

Alexander Calder died as we were on press. He had seen the Whitney Museum retrospective and one hopes he was enriched by the public's joy at the work. Calder met an unusual fate for a great artist: he was appreciated in his own time. Perhaps the reason is that he was not content with art as self-expression but deliberated to communicate.

Consider, if you will, that one man has produced thousands of toys; paintings; gouaches; graphic works (book illustrations, prints, magazine and book covers, posters); tapestries and rugs; theatrical sets; jewelry works; household objects; bronzes; wood and wire sculptures; mechanized sculptures; mobiles (standing, wall, and hanging); and stables. As if this were not sufficient, he also had objects within a category simply titled 'innovative projects'!

America in '77 is being treated to a major definitive retrospective on Calder's accomplishments now through October in four museums. "Calder's Universe," sponsored by Champion International Corporation, will move from the Whitney Museum in New York, where it has been since fall, to the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, for a show March 5 through May 1; next to the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, June 5-August 14; then to the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, September 14-October 30.

Long considered our major sculptor as well as the American artist most renowned internationally, Calder preferred using the word "work" to "art" in describing what he did and referring to his pieces as "objects" (thus, he avoided having to defend his work, particularly the sculpture, to critics).

Although we will never know how he had managed all of what he did we can learn a lot from an exciting

new book jointly published by Viking Press in cooperation with the Whitney, and we are indebted to Jean Lipman, the author, and Ruth Wolfe, editorial director, for uncovering so many jewels about this joyfilled individual with the blithe heart whose lyricism and poetry in his work had at its source a constant sense of play, and for allowing us to recap here.

GT also had occasion to observe him and hear him at close range at the Whitney opening. A man of enormous girth, in red crewneck, red wool socks, baggy trousers, and tweed jacket — apparently a familiar outfit — his shoulders hung over like floating attachments on any happy Calder mobile.

Alexander Calder (Sandy, to friends) had always exhibited his own style. Call it a direct approach. A friend from schooldays reminisced in "Calder's Universe": "If anyone lacked studs for a formal's stiff white shirt, he came up with fasteners that were used to clip lab reports together, or if someone had a hole in his black socks, he'd apply India ink to the flesh to cover it up."

Calder had never wasted words, as exemplified in his responses to a Whitney Museum questionnaire. In answer to — "method of execution — give full details," Calder scrib-

bled: For Double Cat — "chisel & mallet, rasp." For Old Bull — "cut & bent." The book covers in depth Calder's personal declaration of independence, frequently reiterated, with clients — and others. He was once commissioned to do a stabile, preferably suggesting a horse for a Texas town. When it was finished the Texans said it didn't look like a horse. 'Well, it probably isn't a horse,' said Calder.

Calder was the son (and grandson) of eminent sculptors — more specifically, his grandfather was a stonemason and his father learned from working with him on marble tombstones. Alexander Milne Calder, a traditionalist, studied under such as Thomas Eakins and Thomas Anshutz when he arrived in America from Scotland. His son started his career at five in a toy-making workshop where he created wood and wire figures and jewelry (Calder gave these as presents — they were never sold). In his teens, his workshop became a quasi-machine shop with hanging contraptions and gadgets. His mother believed things were best if homemade.

# Calder



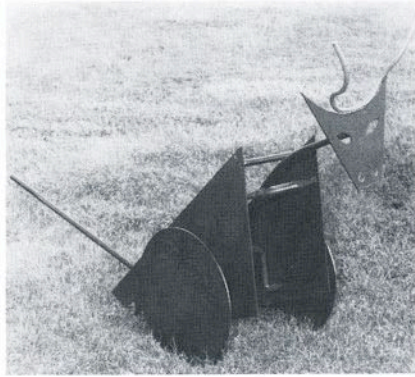
Le Coq de Saché, 1965. Tin can, wire 32" h.

## Toys

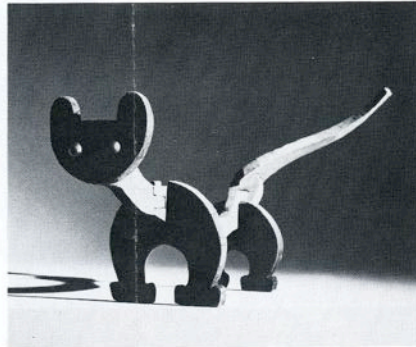
Calder himself reminded his public of what Brancusi said relative to the subject at 80: "To keep one's art young, one must imitate young animals. What do they do? They play?" As children, Calder and his sister Peggy

shared an interest in creating and manipulating toys and toys pointed the way to everything he began with sculpture — consider his experiments with rhythms, surprises — all "condensed resemblance to natural movement." For a brief time, early in his career in the U.S., he made action toys for the Gould Manufacturing Company, and

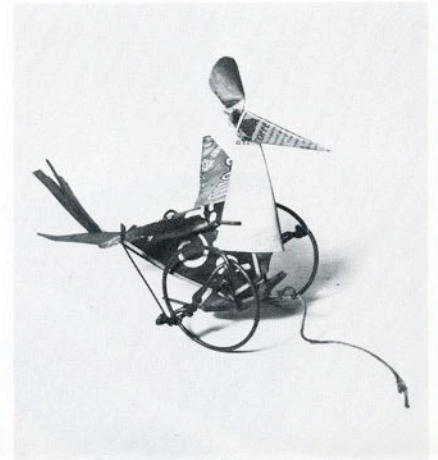
growing up never put an end to this. Adults were often the recipients of his toys for a friend might get a birth-announcement kangaroo or a tin can bird for Christmas. He once made a mask for his own cat that transformed it into a furry cow. Another time, he made a mobile of red and blue balls for a friend's cat. The toys are "serious without appearing so," said Leger of these eccentric and original works, in which Calder invested a vigor and mirth about living.



*Carreta, 1955. painted steel*



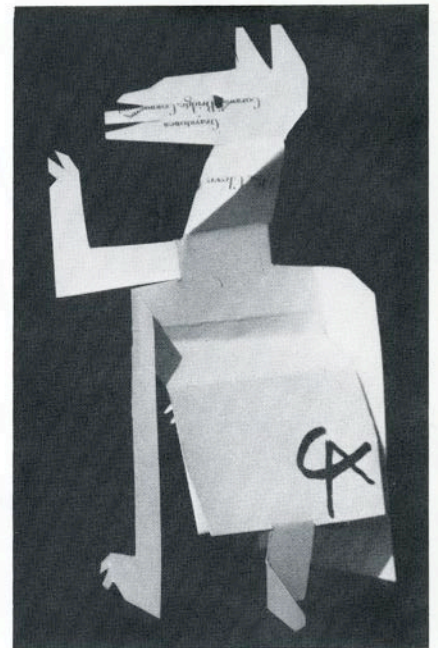
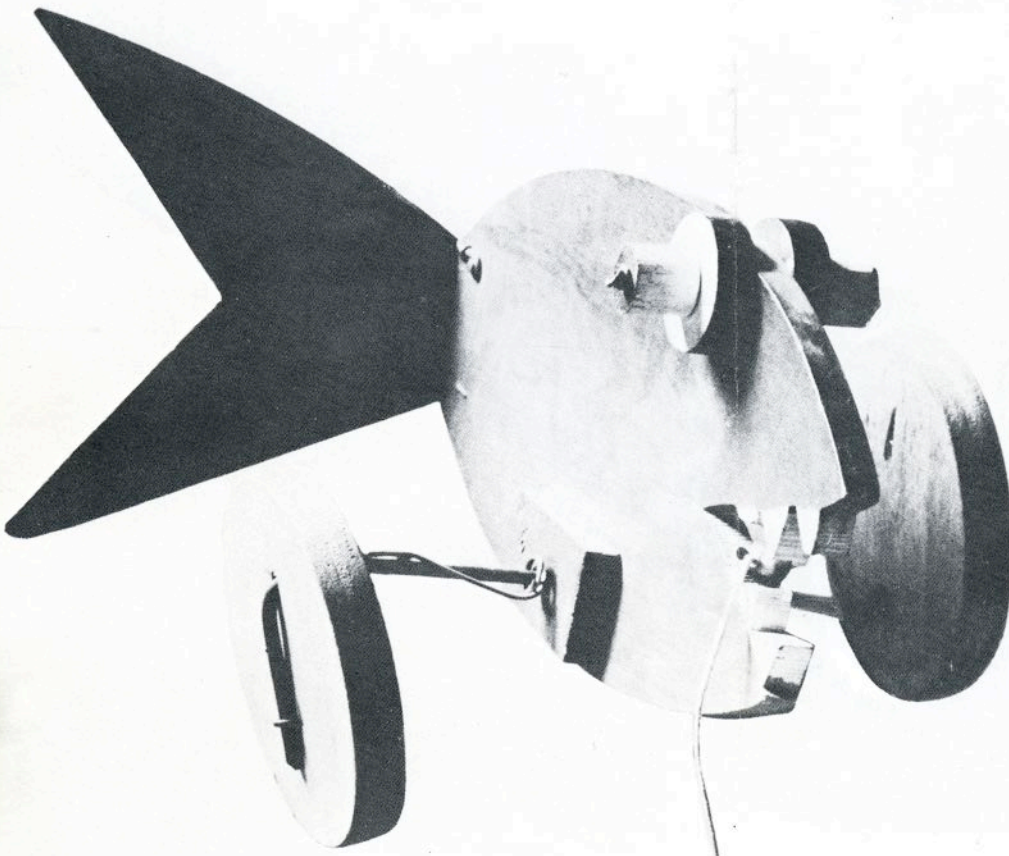
*Kitten, 1927-28. wood*



*Bird on wheels, 1951. tin can, wire*

# Calder

*Fish pull-toy, c.1960. wood, wire*



*Birth-announcement Kangaroo, 1959. paper*

**The Circus**

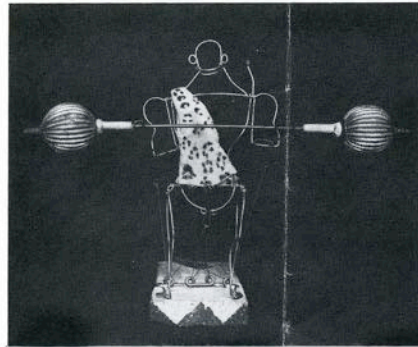
Calder was a free-lance artist for the *National Police Gazette*, where, on assignment at Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey a life-long love affair began with the Circus. The lines in his drawings worked their way into his most famous of animated toys — a

miniature arena which became a full troupe with dozens of performers and animals. His fascination with the tightrope tension and balance, acrobatic motion, and precision engineering in the Circus aesthetic didn't stop at creating his objects for he soon began "hiring out" as Ringmaster, puppeteer and sound-effects man, with his wife Louisa on the victrola providing the Circus

music. Calder cheered thousands with his performances. The miniatures served as a "laboratory" for later work (and the "Calder's Universe" book mentions that this also brought him into association with other circus devotees, such as Mondrian, Miro, Cocteau, Kiesler, Man Ray, Arp, and Pascin). A sample performance will delight audiences at the touring show — from a film by Carlos Vilardebo. Now for the performance and the Circus itself.



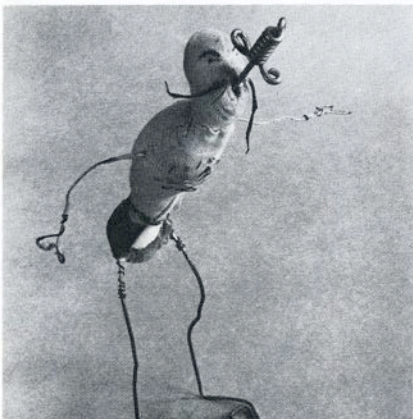
*Clown*



*Rigoulet, the weight lifter*



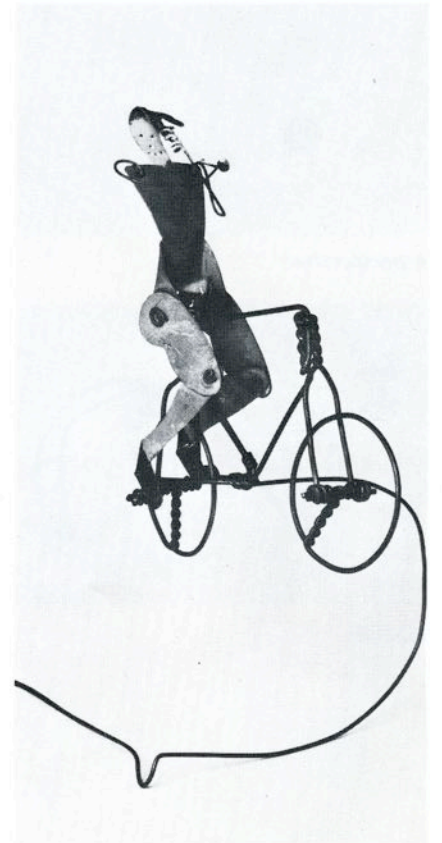
*Monsieur Loyal, ringmaster*



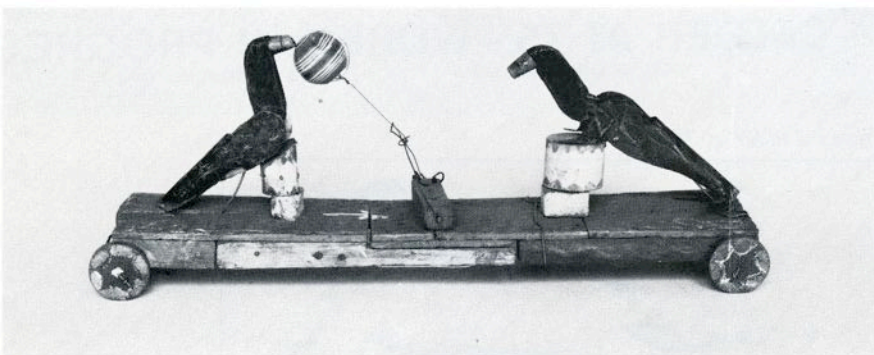
*Sword swallower*



*Calder, 1929*



*Cyclist*



*Seals*

**Graphics and drawings**

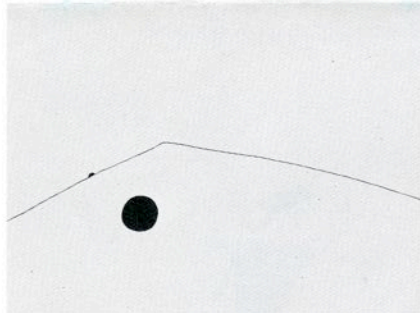
Calder created his famed animal drawings at Central Park and the Bronx Zoos (1920s) using a makeshift cardboard drawing board typewriter size, with India Ink clipped on, and a brush. Of this divine draftsmanship, he noted quite simply in his autobiography: "I seemed to have the knack of doing it with a single line."

It is essential to note here too, the importance of animals and



*Sleeping cat*

**Calder**



*In perspective*



*Baboon*

action in everything of Calder, and on drawing. The master wrote a long time ago this advice:

"'Action' in a drawing is not necessarily comparable to physical action. A cat asleep has intense action . . . And remember, when an animal is in rapid motion, keep rapidly transmitting your impressions of the movements."

Calder's images and the pure, bold primary colors are well suited to the poster and he created literally thousands, for his own shows and as contributions to humanistic causes. Many may not also know he was selected in 1950 by *The New York Times* as one of the 10 best illustrators of children's books on the half century.

Etchings, woodcuts, linoleum cuts. No known form of printmaking



*Porcupine*

has not been tried along with the countless, on-going experiments. To accompany a book honoring his 75th birthday, he developed a technique with printmaker Stanley William Hayter: he hammered a wire sculpture into the woodblock so the indentation in the print was seen as a black, wood-grained background. For a lively edition of La Fontaine's "Fables", he learned a technique of drawing through a soft ground onto zinc plates. In "Fêtes," he cut out the shapes from sheet metal (heavier than the aluminum in his mobiles); then, laid out in an open press, colors were brushed on and the paper run through the press. With Calder, the problem often needed its own solution.

Included here is a one of hundreds of his early "space" drawings. Seeing the work of Mondrian in the '30s had a monumental impact on the young Calder, bringing to the fore a talent for designing into his work the precision found in the objects of the universe.



**CALDER AT 75 - WORKS IN PROGRESS**

OCTOBER 2 - NOVEMBER 3, 1973

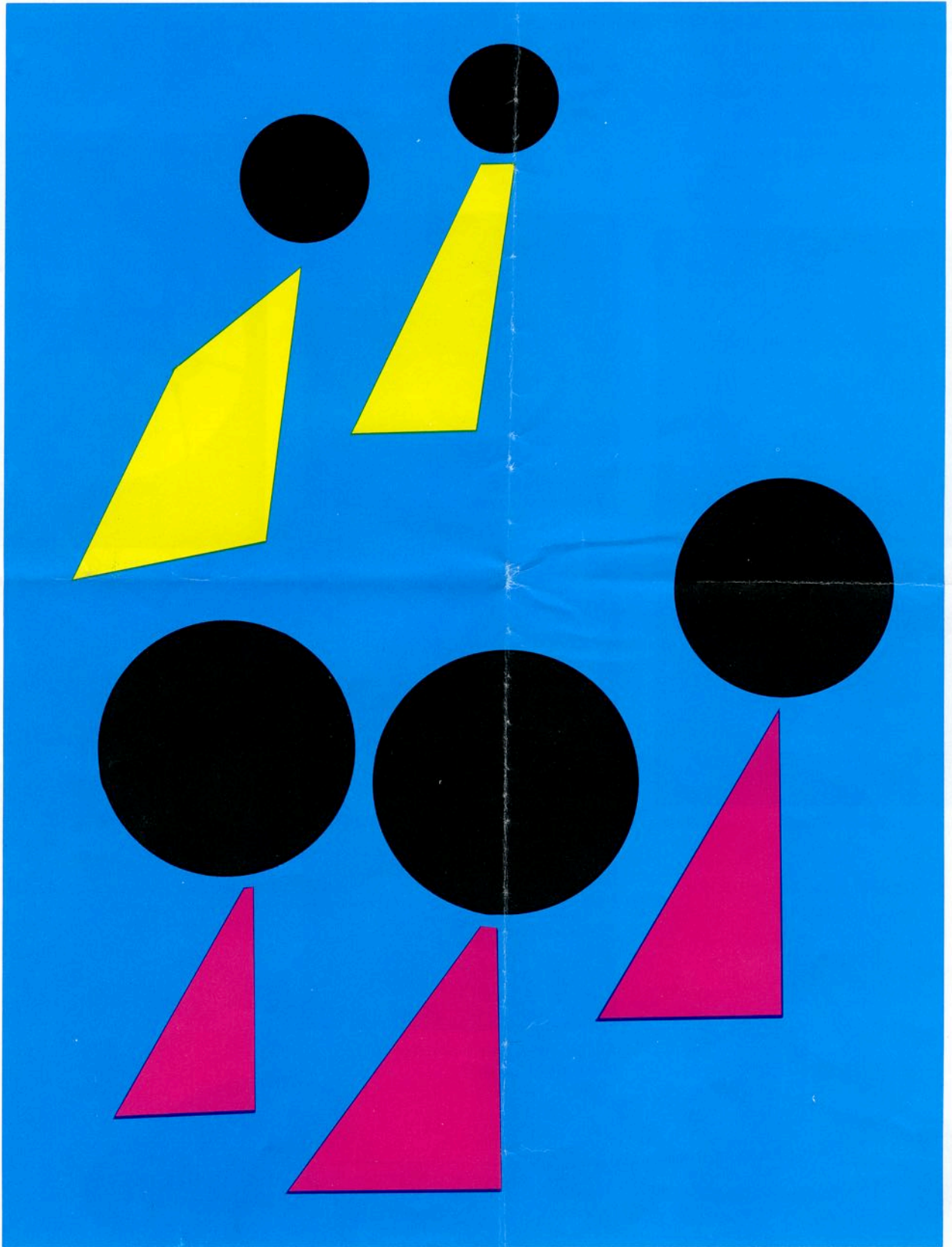
PERLS GALLERIES, NEW YORK

*Calder*

*Poster: Calder at 75 . . .*



*Lion*



Frontispiece of "Fêtes"

**Jewelry, household objects**

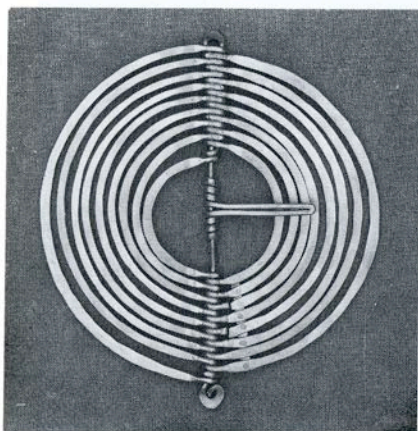
At eight, Calder would find bits of copper wire on the street and splice them together to make dolls for the "ladies" (his sister's dolls).

Calder's jewelry had helped make him famous. Although never mass-produced, apparently there were times in the days of an earlier Paris when it was all the rage (he made them for friends, family and as special favors). Wrote Jean Lipman, "The

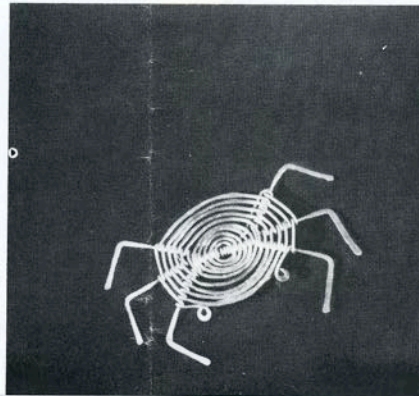
decorative linear design is directly related to his early wire portraits. When he began hammering wire into flat strips and combining several metals, such as silver and brass, gold and zinc, and adding stones, the jewelry took on the complexity, in miniature, of the sculpture."

More proof of the amazing range of his interests! Household objects. He invented gadgets — anything needed — forks, spoons, roasting pans, strainers, lighting

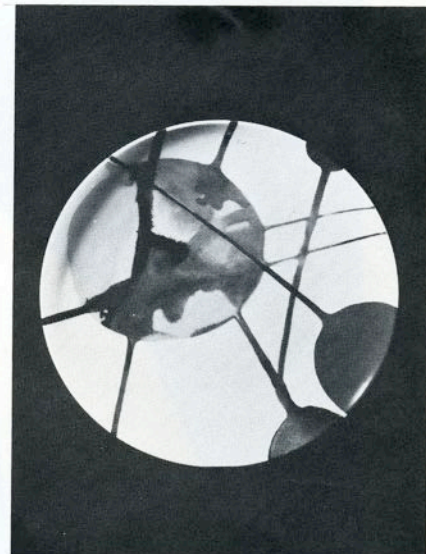
fixtures, door hinges, camouflaged garbage can covers, hand-shaped toilet-paper holders, a string pulley at his own bedside which turned on the burner in the morning for coffee. When his mother reached her 90th birthday, he made her a birthday cake — tin cans, a single candle, and a mobile.



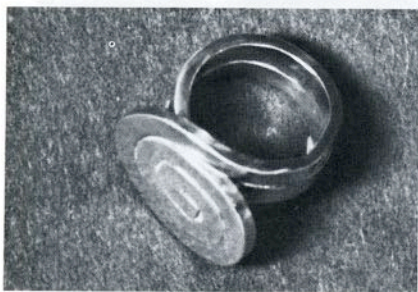
*Buckle, c.1943. brass*



*Spider pin, c.1930-40. silver*



*Sevres plate, 1970. glazed porcelain*



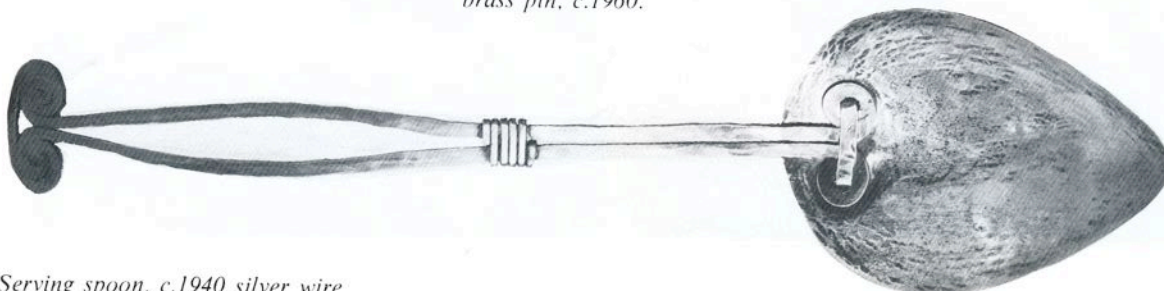
*Ring, c.1930-40. silver*



*Louisa Calder with obsidian and brass pin, c.1960.*



*Coffee cups, c.1940. brass, porcelain*



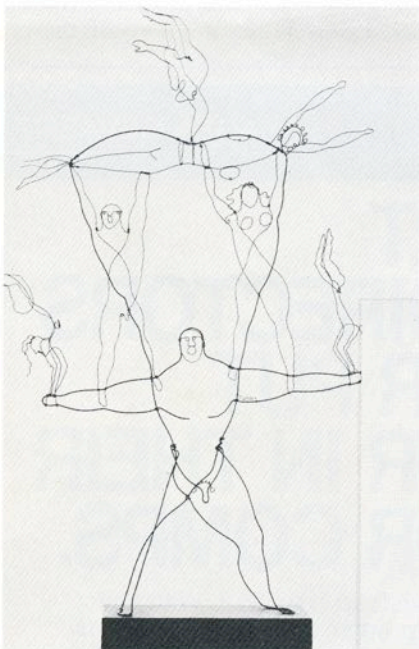
*Serving spoon, c.1940 silver wire*

## Sculpture

About his first woodcarvings in a New York City gallery, Murdock Pemberton (*The New Yorker*, '29) wrote: "Calder makes a mockery of the old-fashioned frozen stone school of sculpture."

Wire: he began making abstract spirals and "concentric entrails"

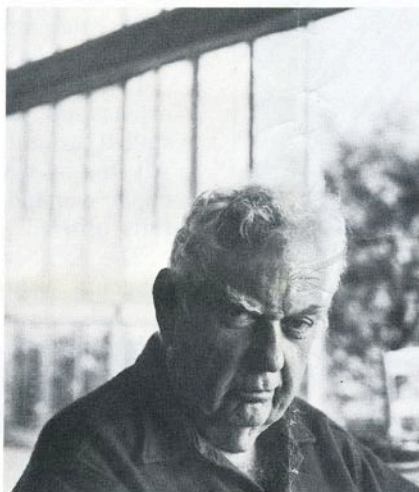
*Cow, 1928. wood*



*The Brass Family, 1929. wire*

— and, these led this time to his mobiles and stables, his major contributions to sculpture in the century. (Calder had confessed to "thinking best in wire," the material of his childhood.)

Mechanized sculpture: moving wall sculptures and motorized pieces of various sizes and forms are abstract ballets, yet the artist in recent years expressed dissatisfaction with the many "bugaboos." Chance and spontaneity in space vs. mathematical relationships provided an interesting series of questions for an artist. Calder introduced them years ago — not based on naturalistic representations but art created for its own sake, relating to both painting and sculpture.



*Calder, 1970*

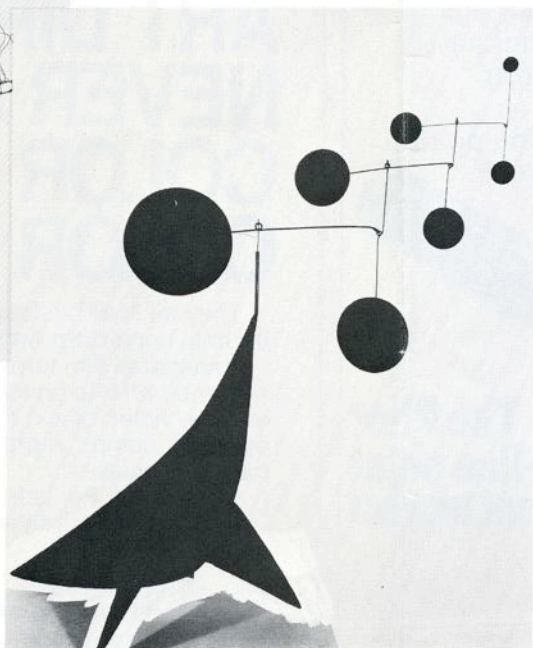
Mobiles: Calder had created thousands, saying "they are abstractions which resemble nothing in life except their manner of reacting." Motion is the essence. They are designed to be unhooked in sections and flattened out for packing.

As for the method, to Selden Rodman he explained: "First, it's the state of mind. Elation. I only feel elation if I've got a hold of something good. Now I start by cutting out a lot of shapes. Next, I file them and smooth them off. Some I keep because they're pleasing or dynamic. Some are bits I just happen to find. Then I arrange them like papier colle on a table and paint them — with wires between the pieces for the overall pattern. Finally I cut some more on them with my shears, calculating for balance."

Calder made many if not all of his tools, used no power tools and set up a workshop anywhere, travelling over the world for commissions. He painted with a brush not a spray gun. One of his inventions was a gadget for locating the center of gravity on a piece of material.

Stables: nearing 80, Calder's stables were the focus of his attention. Some are monumental, approaching architecture. ■

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The Whitney Museum, 1976



*Performing seal. c.1950*



*Portrait of A Young Man, c.1945*