



## MEDIA RELEASE

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

MEDIA CONTACTS: MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, NGV

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## ALEXANDER CALDER: RADICAL INVENTOR

NGV International | 5 April 2019 – 4 August 2019 | Admission fees apply



Known as the man who made sculpture move, Alexander Calder (1898-1976) was one of the most influential and pioneering figures of modern art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Revered for his ingenuity, inventiveness and innovation, Calder will be celebrated in his first retrospective at an Australian public institution, featuring works never-before-seen in Australia, including an impressive display of Calder's most iconic forms: suspended mobiles.

*Alexander Calder: Radical Inventor*, presented at NGV International from 5 April to 4 August 2019, will feature nearly 100 works spanning the artist's oeuvre, ranging from early childhood sculptures to avant-garde innovations to large-

scale objects from the last chapter of his career in the 1970s. Organised in collaboration with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada, the exhibition brings together sculpture, drawing, painting, jewellery and other media from North American art museums and private collections, including generous loans from the Calder Foundation, New York.

Central to the exhibition will be an immersive canopy display of Calder's hanging mobiles, demonstrating his radical and pioneering approach that changed the course of modern art. The display includes *Jacaranda*, 1949, a striking cascading mobile made in a heavy gauge of wire and steel, as well as *Black Mobile with Hole*, 1954, a masterpiece in how to occupy, but not fill, space: strategic voids cut in biomorphic forms provide the necessary weight and counterweight to create a moving sculpture of exceptional grace. Visitors will experience Calder's works by engaging with them in an immersive environment, appreciating sculptures that are only partially understood when represented through photographs or film.

'This exhibition will invite Australian audiences to immerse themselves in the evolution of Calder's artistic career and gain a deeper and richer understanding of his inventiveness. Alexander Calder's masterful manipulation of wire and innovative use of sculptural movement and balance has undoubtedly cemented him as a radical 20<sup>th</sup> century artist,' said Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV.

Exhibition visitors will witness Calder's ingenuity with wire and metal through his early wire sculptures that demonstrate his first major 'invention'. In addition to wire portraits of contemporaries including fellow American artist John Graham, on view are complex works introducing the theme of the circus, such as *The Brass Family*, 1929, a wire sculpture of balancing circus performers, and film documentation of *Cirque Calder*, 1926-31, one of the earliest examples of performance art.

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Calder, an American in 1920s Paris, was immersed in cosmopolitan artistic avant-garde circles. A visit to Piet Mondrian's studio changed the nature of Calder's practice, triggering his interest in pursuing abstraction. His works increasingly began to include kinetic elements, some using motors (such as *Half-circle*, *Quarter-circle and Sphere*, 1932), while others relied on air currents, balance and tension to move. These were coined *mobile* by Marcel Duchamp in 1931, which in French suggests both movement and also a 'motive'. 'Mobile' soon entered common usage to describe suspended sculptures, appearing in *Webster's New International Dictionary* in 1954.

*Alexander Calder: Radical Inventor* will present many incarnations of Calder's signature sculptures, including: 'standing mobiles' (mobile elements suspended from a base), 'gongs' (mobiles with elements that produce sound when by chance they collide); 'Constellations' (carved pieces of wood connected by a network of wires); and 'stables' (grounded sculptures made from bolted sheet metal).

The exhibition will also feature maquettes and large-scale sculptures that represent Calder's endeavours on a grand scale. A working maquette of Montreal's civic emblem *Trois disques* (more commonly known as 'Man') is on show; its unpainted stainless-steel surface inscribed with measurements infers the highly complex combination of engineering, construction and aesthetics that underpin his monumental works.

*Alexander Calder: Radical Inventor* will be accompanied by a dedicated workshop space for budding artists, *Alexander Calder: Workshop for Kids*, featuring hands-on and multimedia creative activities inspired by Calder's works. Drawing from Calder's interest in creating three-dimensional work, kids and families will be able to construct their own animal creatures using unique paper pop-outs and in a specially designed digital activity, build their own virtual large-scale public art work and place the sculpture in bespoke urban environments.

*Alexander Calder: Radical Inventor* and *Alexander Calder: Workshop for Kids* will be on display at NGV International Melbourne from 5 April 2019 – 4 August 2019. Further information is available from [NGV.MELBOURNE](http://NGV.MELBOURNE).

-ends-

### **ALEXANDER S. C. ROWER IN CONVERSATION**

**Thursday 4 April, 6.30pm – 7.30pm**

Alexander S. C. Rower, President, Calder Foundation and grandson of the artist, speaks in conversation with Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV about the artist's work. Further information is available from [NGV.MELBOURNE](http://NGV.MELBOURNE).

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An exhibition developed, organized and circulated by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada in collaboration with the Calder Foundation, New York.

The exhibition and its international tour are made possible thanks to the generous support of the Terra Foundation for American Art, Major Benefactor of *Alexander Calder: Radical Inventor*.

The *Alexander Calder: Radical Inventor* exhibition is supported by the Australian Government International Exhibitions Insurance (AGIEI) Program. This program provides funding for the purchase of insurance for significant cultural exhibitions. Without AGIEI, the high cost of insuring significant cultural items would prohibit this major exhibition from touring to Australia.

### **IMAGE CAPTION**

#### **Alexander Calder**

American 1898–1976

*Little Spider* about 1940

painted sheet metal and wire

111.1 x 127 x 139.7 cm

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Gift of Mr. And Mrs. Klaus G. Perls

Accession number: 1996.120.18

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### **ABOUT**

**Alexander Calder (1898–1976)** utilised his innovative genius to profoundly change the course of modern art. Born in a family of celebrated, though more classically trained artists, he began by developing a new method of sculpting: by bending and twisting wire, he essentially ‘drew’ three-dimensional figures in space. He is renowned for the invention of the mobile, whose suspended, abstract elements move and balance in changing harmony. Coined by Marcel Duchamp in 1931, the word mobile refers to both ‘motion’ and ‘motive’ in French. The earliest mobiles moved by a system of cranks and motors, although these mechanics were virtually abandoned as Calder developed mobiles that responded to air currents, light, humidity, and human interaction. He also created stationary abstract works that Jean Arp dubbed stabiles.

From the 1950s onward, Calder turned his attention to international commissions and increasingly devoted himself to making outdoor sculpture on a grand scale from bolted steel plate. Some of these major commissions include: *125*, for the New York Port Authority in John F. Kennedy Airport (1957); *Spirale*, for UNESCO in Paris (1958); *Teodelapio*, for the city of Spoleto, Italy (1962); *Trois disques*, for the Expo in Montreal (1967); *El Sol Rojo*, for the Olympic Games in Mexico City (1968); *La Grande vitesse*, which was the first public art work to be funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), for the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan (1969); and *Flamingo*, for the General Services Administration in Chicago (1973).

Major retrospectives of Calder's work during his lifetime were held at the George Walter Vincent Smith Gallery, Springfield, Massachusetts (1938); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1943–44); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1964–65); The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

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(1964); Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris (1965); Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France (1969); and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1976–77). Calder died in New York in 1976 at the age of seventy-eight.

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