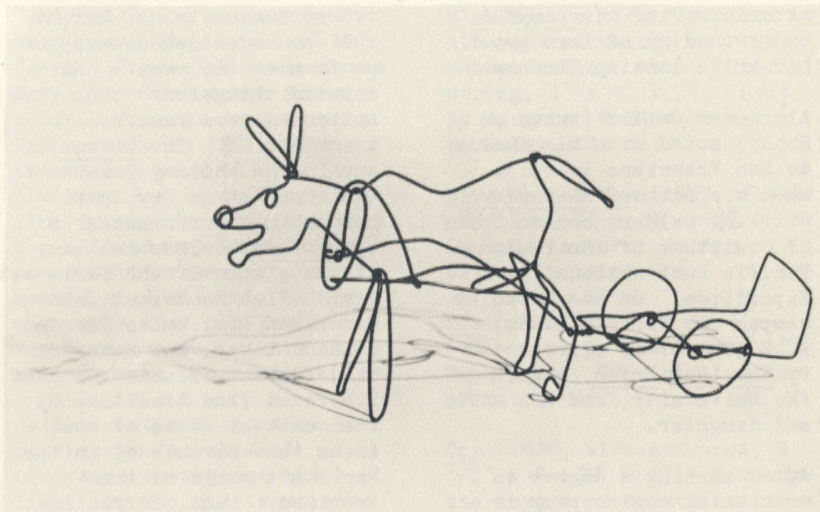


Mule and Cart, ca. 1968-69



If we accept Baudelaire's statement that "Genius is merely childhood retrieved," Alexander Calder (1898-1976) is probably America's greatest genius. He is certainly a pioneering figure in American modernism. At a time when American art was largely timid and provincial, he responded to elements of the revolutionary art movements of Europe with a native American ingenuity. His inventiveness, his patient tinkering with scrap materials, and his playful understanding of form gave his art a lasting freshness.

Alexander Calder (known as Sandy) moved with his family to San Francisco in 1913, when his father, Alexander Stirling Calder, became Chief of Sculpture of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. On the Berkeley campus (in Faculty Glade) A. S. Calder is represented by The Last Dryad, a gift to the University from his wife and daughter.

After earning a degree in mechanical engineering in 1919, Calder studied at the Art Student's League in New York. It was during this period that he became enamored of the circus and spent much time observing and sketching animals at the zoo. Calder's sister Peggy says that when they were children she and Sandy worked out a formula for drawing birds with one uninterrupted line flowing around the entire body. The results can be seen in drawings like the comically ferocious Lions in the Ring (1932), one of the works in MATRIX 56. Calder's many pen and ink drawings were inspired by the animal doodles he created in wire, his favorite medium. (Calder once told Peggy, "I think

best in wire.") One continuous wire "line" travels from the snout to the ears, udders, legs and squiggly tail of Calder's Sow of 1928. A series of bobbing sheet metal circles on wire stems creates the plumage in the Crested Crow, 1972.

In 1926 Calder went to Paris, where he continued making animals in wood and wire, and decided to create a complete circus, "...just for the fun of it." At first it was a two-suitcase circus, but by 1931 he had added so many new performers (55 people and animals altogether) that five suitcases were required to transport it. The Circus is now in the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Through his performances of the Circus, Calder met many of the giants of the Paris art world--Piet Mondrian, Joan Miró, Man Ray, Jules Pascin, Fernand Léger, and Jean Arp. Calder's new friends had been liberated from tradition by the constant waves of new ideas that circulated in the Paris art world of the twenties. Dada, Surrealism, and Constructivism all provided Calder with an atmosphere conducive to the development of open-form sculpture and the free play of imagination.

A visit to Mondrian's Paris studio in 1930 precipitated Calder's entry into the field of abstract art. When Calder saw Mondrian's red, yellow, and blue cardboard rectangles tacked on the studio walls, he suggested that "It would be fun to make those rectangles oscillate." (Mondrian did not agree.) From Mondrian he absorbed the essentials of Neo-plasticism: flat planes, the use of primary colors in opposition to black and white, and

asymmetrical composition. Then he translated these formal elements into a personal idiom, using industrial materials. Among the series of wood and wire constructions he made at this time was a motorized, abstract sculpture for which Marcel Duchamp coined the word, "mobile." When Calder made his first large-scale stationary sculpture in 1935, Jean Arp came up with an appropriate term, "stabile."

"Animobile," a portmanteau word combining "animaux" and "mobile," was invented by the artist's wife Louisa for a series of metal sculptures Calder made in 1971. The animobiles vary in size from the tiny Rat in this exhibition to huge beasts, but they are all endowed with Calder's humorous, irreverent and gentle good nature. Calder once said that his fan mail was tremendous--but all the writers were under six.

Calder continued to show a partiality for animal sculpture throughout his life. In the mid-twenties Calder made prototypes for an American toy company that are similar to the dachshund and blue velvet cow in the MATRIX exhibition. In later years he turned beer and coffee cans into birds (The Only Only Bird, ca. 1950) and continued to make wire animal sculpture (Mule and Cart, 1968-69). Even his greatest abstractions refer to natural forms.

The current MATRIX exhibition is occasioned by the loan of Calder's famous painting, Circus Scene, painted in oil on burlap in 1926 and sent to the Hayses as a tenth anniversary present. It is one of several circus scenes Calder painted at that time.

"I love the feeling of space under the Big Top," he said.

Norma Schlesinger  
Guest Curator

Works in MATRIX:

Circus Scene, 1926, oil on burlap, 69 7/8" x 83 3/4".  
Lent anonymously.

Circus Dachshund, model for Miss Tamara made for clown Albert Fratinelli, ca. 1926, rubber tubing, wire, buttons, string, 4" x 9" x 3".  
Lent by Margaret Calder Hayes, Berkeley, CA.

Blue Velvet Cow, 1927, cloth and wire, 7" x 13" x 2".  
Lent by Margaret Calder Hayes, Berkeley, CA.

Sow, 1928, wire, 7 1/2" x 17".  
Lent by The Museum of Modern Art, NYC; gift of the artist, 1944.

Cow, 1929, wire and wood, 3 1/2" x 8 1/8" x 4".  
Lent by the Museum of Modern Art, NYC; gift of Edward M. M. Warburg, 1941.

The Cow, 1929, wire, 8 3/4" x 13" x 4 3/4".  
Lent by Perls Galleries, NYC.

Bobtail Cat, 1932, wire, 7" x 13" x 2".  
Lent by Margaret Calder Hayes, Berkeley, CA.

Charmed Elephants, 1932, ink on paper, 21 3/4" x 30".  
Private collection, NYC.

Lions in the Ring, 1932, ink and crayon on paper, 22 3/4" x 30 3/4".  
Private collection, NYC.

The Sequel to Saratoga Trunk, 1932, ink on paper, 24" x 32".  
Lent anonymously.

Tessie, the Slack Rope  
Artist, 1932, ink on paper,  
24" x 32". Lent anonymously.

Fish, ca. 1935, brass wire,  
6" x 15" x 2". Lent  
anonymously.

Dragonfly and Bee, ca. 1944,  
brass wire, 25" x 14"  
(diam.). Lent anonymously.

The Only Only Bird, ca. 1950,  
tin cans and wire, 13 1/2" x  
15 1/2" x 19 3/4". Private  
collection, NYC.

Rat, 1952, painted sheet  
metal, wire and 4 iron stones  
(two pieces), 12 1/2" x 6" x  
19". Private collection,  
NYC.

Mule and Cart, ca. 1968-69,  
wire, 4 1/4" x 3" x 9 1/2".  
Private collection, NYC.

The Cathund, 1969, metal, 5  
1/4" x 7". Lent by Perls  
Galleries, NYC.

The Crested Crow, 1972, metal  
and steel wire, 16 1/2" x 10"  
x 11". Lent by Perls  
Galleries, NYC.

The Hawk for Peace, 1968  
is on permanent exhibition in  
front of the Museum. It was a  
gift from the artist in memory  
of his sister's husband, Kenneth  
A. Hayes, UC Berkeley Class  
of 1916.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Weyhe Gallery, NYC '28,'29;  
Pierre Matisse Gallery, NYC,  
'34-'43\* (cats. pub.); The  
Museum of Modern Art, NYC,  
'43 (cat. pub.); Galerie  
Maeght, Paris, '50,'54,'59,  
'63,'66,'68,'71,'73,'75  
(cats. pub.); Perls Gal-  
leries, NYC, '56-'76\* (cats.  
pub.); Stedelijk Museum,  
Amsterdam, '59 (traveling  
exhibition, cat. pub.); Tate  
Gallery, London, '62 (cat.  
pub.); Solomon R. Guggenheim

Museum, NYC, '64 (cat. pub.);  
Akademie der Künste, Berlin,  
'67 (cat. pub.); Museum of  
Contemporary Art, Chicago,  
'74 (cat. pub.); Whitney  
Museum of American Art, '76  
(traveling exhibition, cat.  
pub.).

\* With few exceptions, annual  
exhibitions.

Selected bibliography (see  
also catalogues under  
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'81).

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