





## Louisa James

*So once on board the De Grasse, I started walking the deck. I overtook an elderly man and a young lady. I could only see them from the back, so I reversed my steps the better to see them face on. Upon coming abreast of them the next time around, I said, "Good evening!" And the man said to his daughter, "There is one of them already!"*

*He was Edward Holton James, my future father-in-law.*

*She was Louisa.*

*Her father had just taken her to Europe to mix with the young intellectual elite. All she met were concierges, doormen, cab drivers—and finally me.<sup>1</sup>*

Soon after their chance encounter aboard the *De Grasse* Louisa James received a bracelet made from a continuous brass wire hammered flat spelling out "Medusa." (pp. 34, 41). My grandfather nicknamed her "Medusa" because of the wild ringleted hair she could not tame on board the ship.<sup>2</sup>

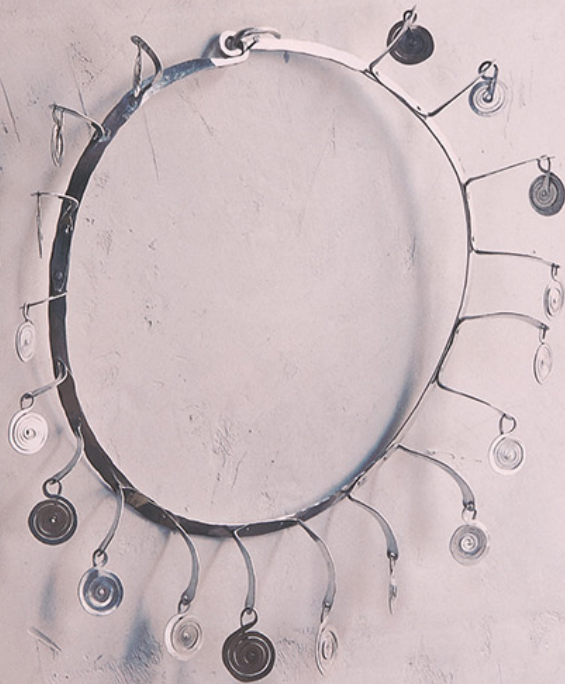
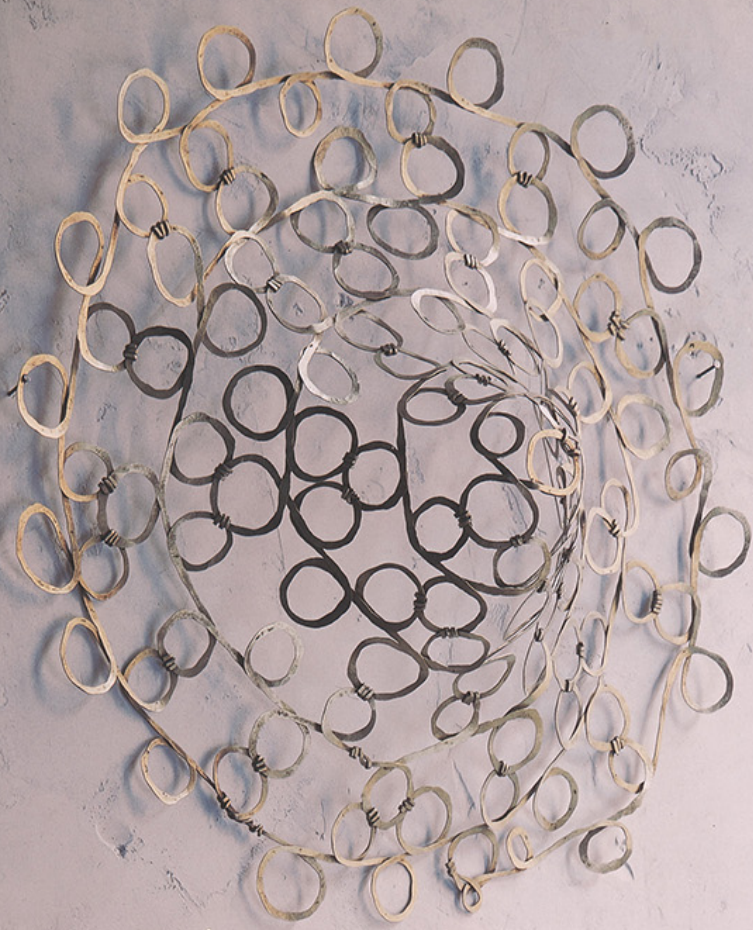
Born into an intellectual family, Louisa was brought up in proper Boston society by an English nurse and a French governess. Her parents were outwardly conformist (he a James and she a Cushing),<sup>3</sup> though her father was a Quixotic fighter for social justice.<sup>4</sup> In 1930, Louisa wrote to her mother:

*To me Sandy is a real person which seems to be a rare thing. He appreciates and enjoys the things in life that most people haven't the sense even to notice . . . He has tremendous originality, imagination and humor which appeal to me very much and which make life colorful and worthwhile.<sup>5</sup>*

That year, Calder made her an engagement ring (pp. 34, 41):

*I had known a little jeweler in Paris, Bucci, and he had helped me make a gold ring—forerunner of an array of family jewelry—with a spiral on top and a helix for*

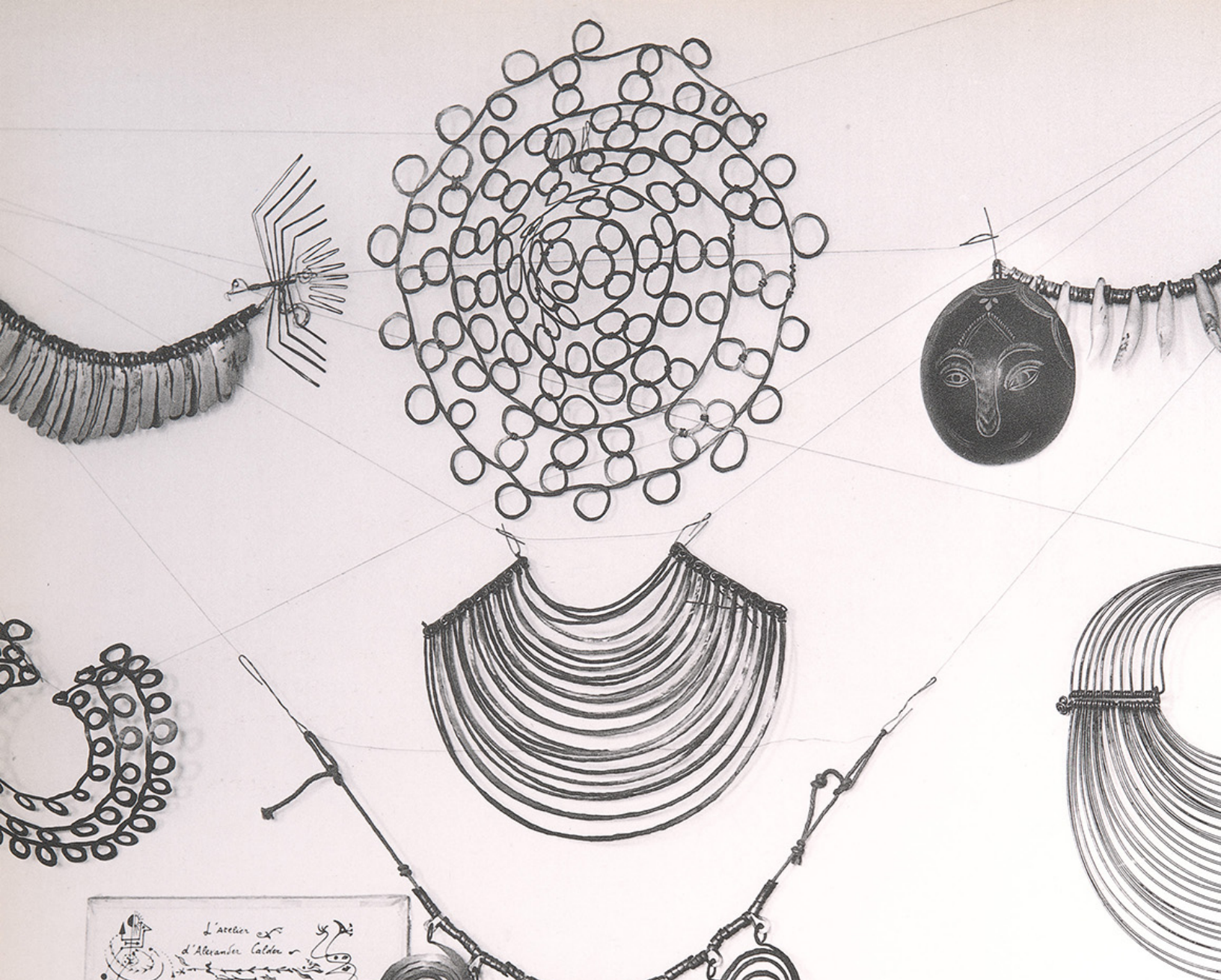












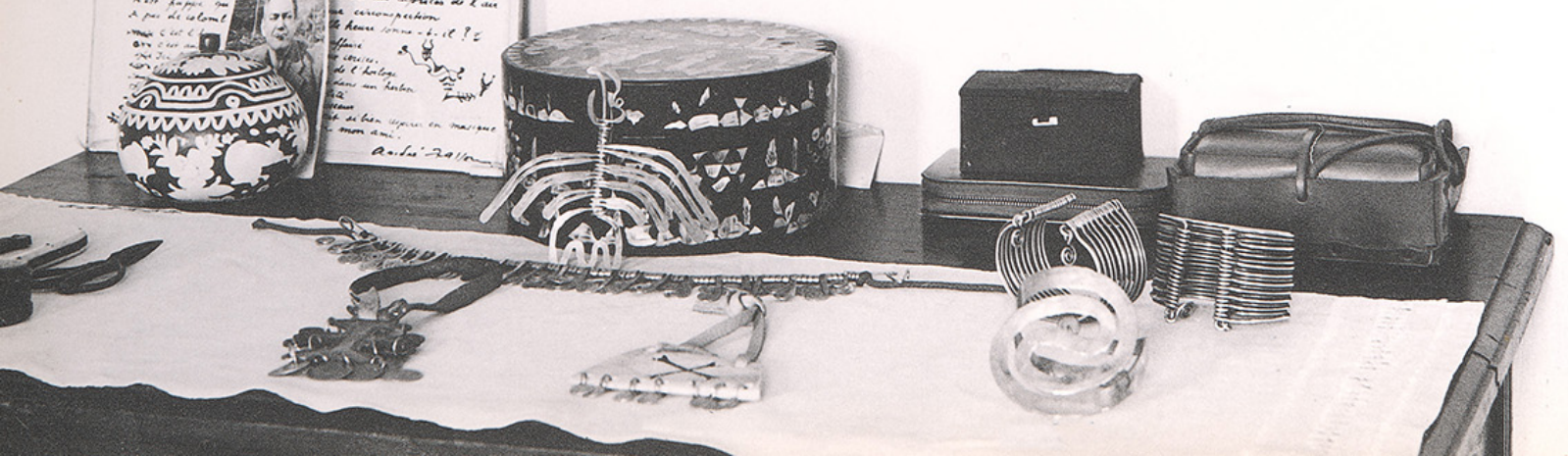
*L'acier*  
*d'Alexander Calder*

*Arrivé d'Europe, comme ils disent  
 Il est vrai que la las fe et amere ne sont qu'oeuvre ma  
 La mort ajouée à la mort et la vie calomnie.  
 Moi je fais, deuis fort deb.  
 L'œuvre à l'œuvre d'un artiste vivant  
 Le jour et la nuit, s'ouvrent des yeux  
 des ailes - algues - feuilles multiples  
 Toujours forgées de géantes multales  
 Sources du mercure la fontaine montrant  
 une eau lourde comme les pleurs.  
 Mais un cascade de petites lames circulaires me réjouit  
 Je pense à un cerceau transparent  
 C'est une feuille braverie pas le soleil.  
 Tu ne vois un jour voit un objet rouge  
 et le poursuivi d'un objet jaune.  
 Tu fais que nous sommes liés à la nature  
 que nous apprenons.*

*Tout haut décroche  
 dans le jour est  
 tout l'après qui  
 à pas de la mort  
 on est en l'air  
 on est en l'air  
 on est en l'air*

*époule de l'acier  
 visible au crepuscule de l'air  
 carroussel  
 le beau monde et il ?  
 dans un salon  
 dans un salon  
 dans un salon  
 dans un salon*

*Arts 24/11*





*the finger. I thought this would do for a wedding ring. But Louisa merely called this one her 'engagement ring' and we had to . . . purchase a wedding ring for two dollars.<sup>6</sup>*

After their marriage in 1931, Louisa became less concerned with social conventions and lived a simple bohemian life with Calder. He would often observe her at work making bread or hooking rugs and go out to the studio to devise a tool to simplify her task. He made hundreds of gifts for her: sculptures, drawings, household inventions, and untold numbers of jewelry that she wore in her daily life (fig. 2). Many of them were created for a specific garment: buttons for a certain coat, a buckle for her black wool cape, etc. As seen in this photograph by Herbert Matter (c. 1942, opposite), her dressing bureau was a very private moment in their home where Louisa displayed her Calder jewelry along with an ode to Calder's studio by André Masson. When I was a child, her bureau always seemed a mysterious altar to me.



Fig. 2: Louisa James Calder, c. 1936

The following pages illustrate Calder's devotion to Louisa through a selection of jewelry he made for her spanning their life together. Many were inscribed for wedding anniversaries (17 January), birthdays (19 February), and other memorable occasions . . .

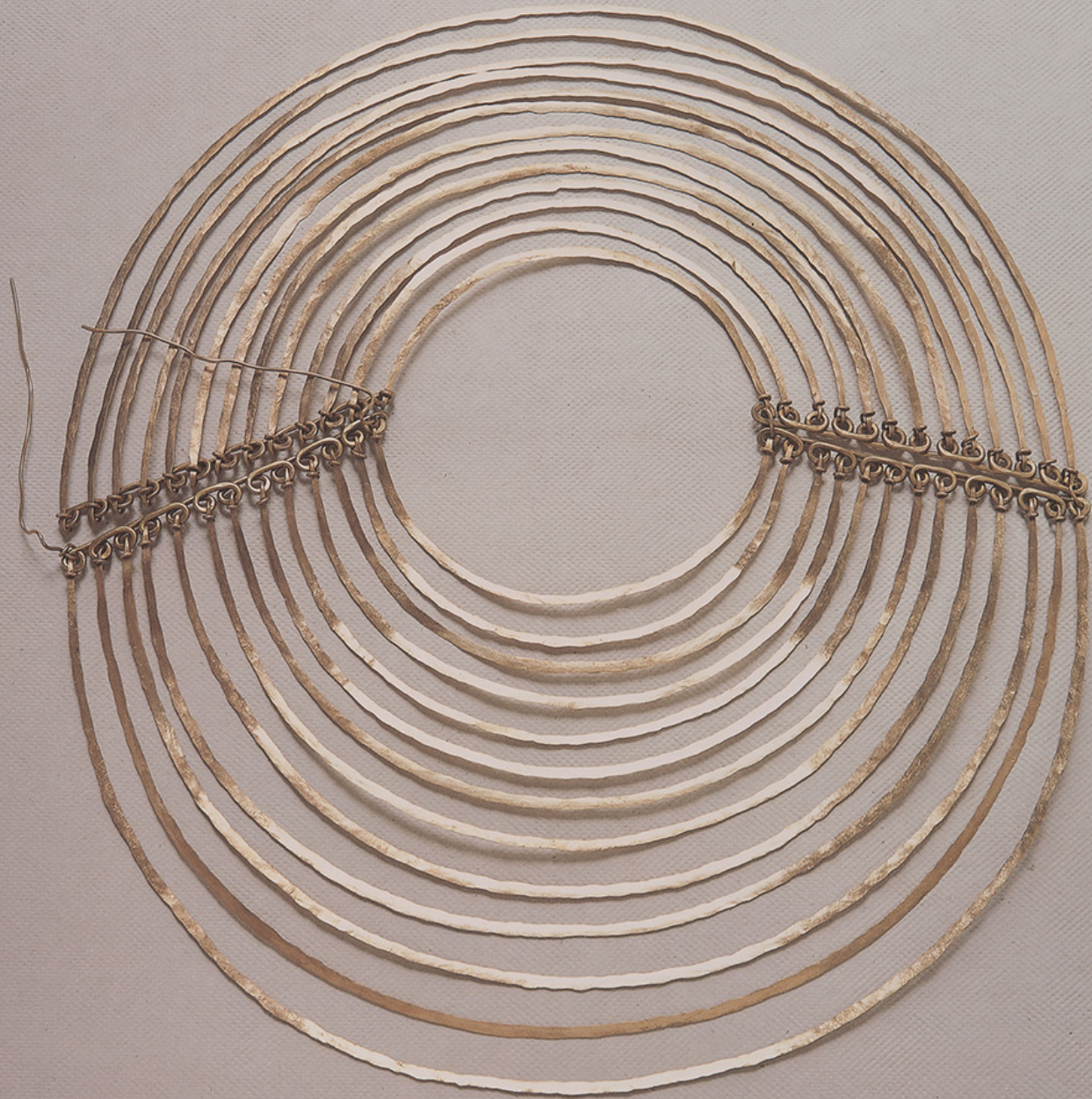
ALEXANDER S. C. ROWER

1. Alexander Calder and Jean Davidson, *Calder, An Autobiography with Pictures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 101.
2. *Ibid.*, 112.
3. Much has been written about the illustrious James and Cushing families, e.g., R.W. Lewis's *The Jameses: A Family Narrative* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991).
4. Louisa's social and political activism was learned from her father and continues to be inspirational in our family. She supported abortion rights and amnesty for political prisoners and draft evaders, and deeply influenced my grandfather's decision to publicly protest the Vietnam War and nuclear proliferation. Louisa was especially proud that they were included on President Nixon's "enemies" list.
5. Louisa James to her mother, after 6 November 1930, Calder Foundation archives.
6. Calder, *Autobiography*, 116. Soon after their wedding, Louisa discarded the store bought wedding band and wore her Calder-made "engagement ring" always.













XIII • MEMENTO

























XIX.11.MEM L III











































