

MASI Lugano

Museo d'arte
della Svizzera italiana,
Lugano

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Calder. Sculpting Time

5 May – 6 October 2024

Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano
Venue LAC

Curated by Carmen Giménez and Ana Mingot Comenge

Press release

Lugano, 15 April 2024

MASI Lugano presents *Calder. Sculpting Time*, the first comprehensive monographic exhibition in a Swiss public institution devoted to Alexander Calder in nearly fifty years. By introducing movement to the static art form of sculpture, Calder extended the medium beyond the visual into the temporal dimension. Drawing from major international public and private collections—including a large body of works loaned from the Calder Foundation, New York—*Calder. Sculpting Time* features over 30 of the artist's masterpieces created between 1931 and 1960.

Calder. Sculpting Time at MASI explores the profound and transformative impact of this revolutionary artist, delineating his development of a formal and sculptural language characterized by unprecedented innovation during the 1930s and 1940s. The exhibition, designed as an open plan without walls, offers the public the opportunity to see works that span Calder's early abstractions or *sphériques* to a magnificent selection of later *mobiles*, *stables* and *standing mobiles* of various sizes. Also on view will be a large body of constellations—a term proposed by Marcel Duchamp and James Johnson Sweeney for the artist's sculptures made of wood and wire in 1943.

Calder ensconced himself in the Parisian avant-garde shortly after moving to the French capital in 1926, when he was in his late twenties. It was during this time that he began creating his path-breaking performance work *Cirque Calder* and expanded upon his invention of radically massless wire portraits. In 1930, the artist's work dramatically shifted to the abstract. The exhibition marks this important juncture in the artist's production with Calder's earliest nonobjective sculptures, which he described as *densités*, *sphériques*, *arcs* and *mouvements arrêtés*. In the catalogue for the artist's 1931 exhibition at Galerie Percier in Paris, Fernand Léger wrote: "It's serious without seeming to be." Prominent among these works is the stable *Croisière*, in which fine wires trace a curvilinear volume to which two small spheres painted black and white are connected. Calder's wire lines present action without mass and sculpt volumes out of voids.

One of Calder's most important innovations was the incorporation of movement into his compositions, thereby introducing the dimension of time. His mobiles—a term coined by Duchamp to describe these works—are kinetic sculptures whose ever-changing compositions are activated

by their environments. The exhibition in Lugano features one of Calder's most important hanging mobiles, *Eucalyptus* (1940). The sculpture made its debut in Calder's 1940 exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York and was later included in almost every major exhibition staged during the artist's lifetime. In the words of the curators, "moving freely and interacting with its surroundings, it seems to shape the air; it is constantly changing, playing with time."

The exhibition also includes hanging mobiles such as *Arc of Petals* (1941) and the large-scale *Red Lily Pads* (1956), which is displayed in the last room close to a large window that offers a striking view over the lake and surrounding landscape. These works respond to the slightest change in air and light, vibrating in the unpredictability of time and its various moments. "Calder took the unique step of creating metal organisms that possess the qualities of lightness and variety, in subtle biomorphic forms, and that are at the same time tough and fragile, dynamic and esthetic, firm and hypersensitive," the exhibition's curators explain. Also on view, Calder's stabiles—a term coined by Jean Arp for the artist's static works in response to Duchamp—instead explore implied movement. *Untitled* (c. 1940) and *Funghi Neri* (1957) show the spectacular shifts in scale in these works, from the miniature to the monumental.

Due to the scarcity of sheet metal during World War II, Calder began a new series of abstract sculptures made from wire and wood in 1943 that are hung at unexpected heights on the wall. Sweeney and Duchamp, who curated Calder's 1943 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, proposed the term "constellation" for these sculptures. "They had a suggestion of some kind of cosmic nuclear gases—which I won't try to explain," Calder wrote. "I was interested in the extremely delicate, open composition."

"Calder's legacy endures not only in the physical presence of his works but also in the profound impact his art has had on shaping the way we perceive and interact with sculpture. His contribution to art history extends far beyond the innovative use of materials and the employment of new techniques, capturing the subtle essence of fleeting moments. Engaging with this temporal dimension is the goal of this exhibition," the curators conclude.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by Silvana Editoriale in three separate editions (Italian, English and German), with an essay by Carmen Giménez and Ana Mingot Comenge and a selection of historical texts.

The exhibition has been made possible thanks to Fondazione Favorita.

The artist:

Alexander Calder (b. 1898, Lawnton, Pennsylvania–d. 1976, New York City), whose illustrious career spanned much of the twentieth century, is the most acclaimed and influential sculptor of our time. Born in a family of celebrated, though more classically trained artists, Calder utilized his innovative genius to profoundly change the course of modern art. He began in the 1920s by developing a new method of sculpting: by bending and twisting wire, he essentially “drew” three-dimensional figures in space. He is renowned for the invention of the mobile, whose suspended, abstract elements move and balance in changing harmony. From the 1950s onward, Calder increasingly devoted himself to making outdoor sculpture on a grand scale from bolted steel plate. Today, these stately titans grace public plazas in cities throughout the world.

Press contacts

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Exhibition venues

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Press images

01.

Alexander Calder

Croisière

1931

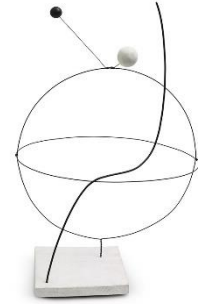
Wire, wood, and paint

94 × 58.4 × 58.4 cm

Calder Foundation, New York

Photograph by Tom Powel Imaging © Calder Foundation, New York. Photo courtesy of Calder Foundation, New York / Art Resource, New York

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02.

Alexander Calder

Assembled Bits of Wood

1935

Wood, sheet metal, wire, and paint

52.4 × 40.6 × 15.2 cm

Calder Foundation, New York; Mary Calder

Rower Bequest, 2011

Photograph by Tom Powel Imaging © Calder Foundation, New York. Photo courtesy of Calder Foundation, New York / Art Resource, New York

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03.

Alexander Calder

Big Bird

1937

Sheet metal, bolts, and paint

223.5 × 127 × 149.9 cm

Calder Foundation, New York

Photo courtesy Calder Foundation, New York / Art Resource, New York

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04.

Alexander Calder

Aluminum Leaves, Red Post

1941

Painted sheet metal

154.3 × 103.5 × 108 cm

The Lipman Family Foundation

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05.

Alexander Calder

Yucca

1941

Painted sheet metal and wire

186.7 × 58.4 × 50.8 cm

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

The Hilla Rebay Collection. 71.1936.R54

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06.

Alexander Calder

Arc of Petals

1941

Painted and unpainted sheet aluminum, iron wire

240 × 220 × 90 cm

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

(Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York) 76.2553 PG 137

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07.

Alexander Calder

Untitled

c. 1941

Sheet metal, wire, wood, string, and paint

97.1 × 83.8 × 29.8 cm

Calder Foundation, New York;

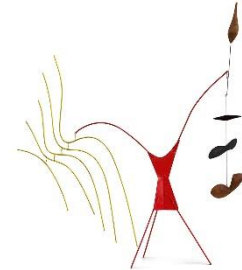
Gift of Charles M. Yassky, New York, 2013

Photo courtesy of Calder Foundation, New York

/ Art Resource, New York

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08.

Alexander Calder

Constellation

1943

Wood, wire, and paint

83.8 × 91.4 × 35.6 cm

Calder Foundation, New York

Photograph by Tom Powel Imaging © Calder

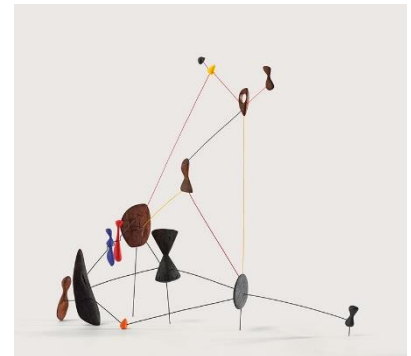
Foundation, New York. Photo courtesy of Calder

Foundation, New York / Art Resource, New

York

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09.

Alexander Calder

Black Lace

c. 1947

Sheet metal, wire, and paint

40 × 254.9 × 110.2 cm

Calder Foundation, New York

Photograph by Tom Powel Imaging.

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Resource, New York

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Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



10.

Alexander Calder

Triple Gong

c. 1948

Brass, sheet metal, wire, and paint

99.1 × 190.5 × 7 cm

Calder Foundation, New York

Photo courtesy Calder Foundation, New York /

Art Resource, New York

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Rights Society (ARS), New York



11.

Alexander Calder

Quatre systèmes rouges

1960

Iron and painted steel

155 × 200 × 200 cm

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk,

Denmark. Donation: The New Carlsberg

Foundation. Photo credit: Louisiana Museum

of Modern Art / Poul Buchard / Brøndum &

Co

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12.

Installation view, "Calder. Sculpting Time"

MASI Lugano, Switzerland.

Photograph by Luca Meneghel © 2024

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13.

Installation view, "Calder. Sculpting Time"

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14.

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15.

Installation view, "Calder. Sculpting Time"

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16.

Installation view, "Calder. Sculpting Time"

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17.

Installation view, "Calder. Sculpting Time"

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18.

Installation view, "Calder. Sculpting Time"

MASI Lugano, Switzerland.

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19.

Installation view, "Calder. Sculpting Time"

MASI Lugano, Switzerland.

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