

LACMA FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXHIBITION: *CALDER AND ABSTRACTION: FROM AVANT-GARDE TO ICONIC*

ON VIEW: NOVEMBER 24, 2013—JULY 27, 2014

LOCATION: RESNICK PAVILION

LACMA PRESENTS THE FIRST MONOGRAPHIC MUSEUM EXHIBITION OF ALEXANDER CALDER IN LOS ANGELES

FORTY YEARS OF CALDER'S ABSTRACT SCULPTURES, MOBILES, STABLES, AND MAQUETTES ARE REPRESENTED IN THE EXHIBITION, DESIGNED BY FRANK O. GEHRY



(IMAGE CAPTIONS ON PAGE 7)

(Los Angeles—September 3, 2013) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Calder and Abstraction: From Avant-Garde to Iconic*, the first monographic presentation of Alexander Calder's work in a Los Angeles museum. Taking as its compass the large-scale sculpture *Three Quintains* (*Hello Girls*), a site-specific fountain commissioned by LACMA's Art Museum Council in 1964 for the opening of LACMA's Hancock Park campus, *Calder and Abstraction* brings together a range of nearly fifty abstract sculptures, including mobiles, stables, and maquettes for larger outdoor works, that span more than four decades of the artist's career. The exhibition at LACMA is organized by LACMA's senior curator of modern art Stephanie Barron and designed by Gehry Partners, LLP.

Barron remarks, "Calder is recognized as one of the greatest pioneers of modernist sculpture, but his contribution to the development of abstract modern sculpture—steeped in beauty and humor—has long been underestimated by critics. Calder was considered a full-fledged member of the European avant-garde, becoming friendly with André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Joan Miró, and Piet Mondrian, and exhibited alongside Jean Arp, Wassily Kandinsky, Fernand Léger, and many of the Surrealists. His radical inventions move easily between seeming opposites: the avant-garde and the iconic, the geometric and the organic, art and science—an anarchic upending of the sculptural paradigm."

"*Calder and Abstraction* offers a window into the remarkably original thinking of this distinguished artist and elucidates his revolutionary and pivotal contribution to the development of modern sculpture," says Michael Govan, CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director of LACMA. "*Three Quintains (Hello Girls)* at LACMA has for decades been seen as an emblem of the museum. Following in the footsteps of its legacy, our campus continues to be enhanced by large-scale, public art—most recently with the inclusion of Chris Burden's *Urban Light* (2008) and Michael Heizer's *Levitated Mass* (2012)."

Calder and Abstraction is organized in collaboration with the Calder Foundation, New York. After its presentation in Los Angeles, the exhibition travels to the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, MA (September 6, 2014–January 4, 2015).

Exhibition Overview

Calder and Abstraction traces the evolution of abstraction in the artist's sculptural practice. The exhibition, arranged in loose chronological order, presents highlights of Calder's oeuvre from his earliest abstract works to the crescendo of his career in the late 1940s to his later public sculptural commissions. While he is considered one of the most popular artists of his time, his work also shares sensibilities with less immediately accessible artists, including the Surrealists and the champions of pure abstraction that made up the Abstraction-Création group, such as Robert Delaunay, Theo van Doesburg, and Kurt Schwitters, among others.

From 1926 to 1933, Pennsylvania-born Calder lived primarily in Paris and was a prevalent figure of the European avant-garde along with peers Marcel Duchamp, Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, Jean Hélion, Wassily Kandinsky, Fernand Léger, Alberto Giacometti, fellow American Man Ray, and many of the Surrealists. At the time, Paris was the epicenter of creative production, and Surrealism was the most significant artistic movement in France. A number of his works from the 1930s referenced astronomy, a preoccupation shared by a number of avant-garde artists. In *Gibraltar* two off-kilter rods thrust upward from a plane encircling a wood base, suggesting a personal solar system. Calder was fascinated with representing the natural world and the cosmos as potent and brimming with energy: "When I have used spheres and discs. . . they should represent more than what they just are. . . [T]he earth is a sphere but also has some miles of gas about it, volcanoes upon it, and the moon making circles around it. . . A ball of wood or a disc of metal is rather a dull object without this sense of something emanating from it."

A crucial encounter for Calder occurred in 1930 upon visiting artist Piet Mondrian's studio. Calder credited Mondrian with opening his eyes to the term "abstract," providing the catalyst to a new phase in his practice. Calder later described this visit as pivotal in his move towards abstraction: "The visit gave me a shock. . . Though I had heard the word 'modern' before, I did not consciously know or feel the term 'abstract.' So now, at thirty-two, I wanted to paint and work in the abstract."

Calder appropriated Surrealism's affinity to curvilinear, biomorphic forms into his sculptures, and when he met Miró in 1928, the two men discovered a mutual admiration for each other's work and developed a close friendship. As Calder stated, "Well, the archaeologists will tell you there's a little bit of Miró in Calder and a little bit of Calder in Miró."

The decade after he met Miró and Mondrian proved to be the most radical of Calder's career. He embraced the Surrealist notion of integrating chance into his works in addition to the Constructivist idea that painting and sculpture should be freed from their standard constraints, such as gravity and traditional sculptural mass. He consequently developed his two signature typologies: the *mobile*, a term coined by Marcel Duchamp after a

visit to Calder's home and studio in 1931; and the *stabile*, named by Jean Arp in 1932.

Calder's mobiles are hanging, kinetic sculptures made of discrete movable parts stirred by air currents, creating sinuous and delicate drawings in space. Either suspended or freestanding, these often large constructions consist of flat pieces of painted metal connected by wire veins and stems. *Eucalyptus* (1940), one of Calder's first mature mobiles, was created during World War II. The piece can be seen as a composition of violent, tortured biomorphic shapes that suggest gaping mouths, body parts, sexual organs, and sinister weapons.

Stabiles, which were developed alongside Calder's mobiles but came to full maturity later in his career, are stationary abstract sculptures, often with mobiles attached to them (standing mobiles). In several of Calder's works from the 1940s—the most prolific decade of his sculptural production—he effectively blended the mobile and stabile forms, as seen in *Laocoön* (1947), in which the stabile supports graceful, arcing branches that cut a broad swath as they rotate at an irregular rhythm.

In the mid-1950s, Calder began working with quarter-inch steel (thicker than the aluminum he had used during the 1940s), which enabled him to construct larger, more durable, and more ambitious sculptures and posed him as an ideal collaborator with architects to create works for public spaces. With commissions from the city of Spoleto, Italy (1962), Montreal's Expo (1967) and Grand Rapids, Michigan (1969)—represented in the exhibition by *La Grande vitesse* (intermediate maquette)—Calder began a virtually non-stop output of public sculpture until his death in 1976. Calder's public sculpture evolved at a time when communities were becoming increasingly proud of public sculpture, although his resolutely bold abstract forms, though hard to imagine now, were initially met with some controversy. Today encountering Calder's iconic sculpture in the center of a city, in front of a courthouse, in the midst of the Senate Office Building, or in front of a museum is a hallmark of postwar public sculpture that he helped to invent.

Three Quintains (Hello Girls)

Included in Calder's portfolio of large-scale outdoor projects is *Three Quintains (Hello Girls)* (1964), commissioned by LACMA's Art Museum Council to coincide with the opening of the museum on Wilshire Boulevard in 1965. The artwork was a milestone achievement for both the artist and museum; it was the second public Calder sculpture to be installed in California and his first site-specific commission on the West Coast. *Three Quintains (Hello Girls)* is one of only a few fountain sculptures the artist realized during his long career.

The piece was originally conceived to reside in an artificial pond on LACMA's campus. Calder created a "splashing fountain" through the use of three mobiles, each balanced and supported by a pylon fabricated out of a single triangular metal sheet, folded. The mobiles are animated by four jets of water.

Three Quintains (Hello Girls) is currently located in the Director's Roundtable Garden, just off of Wilshire Boulevard.

Exhibition Design and Installation

Calder was constantly in conversation and collaborated with other artists and architects in his lifetime, but a major architect has not designed a Calder show since the 1980s. Frank O. Gehry's design for LACMA's exhibition allows for quiet areas of contemplation, unexpected juxtapositions of related works, and opportunities for both intimate and panoramic views of the works. Gehry's gently curved walls frame the sculptures and recall the harmony between art and architecture, emphasizing the organic nature of Calder's works. Gehry's own method of developing architectural forms is inherently tactile, sharing some of the same hands-on techniques of a sculptor.

With the assistance of technology and effective planning, *Calder and Abstraction* at LACMA features a selection of sculptures that are animated throughout the course of the day.

About Alexander Calder

Born in Lawnton, Pennsylvania in 1898, Alexander Calder comes from a lineage of successful traditional sculptors who specialized in canonical

carved and cast images. Though he grew up surrounded by artists, Calder originally set out to become an engineer, earning a degree in mechanical engineering from the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey in 1919.

After committing himself to an art practice in the 1920s, he traveled frequently between the United States and France, positioning himself as a full-fledged member of the European avant-garde. During the 1920s and 1930s in France, he became friendly with and exhibited alongside Europe's most prominent artists. With the outbreak of World War II, Calder returned to the United States from Paris. A number of European artists fleeing the Nazi regime sought shelter in America, and with Calder being one of the only artists known to the refugees before they arrived in New York, he became a close ally of the cultural émigrés.

Calder's status as an artist continued to rise in subsequent decades, and he was celebrated in countless exhibitions, including seminal retrospectives at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1943, curated by James Johnson Sweeney in collaboration with Marcel Duchamp, at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1964, and at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago in 1974.

Exhibition Catalogue

The 256-page catalogue *Calder and Abstraction: From Avant-Garde to Iconic* is co-published by LACMA and DelMonico Books/Prestel. The volume, which includes two-hundred images, is co-edited by Stephanie Barron and Lisa Gabrielle Mark and features essays by Stephanie Barron, Jed Perl, Aleca Le Blanc, Ilene Susan Fort, and Harriet F. Senie, as well as an annotated bibliography and illustrated exhibition chronology.

Credit

Calder and Abstraction: From Avant-Garde to Iconic was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in cooperation with the Calder Foundation, New York.

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About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography—and represent Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a contemporary museum on its campus. With this expanded space for contemporary art, and innovative collaborations with artists, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

Location and Contact: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard (at Fairfax Avenue), Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 11 am-5 pm; Friday: 11 am-8 pm; Saturday, Sunday: 10 am-7 pm; closed Wednesday

General Admission: Adults: \$15; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+: \$10

Free General Admission: Members; children 17 and under; after 3 pm weekdays for L.A. County residents; second Tuesday of every month; Target Free Holiday Mondays

Image captions:

(Left) Alexander Calder, *Gibraltar*, 1936, lignum vitae, walnut, steel rods, and painted wood, 51 7/8 x 24 1/4 x 11 3/8 inches, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist, 847.1966.a-b. © Calder Foundation, New York/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, digital image © 2013 The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

(Center) Alexander Calder, *Eucalyptus*, 1940, Sheet metal, wire, and paint, 94 1/2 x 61 inches, Calder Foundation, New York; Gift of Andréa Davidson, Shawn Davidson, Alexander S.C. Rower, & Holton Rower, 2010. © 2013 Calder Foundation, New York/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo: Calder Foundation, New York/Art Resource, NY

(Right) Alexander Calder, *La Grande vitesse* (intermediate maquette), 1969, Sheet metal, bolts, and paint, 102 x 135 x 93 inches, Calder Foundation, New York. © 2013 Calder Foundation, New York/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo: Calder Foundation, New York/Art Resource, NY

Press Contact: For additional information, contact LACMA Communications at press@lacma.org or 323 857-6522.

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