. The figures are arranged on revolving lazy Susan platters, often stacked high like elaborate multi-tiered wedding cakes—a solid mass similar in structure to Barsamian’s open helical arrangements.

Dyer employs staff and students of the Image Research Center at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where he has been a professor since 2004, to render each phase of the production. The final vision, where everything springs to life in real space, is achieved by LCD shutter glasses



Figure 11.2

Looking through goggles, illustrating a *Bellows March* cinetropo, 2009, at rest and in motion. Photo courtesy of Eric Dyer.



similar to those used in commercial features with two important differences: the lenses blink simultaneously, not alternating left to right, and the speed can be fine-tuned to synchronize with the rotating platter. (Symmetrical blinks refresh both eyes to successive phases of the moving diorama, while asymmetrical blinks force each eye to view alternating 2D stereo images in rapid succession to simulate 3D.)<sup>16</sup> The controllers driving Dyer's special lenses are prototypes, at the cutting edge of expensive experimentation.

The optimal viewing conditions require intense light flooding the platter and a close proximity to the spinning sculpture (about one to two feet) to marvel at the tiny objects mobilized into mysterious actions. It is a lapidary, hyper-realistic phenomenon, similar to Barsamian's, of actual objects defying expectations by moving in synthetic time. The spectacle is enormously complex, as hoards of life forms swarm and wiggle through their permutations in variable perspective: the viewer's eye may pan from an elevation view up to a bird's eye view as if airborne. And the cycle is consistently seamless. At this intimate proximity, one is tempted to reach out to pick up one of these squirming creatures to feel its form and bristling texture, which appear to be pulsating in impossible, random rhythms. As with the flat bottom panel of the traditional zoetrope drum, often embellished with spiraling designs, Dyer's sculptural masses reference biological development based on the Fibonacci Sequence, the essence of the golden spiral by which some flora and fauna grow without altering their shape.<sup>17</sup> Although using different methods to achieve intermittency the visual experience is similar to Barsamian's but there are distinct differences. Dyer's sculpture, like the photography of *Copenhagen Cycles*, is flawlessly rendered, while Barsamian's is idiosyncratic, bearing his gestural hand-print; Dyer develops his cinetropes into developmental chapters while Barsamian's pieces are stand-alone; Dyer's work thus seems scientific, while Barsamian's explores the subjectivity of the unconscious.

As with *Copenhagen Cycles*, Dyer has translated his sculptural inventions of *The Bellows March* into an exquisite, eponymous film. The spectacle is based on all 18 platters blended into a delirious life-cycle narrative. Beginning with jaunty marching concertinas, hinting at Oskar Fischinger's cigarettes,<sup>18</sup> yet here undercut by the stark, metallic nightmare of jack-booted fascism, *Bellows* ultimately transforms into a polychrome Garden of Eden. Emerging from primordial ooze, writhing buds become larvae, then flowering forms, which dance in complex patterns before resolving into ranks of abstract tubes and semaphores. The gaudy, pastel palette (hot pink and lime green) reminds one that this menacing hybrid species is purely synthetic, with slight chance of survival in a real jungle. The off-kilter 'squeezebox' music of Nik Phelps adds a mood of unsettling whimsy.

Dyer the sculptor is constantly planning ideal settings for the cinetropes, such as improvisational 'happenings' with live musicians. Dyer the

filmmaker sees his work as an effort to extend his “waterfall of loops and spirals”<sup>19</sup> into a linear narrative structure. He says his *Copenhagen* cinetropes were “thrown together quickly” as a means to an end, but with *Bellows*, sculpture and film attained equal footing: “separate experiences, different audiences.”<sup>20</sup> Capturing a concrete animation spectacle with video, either as a 2D document for a website (viz. Barsamian) or for theatrical projection, may seem a limitation as it is indistinguishable from ‘stop motion’ animation on film. This push-pull contradiction between an autonomous sculptural animation and a video translation is an issue affecting duplication and marketing too. Artists are confronting the choice of selling unique objects and small editions to elite collectors and institutions, or distributing short films within an unstable yet potentially universal network of viewers.

Dyer’s current project, *Short Ride*, now in development with the National Film Board of Canada, may address the audience issue by allowing an interactive, open-ended walk-through navigation in a controlled animated environment. He has designed a giant cinetope, a 20-foot long spinning tunnel, which visitors will traverse on a footbridge wearing shutter glasses to view spiraling, sculptural forms. The film version will be shot in stereo 3D which will be edited by Dyer and projected using synchronous LCD shutter glasses, the same technology as mainstream 3D films such as *Avatar* and *Hugo*. Dyer hopes the substantial cost of his experimentation will soon abate so the actual sculpture may be seen more widely. His hopeful optimism extends to medical research for a cure to his degenerative eye disease, retinitis pigmentosa.<sup>21</sup> This artist who has conceived and produced a continually evolving, ever more complex, concrete animation project, increasingly has trouble viewing its full 3D effect. Where Dyer and Barsamian design and build kinetic, sculptural objects that occupy unique gallery spaces, to be viewed in the round, Bill Brand, long before, discovered and exploited another radically primitive and obvious spatial context for viewing concrete animation.



# RE-IMAGINING ANIMATION

## THE CHANGING FACE OF THE MOVING IMAGE

- 01 TEACHING MOVING IMAGE CULTURE:  
PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS
- 02 THE POLITICS OF PRACTICE
- 03 ANIMATION RE-IMAGINED
- 04 'OBJECT REACT'
- 05 FROM IDEAS TO IDIOMS

PAUL WELLS  
JOHNNY HARDSTAFF





Wells, Paul and Johnny Hardstaff. "Reclaiming Animation History II." *Re-imagining Animation: the Changing Face of the Moving Image*. Lausanne: AVA Publishing, 2008. 111-13.

# RECLAIMING ANIMATION HISTORY II

In Eric Dyer's **Copenhagen Cycles**, a cyclist travels through a fantastical, collaged reconstruction of Denmark's capital city. The combination of the pre-cinema zoetrope with fast-shutter digital video technology explores the kinetics of Copenhagen life and plays out an important relationship between proto-animation and post-photographic animation. It suggests that the hand-crafted processes of the pre-cinema era are directly echoed in the craft techniques of the contemporary animator using digital technologies. Dyer spent eight months in Copenhagen on a Fulbright Fellowship. He rode around on a bicycle to collect source footage of the city's moving elements, printed and cut the sequences, and then built around 25 cinetropes (zoetrope-like sculptures).

**Copenhagen Cycles** is composed entirely of unprocessed shots of the spinning sculptures. Dyer describes working on the project: 'I wanted to work away from the computer screen, get back to physical processes, and also move animation away from flatness and into real space. I began by creating zoetrope-like sculptures registered with strobe lights, but was unhappy with the flickering effect of the strobe. I realised that using a fast shutter speed on a progressive scan DV camera could also register the sequence parts. This discovery was especially thrilling to me, because this process meant I could create installation art and make films.'

## TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Dyer's working imperatives challenge the viewer to evaluate how the images are created. By operating as an installation, the work provides a visual parallel between traditional and new forms of animation – one creating and reflecting upon the other.

'The **Copenhagen Cycles** installation is really an exposé of the process used to create the film of the same name. I find that audiences are very interested in how the film was created. Many think that the images are computer-generated and effected – when I tell them the film is composed of raw, unprocessed footage of the spinning cinetropes, they are amazed and become very curious about the process. It should not really matter to an audience how the film was made – it should stand on its own, regardless of process, but it seems we have already acquired a kind of quiet disinterest or disbelief in computer-generated work – it seems like it is only a trick – soulless. The reaction to **Copenhagen Cycles** made me really want to show the process, show the objects I created to make the film, and to show those objects in action, live. In the layout of the installation I made sure audiences encountered the live video feed of the spinning cinetropes (the animation) before revealing the process – an attempt to get the audience/viewer to question the process before understanding it.'



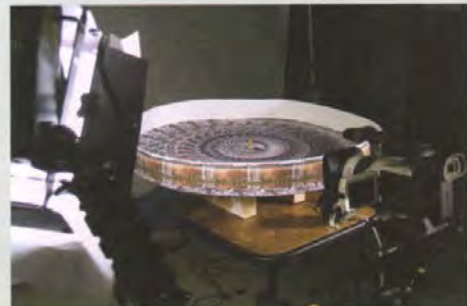
Eric Dyer creates cinetropes of images of Copenhagen, cutting out innumerable shots to mount on a three-dimensional zoetrope-style system.



Like Saint-Pierre, this kind of work recognises a lost aspect – not merely of animation and animation as an art, but of the very experience of engaging with animation as a form. Dyer adds: 'It is interesting to look at animation history and see how technologies heavily influenced the aesthetic of the works created. Today, one can sit in the cinema or in front of the TV and say, "that was created in Maya" or "that was created in After Effects", for example. Each piece of software and each tool system forms its own grammar through which we express ourselves. I am interested in creating with tool systems of my own design, to create new expressive frameworks.

'When motion picture film was invented, animation moved to the screen. Quickly forgotten were the zoetropes, phenakistascopes and praxinoscopes. That sort of animation was a tool system with its own grammar, one of loops and spirals and tactility. With the creation of **Copenhagen Cycles**, I have dug up that old grammar and re-explored its expressive potential. Thanks to the latest DV technology, I have also been able to bring it to the screen. Because of real-time, hand-held DV is used to 'see' the moving elements on the cinetropes; intuition and spontaneity also become part of the process, itself unusual for animation.'

Dyer's judicious use of contemporary animation in reclaiming the older pioneering grammar of moving image practice enables the viewer to embrace the experience of 'seeing again' while 'seeing afresh'. In foregrounding technique alongside content, Dyer reveals Copenhagen in a completely different way than any travelogue or documentary could. Dyer's work bestrides cinema and gallery, time and technology, animation and animus, and effectively re-imagines animation through its long, lost past.



Dyer shoots his revolving cinetropes on a DV camera, creating a record of spinning loops and action cycles.







Spinning cinetropes  
 suggest models of motion  
 in a gallery environment.



Dyer's cinetropes  
 simultaneously operate as  
 abstract forms and specific  
 types of documentary record,  
 both of the environment  
 itself and the process  
 of what might be termed  
 'archaic' technology.