

# Magic of Calder's mobiles

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Midway in the catalogue of the current Calder show, a photograph pictures the sculptor in his studio-shop, two full pages with Calder as one small working form in a clutter of scraps and shapes.

Throughout the studio, long lines of wire lean upright, mounted toward the high ceiling, seeming to sheaf the scene like a spider web spread over captured fragments.

The web of steel lines transformed from the studio wire and forms set aloft are what Calder introduced into a new art form: the mobile.

Balanced and spaced and made to dance a mimic of mechanics and nature for a generation now, they have filtered down to the level of a child's toy. But for all their household familiarity, they retain remarkable freshness, wit, charm, and threatening agility as they swing and sway at the Guggenheim Museum through Jan. 3.

Perhaps no environment has ever proved as hospitable to the playful circus air of Calder's work as the Guggenheim. Or, conversely, Frank Lloyd Wright's hollow-centered museum has never had as appropriate a resident.

Buoyancy, spiritedness, and wry humor prevail. For all the innovating nature of Calder's contribution, for all the adroitly placed flat Miroesque forms (the kidney-shaped disc, the irregular ovals and triangles, the fish-tailed forms, the rooted animal stance), for all the physical grace and aesthetic plotting which Calder has contributed, it is the fashionable movement (kinetic sculpture, the current phase has it) and the not-so-fashionable pure fun that is most endearing, and, indeed, enduring.

The gaiety and playfulness begin even in the earliest wiry circus drawings, the hump-backed camel, the Japanese acrobat in the '20's and '30's. It is all a deceptively effortless chronological transition from one-line flowing drawings to wire face mask caricatures, to wiry line in the air, to line unsuccessfully and tiltedly mechanized to—mobile!

For the total charm of the Guggenheim show should subtract nothing from the seriousness of this interna-

tional and inventive sculptor. Nor should the happy pleasures obscure the fatally menacing air of so many of the works.

"I was talking with Calder one day in his studio," Jean Paul Sartre wrote in 1946, "when suddenly a 'mobile' beside me which until then had been quiet became violently agitated.

"I stepped quickly back, thinking to be out of its reach. But then, when the agitation had ceased and it appeared to have relapsed

into quiescence, its long majestic tail, which until then had not budged, began mournfully to wave and, sweeping through the air, brushed across my face!"

Derived from the forms of abstraction and the flat steel matter of the 20th century's industry, yet dependent on nature's wafts of air and its free floating motions, Calder's forms—suspended as mobiles, or even lodged on earth as stables—have established an independent idiomatic life of their own.