



Calder: Sculptor of Air
22 October 2009 – 14 February 2010

The Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, in collaboration with the Calder Foundation, New York, is pleased to present the retrospective exhibition *Calder: Sculptor of Air*. Curated by Alexander S.C. Rower and organized by Mondo Mostre, the exhibition will be on public view from 22 October 2009 to 14 February 2010.

Calder: Sculptor of Air is the first retrospective of the artist's work in Italy since the 1983 exhibition in Torino designed by Renzo Piano. Rather than being limited to a specific time period or type of work, this exhibition aims to explore Calder's intellect and intuitions on motion, intervention, variable composition, performance, and chance, presenting viewers with an opportunity to experience Calder's work in an exciting and compelling way.

Alexander Calder (1898-1976), whose illustrious career spanned much of the 20th century, is the most acclaimed and influential sculptor of our time. Born into a family of celebrated, though more classically trained artists, Calder utilized his innovative genius to profoundly change the course of modern art. He began by developing a new method of sculpting: he delineated mass by suggesting its volume in a few lines of wire. He is renowned for the invention of the mobile, whose suspended, abstract elements move and balance in changing harmony. Calder also devoted himself to making outdoor sculpture on a grand scale from bolted sheet steel. Today, these stately titans grace public plazas in cities throughout the world.

Calder's creativity extended beyond the lines of an established genre in art to arrive at work that was completely original and profoundly affecting. *Calder: Sculptor of Air* is an exploration of Calder's talent for creating engaging manifestations of energy. As described by Rower in his foreword to the catalogue, "By integrating subliminal elements like gravity, equilibrium, and negative space, Calder's sculpture creates a new experience of object and environment. This exhibition is an invitation to take part in this

visual experience, to go deeply into Calder's unique mastery of energy and space."

In addition to its unique curatorial vision, *Calder: Sculptor of Air* constitutes an impressive retrospective of the artist's work due to the number and quality of works exhibited, many of which have never been exhibited. The works on exhibition include mobiles, stabiles, monumental sculpture, oil and gouache paintings, bronze, wire and wood sculptures, and jewelry.

Visitors to the exhibition will first be met with the massive mobile *Pittsburgh* that fills the central Rotunda. Surrounding the mobile are four small maquettes, or the models from which monumental sculptures were made. Included here is *Teodelapio*, the large version of which was commissioned from the artist in 1962 for Spoleto's Festival of Two Worlds. *Teodelapio* is not only one of the only examples of contemporary monumental sculpture in Italy, but as the first work designed to enliven and completely transform a large public space, it is also significant in terms of Calder's development as an artist.

Gallery 1 begins with Calder's earliest sculptures, *Dog and Duck* (1909), created when Calder was just eleven years old, and continues through his early paintings and spirited illustrations of animals, made when he was an art student in New York in the early twenties. In 1926, Calder traveled to Paris and became a part of a vibrant community of avant-garde artists. Soon after his arrival, Calder invented wire sculpture, a totally new way of describing three-dimensional space with a single line. This gallery features the largest wire sculpture *Romulus and Remus* (1928), an ingenious rendering of the founders of Rome nursing from the she-wolf in wire and wooden doorstops, exhibited in Italy for the first time.

In Gallery 2, viewers will find the next and most innovative phase of Calder's career: his shift from figuration to abstraction and the invention of the mobile. The expressive lines of wire sculptures are transformed into definitions of pure energy in the earliest abstract constructions. Calder's very first abstract works, a group of rarely exhibited oil paintings, show his ability to translate energy into color and form. The highlight of this gallery is the revolutionary *Small Sphere and Heavy Sphere* (1932-1933), the first mobile designed to be suspended from the ceiling. An astonishing manifestation of gravity and variation, *Small Sphere and Heavy Sphere* is not simply an object but a performance: one gently pushes the heavy sphere,

causing the small sphere to swing into an unpatterned orbit where it may strike impedimenta arranged on the floor. This gallery also contains the impressive *Untitled* (c. 1932); at nearly four meters across it is a fascinating early example of Calder's ability to combine monumentality and grace.

Gallery 3 moves farther into the 1930s. The performative nature of *Small Sphere and Heavy Sphere* carried over into other works, particularly works like *White Panel* (1936) and *Red Panel* (c. 1938), in which the abstract objects in the foreground act against the panels' solid colored background. Many of the works from this period, with their exaggerated naturalistic imagery, show Calder's sympathy with surrealism. Also included in the gallery is a special selection of Calder's jewelry. These carefully crafted assertions of personal style show the more intimate side of Calder's work - indeed, many of the pieces were created especially for friends and family.

Gallery 4 showcases impressive large-scale works and lyrical paintings in gouache, as well as gently turning mobiles, illustrating the wide range of Calder's creative output. The paintings and sculpture complement each other, as the rhythmic melodies of the sculptures are echoed in the colors and forms of the paintings.

A number of works from the 1940s are brought together in Gallery 5, including several constellations, an open construction in which pieces of wood are fixed in place by single lines of wire. Alongside such signature Calder works such as *Spider*, Gallery 5 also includes *Tree* (1941) and *Scarlet Digitals* (1945), which have not been exhibited since the 1940s. *Tree* shows an elegant handling of the contrast between the delicate glass elements and the sturdy trunk-like base. *Scarlet Digitals* presents complex and fascinating ensembles of movement harmonized in one composition.

Central to Gallery 6 are *Parasite* (1947) and *Blue Feather* (c. 1948), two mesmerizing examples of Calder's ability to develop complex systems of motion and balance. The wall-mounted towers and hanging mobiles demonstrate Calder's use of wire to sculpt space, while the colorful gouaches, all created in Paris just after World War II, and rarely exhibited, show his spatial creativity in two-dimensions.

Gallery 7 contains *Glass Fish* (1955), a fine example of Calder's rare glass fish, whose shimmering broken glass bodies inspire contemplation of both light and motion. The juxtaposition of mobiles and bronzes emphasizes the

contradictions of each. The light ebullience of the mobiles is balanced by the descending progression of their elements, which reminds the viewer of their own rootedness, while the bronzes project both an earthbound solidity and, in their precarious balance, an inclination to defy gravity.

The exhibition is designed to make viewers aware of their experience of viewing the works. Rower notes that Calder “always worked towards a purified form of idealized beauty, and this intention was communicated through the reality of the viewer’s inspiring personal experience. When engaged, his works communicate his subliminal dictates; sensory statements emanate from the composition. It is this primary interaction with his sculpture in present time that makes Calder’s work continually fresh and alive to contemporary audiences.”

ALEXANDER S.C. ROWER, Curator, established the Calder Foundation in 1987. As President, he has documented more than 22,000 works by Alexander Calder and established an extensive archive dedicated to all aspects of Calder’s career. He has curated and co-curated many exhibitions including *Calder Jewelry* (2008), which opened at the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, and traveled to the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among other institutions; *Calder: Gravity and Grace* (2003), Guggenheim, Bilbao and the Reina Sofia, Madrid; and *Alexander Calder: 1898-1976*, (1988), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. He has published many texts on Calder’s life and work and frequently lectures on the subject.