



**EXPLODING GALAXIES**

**The Art of David Medalla**

Guy Brett



## **Biokinetics**

The movement known as Kinetic Art is in need of a reappraisal. It is often treated as an interlude or sideshow in recent art which has sunk back into history without ever entering, as terms like Pop Art or Minimal Art have done, into discussions of the mainstream of art. This is partly because there is very little of this work on view today. Museums favour the static. It is only very occasionally that one can get a glimpse of the new sensibility, in the true meaning of a new formation of the senses, which was introduced into art by the use of actual movement and internal sources of light. When one does, it is always a revelation. In the work of the best artists, movement emerges as a fully-articulated and inflected language, able to range from sublime beauty and tender sensuality to the carnivalesque. The art called 'kinetic' was simultaneously a technical development in the use of materials and media, and a new stage in the investigation of certain problematics which have always haunted art: particularly the relationship between movement and rest, light and dark, matter and energy.

As such, kinetic art could be interpreted either within a narrow framework of technique, or with a much broader focus. Both are valid. The narrow focus defines kineticism's specific characteristics as an art movement but is liable to dogmatism and a literal interpretation of the nature of movement. The broader focus is particularly pertinent to David Medalla, enabling one to see the relationship between his 'biokinetics' and the long-term concerns of his art as a whole.

Museums have only grudgingly accepted kinetic art not only because it makes unusual technical and conservational demands, but for conceptual reasons too. Museums (together with galleries and the commercial system of the art world) are themselves an expression of a static conception of seeing and understanding and they impose this upon everything in their care. Since, in its broader sense, 'kineticism' is a way of knowing reality as a process of continuous change, it implies a new take upon all phenomena, including the past history of art, and including art works which have always been presented as static entities. When the emphasis shifts to change and 'process', the work itself is redefined in many senses. Ancient sculptures and paintings, for example, are seen as part of performative ritual practices, not as self-sufficient monuments. The relationship between the conceiving of a work, its execution, and its final exposure in public is seen as a process. The dichotomy, in the western tradition, between rough sketch and finished work may be contrasted with other notions, like the fusion of the premeditated and the spontaneous in Chinese calligraphy, for example. In

20th century art, Matisse's transition from the brush to cut paper in his last works, Mondrian's continuous rearrangement of panels of primary colour on his studio walls, Schwitters's *Merzbau*, Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, Klee's "taking a line for a walk", Pollock's action-painting: all of these episodes could be included within a general kinetic concept of an evolution in modern art towards overcoming rigidity, lightening the material element, moving "from mass towards motion", as Moholy-Nagy expressed it.

Moholy-Nagy's experiments with light, transparency and movement, Duchamp's optical machines, Gabo's vibrating wire, Calder's mobiles – the examples usually given in attempts to trace a genealogy for kinetic art as such – would then fit within a larger picture of experiment. 'Orders' in art history tend to be linear and chronological. But movements can also be understood in the way they spread out sideways or in all directions. The term 'kinetic art' then comes to represent one nexus in shifting and overlapping fields of experiment which characterised the 1950s and 1960s. The 'kinetic' nexus, strictly defined, incorporates work connected with visual and perceptual research, processes of material transformation, use of the elements light, fire, electricity and magnetism, and so on. But beside and around it, touching it at many points, were other sorts of nexus: concrete poetry, non-composition or random composition, Fluxus events, happenings, spectator participation, neo-Dada, assemblage. Monochrome painting, for example, shared a permeable boundary with kinetic art in the 1950s and 1960s, a basic feature of the work of Yves Klein, Aubertin, Soto, Otero, Fontana, Calderara, Li Yuan-chia, von Graevenitz, Takis, Camargo, Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and extending to Medalla's foam sculptures and mud machines. The monochrome was expressive of the *tabula rasa*, the degree zero, out of which the new space-time would arise. All in all, a more sophisticated understanding is needed of the way in which ideas are 'in the air' at any given moment – an understanding, in fact, of the kind of 'meta', or even 'telepathic', communication implied by this common phrase.

When it is considered in this way, one is powerfully struck by two features of this fluid scene of experimentation: its internationalism and its interdisciplinarity. A list of both major and minor figures would include people born in widely different parts of the world, with a high proportion of these artists coming from Third World countries. The kinetic nexus was particularly cosmopolitan. Its origins cannot be associated with any one country, especially not the USA whose local conditions have always been considered (probably exaggeratedly) so important in the formation of Pop Art or Minimal Art. In fact, after the Second World War, kineticism was one powerful focus for the aspirations felt by young artists from colonised, 'developing' or marginalised countries to be 'absolutely modern'. It was the means of catching up and then surpassing the development of modernism in Europe, and of assuming the right to speak in visionary, utopian, even cosmic terms. The more profound the artist, the more these 'universal' terms incorporated the particularities of local experience and







Signals Newsletter. Left: special Camargo issue, vol 1 no 5, December 1964 - January 1965. Right: 'Soundings Two' special issue, vol 1 no 8, June - July 1965.

structures. In other cases a generalised notion of painting was not a problem because what the experimenter had discovered was a new relationship between nature, technology and the science of optics.

The 'Robot Painter' of the Israeli artist P.K. Hoenich is an example of the latter. Hoenich devised a system of mobile reflectors to work directly with sunlight, producing beautiful projections on the walls of a darkened room. In doing so he renewed the wonder of sunlight in contemporary terms as a fusion of macroscopic/microscopic imagery. Hoenich's work is forgotten today because only those parts of kinetic art which could be assimilated within the conventional limits of the art world have been remembered. He himself had little interest in that set-up, regarding his work not as a personal expression but as a means, "a gift to artists all over the world", as he wrote to David Medalla when Medalla featured his work in *Signals Newsletter* in 1965.<sup>1</sup>

Some artists arrived at a kinetic art through a rigorous investigation of the pictorial or sculptural order, consciously working forward from positions reached by Mondrian, Malevich, or Albers. The Brazilians Lygia Clark's and Hélio Oiticica's, and the Venezuelan Soto's, discoveries were of this kind. For them, the pictorial order was a

kind of paradigm of the cosmic order.<sup>2</sup> Takis's invention of the *Telemagnetic* sculpture, 1959, and Medalla's 'auto-creative art', beginning with his *Bubble Machines*, 1963, on the other hand, were in the nature of a sudden breakthrough, a fresh and unprecedented reformulation in aesthetic terms of the relationship between matter and energy. But these 'leaps' also involved a summing-up of previous pictorial and sculptural history, as will become clear from the evolution of Medalla's own 'biokinetics'.

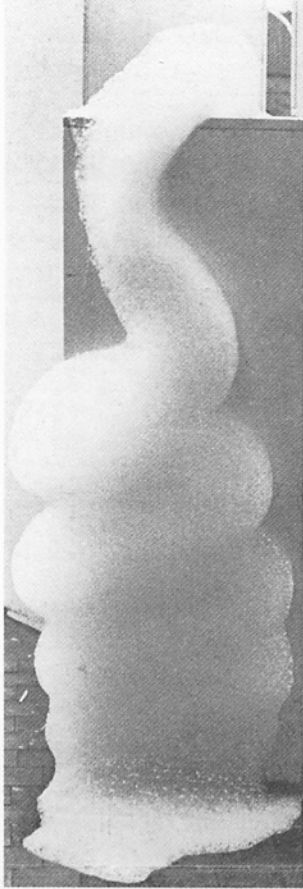


David Medalla had spent the early part of the 1960s travelling between England and France. He made his European landfall at Marseilles in March 1960. After visiting

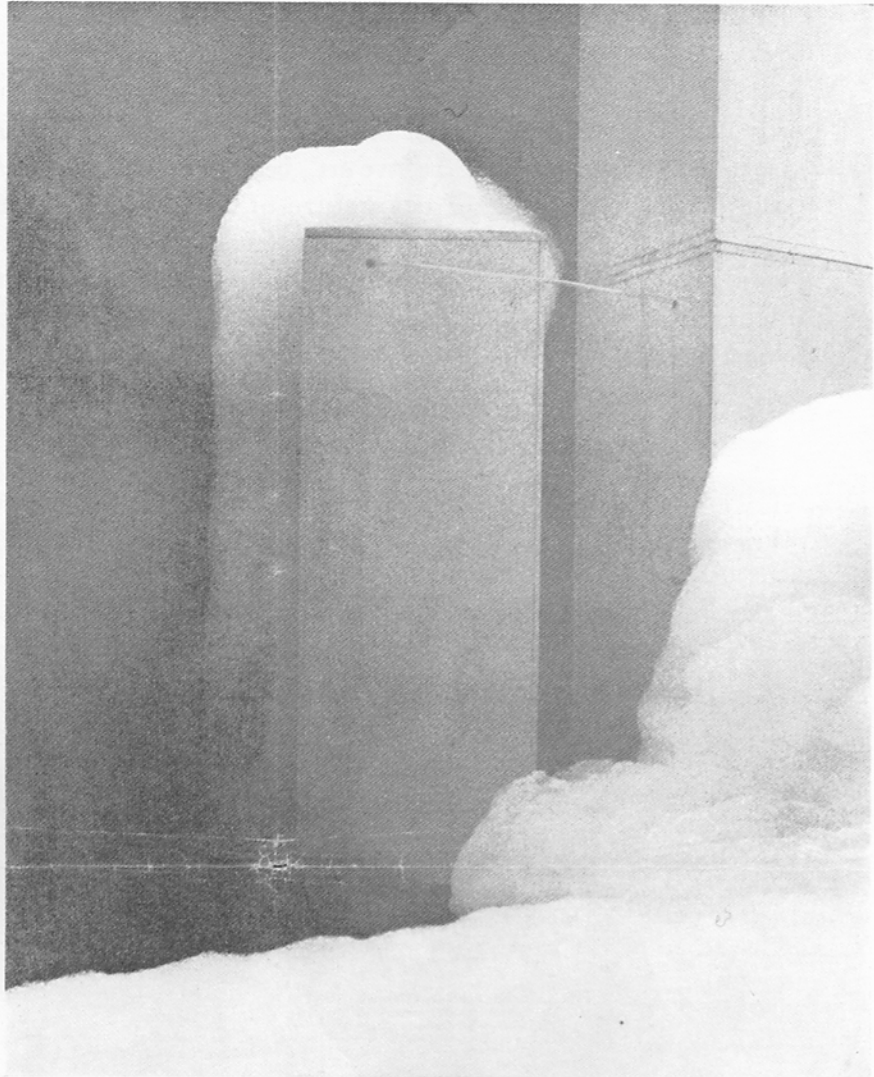
Mailing Signals Newsbulletin, Cornwall Gardens, 1964. Clockwise: GB, Sergio Camargo, Paul Keeler, Christopher Walker, DM, Gustav Metzger.







**DAVID MEDALLA: CLOUD CANYONS:  
BUBBLE MOBILES 1964.**  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAY PERRY.



"... the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine... The old dualism of mind and matter... seems likely to disappear, not through matter becoming in any way more shadowy or insubstantial than heretofore, or through mind becoming resolved into a function of the working of matter, but through substantial matter resolving itself into a creation and manifestation of mind...  
A soap bubble with irregularities and corrugations on its surface is perhaps the best representation, in terms of simple and familiar materials, of the new universe revealed to us by the theory of relativity."

—Sir James Jeans.

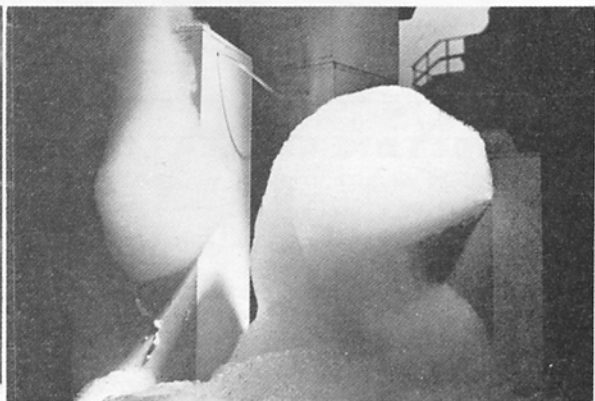
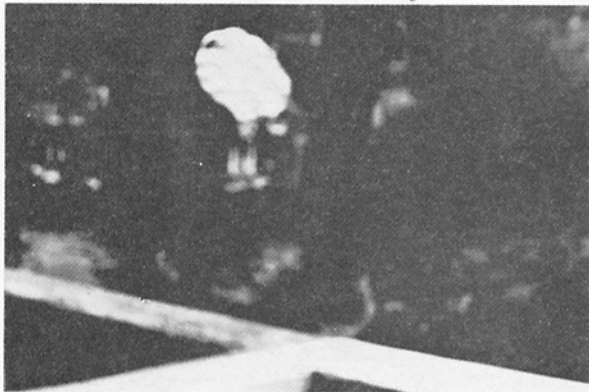
"IF YOU LIKE I SHALL GROW  
IRREPROACHABLY GENTLE,  
NOT A MAN, BUT A CLOUD  
IN TROUSERS. . ."

Vladimir Mayakovsky.

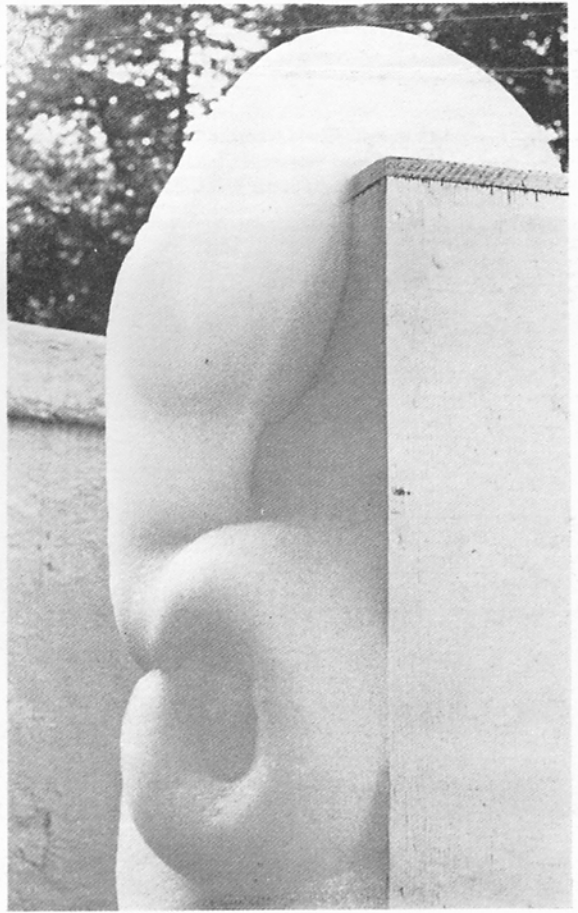
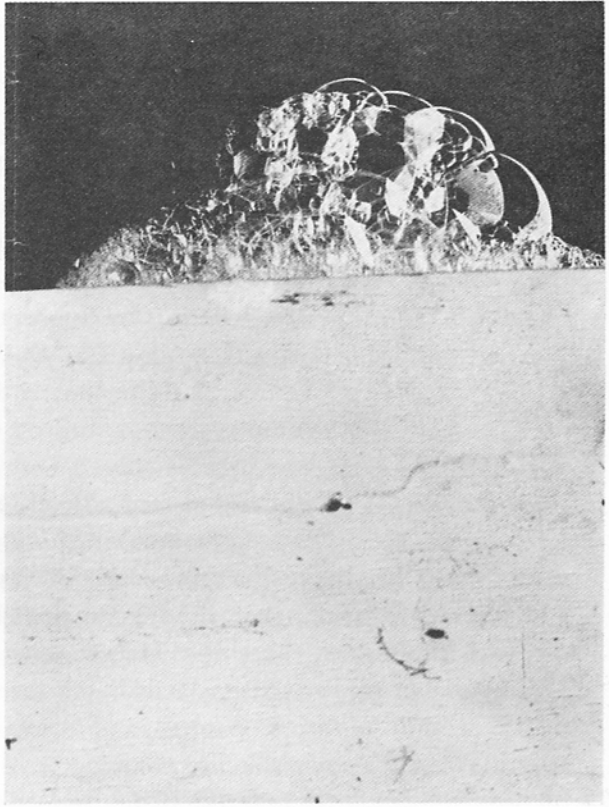
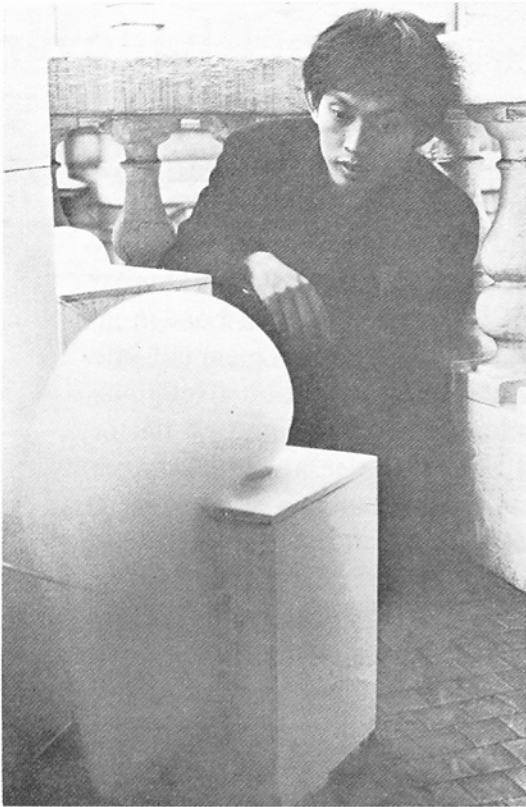
With the five bubble machines exhibited this year in London David Medalla has achieved a leading position in art. A quarter million forms continuously changing, reflecting, growing, disintegrating. Random activity is at present among the most crucial questions in art. Apart from other contributions his works have made, Medalla has shown conclusively that random activity in material/transforming art is capable of achieving not only the most complex forms and motions but also an aesthetic content of the highest order.

—Gustav Metzger.

Bubbles in flight over Cornwall Gardens



Portrait of David Gates de Medalla by Clay Perry





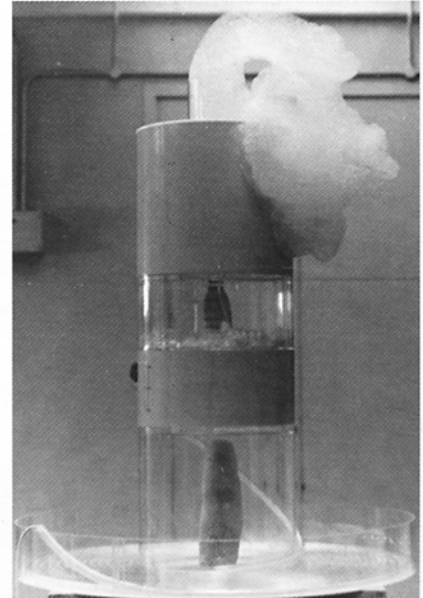
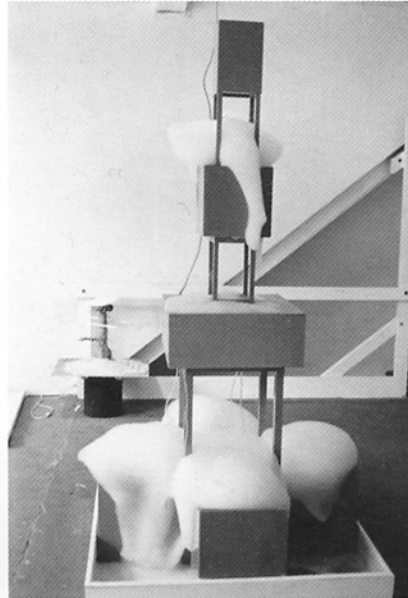
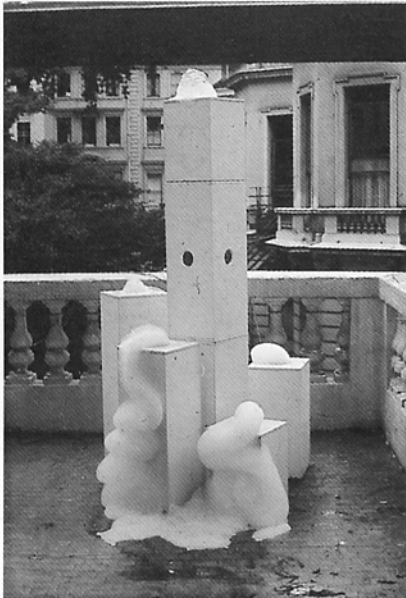


For Smokey, the First Bubble Machine, Paris, 1963.

Paris and staying there to the end of his three-month French visa, he crossed to England. He was writing and painting with equal emphasis, and he continued to give the occasional performance as he had done in Manila and New York (Medalla's first performance in Paris was in the theatre of the Raymond Duncan Academy, run by the brother of Isadora Duncan). In London he painted the church of St. Mary Magdalene near his room in Little Venice, Paddington, and in 1962 was working on a religious composition, including a madonna, after moving to a flat in Islington he shared with Paul Keeler. Keeler, a young ex-actor who had started a small business priming canvases, was also eager to organise exhibitions. In 1963 he arranged Medalla's first

exhibition in England of paintings and drawings at the Mayflower Barn at Seer Green and Jordans in Buckinghamshire, an ancient building made from the timbers of the original Mayflower, the ship which took the Pilgrim Fathers to the New World. During one of his Paris visits Medalla saw for the first time the *Telemagnetic* sculpture of Takis, the 'vibration' paintings of Soto, and Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* (his paintings using women's bodies as 'living brushes'). They made a profound impression on him, whose effects began to be felt immediately. 'Soundings 1', a group show Paul

Left to right: *Cloud Canyons no 2*, ensemble of bubble machines, London, 1964. Collection of the artist.  
*Cloud Messenger*, bubble machine, Indica Gallery, London, 1967. Collection of the artist.  
 Megha Sutta: *The Cloud Discourse*, bubble machine, 1971. Collection of the artist.

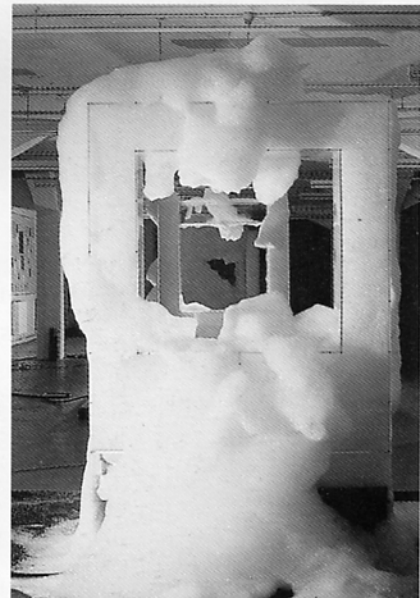
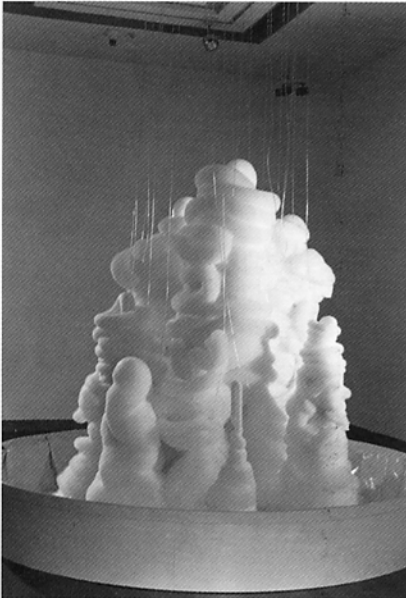


Keeler organised at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 1964, included pieces by Soto, Takis and Pol Bury alongside works in many different styles. More encounters were made in Paris: the white wood reliefs of Camargo and, through him, the work of other Brazilians living in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and Mira Schendel. Medalla began making his own kinetic experiments in 1963 and exhibited his first *Bubble Machine* and *Smoke Machine* in 'Structures Vivantes: Mobiles/Images', effectively the first survey of kinetic and optical art held in Britain, organised by Paul Keeler at the Redfern Gallery in 1964.<sup>3</sup>

A group of likeminded artists began to coalesce. Keeler and Medalla moved to a spacious flat in Cornwall Gardens, South Kensington, and the Centre for Advanced Creative Study was founded there in 1964 by Keeler, Medalla, artists Gustav Metzger and Marcelo Salvadori, Christopher Walker and myself. *Signals Newsletter* (its title inspired by a series of tensile sculptures by Takis) was started, edited and designed by Medalla, and Signals London became the name of the group, and of the 'showroom', when it was moved, in late 1964, to a large four-storey building at the corner of Wigmore Street and Welbeck Street in central London. The building was made available by Keeler's father, an optical instruments manufacturer.

By the time they joined Signals, Salvadori's and Metzger's interests were already clearly defined. Salvadori, who was born in Florence and came to England in

Left to right: **Cloud Canyons no 10**, bubble machines, 1985. Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery, New Zealand. **Cloud Canyons no 11**, bubble machines, 1989. Installed at "The Other Story" exhibition, Hayward Gallery, London. Collection of the artist. **Cloud Gates**, ensemble of four bubble machines, 1994. Installed at Medalla's exhibition, 'The Secret History of the Mondrian Fan Club', 55 Gee Street, London, 1994-5. Collection of the artist.





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**Cloud Towers: Homage to Lu Xun**, bubble machines forming part of **Peoples' Participation Pavilion**, Medalla's and John Dugger's contribution to Documenta 5, Kassel, 1972. Behind the bubble machines are scrolls with poems by Lu Xun. On the roof of the pavilion, inflatable by Graham Stevens.

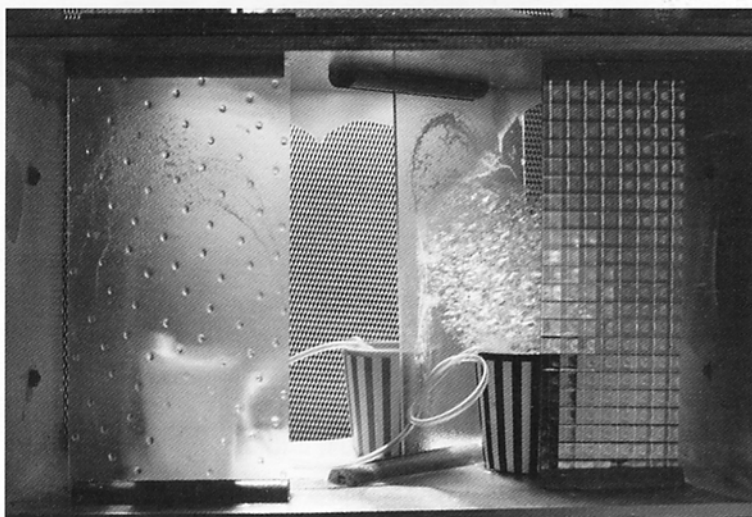
1955, was looking for a close collaboration between artists and scientists based on the model of a research institute (the original name of the group was his). He thought of his own works using plastics and foam rubber as maquettes for a transformation of the environment. Metzger was the apostle of 'auto-destructive art'. He combined a pioneering interest in self-generated and random forms in art with a wide-ranging critique of contemporary society. These interests mainly took the form of written manifestos, since, in his view, the theory of 'auto-destruction' was ten years ahead of practice.

Medalla's approach was broader. As an artist he was completely committed to the ideas he had adopted, plumbing them to the depths so to speak. At the same time

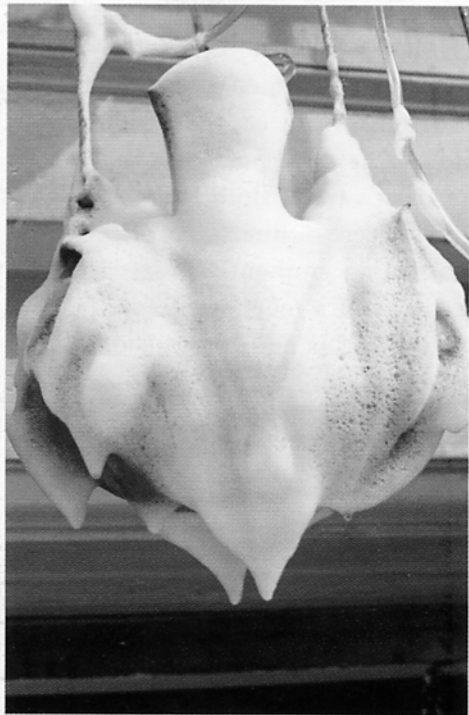
he always maintained a certain attitude of free-floating, uncommitted openness. As an organiser and publicist he pursued a non-dogmatic and non-exclusive policy. His statement defining the aims of Signals, in its newspaper-format periodical, said only that it was “dedicated to the adventures of the modern spirit”,<sup>4</sup> and encouraged experiment in art. *Signals Newsbulletin* printed poems, political discussions, a digest of scientific discoveries and personal news as well as extensive documentation of the artists exhibiting in the gallery (the quality of information on each artist was outstanding in a period before large catalogues).<sup>5</sup> He always gave poems as much prominence as critical essays in the interpretation of an artist’s work. Both Keeler and Medalla commissioned artists to produce a new large-scale environmental work for their Signals shows.<sup>6</sup> In a curious way, Medalla combined an eminently pragmatic sense, as an organiser, of what could actually be created out of a meeting of specific people, with the wildest flights of fantasy in his kinetic projects and ‘propulsions’, whose playfulness and poetic licence showed up a sometimes pedestrian strain in the more earnest attempts by other artists to link art and science.

From 1964–66 Signals London was a major showroom of the international avant-garde. Its premises were bigger than the old Institute of Contemporary Arts in Dover Street and its *Newsbulletin* was far more lavish than the ICA’s small publication. Artists like Takis, Camargo, Soto, Otero, Kenneth and Mary Martin, Li Yuan-chia, Gerhard von Graevenitz and Lygia Clark had opportunities to exhibit on a large scale, and to experiment, which they did not yet have in London or in Paris. An international and diverse public sought out the gallery. The first two small-scale ‘Pilot Shows’ held at Cornwall Gardens, even before the move to Wigmore Street, were attended by 6,854

**Bubble Wall**, bubble machines built in situ at Cornwall Gardens, London, 1964 (detail).



people, according to records kept by Medalla, and these included, besides artists and students, “architects, engineers, writers, scientists, technologists, designers, industrialists, doctors, nurses and teachers”.<sup>7</sup>



Opposite page and above: *Cloud Fruits*, bubble machine, the facade of Gallery House, Goethe Institute, London 1972.

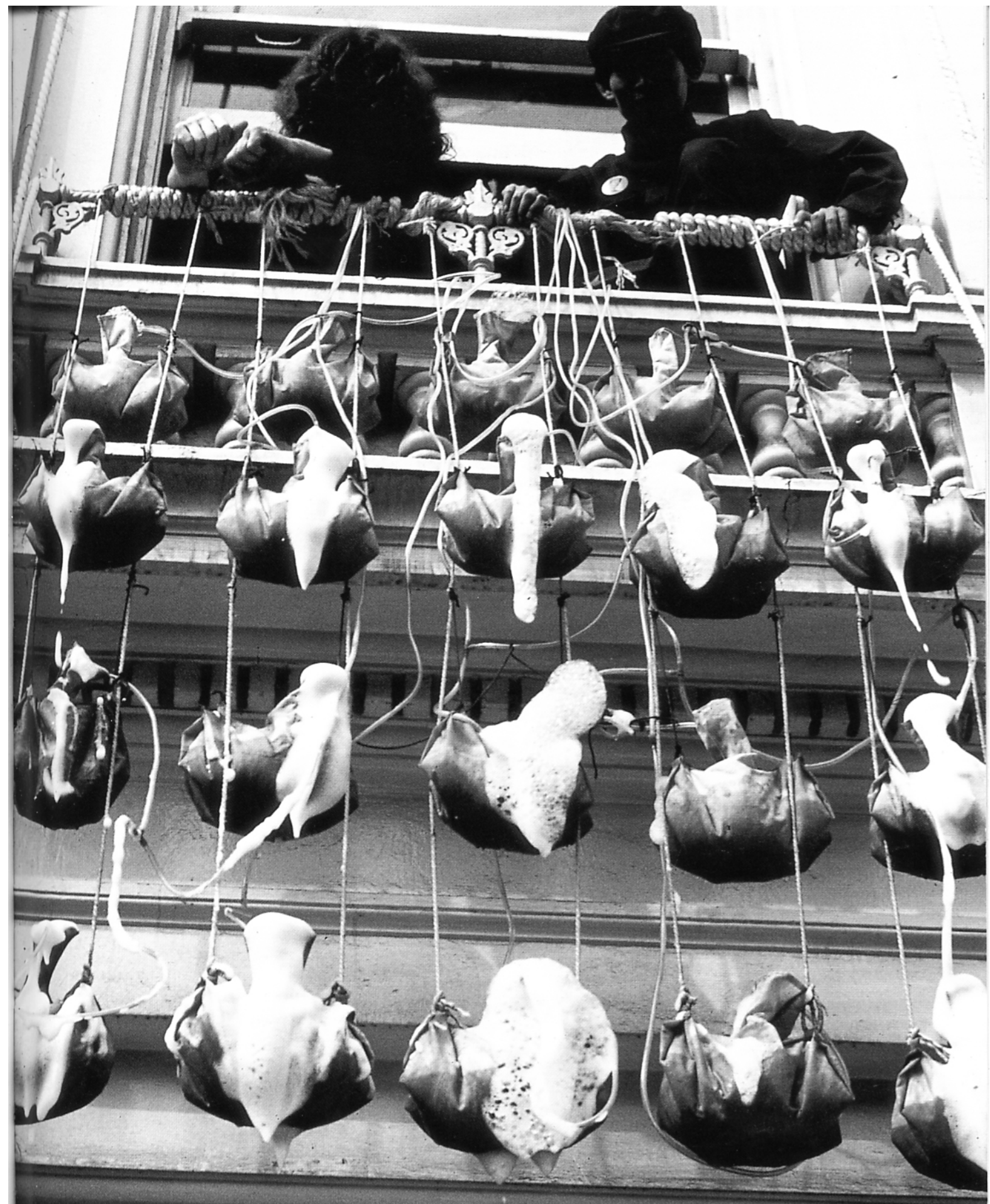
In fact *Signals* encapsulated the character of the London-based avant-garde for the period. Like the ICA (originally founded in 1947 by Roland Penrose, Herbert Read, Peter Watson and others), which had a far longer life than *Signals*, and venues of the early 1960s such as Victor Musgrave’s Gallery One and Denis Bowen’s and Kenneth Courtts-Smith’s New Vision Centre, the character of *Signals* was cosmopolitan, experimental and interdisciplinary. These qualities have never been recognised by British art history. In fact the entire mainstream historical writing and exhibition-making has been concerned with constructing a national image of British art, wedded to a traditionalist, beaux-arts view of practice, ignoring or excluding the work of those foreigners which cannot be assimilated within the national canon. By the cruel logic of chauvinism, official aspirations to make London an international art centre have only resulted in obliterating London’s cosmopolitan reality and the actual ferment of its cultural life.



Those who like to trace the ‘migration of symbols’, and the renewal of metaphors, would probably notice that the snake motif, which is common in Medalla’s earliest paintings, reappears in his biokinetic works. By chance or design, or by a deeper process which unifies both, the foam in the *Bubble Machines*, the metal and sand in the *Sand Machine*, the thin, flexible rods which delve sponges into the liquid mud in the *Mud Machine* take on sinuous, serpentine forms. When I first saw these machines in the 1960s I was deeply struck by the quality of their movements. “A complex and tender expression of energy which before had not existed in mechanical sculpture”, I wrote at the time.<sup>8</sup> This intimate response was somehow mixed together with amazement at the works’ conceptual audacity as artistic propositions in the context of their time.

Medalla himself, when describing the origins of the Bubble Machines, likes to





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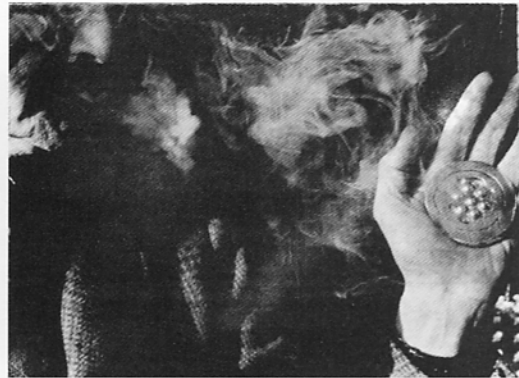
mix artistic and scientific aspirations with an assortment of personal memories. From 1960 to 1963 he was consciously experimenting to find a way to give “tangible form to invisible forces....to find a model which would show the transformation of matter into energy”.<sup>9</sup> This search re-awakened childhood memories. On a grand scale, he remembered the fantastic colours and shapes of the clouds in the tropical sunsets over Manila Bay; on a homely scale, watching his mother cook *guinataan* with *bola bola*, a bubbling coconut delicacy. Later, in 1961, he made a visit to an Edinburgh brewery with the writer and musician Viv McCorry. After looking at the enormous vats of foaming beer, they climbed up to the top of the hill at King Arthur’s Seat and lay on the ground watching the clouds race overhead. Occasionally Medalla mentioned a more disturbing memory: at the age of three he stared fascinated at the frothing mouth of a young resistance fighter who lay shot and mortally wounded in the family garden. He had been shot by the Japanese occupation forces’ savage military police, the *Kempetai*, while attempting to warn Medalla’s father, who was fighting in the resistance, of an impending Japanese attack.

There was, too, Medalla’s appraisal of developments within kinetic art itself. All movements produce pedestrian work. In kinetic art there was a particularly sharp distinction between those artists who were content merely to ‘motorise’ already existing formal structures, anecdotal caricatures or other whimsicalities, and artists

John Dugger with Megha Sutta: *The Cloud Discourse* in the basement of the Tate Gallery, London, 1971.



who were searching for a new structure of material transformation, and a new space. What was at stake was to make visible the equivalence of matter and energy, and it seemed a point of honour to accomplish this with the greatest possible economy and wit. To do so laboriously was a contradiction in terms. The new structure would achieve greater freedom and depth by being transparently simple, being both ordinary and cosmic at the same time.



Marcel Duchamp with his *Medallic Sculpture*, 1968.

This was the beauty of *Cloud Canyons*, as Medalla's early ensembles of Bubble Machines were called. The foam was allowed to follow its aleatory paths, emerging and forming according to its own energies interacting with gravity, air currents, atmospheric pressure, and the shape of the containers. The genius of the Bubble Machine was that a conceptual logic went together with an extraordinary subtlety of luminosity and texture, for which the analogy with clouds was no exaggeration. It was never the same two days in a row. When *Cloud Canyons* was mounted on the balcony at Cornwall Gardens in the summer of 1964, the photographer Clay Perry remembers being called sometimes in the middle of the night by Medalla to come over and capture a particular effect.

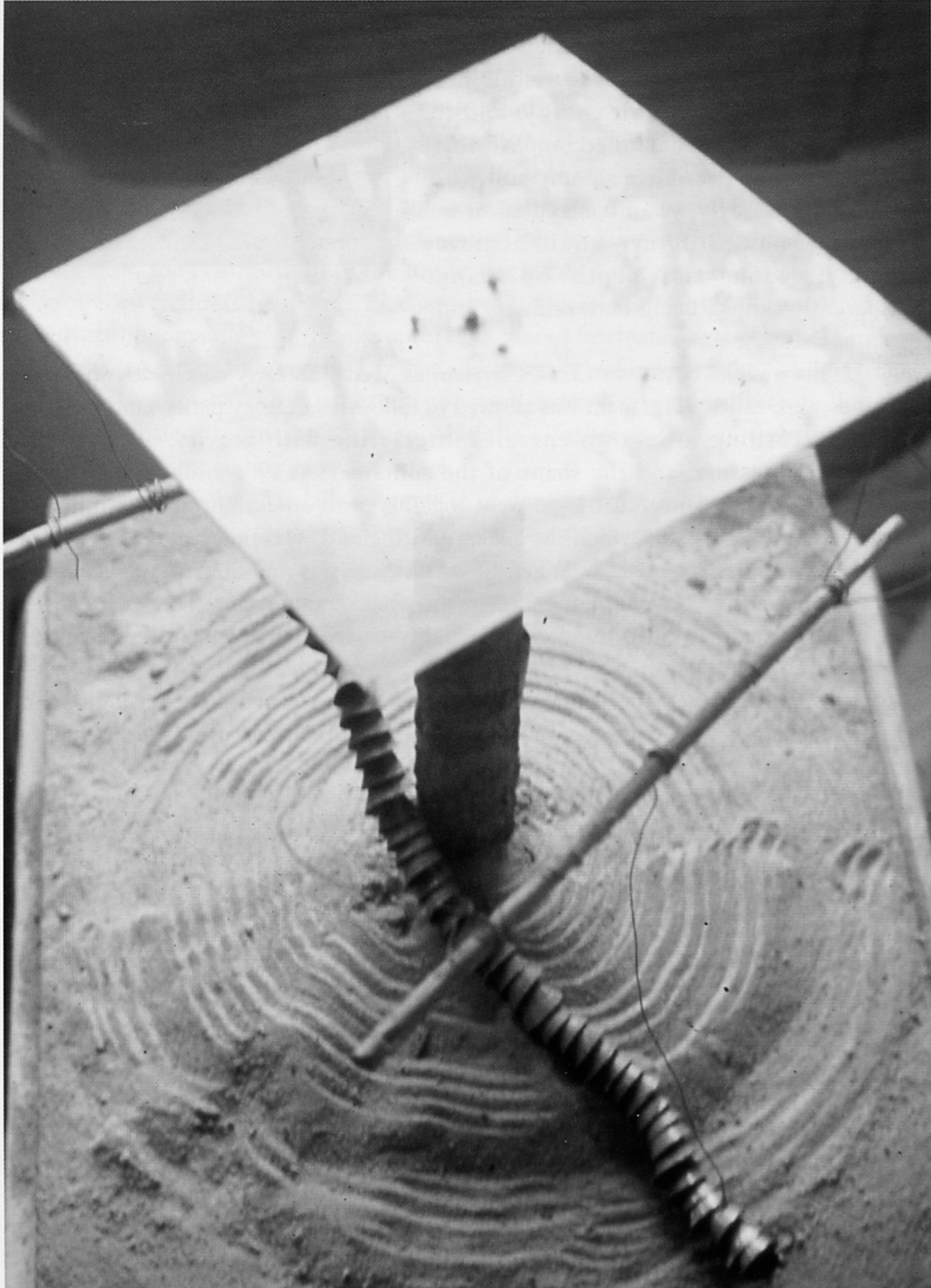
At another level, the Bubble Machines offered a provocative critique of the position reached by Minimalist sculpture. Minimalism had freed itself to some degree from the element of individual expression and taste by cultivating various systems of cellular, serial, uniform and repetitive structure. The plain white boxes of Medalla's early foam machines acknowledged this tenet of Minimalism, but the emerging foam disturbingly exceeded these orderly and static forms and introduced a completely new, kinetic and organic understanding of the cellular and repetitive. In fact the structure of the Bubble Machine was dialectical at both formal and philosophical levels. Creation proceeded inseparably from destruction, the fullness and monumentality of form was accompanied by its complete evaporation, it was simultaneously a material 'something' and an immaterial 'nothing'. A seething activity went together with an overall calm. Chaos and order coexisted. Motion and rest.

Medalla considered these and the other machines he made as facets of an exploration of the sculptural possibilities of pulverised, elastic and soluble materials: "Water, grains of rice, gold and silver dust, sand, fire, powdered coal, granulated coffee-beans, dried seeds, rubber, gum, mud, ice, salt, oil, steam, mist, smoke, etc... I was looking for materials that, in sculpture, would be analogous to the smallest biological unit, the cell; materials that would be capable of multiplication."<sup>10</sup>

The import of Medalla's innovation was immediately recognised by his peers. Gustav Metzger wrote: "The foam kinetics stand at the peak of a development started



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Lament, Sand Machine, 1964. Collection of the artist.

at the end of the last century. Gabo, Moholy-Nagy, Brancusi, Arp, Calder and others produced theories and works that lead to Medalla.”<sup>11</sup> Metzger called Medalla “the first master of auto-creative art”, a term Metzger had introduced, along with ‘auto-destruction’, in a theoretical manifesto of 1961. Among others, Hans Haacke, then a young artist in Germany, wrote the artist with “admiration for what you did in this field”.<sup>12</sup> Scientists responded too. Medalla received a letter from Werner Heisenberg (he had published the great physicist’s text on indeterminacy in *Signals Newsbulletin*), praising his demonstration of the poetic interactions between human-made technology and natural phenomena. J. D. Bernal, the crystallographer, writer and friend of Picasso, who visited *Signals* several times, also expressed a keen interest. On a visit to New York, Paul Keeler showed photographs of the Bubble Machines to Marcel Duchamp. It was intriguing to see, given the French artist’s love of wordplay, that a short while later Duchamp issued a multiple he called *Medallic Object* (1968). This was a silver medal erupting with bubblelike forms which Duchamp was photographed holding in the palm of his hand surrounded by swathes of cigar smoke.

The mainstream world of British art, however, ignored the Bubble Machines. Despite the fact that this was the period when the new sculpture of Anthony Caro, Philip King, William Tucker and others was emerging, few in that milieu were able to see the greater daring and wit of Medalla’s reprise of sculptural history. For as well as being a model of the “transformation of matter into energy”, the Bubble Machines provided a startling development of the problematics explored by sculptors like Arp, Gabo and Brancusi (the latter often used as a touchstone in discussions of sculpture by the younger generation in the 1960s). Medalla felt that Brancusi had come as close as he could to the idea of dematerialisation, within the limits of a static and solid sculptural object, by polishing the smooth metal skin of his *Bird in Space* and egg-shaped *Beginning of the World*. In his use of plastics, Gabo also went as far as he could “to destroy the traditional idea of mass in sculpture”. In Gabo’s work “the experience of sculptural space becomes synonymous with the experience of continuous depth”.<sup>13</sup> Similarly it could be said that Arp’s *Concretions* reached static sculpture’s limits in suggesting a polymorphic biological energy which all organisms have in common. The Bubble Machines seemed to take up the latent implications in these works and recast them in a new, freer spatio-temporal structure, or paradigm. Perhaps just for these reasons Medalla’s work was seen as disturbing, for the ephemerality of mere foam threatened the laboured craft traditions which have always had such a hold on British art.

Medalla himself had no intention of leaving the Bubble Machine as a historical marker. The foam was a metaphor for expansion and growth which naturally exceeded its own bounds. There was no reason to declare it finished in the geometric and minimal framework in which he presented it in the mid-1960s, or to repeat it. It could continue to grow. As Medalla became increasingly absorbed by Buddhism in the late 1960s, and then by Marxism in the early 1970s, he produced a number of new Bubble

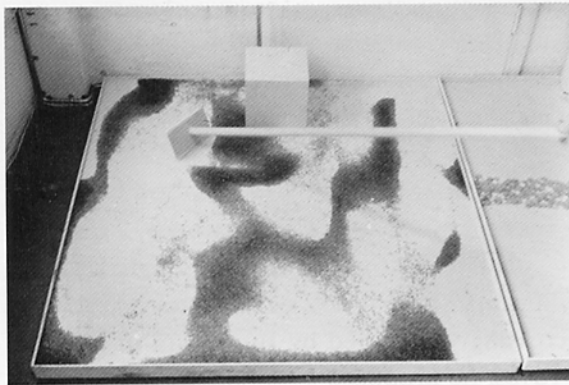
Machines in which the basic metaphor can be seen in beautiful and subtle reincarnations. For example, there was the philosophical, even cosmological, stupa-like mode of *MeghaSutta: The Cloud Discourse*, 1971,<sup>14</sup> and the delectable, sensuous structure of the hanging *Cloud Fruits*, 1972.

The first Bubble Machine (a single box) was exhibited in the 'Structures Vivantes' exhibition at the Redfern Gallery in 1964.<sup>15</sup> Later in the same year Medalla made the Sand Machine, quite a different sort of structure. In place of liquidity and flow there was something brittle and dry. A flimsy motor-driven structure dragged a suspended metal snake or helix slowly around a circular patch of sand. The Sand Machine was called *Lament*: it was "the death of metal, stone, all the materials of the past".<sup>16</sup> At the same time it suggested the possibility of growth. "I also see the sand machine", Medalla said, "as a metaphor for the future, when technology will be able to use solar power to help irrigate the world's deserts".<sup>17</sup> The sand imprinted by the metal was never still and "returned energy to it". Medalla saw the work as "like a three-dimensional mandala – it turns around".<sup>18</sup> Although revolving repetitively, the Sand Machine was in every other way reminiscent of non-mechanical technology, like a rudimentary plough suspended by wires, or "like the outriggers of Philippine canoes".<sup>19</sup> At the same time it was a snake, a penis, or a chrysalis about to discharge its contents.<sup>20</sup>

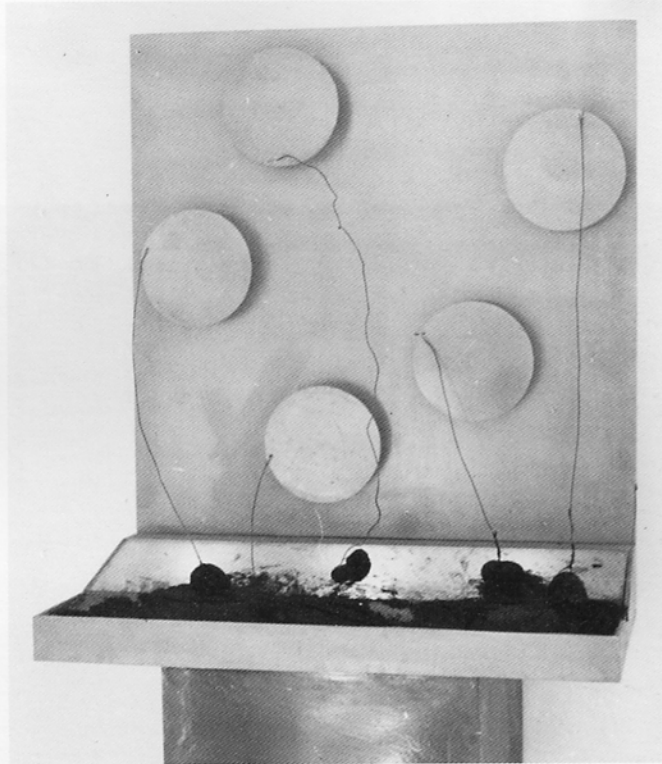
If Medalla's kinetics generally refer to sculptural traditions, the *Mud Machine*, 1964-67, is undoubtedly a 'painting machine'. As such it belongs to a small sub-genre within kinetic art. It invites comparison with certain of Jean Tinguely's *Metamatics*, machines which contain a roll or sheet of paper, a crank holding a pen, and produce wild automatic drawings one after another. In one sense painting machines were kinetic art's wry comment on the automatism of action painting. But the connections go deeper than that, for the drawing or painting machine is also analogous to the seismograph, encephalograph (and equivalents): devices for obtaining graphic traces of

vital or cosmic energies. The 'painting machine' was another way of approaching the enigmatic borderline between aesthetic form and the forces of nature, between matter and meaning, between volition and chance, between pure play and intelligible signs, the domain of language. Medalla's *Mud Machine* is very elegantly poised on this borderline. By means of revolving discs, red-painted and mounted on a red panel, sponges on the end of wires delve with

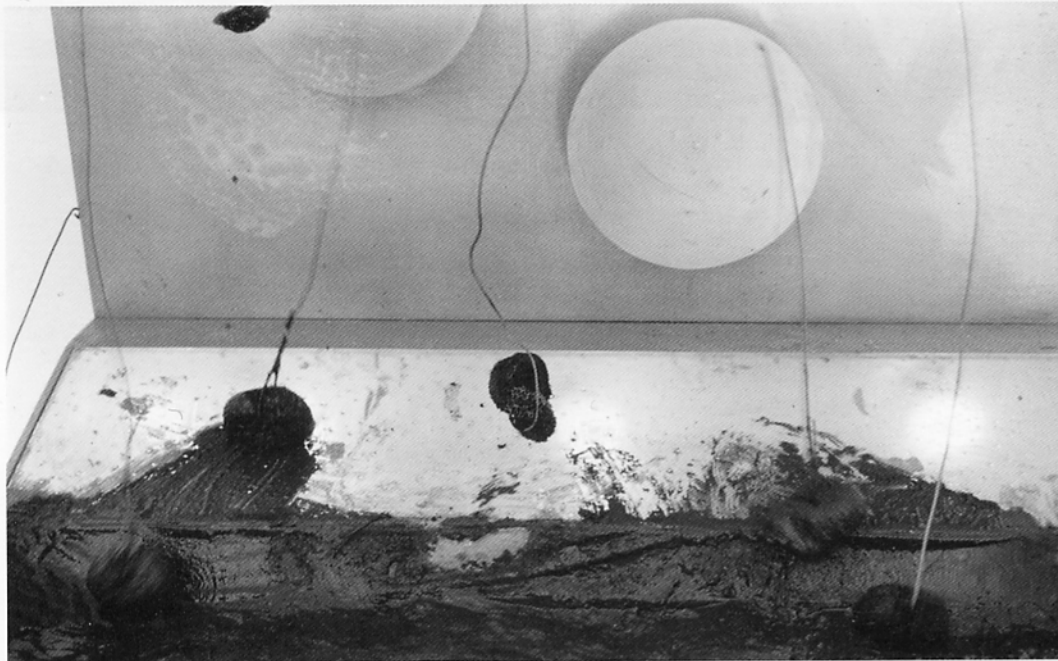
Glue Pearls Machine, 1967. Collection of the artist.







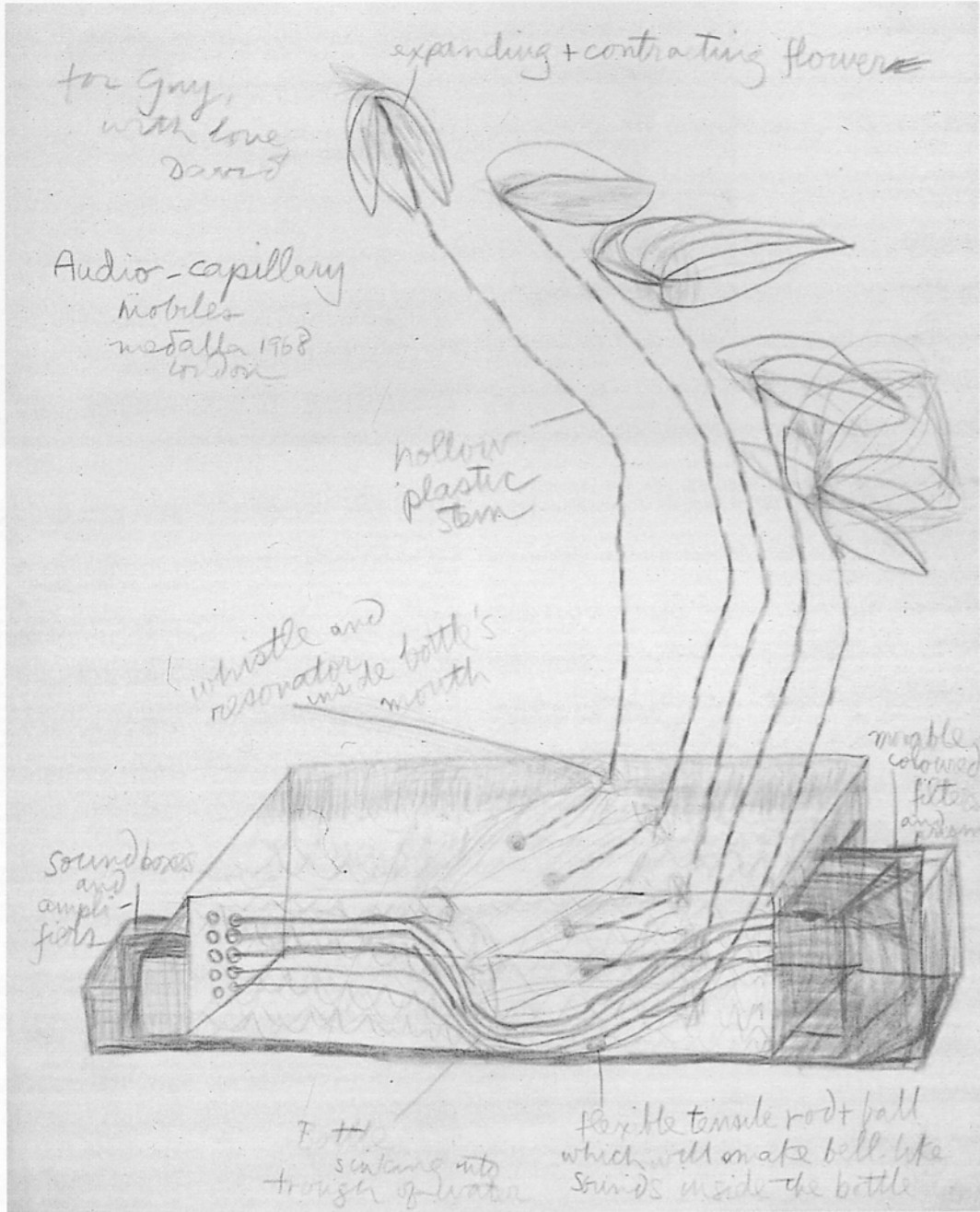
**Mud Machine**, 1967. Collection of the artist.





Medalla with a pair of Mud Machines, made in 1994 and exhibited during the 'Secret History of the Mondrian Fan Club', 55 Gee Street, London, 1994-5. The light apertures in the blue discs follow the patterns of the constellations, one of the southern hemisphere, the other of the northern.

Opposite: Study for **Audio-Capillary Mobiles**, 1968. Crayon on paper, 25.5 x 22 cms. Collection Guy Brett.





## Mondrian

Pruned his palette to  
Primary colours and his  
Design mechanisms to  
Verticals and horizontals—  
Finally he  
Reached a point at which  
He could not abide  
Green and changed seats  
At tables to avoid  
Seeing trees:  
This magician who in  
His early work did some  
Of the most sensitive  
Studies of trees over achieved:  
Advancing  
The degree of abstraction  
From example to  
Example until they  
Vanished in squares and  
Rectangles.

José Garcia Villa,  
(New York)

## Medalla : New Projects

David Medalla, the Filipino artist, has embarked on a series of new projects. David describes himself as "an hylozoist" (in reference to the Old Ionian pre-Sokratik philosophers)—"one of Those-who-think-Matter-is-Alive." Medalla introduced into sculpture the use of actual elements, not merely as adjuncts of objects but the elements themselves forming the major part of his truly original objects. David's main interest is matter in all its living manifestations. "I am not a physicist," he says, "but I like to think of myself as a poet who celebrates physics."

Julio Herrera described David as "a boy of wisdom, the ferocity of whose wrath is tempered always with the tenderness of his loves." An apt description, say those who know David personally.

In Paris last month fellow-artist Takis, upon seeing David's sand machine, hailed him as a genius. "If other artists understand what Medalla has discovered," said Takis, "then they too will be geniuses like Medalla himself."

A number of David Medalla's new work is a direct continuation of his "thermal sculptures." The first of these thermal sculptures was the bubble machine which was included in last month's pilot show at the Centre's headquarters. Other new developments are the following projects, small models of which will be included in the second pilot show and in subsequent exhibitions of the Centre for Advanced Creative Study.

1. **Smoke machines** with flickering lights in which the smoke itself, with its varying shapes, colours and densities, is the actual sculpture.

2. **Artic columns:** a series of sculptures in which water turns into icicles; the icicles dance, crackle and refract sunlight into a thousand rainbows; the icicles then melt into water and the process outlined above is repeated in an infinity of variations.

3. **Floating sculptures** which produce musical sounds when they hit each other while creating "pelagic pictures" under water with electric lights. A small study for this project was exhibited at last month's pilot show.

4. **Whirlpool sculptures:** leaves and other floating things whirling in actual whirlpools.

5. **Machines for making Instant-Poetry.** With a twinkle in his eye David says that these machines should provide "a sort of un-unified field theory of poetry somewhat analogous to the still missing unified field theory in physics which physicists have been trying to find in the last two or three thousand odd years."

6. **Sand, wind and rain sculptures:** further developments of Medalla's sand mobiles. In these constructions sand is blown by winds in different directions while raindrops and running water, make continuous patterns on sand. (Several people incidentally have noted the similarity of this concept to those of the sand gardens of Japan like the Ginkakuji in Kyoto and to the sand paintings of the Tacos Indians of North America.)

7. **Hydrophonic rooms:** rooms with ceilings planted with a million edible mushrooms, rooms with melting walls of milk and butter, rooms with transparent floors containing herbariums.

8. **Collapsible sculptures** and sculptures in components incorporating actual living things such as snails, shrimps, ants. In one construction, snails pass over sensitive plates of metal which trigger off certain modulated sounds. In another, ants travel in space through different lenses, the lenses magnifying and fragmenting into abstract patterns the ants' shapes. A third construction will present an underwater ballet of shrimps. In this set of projects living things are encouraged to express



David Medalla with his Sand Machine. 1964

themselves. Medalla will thus confer the titles of "musicians to the snails, artists to the ants and dancers to the shrimps."

9. **Radio-controlled flying sculptures,** in which objects fly from a sort of gigantic "hive" into different parts of a room, different parts of a house, and into the streets. The "vagabond objects" will return to the hive at different intervals, at different hours of the day, even different days and months, from all parts of a city and may be also the countryside, bringing with them all sorts of things such as envelopes, handkerchiefs, banners, buttons, banana peelings.

10. **Lightning-rod sculptures:** sculptures to be set in the open air and on top of skyscrapers. The electricity which is "picked" by the lightning rods is conducted and transmitted into picture-making machines.

11. **The thermo-paintings,** in which pictures on frosted and mist-covered glass are made and unmade purely by the warmth of human breath, . . .

12. **The machines for making mud pictures and sculptures.**

13. **The Braille sculptures:** sculptures to be felt in the dark emitting incense, marjoram, thyme, mint, laurel, benjamin and other fragrances.

14. **Transparent sculptures that sweat and perspire.** When the spectator fans these sculptures, they cool down, reduce their volumes, change their colours, sizes, shapes. These perspiring sculptures also palpitate with the changing intensities of darkness and light.

David Medalla is also a poet, a mime, and a dancer. At the age of 12 Medalla was appointed lecturer on the humanities at the state University of the Philippines. By that time he had already written anthropological studies on the remaining primitive tribes of the Philippines as well as the first translations into Tagalog, the Filipino national language, of the works of Shakespeare, Milton and Walt Whitman.

At 15, upon the recommendation of the American poet Mark Van Doren, Medalla was admitted as a special scholar at Columbia University. At Columbia David studied Greek drama under Professor Moses Hadas who was also appointed Medalla's tutor. It was in New York that David took up painting seriously under the encouragement of the poet José Garcia Villa.

When David returned to the Philippines he was invited to deliver a set of lectures on Dante's *Commedia* before the Poetry Club of Manila. Shortly afterwards, David delivered another set of lectures, *The Ironical Discourses*, parodying the postpositives of Manila's social and cultural life, before a herd of carabao (water-buffaloes) and a flock of white-legged herons in the rice-fields of his father's home province.

David is the author of a comic biography in verse of Arthur Rimbaud entitled *The Poet in Abyssinia*, and of several *black fairytales* including one about the love life of a daylight-bat and another on "the memoirs of an Irish trombone in the Chicago days of the gangster Al Capone." A third fairytale, *The Floating Pagoda*, was successfully translated into a dance drama for children.

David has given many lectures before schools and clubs in England on behalf of the Freedom from Hunger campaign ("the only movement," he says, "in which I truly believe."). This year David Medalla is designing an *Heracleian Ballet* in which dancers will perform on a smoking stage while spirals, squares, cones, cubes, and pyramids of fire whirl in space.

## New Books

Next year should see the publication of several interesting books on kinetic art. Frank Popper is completing a history of movement in art which he hopes to publish soon in paperback form. Popper's informative article "Movement and Light in Today's Art" in *The Unesco Courier*, September 1963, may be said to have sparked the present worldwide interest in this subject. Reg Gadeny of Cambridge is also preparing a full-length study of art in motion. Gadeny wrote an article on kinetic art for *Granta*, November 1963, and he has just finished another essay with special emphasis on the aesthetic problems of this movement which will appear soon in *The London Magazine*.

Guy Brett, youngest and in many ways the most dynamic of London's art critics, is writing a book on individual kinetic artists. Brett is personally acquainted with the leading artists of this movement and should be able to report firsthand their ideas, plans, thoughts and projects. Brett is the author of three full-length articles in *The Guardian* on the immense possibilities of kinetic art in relation to our environment.

Jack Burnham and Willoughby Sharp are two art historians from America who will also be writing on kinetic art in the next few months. Both came to London last month to attend the first pilot show of the Centre for Advanced Creative Study and to gather material for their work. Willoughby Sharp is a graduate of Columbia University and writes for American art magazines. Jack Burnham is with the art department of Northwestern University, Illinois, where he is now preparing a study of kinetic art with special emphasis on artists like Medalla and Yves Klein who have broken the artificial "boundaries" between nature and the so-called art object.

Most recent book to discuss (along with other subjects) aspects of kinetic art is Frank Avray Wilson's *Art as Understanding*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963. Signalz recommends Mr. Wilson's book for its detailed and intelligent exposition of the different trends in today's art.

## Many Thanks

The Centre thanks Miss H. Swift and the Central Office of Information for the loan of their documentary film on *structures vivants*, and Mr. Simon Watson Taylor, *potaphysicien*, for the loan to the first pilot show of two small erectiles by Pol Bury. Many thanks also to the anonymous donor who gave the Centre its first gift: an Isokan pengiun donkey mark 2. Thanks also to the Couper Gallery for the loan of works by J. M. Cruxent to the second pilot show; to the McRoberts and Tunnard Gallery for the loan of a work by Otto Piene; to Willoughby Sharp for bringing over from Europe works by Hans Haacke and Aubertin; to Clay Perry for the photographs in this issue; to Julie Lawson of the Institute of Contemporary Arts for her encouragement and cooperation; and to the

following for their gift of a book (*Kunst und Naturform*, Basilius Presse, Basel): Brian Stones, Keith Potts, Philip Smythe and Stephen Knott.

## Book on Nena Saguli

Mme. Suzanne de Coninck, directress of the Centre d'Art Cybetique and of the Galerie de Beaune in Paris, has announced the publication for autumn of a book on the art of Nena Saguli.

The book was begun last year by the late Professor Ernest Fraenkel, author of a monograph on the Russian expatriate painter Schragra Zarin and of a remarkable critique cinétique on Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés n'abolira pas le hasard*. Professor Fraenkel died last spring a month after he wrote the note on Saguli for the catalogue of the *Soundings One* exhibition which Paul Keeler organised at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Fraenkel's unfinished essay on Saguli is now being completed by the French critic and art historian M. Waldemar George. In M. George's opinion the essay on Saguli was Professor Fraenkel's most beautiful work. The book when completed will contain over fifty black-and-white illustrations and half a dozen colour reproductions tracing the development of Nena Saguli's art from her early geometric abstractions to her present explorations into "the fourth dimension in painting."

## BBC Film, Interview

The film unit of BBC's *Town and Around* under producer David Hartsilver made a 3-minute film on the Centre's first pilot show. Michael Noakes interviewed David Medalla who discussed some of the work on view including Salvadori's *Eclipses*, Camargo's *Wooden Reliefs*, Soto's *Vibrations*, and the Ballet *Magnétique* by Takis. Last June 21st, John Newell, BBC science correspondent, interviewed Paul Keeler on the BBC home service about the aims and activities of the Centre.

## Vasarely Journals

The cultural bureau of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, Paris, has just published the journals of Victor Vasarely. Mimeographed on green paper with an original cover by Vasarely himself, this handsome volume contains notes and reflections on life and art by this profound and fecund artist. Translations of the journal will appear soon in Peacock, a new literary magazine in Oxford.

## Metzger Film

Centre members recently attended a private showing of a film on Gustav Metzger's demonstration of auto-destructive art.

## Telescope

A medium-range telescope will be installed in the balcony of Flat 4, 92 Cornwall Gardens this summer for the use of Centre members and their guests.

abandon and also considerable delicacy into a mixture of mud and oil and drag it onto an electrically-lit glass screen.

A comparison between Tinguely's and Medalla's machines is quite revealing. Tinguely's are considerably more frenetic, noisy and draw attention to their own exertions. They lurch about like clowns, but they are very much clowns at the court of King Machine, completely imbued with the mechanical ethos. Tinguely, after all, was Swiss, from a country with a long-standing culture of the machine, whereas the Philippines, according to Medalla, traditionally had no concept of the machine. Medalla's are machines made by a non-mechanical person. It is also a curious and revealing fact that, whereas Tinguely's machines keep an exclusive mechanistic integrity into which one would not dare to insert a hand (like the machine in Chaplin's *Modern Times*), Medalla's welcome the hand.

Thus, although both artist's works are ultimately propelled by the same type of electric motor, with its uniform and repetitive motion, the expression is quite different. The painting simile in the Tinguely is close to the Baroque, in the Medalla to oriental calligraphy. Medalla himself noted the difference: "In western sculpture, in Baroque art for instance, there is no balance between active and passive. There is pure emphasis on dynamic movement: no point of rest and no point of meditation".<sup>21</sup> By inclination, and fuelled by the study he was then making of Buddhism and Indian and Chinese art, Medalla was looking for a kind of movement which would also contain stillness, "a movement which is elastic and very still and calm... without frenzy such as you find in Baroque art".<sup>22</sup> He later said of his Bubble Machines that "there is a certain slowness in motion,

●  
MMMMMMMM . . .  
MANIFESTO

(a fragment)

●  
Mmmmmmm . . . Mmmedalla! What do you dream of?

I dream of the day when I shall create sculptures that breathe, perspire, cough, laugh, yawn, smirk, wink, pant, dance, walk, crawl, . . . and move among people as shadows move among people. . . . Sculptures that will retain a shadow's secret dimensions without a shadow's obsequious behaviour. . . . Sculptures without hope, with waking and sleeping hours. . . . Sculptures that, on certain seasons, will migrate *en masse* to the North Pole. Sculptures with a mirror's translucency minus the memory of a mirror!

●  
Mmmmmmm . . . Mmmedalla! What do you dream of?

I dream of the day when I shall go to the centre of the earth and in the earth's core place a flower-sculpture. . . . Not a lotus, nor a rose, nor a flower of metal, . . . nor yet a flower of ice and fire. . . . But a *mohole*-flower, its petals curled like the crest of a tidal wave approaching the shore. . . .

●  
Mmmmmmm . . . Mmmedalla! What do you dream of?

I dream of a day when, from the capitals of the world, London Paris New York Madrid Rome, I shall release missile-sculptures. . . . to fly — at nine times the speed of sound . . . to fall — slim as a stork on a square in Peking . . . bent, crushed — like a soldier's boot after an explosion — on an airport in Ecuador . . . in splinters — on the fields of Omaha. . . . A few — to cross interstellar space . . . accumulating, as they wing along, asteroids, meteorites, magnetic fields, interstellar germs . . . of a new life . . . on their way from our galaxy to the Spiral Nebula. . . . Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm. . . .

●  
David Medalla

London, 1965

●  
MMMMMMMM..... Manifesto, 1965, published in Signals Newsbulletin, Vol 1 no 8, June-July 1965.

Opposite: New Projects published in Signals Newsbulletin vol 1 no 1, August 1964.

## EXPLODING GALAXIES

quite different from the dizzying and frenetic kind of kinetic art”.<sup>23</sup> The exploration of movement in Medalla’s sculpture took forms which sometimes bring to mind the eroded stones used in Taoist cosmology as symbols of the universal flux, or the “growing and expanding” sense of form which the German scholar Heinrich Zimmer,



Above and opposite: **The Mohole Flower**, 1964-72, project for a “biothermal sculpture to be buried and sealed in the centre of the earth to emerge in various shapes in different parts of the world.” Collection of the artist.

in a seminal book, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, identified as characteristic of Indian sculpture. Thus was the internationalism of kinetic art mixed with distinct cultural traditions.

Medalla produced a rather small number of kinetic machines. Each had a distinct identity. He made one when the possibility or the need arose, but equally striking at this period is the relationship he posed between the sensuous experience given by a physical object, and the imaginative experience given by words. Direct exposure to the Bubble Machine is essential: there is no other way to experience the quality of its movement, its translucency, even the sound of its millions of tiny bursting bubbles. For the artist this kinetic experience was a way of overcoming a gulf between spectator and work: “The most important thing I think is to give life to materials, so that instead of finding ourselves separate from them we find a complete dialogue with the material.”<sup>24</sup> “For me, interior space and exterior space are mutually interchangeable... and access from one to the other is made possible through rhythm.”<sup>25</sup> He had constructed the group of boxes in *Cloud Canyons* according to the proportions of his own body: he was looking for a correspondence between the play of elemental forces in the work and in the spectator’s body, very much in the manner Moholy-Nagy had prophesied forty years before for a future kinetic art:



Dynamic construction... must be evolved, in which material is employed as the carrier of forces... A dynamic-constructive system... is attained whereby man, hitherto merely receptive in his observation of works of art, experiences a heightening of his own faculties, and becomes himself an active partner with the forces unfolding themselves.<sup>26</sup>



Medalla believed that biokinetics offered new possibilities of “making people sensuously alive once more”,<sup>27</sup> at a time when the senses were undervalued in favour of the intellect. His kinetic objects were intended to bridge the gap between our expanding scientific knowledge of the universe, including ourselves, and our psychic awareness of it, the sensory experience with its complex of instincts and reflexes, memories and suppressions, unique to each individual, with which art is concerned.

At the same time Medalla remained very much the writer. His physical art objects may be said to represent the tangible portion of a larger intangible reality which was in some sense a poetic reality, a boundless reality, a longing for the impossible. His kinetic machines were accompanied by a great outpouring of ideas in the form of fantastic projects for sculpture. These make a playful use of the conceits of literary style. As in the list of *New Projects* published in the first issue of *Signals Newsbulletin*, or the *MMMMM.....Manifesto*, 1965, published in *Signals Newsbulletin* 8, Medalla contrived to weave together the roles of pragmatic ‘maker’ and unrestrained ‘dreamer’. Later he gave the name of *Cosmic Propulsions* to these foci for imaginative reverie, which could both take a verbal and/or a physical form. They became a constant vehicle for his thinking, even while the style of his work changed and he experimented with various media. One model for his notion of the *Cosmic Propulsion* he found in the kind

of metaphors the Buddha would use in his discourses in answer to the questions which obsessed people at the time:

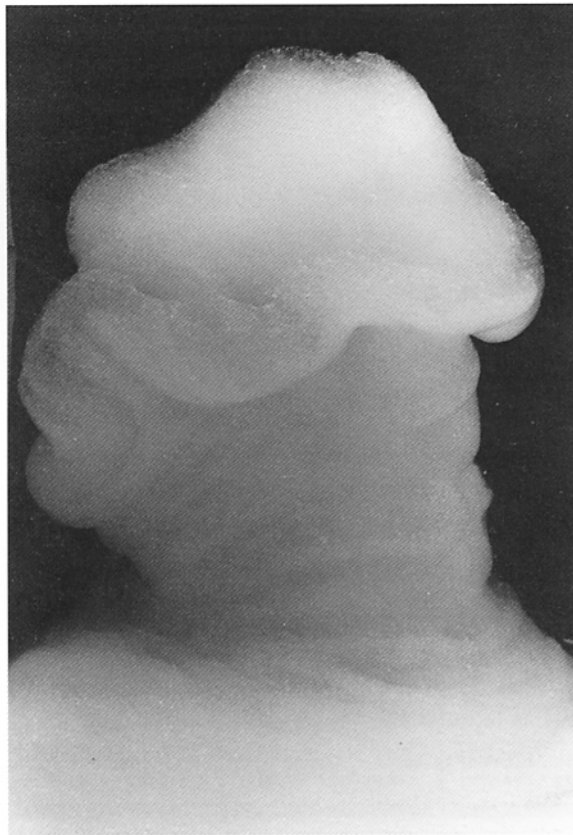
...pedants were trying to determine the length of one kalpa - the life span of one cosmic system - but the Buddha had more wisdom and imagination than these scholastics and he proposed a metaphor: if you imagine a cube of solid rock which is four metres square, and at the end of every century a man were to stroke it once with a fine piece of Benares muslin, the rock would be worn away before the kalpa came to an end...

This kind of metaphor is incredible! It shows what a metaphor is. First, you have two separate elements: a piece of solid rock and a piece of the finest Benares muslin - two almost incongruous elements. The equation between these two produces an image which is almost boundless. If I aspire to anything in art, I aspire for that kind of proposition. It doesn't matter if it is only a proposition if it inspires others. Confronted with such a metaphor, your mind will be able to grasp the mysteries of life. A metaphor also has the capacity for continuous growth. It grows all the time you think about it. It transcends the elements which constitute it...<sup>28</sup>

Medalla's written kinetic projects draw upon visual art as a metaphorical structure. 'Sculpture' becomes an elastic concept or a designation to celebrate the richness of nature, and its micro/macrocosmic unity. Some of these projects were based on the human body (*Capillary Environments*, 1964, *Astroacupuncture Man*, 1964, or sculptures which "move among people as shadows move among people... [retaining] a shadow's secret dimensions without a shadow's obsequious behaviour", (*MMMMMM.....Manifesto*). Others were based on the globe itself: *The Mohole Flower*, 1967, a sculpture to be placed at the core of the earth to grow towards the surface in the heat and darkness - an opposite of the Bubble Machine's "quiet celebration of the beneficence of sunlight and water"; *Listen to the Sonar Trees*, 1969, where electronic trees on the daylight side of the world would receive and broadcast the nocturnal sounds of people sleeping on the other side; *Sweeping the Sounds of the Sea*, at various ports (Venice, Barcelona, Dakar, Mombassa, Karachi, Bombay, Cochin, Madras, Colombo, Singapore, Bangkok and Manila) and putting them in a crystal box which the artist dropped into the Marianas Trench in the Pacific, 1968-69; *The World as a Migrant Microdot*, 1964, images of every face in the world condensed into a microdot and launched into outer space, and so on. In *Go to Work on a Poem*, 1965, the 'poem' is submitted to the same treatment.<sup>29</sup> Such projects provided a precedent and pioneered an atmosphere in which artists later could think of taking a walk, cooking food, digging a hole or building an aeroplane as 'sculpture'.

As Medalla's kinetic work progressed the overall theme of an interaction between human beings and materials, between human beings and nature, was increasingly given a social and a psychological dimension. The Brazilian sculptor Sergio de Camargo considered Medalla's Bubble Machines as modern-day fountains (albeit proposing a more subtle form of mutability than the graphic patterns of water-

jets). The Bubble Machines are public, communal amenities, enjoyable as a simple form of recreation as well as a radical proposition in the discourse of sculpture.<sup>30</sup> Medalla speculated on the possibility of bringing together the themes of kinetic sculpture, the transformation of materials, social amenity, and the participation of the spectator, in unrealised projects like his *Monumental Breadmaking Machines* of 1967 (environmental urban sculptures incorporating ovens in which people could bake bread in any shape they chose). These interrelated themes were to become of increasing importance in the next phase of his work.





## Biography

- 1942 Born March 23, Manila, Philippines.
- 1952 Attended schools in various parts of the Philippines. Lived for a time with the Igorots, a Filipino indigenous tribal mountain people, learned their language and translated some of their epic songs into English.
- 1953 Invited to give special lectures at the University of the Philippines.
- 1954 Attended Camp Rising Sun, Rhinebeck, New York. Invited by Professor Mark van Doren to attend Columbia University as a special student studying modern philosophy and Greek drama. Spent much of his time in Greenwich Village, meeting artists and writers. Started to paint.
- 1957 Returned to the Philippines. Attended lectures on art by Fernando Zobel de Ayala at the Ateneo de Manila. Founded the Poetry Club of Manila and the Blue Bamboo studio. Organized poetry readings and performances. Held first solo exhibition of paintings, drawings and sculptures at La Cave D'Angely. Selected as the youngest artist in the 500-year survey of Philippine art organized by UNESCO and shown in the Social Hall of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines.
- 1960 Travelled to Europe by ship, via Indochina, Singapore, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, East Africa and Egypt. Arrived Marseilles and made his way to Paris. Crossed the Channel and visited London for the first time. Gave his first performances in Paris at the Raymond Duncan Academy. Met many artists and writers, including Man Ray, Georges Braque, Gaston Bachelard, Meret Oppenheim, Lourdes Castro, Yves Klein, Takis, Tinguely, Fontana, Giacometti, Ad Reinhardt, Max Ernst, Magritte, Arp and Hans Richter.
- 1963 Organized, with Paul Keeler, 'Soundings One', an international art exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Held a solo exhibition of his paintings at the Mayflower Barn, Jordans, Buckinghamshire. Made first kinetic works in Paris, London and Amsterdam.
- 1964 Founded the Centre for Advanced Creative Study (later Signals London) with Paul Keeler, Guy Brett, Marcello Salvadori and Gustav Metzger. Opened the flat in Cornwall Gardens he shared with Paul Keeler as a showroom of the avant-garde. Launched *Signals Newsbulletin*, which he edited and designed (1964-66). Participated in 'Structures Vivantes: Mobiles/Images' at the Redfern Gallery, the first exhibition of kinetic art in Britain, and the 'Nocturnal Show of Kinetic Art' at Villa La Malcontenta, near Venice.
- 1965 Signals moved to a three-storey showroom in Wigmore Street, mounting a series of large-scale shows of experimental and kinetic art. Special issues of *Signals Newsbulletin* published to accompany exhibitions by Takis, Camargo, Lygia Clark, Soto, Otero and other artists. Exhibited ensemble of monumental bubble-machines at the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition.
- 1966 Exhibited bubble-machines in 'Weiss auf Weiss', curated by Harald Szeemann at the Kunsthalle, Bern. Exhibited kinetic works in 'Art and Movement', curated by William Buchanan at the Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, and Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow; the kinetic art exhibition curated by Cyril Barrett, Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry; and 'In Motion', a touring exhibition of kinetic art curated by Guy Brett for the Arts Council of Great Britain. Closure of Signals.
- 1967 Initiated the Exploding Galaxy, "a kinetic confluence of transmedia explorers", on January 1. Based in a house at 99 Balls Pond Road, Dalston, the Exploding Galaxy devised and performed dance-dramas in many public places in London, Britain and the Continent, as well as in formal venues such as the Round House, London (*The Bird Ballet*, 1967). Solo exhibition of kinetic works at Indica Gallery, London.
- 1968 Inaugurated *The Buddha Ballet* with John Dugger, a weekend participatory event at Parliament Hill, London. Break-up of the

- Galaxy. Travelled with John Dugger and other Galaxy members to France, Italy, Spain, Senegal, South Africa, Kenya, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Nepal, (1968-70). Stayed with the Kerala Kalamandalam troupe of Kathakali dancers in India and studied Indian dance. Founded the Arts Council of the Philippines while in Manila. Exhibited bubble-machines in 'Air Art', curated by Willoughby Sharp for the University of California Art Museum at Berkeley and other venues in the USA.
- 1969 Exhibited in 'Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form', the first comprehensive survey of conceptual art, curated by Harald Szeemann at the Kunsthalle, Berne; ICA, London, and other venues in Europe.
- 1971 Staff-Student advisor at the Slade School of Fine Art, University of London (1971-72). Lecturer on Oriental culture, St Martins School of Art, London (1971-73). Founder and Secretary of the Artists Liberation Front (1971-74). Exhibited in 'Pioneers of Participation Art' at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford; 'Microcosm', curated by Peter Carey at the Camden Arts Centre, London; '3 > ∞: New Multiple Art', curated by Bidly Peppin and Hugh Shaw at the Whitechapel Gallery, London.
- 1972 Exhibited jointly with John Dugger at Documenta 5, Kassel, curated by Harald Szeemann, devising and building the *Peoples' Participation Pavilion*. Exhibited *A Stitch in Time* in 'Toeval' (on the random in art), curated by Frans Haks at the Rijksuniversiteit, Utrecht, and in the 'Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain', curated by Sigi Krauss and Rosetta Brooks at Gallery House, London. Joint exhibition with John Dugger at the ICA, London.
- 1973 Lecturer in General Studies, Chelsea School of Art (1973-75). Lecturer on Chinese culture and civilization, University of Southampton (1973-74). Chairman, International Committee for Freedom in the Philippines.
- 1974 Co-founder and Chairman of Artists for Democracy, a broad organization dedicated to "giving material and cultural support to liberation movements worldwide" (1974-77).
- AFD's first major project was the International Arts Festival for Democracy in Chile, at the Royal College of Art, London. Enacted *The Porcelain Wedding*, a participation-production-performance, at Edinburgh College of Art, curated by Lynne MacRitchie, and at Arts Meeting Place, London.
- 1975 AFD opened a cultural centre in Whitfield Street, London. With Medalla as director and Nick Payne as manager, the 'Fitzrovia Cultural centre' staged exhibitions, performances, poetry readings, film shows, lectures and meetings until 1977. Participated in the International Video Encounter, curated by Jorge Glusberg at the Espace Cardin, Paris. Began an intensive development of his performance work (see Appendix 1).
- 1976 Staged *Thunderous Applause*, a review of three years' work, as part of London Calling, curated by John Sharkey, at Acme Gallery, London.
- 1977 Exhibited *Eskimo Carver*, a 'participation-production-propulsion' at AFD - Fitzrovia Cultural Centre, the last event before the Centre's closure.
- 1979 Organized, with Oriol de Quadras and Rino Telaro, 'Mayfair Illuminations 1&2', in which many artists were invited to exhibit and hold events at a large, temporally empty mansion, Hill House, Berkeley Square, London. Exhibited *Rhapsody of the Dagger and Ammonia Boy* and related 'Synoptic-Realist' paintings at the Chenil Art Gallery, London. Left England and began a five-year period of travelling and performing in Italy, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France and Spain, returning occasionally for short stays in Britain.
- 1980 Performed *Voyages and Somersaults of the Pilgrim Monkey* in the Great Hall of the Academy in Venice. Invited by William Xerra to perform in the 'Vive' festival in Pavia Italy. Performance of *L'Ange du Jour, l'Ange de la Nuit* by Aragon at Galerie Biren, Paris.
- 1983 Appointed Artist in Residence at South Hill Park Art Centre, Bracknell. Organized, with Gavin Henderson, Director, Alistair Snow, Artistic Director, and Jenni Walwin, the First International Festival of Performance Art at South Hill Park. Participated in 'Perfotijd', curated by Wink van Kempen, at the Theater de Lantaren, Rotterdam. Formed Octetto

- Ironico with James Acheson, Lesley Butler, Kevin Goss, Sonia Knox, Roberta Kravitz, Alistair Snow and Anna Thew. Wrote and co-directed with Mark Greaves the film version of *The Hand of Marie Curie*. The film was premiered a few years later at the London Film Co-op during an evening dedicated to Mark Greaves organized by Nick Gordon-Smith. Began his *Parables of Friendship* painting cycle.
- 1984 Formed a creative partnership with Kai Hilgemann, as The Signs and Wonders of David and Kai and gave many performances together in Europe. Participated in 'Perfotijd 2' in Rotterdam. Co-organized and participated in the Second International Festival of Performance Art at South Hill Park. Performed *Metamorphoses of an Enigma*, at Cirque Divers, Liège, Belgium.
- 1985 Visited the Philippines with Kai Hilgemann and held a solo exhibition of his work at Pinaglabanan Art Gallery, Manila.
- 1986 Monumental bubble-machine commissioned by the Auckland City Art gallery, New Zealand for the exhibition 'Chance and Change: a Century of the Avant-Garde', curated by Andrew Bogle. Began his *Luz. Vi. Minda. (Filipiniana)* painting series.
- 1987 Began a new performance series, *A Shot in the Dark*, with Brian Morgan. The audience were invited to bring cameras of all kinds to film the performances. Began work on his painting *A Memory of Mr Morley's Harp-Shop in South Kensington*.
- 1989 Performance of *The Dream of Andres Bonifacio*, organized by Hermine Demoriane for the 200th anniversary of the French revolution, at Espace Donguy, Paris. Exhibited in 'The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain', curated by Rasheed Araeen at the Hayward Gallery, London. Painted *A Prophecy in the Shadow of La Grande Arche in Paris*, now in the Arts Council Collection. *A Stitch in Time* also acquired by the Arts Council Collection. Exhibited, and gave performances, in 'Here and There: Travels II', curated by Chris Dercon at the Clocktower Gallery, New York.
- 1990 Became Artist in Transit at the New York Port Authority. Invited to give a series of five lectures at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for which his title was 'The Dream of Yawwigha: The Sources in Global Cultures of Modern Art'. Wrote a weekly column for the *Filipino Express*, 'Medalla in Manhattan' (1990-91). Began his painting cycle *New York Epiphanies*. Exhibited in 'Public Mirror: Artists against Racial Prejudice', curated by Tom Finkelppearl, Rebecca Quaytman and Ken Chu at the Clocktower Gallery, New York.
- 1991 Awarded an Artist's Fellowship by the New York Foundation for the Arts. Exhibited in 'Shocks to the System: Works from the Arts Council Collection', curated by Isobel Johnstone at the Royal Festival Hall, London, and City Art Gallery, Manchester. Started a new collaboration with the Australian artist Adam Nankervis. The duo performed a number of time-based and site-specific events in New York.
- 1992 Awarded a second Artist's Fellowship by the New York Foundation for the Arts. Exhibited in 'Fluxattitudes', curated by Cornelia Lauf and Susan Hapgood at the New Museum, New York. Awarded a fellowship by the Jerome Foundation of America. Performed *Five Immortals at Drop-Dead Prices* in the Great Hall of Cooper Union, New York, organized by Franklin Furnace.
- 1993 Lectured on transcendental art in the mid-Manhattan branch of the New York Public Library. Exhibited *New York Epiphanies* and other paintings at the Philippines Center in Manhattan.
- 1994 Founder and President, The Mondrian Fan Club. A major exhibition of new work held in London, 'The Secret History of the Mondrian Fan Club Part II', at 55 Gee Street, Clerkenwell. For this exhibition he was commissioned by Pulsynetic to produce an ensemble of four monumental perspex bubble-machines, *Cloud Gates*, two new mud- and compost-machines, a neon work, *Kinetic Mudras for Piet Mondrian*, and a suite of paintings and giant chromo-copies. During this exhibition he opened his space to artists, dancers, film-makers, architects, writers and others to exhibit and perform.



## Bibliography

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Medalla edited and designed the *Signals Newsbulletin*, publication of Signals London. Ten issues were produced between August 1964 and March 1966. They were related to the exhibitions in the showroom, with detailed documentation of each artist's work. They also included poems, critical essays, scientific digests, found images and experimental art news. The ten issues of *Signals Newsbulletin* have been reprinted a facsimile and published by INVA, London, 1995. Medalla also edited and designed invitation brochures (often running to several pages) for 12 exhibitions organised by Paul Keeler as Signals in Wigmore Street, London, between November 1964 and August 1966.

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<p>Exhibitions &amp; events at the Fitzrovia Cultural Centre are sponsored by Friends of AVD and, in part, by GLAA * The Greater London Arts Association.</p>			
<p><b>MECHANICKS</b> a performance art event written and performed by <b>NICK PAYNE</b> with guitar music especially composed and played by <b>ROB COLLINS</b> Sunday, April 17th, 1977, at 8 p.m.</p>	<p><b>COYOTE</b> <b>JOSEPH BEUYS</b> photographs by <b>CAROLINE TISDALL</b> CAROLINE TISDALL, art critic of <i>The Guardian</i>, will give a talk with slides on JOSEPH BEUYS' "COYOTE" on Sunday, April 23rd, 1977, at 8 p.m. Admission free.</p>	<p><b>SHADOW WOMAN</b> live event with film by <b>TINA KEANE</b> Sunday, April 24th, 1977, at 9 p.m.</p>	<p><b>'ESKIMO CARVER'</b> new works (1977), video, drawings, paintings, events, by <b>DAVID MEDALLA</b> opens Sunday, May 1st, 1977, at 8 p.m., closes on June 7th, 1977.</p>
<p><b>"DREAMY BOXES"</b> video event &amp; environment by <b>MORRIS CRAMER</b> assisted by <b>JETT RUBIN</b> Sunday, April 17th, 1977, at 7 p.m. With grateful acknowledgement to the Arts Council of Great Britain for the loan of video equipment</p>	<p>"COYOTE" show by BEUYS and TISDALL closes on May 1st, 1977. Gallery open Tuesday-Sunday, 1 to 6 p.m. Admission free. Nearest tube: Warren Street.</p>	<p><i>"Popular Art Forms and Modern Artists"</i> a lecture &amp; slides show by <b>GUY BRETT</b> Sunday, May 1st 1977, at 7 p.m.</p>	<p><b>"VANMOULAS AND IN CAMOU"</b> a mixed show featuring new art works, performance events, video, films, photos, books, and poems by Barbara Aronow, Su Burrey, Virgil Caluogian, Ray Calderstone, Harriet Clarke, Philip Cohen, Robert Curson, Tom Dragicevic, Ian Finlay, Peter Fisher, Andrew Forrest, Iel Green, Don Sylvester and others (4th), Charles Bostwick, George Isherwood, Attilio Lopez, Steve Gile?, Red Shepherd, Ars Seriana, Jan Terra, Giles Thomas, Steve Thorne, and other artists, opens on Sunday, June 12th, 1977, at 8 p.m.</p>
<p>AVD warmly thank AIN, OMA (Holland), poets Edgell Rickwood, Arthur Clegg, 4th, film-maker Joris Ivens, writers Mary McCarthy, Julia Cortazar, artists Sonia Delaunay, Heret Oppenheim, Lygia Clark, Matta, Claes Oldenburg, Christo, Kenneth Heland, Sal Lewitt, Lourdes Castro, Susan Hiller, Joyce Wieland, Takis, Lee Levine, Rene Berthois, Paul Peucher, Pedro Uhart &amp; others for their support</p> <p><b>ARTISTS FOR DEMOCRACY</b>      <b>FITZROVIA CULTURAL CENTRE</b>      143 Whitfield St. London W1P 5RY</p>			



This book by the distinguished art critic Guy Brett is the first attempt to bring together a fascinating and ephemeral body of artistic work which escapes a simple definition. Born in Manila, in the Philippines in 1942, and based since 1960 mainly in London, David Medalla has distinguished himself internationally as a major innovator of the avant-garde. Over the last forty years his work has embraced a multitude of enquiries and enthusiasms, forms and formats, to express a singular yet deeply coherent vision of the world. Proud of his effort to remain independent of the commercial, bureaucratic and chauvinistic pressures of the art world, he has nevertheless been an international creative force, travelling, encouraging artists, creating groups and exhibition spaces, and evolving his own art which strives towards the emergence of a new kind of transnational and polymorphic culture.

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Covers: Kinetic Mudras for Piet Mondrian, animated neon art work by David Medalla, 1994.

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