

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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ONE OF TWENTIETH CENTURY'S MOST INNOVATIVE ARTISTS CELEBRATED

IN CENTENARY EXHIBITION, ALEXANDER CALDER: 1898-1976,

ON VIEW AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

MARCH 29 - JULY 12, 1998

Washington, D.C. -- The dynamic career of one of the twentieth century's most innovative artists and great public sculptors will be presented in Alexander Calder: 1898-1976, the most important exhibition of the artist's work in more than fifty years. Organized by the National Gallery of Art to celebrate the centenary of Calder's birth, the retrospective will be on view at the National Gallery, March 29 - July 12, 1998. Its only other venue is the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, September 4 - December 1, 1998.

The exhibition is made possible by GTE Corporation. It is the tenth exhibition that GTE Corporation has supported at the National Gallery of Art since 1980.

Approximately 250 works will be brought together to document Calder's development as a sculptor with supporting works on paper, paintings, and jewelry that provide additional context for the sculpture. The exhibition will be installed on several levels of the Gallery's East Building, in interior galleries and public spaces, and will

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include three outdoor sculptures.

The enormous breadth of Calder's career will be explored through works, ranging in size from small-scale to monumental, in every medium he employed: wire constructions, mobiles, standing mobiles, stabiles, constellations, and towers, among others. Many of the important early works in this exhibition have never been shown or have not been on public view since the 1943 Calder retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York. Some of the works have rarely been exhibited, such as the monumental outdoor sculpture, Southern Cross (1963), made for Calder's home in Connecticut, that has been on loan only once before to the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1976.

"We are extremely grateful to the GTE Corporation for their ongoing and generous support and to The Alexander and Louisa Calder Foundation and the Calder family for their collaboration in organizing this important exhibition," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The National Gallery has enjoyed a special relationship with the artist and is a major repository for his art, symbolized best by Untitled (1976), the grand mobile commissioned for the East Building." The exhibition will be on view during the twentieth anniversary of the East Building, which opened to the public on June 1, 1978.

"We are delighted to help bring this major retrospective exhibition of Alexander Calder's works to the National Gallery of Art," said Charles R. Lee, chairman and chief executive officer, GTE Corporation. "This continues a tradition of collaboration between GTE and the National Gallery of Art that spans over fifteen years. Calder's

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work reflects imagination, innovation, and creative genius -- qualities that are essential to success in the business world and throughout society."

Alexander Calder: 1898-1976 represents a unique and extensive collaboration between Marla Prather, the Gallery's curator of twentieth-century art; Alexander S.C. Rower, director of The Alexander and Louisa Calder Foundation; and the Calder family. Unprecedented access to works in the family collections and to the foundation's archive and catalogue raisonné research has provided information that enabled a selection of objects from the broadest variety of sources.

The very definition of sculpture was changed by Calder. Not only did he perpetually invent new shapes, he also created innovative forms of sculpture that necessitated coining the terms "mobile" and "stabile" to describe them. Although Calder was not the first sculptor to work kinetically, no other artist did so as extensively, exploring all the potential of motion.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition explores Calder's stylistic development beginning with some of his earliest works, such as Dog and Duck of 1909, which show the artist's sculptural facility at the age of eleven. Included are examples of Calder's first wire sculptures made in Paris, such as the ambitious and fluid Rearing Stallion (c. 1928); the innovative, crank-driven Goldfish Bowl (1929), in which the fish "swim"; and portraits of artists and entertainers such as Fernand Léger (1930) and Aztec Josephine Baker (c. 1929). The latter construction is suspended from a single wire thread, one of a series on the American-born singer who startled Paris audiences with her exuberant dancing

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in the 1920s.

Calder's movement into abstraction can be seen in Circus Scene (1929), in which he combines linear wire sculpture with gestural painting on a base that tends toward the abstract, and in Croisière (1931), one of the most successful of the first group of abstract works. The artist's Object with Red Ball (1931) is an example of an open composition in which the position of elements can be altered, and Cône d'ébène (1933), one of his earliest hanging mobiles, combines the technique of carving with an interest in geometric abstraction.

Also on view in the exhibition is the striking ten-foot-high construction Steel Fish, one of several large-scale standing mobiles produced in 1934 and the first of a number of outdoor wind-driven works. In Calder's Snake and the Cross (1936), a culmination of two aspects of experimentation, the use of a frame is combined with that of mobile elements. In the theatrical Tightrope (1936), a construction of two large wooden bollards holds a tightrope in place on which several wire elements are poised.

Fantastical animal forms began to appear in Calder's art in 1937 and can be seen in his first bolted sculpture, Whale (1937), a six-foot-high stabile assembled from curving sheets of metal, delicately balanced on a few points, and in Black Beast (1940), the earliest industrially made object and largest scale work to date. Calder's Constellation of 1943 -- like his cosmic spheres of the 1930s -- is designed to mimic astral formations by attaching various elements to fragments of wire. Also on view from the same year is The Big Ear, made specifically for an extension of the 1943 exhibition at MOMA to take the place of Red Petals, which had to be returned to the

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Arts Club of Chicago at the expiration of the loan. Other exhibition-specific works that will be on view are Baby Flat Top and S-Shaped Vine -- both made for the 1946 showing at Galerie Louis Carré in Paris, organized by Marcel Duchamp -- which were designed to disassemble for shipping. Works from 1947 include the complex and majestic 1 Red, 4 Black plus X White, an example of one of Calder's earliest large mobiles in the artist's mature style; Little Parasite, described by Calder as his "favorite mobile" on a photograph of the work; Bougainvillier, one of Calder's final large inclusion disc standing mobiles; and The Lace On the Edge of Your Panties, a prime example of his lacy cut-out works of 1945-1949.

Included in the show is Calder's International Mobile (1949), made especially for the Third International Exhibition of Sculpture held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. A final foray into wire constructions can be seen in Tower with Painting (1951), in which Calder combines a derrick-like construction of constellations with a painting of circa 1945.

CALDER: THE SCULPTOR

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1898, Calder was the son of a successful sculptor, Alexander Stirling Calder (1870-1945), and Nanette Lederer (1866-1960), who remained an active painter throughout her entire life. Although Calder's father and grandfather were both well-known sculptors of public monuments in American cities, he initially decided on a career in mechanical engineering and received a bachelor's degree, which included training in physics and kinetics. This knowledge provided a sound basis for later experimentation with motorized devices and wind-driven mobiles that would make Calder unique among artists of the modern era. After receiving his

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undergraduate degree from the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, Calder worked at a variety of jobs. In 1923, he decided to enroll in the Art Students League with plans to become a painter.

Calder worked brilliantly in both figurative and abstract modes. From his student beginnings as a rather conventional ashcan school painter, he moved on to make sculpture in wood and then wire, and later to develop an abstract style; he subsequently worked simultaneously in both modes. Although Calder is primarily considered a sculptor, he was a marvelous draftsman as well, and much of his innovation first took place in two dimensions. In format, Calder's work ranges from the minute to the monumental. He was one of the great public sculptors of the twentieth century, and his outdoor works are installed in public spaces throughout the world.

CATALOGUE

A fully illustrated 304-page catalogue will accompany the exhibition, including color plates of every work in the show. The scholarly catalogue includes essays by Marla Prather and French scholar Arnauld Pierre, and a comprehensive bibliography, exhibition history, and chronology provided by Alexander S.C. Rower, the author of the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Calder's work. The exhibition catalogue will be published by the National Gallery of Art and distributed by Yale University Press (London and New Haven).

CALDER AND THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Calder's work has been closely associated with the National Gallery since the installation of the large mobile Untitled (1976), one of Calder's last works, in the East

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Building in 1977. Other recently donated works have strengthened the representation of Calder's work in the collection, including forty sculptures and drawings given in 1996 by Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls, Calder's dealers in the United States for more than two decades, as well as the large stabile Obus (1972) and a group of ten "Animobiles" (1970-1976) given by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. These examples of Calder's work, covering six decades of the artist's career, establish the Gallery as a major repository for Alexander Calder's art.

SUPPORT FROM GTE CORPORATION

GTE Corporation has sponsored nine other exhibitions at the National Gallery: Winslow Homer (1995-1996), Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation (1993), Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art (1991), Masterpieces of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism: The Annenberg Collection (1990), Paintings by Fitz Hugh Lane (1988), Henri Matisse: The Early Years in Nice, 1916-1930 (1986-1987), Art of Aztec Mexico: Treasures of Tenochtitlan (1983-1984), Mauritshuis: Dutch Painting of the Golden Age from the Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague (1982), and Post-Impressionism: Cross-Currents in European and American Painting, 1880-1906 (1980).

The National Gallery of Art, located on Constitution Avenue, between Third and Seventh Streets, N.W., is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215, the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf at (202) 842-6176, or visit the National Gallery's Web site at <http://www.nga.gov>.

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