

# Calder in Paris 1898 - 1976

Paris Art Studies

Alexander Calder 1898 - 1976

1898. Born Lawnton, Penn. second child of sculptor Alexander Stirling Calder (1870-1945) and painter Nanette Lederer Calder (1866-1960). Family moves frequently across the USA following father's commissions. Young Calder is encouraged to create.

1909. Calder presents his parents with his first sculptures: a dog and duck made of brass.

1919. Receives degree from the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken NJ. Employed as draftsman for the NY Edison company and also as efficiency engineer for another firm.

1922. Serves as fireman on cargo ship, sails from New York to San Francisco via Panama canal. Experience of seeing simultaneously sunrise and setting moon from deck in Guatemala will prove to be his artistic epiphany.

1923. Decides to be an artist. Begins classes at Art Students League in New York. Studies composition with John Sloan, portrait painting with George Luks, head and figure with Guy Pène du Bois.

1924. Works as sports illustrator for the National Police Gazette.

1925. Exhibits painting of sun eclipse at 9th exhibition of Independent artists at the Waldorf Astoria. Illustrations of Barnum & Bailey circus for police gazette. Hundreds of sketches of animals at Bronx and Central park zoos.

1926. Improves toy circus belonging to the children of a friend. Stag dinner organized by Walter Khun for the visit of Paris modern sculptor Brancusi to New York becomes subject for a Calder painting. Makes his first wire sculpture, a rooster. Decides to leave for Paris. Arrives via England in July. Meets fellow American artists at the café du Dôme in Montparnasse. Begins creating Le Cirque Calder fashioned out of wire, fabric, leather, rubber, cork and other materials. Gives first performance of his circus for American art patron Mrs Frances Robbins. This is the first of numerous and regular performances that Calder will hold over the years and which will become one of his main promotional tools both in Paris and the USA. As the circus figures grow in number they will come to occupy 5 full suitcases.

1927. Exhibits toys at Salon des Humoristes in galerie La Boétie and at Jacques Seligman & Co.

Trip back to USA, designs prototypes for plywood animals for Winsconsin toy manufacturer.

1928. Exhibits 4 wire sculptures including Romulus and Remus at 12th exhibition of Independent Artists at the Waldorf Astoria. Makes first wire portrait of fashion designer of Elizabeth "Babe" Hawes. Designs accessories and neckpieces for Hawes. Returns to Paris in November. At the recommendation of Hawes writes to Miro in Spain expressing a wish to meet him on his return to Paris. Visits Miro studio and is shown a curious collage made of a feather, cork and picture postcard.

1929. Exhibits wire sculptures at Salon des Indépendants in Paris. Public reacts with confusion and delight. Exhibition of

wire sculptures at galerie Billiet-Pierre Vorms, catalog prefaced by prominent Montparnasse artist Jules Pascin. Paul Fratellini the famous clown from the Cirque d'Éclair attendes one of Calder's circus performances. The notorious model and art world muse Kiki de Montparnasse sits for her portrait. Calder performs in studio of fashionable Montparnasse painter Foujita who accompanies performance playing drums. Man Ray and Kiki are among the guests. Meets his future wife Louisa James on transatlantic crossing. Visits her family at Cape Cod. Creates his first mechanized sculpture Goldfish Bowl as Christmas present for his mother in New York. Gives circus performance on Christmas day in home of Park avenue socialite Aline Bernstein. Author Thomas Wolfe who attends this event will later satirize it in his novel *You Can't Go Home Again*.

1930. Returns to Paris in March, rents studio at 7 villa Brune. Broke, he begins charging admission for the circus performances organized in his studio. Le Corbusier, Léger Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg are invited to a performance in October. Calder is introduced to composer Edgard Varese. Visits Piet Mondrian's studio in Paris — this will prove to be his second artistic epiphany that will convert him to abstract art. Louisa James tired of her dates with dull polo players decides to marry 'Sandy'. Calder makes gold engagement ring for her. Exhibits 4 sculptures in group show at MoMA.

1931. Calder and Louisa marry in the US and sail for Europe in February. Calder exhibits his new abstract work for the first time in *Alexander Calder: Volumes — Vecteurs — Densités; dessins et portraits* at the galerie Percier in Paris. Accepts invitation to join newly founded Abstraction- Création group in Paris. Marcel Duchamp visits his studio and suggests a name for the new abstract sculptures: 'mobiles'. Exhibits with Abstraction-Création at the Porte de Versailles.

1932. Calder: ses mobiles exhibition at galerie Vignon, Paris. Great success with art world (Picasso, Léger, van Doesburg, Cocteau&hellip;). Only Mondrian objects to their motion. Cryptically states kinetic sculptures are 'not fast enough' and never would be because ideally they should be still. The artist Hans Arp suggests a term for the non-moving sculptures: 'stables'. Calder meets American art critic James Johnson Sweeney. Exhibition at the Julien Levy gallery in New York: *Calder: Mobiles, Abstract Sculptures*. In September the Calders visit Miro at his farm near Barcelona Montroig. Gives circus performance for local famers.

1933. Calder performs in Madrid and Barcelona. Miro arranges an exhibition in Barcelona gallery.

Exhibition at Pierre Colle gallery in Paris. Worried by recent political developments in Europe (Hitler's election in Germany among them) the Calders decide to give up their Paris house and return to the US. Miro gives them a large blue painting as going-away present. They leave in July in the company of Paris painter Jean Hélion.

After 1933:

The Calders will establish themselves in New York and also buy an 18c farmhouse in Connecticut. The 1930's will be the most inventive period for Calder's work. He begins a fruitful association with the Pierre Matisse gallery in New York. In 1937 he will exhibit a Mercury Fountain next to Picasso's Guernica at the Spanish pavilion of the Paris World's Fair. MoMa will hold a major retrospective of his work curated by J. J. Sweeney and Marcel Duchamp in 1943.

The shortage of metal during the war will lead him to create sculpture out of recycled materials and found objects. These will be shown in Paris after the war in 1946 at the Louis Carré gallery in a show organized by Marcel Duchamp with a catalog prefaced by Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1954 the Calders buy a house in the French countryside in Saché in the Loire valley. At this time Calder receives more and more public and private commissions (more than 250 in his entire career). Major retrospectives of Calder's work will be held in 1964 at the Guggenheim museum in New York and at the national museum of modern art in Paris. The greatest retrospective is Calder's Universe at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1976. Calder will die at the age of 78 in 1976.

