

Alexander Calder

Alexander was born on July 22nd, 1898, in Lawton, Pennsylvania, into a family of artists. In 1919, he received an engineering degree from Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken. Calder attended the Art Students League, New York, from 1923 to 1926, studying briefly with Thomas Hart Benton and John Sloan among others. As a freelance artist for the national Police Gazette in 1925, he spent two weeks sketching at the circus; his fascination with the subject dates from this time. He also made his first public sculpture in 1925; the following year he made several constructions of animals and figures with wire and wood. Calder's first exhibition of paintings took place in 1926 at the Artists Gallery, New York. Later that year, he went to Paris and attended the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere. In Paris, he met Stanley William Hayter, exhibited at the 1926 Salon des Independants, and in 1927 began giving performances of his miniature circus. The first show of his wire animals and caricature portraits was held at the Weyhe Gallery, New York, in 1928. That same year, he met Joan Miro, who became his lifelong friend. Subsequently, Calder divided his time between France and the United States. In 1929, the Galerie Billiet gave him his first solo show in Paris. He met Frederick Kiesler, Fernand Leger and Theo van Doesburg and visited Piet Mondrian's studio in 1930. Calder began to experiment with abstract sculpture at this time and in 1931 and 1932 introduced moving parts into his work. These moving sculptures were called mobiles; the stationary constructions were to be named stabiles. He exhibited with the Abstract Creation Group in Paris in 1933. In 1943, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, gave him a solo exhibition.

During the 1950s, Calder travelled widely and executed Towers (wall mobiles) and Gongs (sound mobiles). He won the Grand Prize for Sculpture at the 1952 Venice Biennale. Late in the decade, the artist worked extensively with gouache; from this period, he executed numerous major public commissions. In 1964-1965, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, presented a Calder retrospective. He began the Totems in 1966 and the Animobiles in 1971; both are variations of the standing mobile. A Calder exhibition was held at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 1976.

Calder was impressed by the formal qualities and tonal implications of Mondrian's work and the art of Joan Miro. Their respective influences can be seen in Calder's subsequent work, which elegantly combines elements of abstraction, surrealism and constructivism.

Calder died on November 11th, 1976, in New York.

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