
C A L D E R



Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris
May 17–July 11, 1984

This exhibition and accompanying publication were organized by Pamela Gruninger Perkins, Manager, Whitney Museum of American Art, Fairfield County and Susan Lubowsky, Manager Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris. The exhibition opens at the Fairfield County branch in Stamford, Connecticut (January 20–March 21, 1984), and then travels to the Philip Morris branch in New York City (May 17–July 11, 1984)

The Whitney Museum has had a long association with Alexander Calder. His art was shown for the first time at the Museum in its Annual Exhibition of 1942 and has since been included in numerous exhibitions there. Since 1950, the Museum has acquired more than fifty of his works, including a painting, sculpture, drawings, prints, jewelry, and tapestries. Many of these pieces have come to the Museum through the generosity of Howard and Jean Lipman.

Special thanks are extended to Patterson Sims, Associate Curator, Permanent Collection, and Richard Marshall, Associate Curator, Exhibitions, for their advice and suggestions, Robert Anderson, intern, Fairfield County, and Cynthia Gowen, intern, Philip Morris, who ably assisted in the preparation of this publication.

Copyright © 1984 Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10021

Design: Alicia Landon Design
Typesetting: Typographics Communications, Inc.
Printing: Eastern Press, Inc.
Paper: Cover—Champion 10 pt. Kromekote C1S
Text—Champion 80 lb. Wedgewood Dull

Photographs by Geoffrey Clements, cover, pp. 4 (right), 6;
Seth Joel, p. 4 (left), Jerry L. Thompson, p. 5.

Cover
Wire Sculpture by Calder, 1928
Wire, 49½ x 26 x 6 (125.7 x 66 x 15.2)
Gift of Howard and Jean Lipman 72.168

CALDER

Selections from the Permanent Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art

At the age of eight, Alexander Calder (1898–1976) began to make toy figures and jewelry for his sister's dolls out of bits of wire and scraps of wood. For the rest of his life he would use the simple, inexpensive materials he found close at hand to create one imaginative piece after another. The childhood works also exhibit the economy of line and form, directness of presentation, feeling for motion, and, most important, the humor and playfulness that became characteristic of his mature art. The ability to produce art that is sophisticated, yet reminiscent of child's play is what endears Calder to audiences everywhere.

Calder was born into a family of artists. His mother, Nanette Lederer, was a professional portrait painter. Both his father, Alexander Stirling Calder, and his grandfather, Alexander Milne Calder, were successful sculptors of monumental public statues, rendered in the classical tradition. Having witnessed the insecurity of his father's career—the family moved from one place to another in pursuit of commissions—Calder opted for a different profession. After attending high school in Berkeley, California, he entered Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, where he graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering in 1919. In later years, his training as an engineer aided him in the execution of his sculpture.

For several years after graduation Calder worked at a variety of jobs. In 1923, with the encouragement of a family friend, he enrolled in painting and drawing classes at the Art Students League in New York. Painting in oil was not to his liking, but during his three years at the League drawing became a passion. The medium suited his desire for spontaneity, for being able to record rapidly the action of a moment.

Calder's first art-related job came in 1924, when he was hired as a free-lance illustrator for the *National Police Gazette*. In the spring of 1925, he spent two weeks sketching the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus performances. After that, he decided to create his own circus "just for the fun of it." The following year, in Paris, he began to make cloth and wire figures, and over the next six years he enlarged the circus troupe to its present size. (Calder's *Circus* is on permanent display at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.) Calder not only fabricated a circus, but for three decades he also gave live performances for friends and special audiences in America and Europe.

Calder's *Circus* was a logical extension of his interest in toys and especially in animals; it also laid the groundwork for all of his future activities as an artist. The elements of surprise, suspense, humor, and action—all essential to a circus—became an inte-

gral part of his art. At his *Circus* performances in Paris he also met the leading artists of the day, among them, Jean Arp, Fernand Léger, Frederick Kiesler, Théo van Doesburg, Joan Miró, and Piet Mondrian. The last two subsequently had a direct influence on his work, and Miró became a lifelong friend.

Between 1926 and 1934, Calder alternated between living in Paris and New York. The years in Paris were enormously important and productive ones for Calder. In addition to working on his *Circus*, he sculpted in wood, wire, and bronze, took up printmaking, and continued to draw.

Calder's experiments with wood and bronze were relatively short-lived. The bronze medium was too expensive and did not suit his working method. He also produced in this period some figurative work in wood and, slightly later, abstract *stabiles* with wood and other materials.

Calder's engagement with abstraction can be traced to his 1930 visit to Mondrian's studio. Seeing some rectangles of color tacked to the wall, Calder thought it would be fun to make them "oscillate." Mondrian was not amused. Undaunted, Calder went home and began his first experiments with abstract art. He demonstrated his immediate and successful grasp of geometric abstraction with the wire sculptures he created following his visit to Mondrian's studio. As a result, he was invited to join the Paris-based Abstraction-Création group, which had just been founded by van Doesburg. The group consisted of forty artists, including Mondrian, Jean Hélion, and Arp, all of whom were involved with nonrepresenta-

tional art. Calder's membership in the group (only two other Americans were asked to join) affirmed his stature in the art world. In 1931, he had his landmark exhibition of standing abstract wire sculptures at the Galerie Percier in Paris. A year later, on the occasion of his first exhibition of moving sculptures, Arp named the stationary pieces "stabiles."

By the end of 1931, Calder was using electric motors or hand cranks to introduce motion into his abstract sculptures. (Actually he had created a "moving" sculpture as early as 1929—a wire goldfish-filled bowl with a hand crank to move the fish around.) In 1932, at the Galerie Vignon in Paris, Calder first exhibited his moving sculptures, which Marcel Duchamp dubbed "mobiles." Calder continued to experiment with motorized moving sculpture but eventually lost interest in the mathematically predictable movements. In keeping with his desire for the spontaneous, he chose instead to pursue an art based on motion and chance: at the end of 1932, he produced his first mobile to be propelled by air current alone.

During his lifetime, Calder made around two thousand mobiles in a great variety of shapes, sizes, and materials. The earliest ones often incorporated "found" objects such as bits of colored glass and pottery; the later ones were made of aluminum or steel. Eventually, the moving parts were liberated from their wood or metal bases and were attached to

the wall, or hung directly from the ceiling, which allowed for even greater and more complex movement. The mobiles revolutionized the concept of sculpture: no longer did sculpture have to be stationary or planted on the ground.

In 1933, Calder and his wife, Louisa, bought their first house, in Roxbury, Connecticut. For years the Calders would divide their time between New York City and Roxbury. In Roxbury, Calder had a good-sized studio, and the scale of his work seemed to increase in response to the open countryside of Connecticut. He also started producing outdoor works for the first time.

Nineteen thirty-four was the year Calder met the critic James Johnson Sweeney, who became the leading advocate of his work. Calder's art found an immediate and appreciative audience in this country; he exhibited with major New York galleries and in many museum exhibitions. From the 1950s on, Calder was inundated with commissions from around the world for mobiles and stabiles. As a result, he and Louisa began to travel more. In 1953, they bought a home in Saché, France, where they spent an increasing amount of time. His first monumental stabile was erected in 1962 in Spoleto, Italy. Calder stabiles and mobiles now grace practically every major city between New York and Los Angeles, as well as key sites in Canada, Mexico, South America, and Western Europe.

Calder also produced gouaches throughout most of his life. As with drawing, he took to the medium with ease, appropriating his usual sources—natural forms

and abstract designs—to create compositions of simple shapes and bold primary colors. In later years, the gouaches functioned as models for lithographs. In addition to lithography, Calder was involved with other major forms of printmaking—etching, woodcut, and linoleum block prints. Many of the prints were done as illustrations for texts. He also designed numerous magazine covers, posters, and exhibition announcements.

Calder's creative energy spilled over into all aspects of his life. For his family and friends he made jewelry, tapestries, and all sorts of household items, including kitchen utensils, china, ceramic tiles, wallpaper, and fabric. He designed more than a dozen stage sets, an acoustical ceiling, and a sidewalk pavement; built a mercury fountain; and painted two airplanes and a sports car.

Calder's approach to art was unique. He had decided, early in his career, to "remain as primitive as possible." Not only did he prefer the simple, inexpensive materials available to him, but he also insisted on the least complicated means for construction. His vocabulary of forms was equally elemental: circles, spheres, spirals, curves, and triangles. But Calder's apparent simplicity is deceptive, for he used it to create the most imaginative sculpture in twentieth-century art, a body of work justifiably renowned for its ingenuity, wit, and grace.

Horse, c. 1928

Wire Sculpture by Calder, 1928 (cover)

From the tiny wire jewelry Calder made as a child for his sister's dolls, he developed the playful shorthand that came to define his adult work. "I think best in wire," he once said, though the swift-looking contours of these figurative sculptures also reflect his approach to drawing. *Wire Sculpture by Calder*, the sign for his first exhibition in this medium at the Weyhe Gallery, New York, in 1928, was directly influenced by a series of drawings of Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, made three years earlier for the *National Police Gazette*. *Horse* is a stylized silhouette—a line drawing in three dimensions. Both *Horse* and *Wire Sculpture* are among Calder's early experiments with motion, antecedents to the abstract stables and mobiles of the 1930s. The horse's front legs can pivot on their base, while *Wire Sculpture* can swing like a tavern sign.

Le Dompteur et Ses Fauves, 1932

"ANIMALS—ACTION. These two words go hand in hand in art. . . ." Calder's statement explains both his choice of subject matter and his technique. One of a group of drawings made in France between 1931 and 1932, *Le Dompteur et Ses Fauves* ("The Animal Tamer and His Beasts") exemplifies two of Calder's favorite early themes: animals and the circus. The humor in this series of drawings, sometimes vacillating between the innocent and the bawdy, is derived from the miniature circus troupe created by the artist in the mid-1920s. Though Calder's circus was fabricated from wire, and the drawings were rendered in ink, both are formed by a continuous line, ideal for achieving the effects of action and movement.



Wooden Bottle with Hairs, 1943

In the early 1940s, when all available metal was needed for the war effort, Calder returned to wood sculpture, a medium he had abandoned a decade before after producing such whimsical works as *Double Cat* (1930). In the wood sculptures of the 1940s, Calder retained the abstract conceits he had developed in his mobiles and stabiles under the influence of Jean Arp, Joan Miró, and Yves Tanguy. Both *Wooden Bottle with Hairs* and Calder's series known as Constellations are composed of a variety of materials: whatever he had within reach, combined with carved blocks of wood. The bottle, his most Surrealist work, is reminiscent of Miró's forms, and, by hanging the "hairs" from protruding wires, Calder once again used motion as a key element.



Dots and Dashes, 1959

The development of the mobile is perhaps Calder's greatest achievement. In the moving sculptures he began to produce in the 1930s, color came to play a dominant role. Like Mondrian, who first inspired him to take up abstraction, Calder favored black, white, and bright primary colors. Calder's mobiles grew more ambitious and, by the 1950s, they had become so large that it was no longer possible for him to construct them by hand in the studio. Though a commercial metal shop fabricated the finished piece, Calder still relied on simple tools and materials to make the scale model—and on his engineering skills to plot out motion and balance. The process duplicated that of the early mobiles: many forms were cut from light aluminum and arranged on a flat surface. When he felt pleased with the shapes and configurations, they were strung together and delivered to the metal shop. *Dots and Dashes* is typical of the hanging mobiles of the late 1950s. Painted black, it is one of a number of monochromatic works whose facetious titles describe their abstract imagery.



The Cock's Comb, 1960

As Calder grew older, his projects steadily increased in size. *The Cock's Comb* is among the first of the monumental stabiles begun in the 1960s that continued to command his attention until his death. Fabricated in a process similar to that of the mobiles, they are cut from large sheets of metal which are then bolted together. In conceiving works on this scale, Calder manipulated massive shapes as he had once fashioned delicate lengths of wire. The title evokes the work's rooster-like character, but the real playfulness resides in the whimsical treatment of mass and scale—a central feature of all Calder's stabiles.



Contour Plowing, 1974

Calder began to paint in gouache during the mid-1940s and continued to work in this medium for the rest of his life. The speed with which gouache could be applied appealed to Calder's spontaneous nature in much the same way that drawing in ink had earlier engaged him. In each of his houses, he set aside a room he wryly called his "gouacherie," and even in old age spent part of each day there. As in the early drawings, Calder relied on the use of line, though it was now bolder and abstracted. Flat primary colors, straight from the jar, fill in shapes which, as in *Contour Plowing*, are often inspired by natural forms.



Checklist

Dimensions are given first in inches, then in centimeters; height precedes width. The works are arranged chronologically.

Firemen's Dinner for Brancusi, 1926

Oil on canvas, 36 x 42
(91.4 x 106.7)
Gift of the artist 63.58

Wire Sculpture by Calder, 1928

Wire, 49½ x 26 x 6
(125.7 x 66 x 15.2)
Gift of Howard and Jean Lipman 72.168

Elephant, c. 1928

Sheet brass on wood base,
3½ x 9¾ x 3⅝ (8.9 x 24.8 x
9.2) overall
Promised gift of M.H. Lloyd
P. 69.80

Horse, c. 1928

Wire on wood base, 16 x 23⅞ x
5½ (40.6 x 60.6 x 14) height
variable
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Al
Hirschfeld 80.49

Double Cat, 1930

Wood, 7 x 51 x 4½
(17.8 x 129.5 x 11.4)
Gift of the Howard and Jean
Lipman Foundation, Inc.
69.256

Old Bull, 1930

Sheet brass, 9 x 18 x 2¼
(22.9 x 45.7 x 5.7)
Gift of the Howard and Jean
Lipman Foundation, Inc.
69.257

Juggler with Dog, 1931

Ink on paper, 22¾ x 30¾
(57.8 x 78.1)
Gift of Howard and Jean
Lipman 81.23.2

Tumbler on Swing, 1931

Ink on paper, 30¾ x 22¾
(78.1 x 57.8)
Gift of Howard and Jean
Lipman 81.23.4

Varèse, 1931

Wire, 13½ x 13¾ x 12¼
(34.3 x 34.9 x 31.1)
50th Anniversary Gift of Mrs.
Louise Varèse in honor of
Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney
80.25

Le Dompteur et Ses Fauves, 1932

Ink on paper, 21¾ x 20¾
(55.2 x 52.7)
Gift of Howard and Jean
Lipman 80.50.2

Half-circle, Quarter-circle and Sphere, 1932

Metal, wire, and motor, 78¾ x
24 x 13¾ (198.8 x 61 x 34.9)
Gift of the Howard and Jean
Lipman Foundation, Inc.
69.258

On the High Wire, 1932

Ink on paper, 20½ x 24⅞
(52.1 x 63.2)
Gift of Howard and Jean
Lipman 81.23.3

Two Acrobats, 1932

Ink on paper (drawing on
both sides), 21¾ x 29⅞
(55.2 x 75.2)
Gift of Howard and Jean
Lipman 80.50.1

Belt Buckle, 1935

Brass, 8 x 5½ x ½
(20.3 x 14 x 1.3)
Gift of Mrs. Marcel Duchamp
in memory of the artist
77.21

Cage within a Cage, 1939

Metal, wood, and string,
37½ x 58¾ x 21 (95.3 x 149.2
x 53.3)
Gift of the Howard and Jean
Lipman Foundation, Inc.
75.23

Necklace, c. 1940

Silver, 19¼ long (48.9)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Marcel
Breuer 71.208

Wooden Bottle with Hairs, 1943

Wood and wire, 22 x 14½ x 10½
(55.9 x 36.8 x 26.7)
50th Anniversary Gift of the
Howard and Jean Lipman
Foundation, Inc. 80.28.2

Snake on a Post, 1944

(cast 1969)
Bronze, 24 x 32 x 12
(61 x 81.3 x 30.5)
Gift of the Howard and
Jean Lipman Foundation,
Inc. 70.3

Sea Scape, 1947

Wood, string, metal, and poly-
chrome paint, 36½ high x 60
diameter (92.7 x 152.4)
Gift of the Howard and
Jean Lipman Foundation,
Inc. (and purchase) 72.120

Earrings, c. 1947

Iron, 2 diameter (5.1)
Gift of Mrs. Katharine Kuh
70.45a

Earrings, c. 1947

Brass with iron, wire, and
stone, 2 x 1 (5.1 x 2.5)
Gift of Mrs. Katharine Kuh
70.45b

Pomegranate, 1949

Painted sheet aluminum, steel rods, and wire, 72 high x 68 diameter (182.9 x 172.7)

Purchase 50.6

Bifurcated Tower, 1950

Painted metal and wire, 58 x 72 x 53 (147.3 x 182.9 x 134.6) variable

Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc. (and exchange) 73.31

Composition, 1953

Watercolor on paper, 28 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 41 $\frac{1}{2}$ (72.1 x 105.7)

Gift of Mrs. Milton Weill 61.15

Big Red, 1959

Painted sheet metal and steel wire, 74 high x 114 diameter (188 x 289.6)

Gift of the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art 61.46

On permanent display

Dots and Dashes, 1959

Painted sheet metal and wire, 60 high x 60 diameter (152.4 x 152.4)

On extended loan from the collection of Howard and Jean Lipman

The Cock's Comb, 1960

Painted sheet iron, 119 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 145 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 98 $\frac{1}{2}$ (302.9 x 370.2 x 250.2)

Gift of the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art 62.18

Portrait of Yves Elléounët

from **La Proue de la Table**, 1967

Etching, 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ (28.6 x 37.8)

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. David B. Pall in honor of John I. H. Baur 74.78

Indian Feathers, 1969

Painted sheet aluminum and stainless steel rods, 136 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 91 x 63 (347.3 x 231.1 x 160)

Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc 69.260

The Red Nose, 1969

Lithograph, 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 43 $\frac{3}{8}$ (74.9 x 110.2)

Promised gift of Howard and Jean Lipman P.39.80

Big Bug, 1970

Gouache on paper, 29 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 42 $\frac{3}{4}$ (74 x 108.6)

Promised gift of Howard and Jean Lipman P 40.80

Glacier with Coloured Petals, 1971

Tapestry, 66 x 93 $\frac{1}{2}$ (167.6 x 237.5)

Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc 71.220

Les Masques, 1971

Tapestry, 63 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 97 $\frac{1}{4}$ (161.3 x 247)

Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc. 74.95

Chock, 1972

Metal assemblage, 11 x 28 x 22 (27.9 x 71.1 x 55.9)

Gift of the artist 72.55

Contour Plowing, 1974

Gouache on paper, 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 43 $\frac{3}{8}$ (74.3 x 109.5)

Gift of the artist 74.91

Four Black Dots, 1974

Gouache on paper, 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 43 (74.9 x 109.2)

Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc. 74.94

Triumph, 1974

Gouache on paper, 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 43 $\frac{1}{4}$ (74.9 x 109.9)

Gift of the artist in honor of John I. H. Baur 74.63

Menagerie, 1975

Gouache on paper, 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 42 (74.3 x 106.7)

Gift of the artist 75.42

The Horse, 1976

Lithograph, 29 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ (75.3 x 54)

Gift of Brewster Fine Arts Ltd 77.90

Necklace, n.d

Brass, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ diameter (26.7)

Gift of Sculptotek Inc. 81.10

Since this catalogue went to press, the following works have been added to the exhibition. With the exception of *Constellation*, all are displayed in the sculpture court.

Constellation, 1941

Painted wood and wire,
51 x 46½ x 10
(129.5 x 118.1 x 25.4)

Promised gift of Mrs. Theodate
Johnson Severns P.3.81

Longnose, 1957

Painted steel, 98 x 103 x 64
(248.9 x 261.6 x 162.6)

On extended loan from the
collection of Howard and
Jean Lipman

Seven Foot Beastie, 1957

Painted steel plate, 84 x 84 x 48
(213.4 x 213.4 x 121.9)

Gift of Louisa Calder 83.45

Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris

120 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Hours

Monday–Saturday 11:00–6:00

Thursday 11:00–7:30

Staff

Lisa Phillips

Head, Branch Museums, and Associate Curator

Susan Lubowsky

*Manager, Whitney Museum of American Art
at Philip Morris*

Sarah Warren

Assistant Manager

Janis Krasnow

Gallery Assistant

Funding for the Whitney Museum of American Art at
Philip Morris is provided by Philip Morris Incorporated

