

Press release

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National Gallery of Art unveils Calder in the Tower



Eucalyptus, 1940

New York, NY, 25 September 2016. As part of its East Building renovation and expansion, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., will devote a new skylit Tower Level gallery to the work of Alexander Calder, constituting the largest long-term gallery space in the world dedicated to the beloved modern master. Long a keystone in the NGA's collection, Calder will be represented by nearly fifty works spanning the late 1920s through 1976, in addition to the monumental hanging mobile that occupies the building's atrium. Approximately half of the works on view will be on long-term loan from the Calder Foundation, while the rest belong to the National Gallery.

Calder Foundation President Alexander S. C. Rower states, "It is such a privilege to collaborate again with the National Gallery of Art on this tremendous presentation of my grandfather's works.

The Calder gallery shall be an ongoing destination for visitors to experience Calder's masterpieces, which engage our senses with anticipation and surprise."

Among the earliest works on view from the Foundation's collection will be Calder's *Aztec Josephine Baker* (1930), a fully articulated hanging wire sculpture depicting the music-hall superstar and darling of the Parisian avant-garde. A sensational performer, Baker was the subject of five distinct wire renderings by Calder, of which *Aztec Josephine Baker* is the ultimate and largest example. Calder was known to dance with this celebrated wire figure, which features a dozen jointed articulations.

Illustrating Calder's definitive shift to abstraction will be seven nonobjective oil paintings from 1930. These were part of a series created over a period of two weeks following Calder's visit to Piet Mondrian's studio, where he was impressed not by the Dutch artist's paintings themselves but by the total studio environment he had designed. Preceding Calder's invention of the mobile, these paintings are remarkable representations of the artist's first venture into abstraction and do not resemble anything else within Calder's oeuvre.

In summer 1934, just a year after moving to Roxbury, Connecticut, Calder made his first standing mobiles for the outdoors, prompting the development of the monumental works to come. As Calder recounted in 1937, "I have made a number of things for the open air. All of them react to



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the wind, and are like a sailing vessel in that they react best to one kind of breeze.” Standing prominently in the gallery will be *Steel Fish* (1934), among the first of his outdoor works, made of welded steel rods to withstand the natural elements.

In the mid-1930s, in addition to developing his classic mobiles, Calder began to work prolifically on frames and panels that explored the concept of two-dimensional paintings in actual motion. Instigated either by natural forces or human intervention, these three-dimensional compositions flash forms and colors in real time, activating a complex choreography of elements that blur the lines between circumstance and permanence. Featured in the Tower will be *Red Panel* (1936), which constitutes Calder’s largest “painting in motion.”

A highlight of the NGA’s presentation will be *Eucalyptus* (1940), a majestic hanging mobile that exemplifies Calder’s mature vocabulary. With a large, surreal element hanging in palpable tension with the floor, *Eucalyptus* premiered in Calder’s 1940 exhibition at Pierre Matisse Gallery and went on to be included in nearly all of the major exhibitions staged during the artist’s life. A favorite among art historians, curators, and the general public alike, *Eucalyptus* moves with hypnotic grace and almost human emotion.

Also on display will be *The Big Ear* (1943), a large-scale stabile that stands at eleven feet tall. When Calder’s immensely popular retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was extended into 1944, Calder made this sculpture for the main entryway of the museum to replace *Red Petals* (1942), which had been returned to its owner. At once solid and buoyant, *The Big Ear* engages the senses by amplifying sounds through a dynamic, arching form.

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