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PRESS RELEASE

Kulturforum, Neue Nationalgalerie

Potsdamer Straße 50, 10785 Berlin

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Alexander Calder. Minimal / Maximal

August 22, 2021 – February 13, 2022

A special exhibition by Nationalgalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Alexander Calder (1898–1976) has been closely associated with the Neue Nationalgalerie for decades thanks to his masterpiece “Têtes et queue” (1965). Berlin’s first major exhibition of the American Modernist’s work in more than 50 years, “Alexander Calder. Minimal / Maximal” explores the dynamics between size, scale, and space in his oeuvre. The mobiles, stables, and standing mobiles on display range from miniature to monumental, juxtaposing Calder’s abstract forms with the strict geometry of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in a poetic dialogue. The open, experimental approach of the installation—which was specifically conceived for the Neue Nationalgalerie’s glass hall—relies on the participation of visitors, who will be able to experience some of Calder’s works in motion.

The restoration of the Neue Nationalgalerie—undertaken in strict conformity with monument preservation standards—has returned the structure to its original appearance in the 1960s. Today, more than ever, the building shines as an example of a visionary Western Modernism. Perhaps no artist is better suited to inaugurate the building’s reopening than Calder. He and Mies were contemporaries who both had a major influence on the Modernist understanding of art and architecture, and continue to inspire in those disciplines to this day. The principle of openness that marks Mies’s architecture finds similar expression in the complexity of Calder’s work.

“Alexander Calder. Minimal / Maximal” focuses not only on the spectacular diversity of scale in Calder’s work but also on his radical concept of sculpture as an active medium. With the public in mind, Calder used color, form, scale, and movement to create a new kind of interactive sculpture, a “social” art. Whether a work fits in the palm of one’s hand or commands a huge public plaza, it similarly transforms our sense of space.

Utilizing the glass hall’s vast dimensions, the exhibition places particular emphasis on Calder’s large-scale later work. By the 1950s, advances in steel production gave the artist new opportunities in both design and scale. He impressively exploited them in such pieces as “Les Trois Ailes and Les Triangles” (both from 1963) and the show’s central work, “Five Swords” (1976). Its bright red, expressive curves form a striking contrast to Neue Nationalgalerie’s geometric severity, though the two are closely related in their use of steel and monumentality.

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Calder's mobiles also underwent a considerable change in scale after 1950. On display are important works such as *Blizzard* (1950), *Otto's Mobile* (1952), and the newly restored *Le Cagoulard* (1954) from the Piezsch Collection. With their moving elements, some quite delicate, the mobiles take command of their surrounding space and subtly but constantly alter it. That spatial transformation and variable composition is achieved equally by the miniature objects that Calder started making in the 1940s. His small-scale stabiles and standing mobiles, which balance kinetic tops on stabile bases, demonstrate that objects lose none of their expressive-ness in this tiny format.

During this exhibition, a number of the objects are regularly activated, which is virtually unheard-of in conventional museum shows. This includes one of Calder's earliest performative works and first hanging mobile, "*Small Sphere and Heavy Sphere*" (1932/1933). Additionally, the small sculptures will be taken out of their display cases at set times and activated—an intimate performance not yet given in a museum.

This presentation deliberately highlights the opportunity for viewers to engage with the sculptures and their surroundings by moving around them, exploring shifting perspectives, or even "using" them, as in the case of the chess set. Calder created the set on display in 1944 and kept it in his home in Roxbury, Connecticut. A number of facsimile chess sets, published by *Cahiers d'Art* in collaboration with the Calder Foundation on the occasion of this exhibition, will be made available to chess-playing visitors, to be activated as Calder intended. Special events have been planned in collaboration with the Berlin Chess Association during the run of the show.

Another special event will feature the large standing mobile "*Chef d'orchestre*" (Performance Facsimile, 1966/2019). On three evenings in the fall and winter, the Berlin Philharmonie will perform American composer Earle Brown's "*Calder Piece*" (1963–1966), in which Calder's sculpture serves both as conductor, setting the tempo, as well as the central percussion instrument. Up-to-date information regarding the performance dates and times will be available later this fall at: www.smb.museum/nng.

On the opening days of the exhibition, visitors can admire the Calder BMW Art Car (Artist's Proof, 1975/2021). Featuring radiant colors and organic forms, the car is but one more testament to the special importance of movement in Calder's work. It also attests to his conviction that art does not have to be staid and elitist, that it can be something with which one is intimately involved. The lack of exclusivity in the art of Calder aligns him with Mies van der Rohe, whose greatest achievement was freeing architecture from enclosure, opening it up for social engagement.

In addition to works from the Nationalgalerie collection, the exhibition "*Alexander Calder. Minimal / Maximal*" includes important loans from the Calder Foundation, New York; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris; Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel; David and Ezra Nahmad Collection; and Sprengel Museum Hannover. The exhibition's central work is the monumental sculpture "*Five Swords*" (1976), which is on view in Europe for the first time thanks to generous support from the Calder Foundation.

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The exhibition was curated by Joachim Jäger, Udo Kittelmann, and Maike Steinkamp. It was realized in close collaboration with the Calder Foundation, New York.

To coincide with the exhibition, Prestel Verlag is publishing a catalogue with texts by Beryl Gilothwest, Elizabeth Hutton Turner, Joachim Jäger, Kaitlyn A. Kramer, Nina Schallenberg, Robert Slifkin, and Maike Steinkamp—Alexander Calder. *Minimal / Maximal*, exh. cat. Neue Nationalgalerie, Munich and London: Prestel, 2021, a publication of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Price: roughly 25 Euros.

The exhibition was made possible by the Friends of the Nationalgalerie.

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