

Carl Sydow

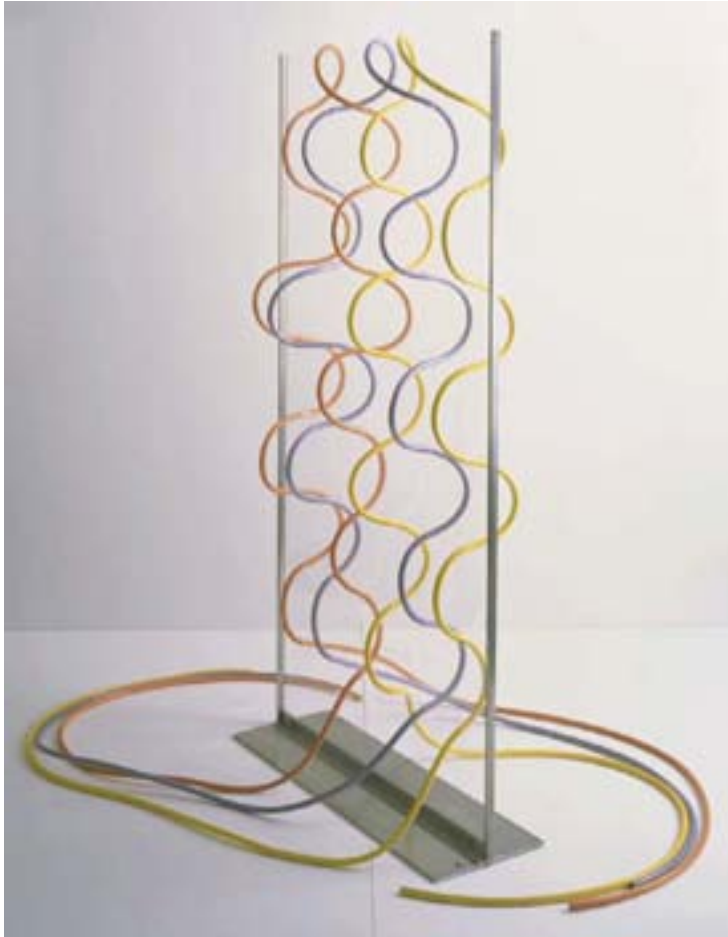
New Zealander, 1940-1975

Meander I

1971, perspex, aluminium base and hose, 183.8x90.2x30.8 cm

Purchased 1973

Reproduced courtesy of R. Sydow



About the work

Meander I is a Constructivist sculpture in which the forms are made from materials developed for manufacture or engineering work. Constructivism, a Russian art movement at the turn of the 20th century, aimed to make art a detached, scientific investigation of abstract properties such as geometric surface, construction, line and colour. *Meander I* calls on geometric structural principles of space, volume, movement and form to suggest sculptural spaces rather than masses. The hose creates not only interlacing shapes but defines a field of space inside the curves.

By drawing lines in space through the use of colourful plastic hosing, Carl Sydow was exploring the ideas of continuity and circularity. *Meander I*, as the title suggests, connotes a playful meandering line that appears to be moving in space and time. The hoses loop back and forth through a clear perspex frame suggesting music and movement, or rivers and water.

Like many sculptors using the Constructivist style, Sydow first conceived his sculptures as drawings and then translated them into sculptural forms. He has clearly seen the potential for bright colours and flexible forms which the newly released plastic hoses afforded, giving a contemporary take on the

constructivist use of industrial materials.

The Constructivist *Meander* series was an innovation in New Zealand sculpture and was developed by Sydow in 1970 after experimenting with rigid, brightly coloured PVC pipes. It revealed his response to the move away from traditional sculptural materials found in the work of Henry Moore (1898 -1986) and Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975). This style was developed in the early 20th century with the work of the Russian sculptors Vladimir Tatlin (1885 -1953) and Antoine Pevsner (1886-1962) who were working on minimalist sculptures devoid of any representational imagery. Instead, he deliberately employed industrial materials as a step in the liberation of art from nature toward structural principles which are concerned with pure geometry and spatial relationships. The sculpture is also released from the traditional plinth or pedestal.

In another work in this series, *Meander II*, Sydow placed the forms horizontally on the floor and used a mirror to reflect the hosing, thus extending spatial concerns into another dimension.

Carl Sydow

New Zealander , 1940-1975

About the artist

Carl Sydow was born in Takapuna, near Auckland, in 1940. He attended the School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, from 1959 to 1961 and completed an Honours course in Sculpture at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 1963. He also completed a teaching diploma at Auckland Teachers' College in 1962.

From 1964 to 1966 Sydow visited England on a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Grant and worked in the studios of the Royal College of Art. Back in New Zealand he taught in Christchurch from 1967 to 1970. He died suddenly in 1975, aged only 35 years.

Sydow regularly exhibited with The Group and was a founder member of the Sculptors' Group formed in 1970. He was Vice-President of the New Zealand Society of Sculptors and Painters Inc. from 1972 to 1973 and held solo exhibitions at the Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch and with the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington.

Sydow's early sculptures from 1963 to 1968 display traditional figurative conventions such as elements of the human form cast in bronze. After 1969 he abandoned figurative forms and the traditional process in favour of industrial materials and assembled Constructivist sculptures.

The *Meander* series was succeeded by an investigation of suspension installations involving large nets. Optical patterns and kinetic effects were achieved by overlays of netting. These were further developed in the later *Constructions*. These later works, the last of Sydow's sculptures before his untimely death, eliminated colour in favour of a more severe concentration on form and shape.

Other works by the artist in the Collection

Flow

1970, PVC tube, steel and plastic hose
Presented by Rosemary Sydow 1979

Untitled Drawing

1972, ink
Presented by Alan Pearson 1996

Construction I

1973, painted aluminium, zinc sheet and springs
Purchased 1978

Drawing 3: iii

1974, Letrafilm/Letratone on paper
Purchased 1976

Drawing 6, v

1975, Letraset, Letrafilm and ink
Purchased 1976

Drawing 5 xix

1975, Letrafilm/Letratone and ink
Purchased 1976

Maquette of a proposed sculpture for Queen Elizabeth II Park, Christchurch

1973, 3 units of painted aluminium zinc
Purchased 1979

Portrait of A. R. Pearson

date unknown, photo-print of x-ray
Purchased 1979

Two Face Lady

date unknown, silkscreen
Purchased 1979

Further reading

Carl Sydow: Memorial Exhibition, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1979.

'Drawing together', John Coley, *NZ Listener*, June 16, 1979, p. 24.

