

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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ALEXANDER CALDER: THE COLLECTION OF MR. AND MRS. KLAUS G. PERLS
OPENS AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, ON MARCH 9, 1997

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 4, 1997 -- Thirty-five works highlighting aspects of the career of modern master Alexander Calder, perhaps best known as the inventor of the mobile, will be on view at the National Gallery of Art, March 9 - May 26, 1997. The exhibition, Alexander Calder: The Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls, celebrates a recent gift of forty works to the National Gallery from the Perlses, who represented Calder in their New York gallery from 1955 until the artist's death in 1976. Many of the works seen in this installation will be included in the Calder retrospective scheduled to open at the Gallery in March 1998.

Calder is well known to National Gallery audiences through such late works as his monumental Untitled mobile (1976) in the East Building and several late works given by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, including the large stabile Obus (1972) and a group of ten "Animobiles" (1970-76). The Perls collection, however, presents an extensive view of Calder's oeuvre with seminal examples of his early work, dating

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from the late 1920s through 1973. In addition to fifteen pieces of sculpture, the objects on view include seventeen works on paper and three pieces of jewelry, and span six decades of the artist's career.

"We are very grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Perls for their generous donation, which enables the National Gallery to more completely represent the full scope and breadth of Calder's artistic achievement," said Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art.

The Exhibition

Featured in the exhibition are two outstanding examples of Calder's wire constructions, his first important work made from the mid-1920s through 1930. These sculptures -- mainly portraits and animals -- show the artist's remarkable facility for line and form, as well as an early interest in motion.

After Calder visited the Parisian studio of Piet Mondrian in 1930, he began making spare, abstract paintings and wire constructions. Soon thereafter he introduced movement into his abstract constructions, first with small motors and then by way of available air currents. Calder's innovative abstract moving sculptures were named "mobiles" by artist Marcel Duchamp in 1932 and his static constructions were called "stabiles" by sculptor Jean Arp. The Perls collection traces the development of the mobile, from the early Untitled (The McCausland Mobile) (1937), to the lyrical Cascading Flowers (c. 1945) and the sound-producing Triple Gong (1951).

Trained as an engineer with an appetite for inventing new forms, Calder

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constantly sought to find new solutions to abstract sculpture. These innovations can be seen in Ruby-Eyed (1936), an early example of his "stabiles" that Calder later developed on a monumental scale; Little Spider (c. 1940), a delicate indoor standing mobile; and Four White Petals (1960), a sculpture that previously resided in the Perls Galleries sculpture garden.

Among Calder's most striking formal inventions are the group of "Constellations," biomorphic shapes carved in wood connected by thin metal wires, and "Towers," architectural constructions of metal wire mounted on the wall. Two superlative examples from these series, Vertical Constellation with Bomb (1943) and Tower with Pinwheel (1951), can be seen in the exhibition. Likewise, Calder applied his skillful hands to household objects and jewelry and was an accomplished draftsman. The drawings in the Perls collection, including pen and ink, watercolor, graphite, and gouache on paper, illustrate the remarkable scope of Calder's graphic oeuvre with examples of both his abstract "Space" drawings and his figurative line drawings made simultaneously in the early 1930s.

Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls

During the time the Perlses represented Calder, they organized eighteen Calder exhibitions and developed a close relationship with the artist. Klaus Perls first opened a gallery in New York in 1937 and three years later was joined in the business by his new wife, Dolly. Together they ran the gallery until 1995. Over the years, the Perlses represented many distinguished artists including Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Fernand

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Léger, André Derain, Amedeo Modigliani, and Maurice de Vlaminck.

The National Gallery of Art, located on Constitution Avenue between Third and Seventh Streets, N.W., is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free of charge. For general information, call (202) 737-4215, or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at (202) 842-6176.

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