Alexander Calder Essay, Research Paper

Alexander Calder was one of the most innovative and original American artists of the twentieth century. In 1926, Calder arrived in Paris and devoted himself to a project called the Circus that occupied him for over five years. This contains characters and animals made out of wire, scraps of cloth, wood, cork, labels, bits of scrap metal and pieces of rubber. Calder transported his little theater in suitcases and performed it for his friends. During his performances, Calder invented ways to simulate the flight of birds: ?These are little bits of white paper, with a hole and slight weight on each one, which flutter down several variously coiled thin steel wires which I jiggle so that they flutter down like doves?? (Alexander Calder, An Autobiography with Pictures [New York: Pantheon, 1966], p.92) The Circus is the laboratory of Calder?s work; in it he experimented with new formulas and techniques. “By 1930,” sculptor historian Wayne Craven has written, Calder’s “Circus had become one of the real successes of the art world of Montparnasse, as well as among the Paris intellectuals. Jean Cocteau, Fernand Leger, Joan Miro, Piet Mondrian, Jean Arp… and others were captivated by it, whereas none of them paid much attention to Calder’s wood carvings. Such encouragement undoubtedly led him to try more serious experiments in wire sculptures.” During this same period he developed wire figures such as Josephine Baker, The Negress, and the Portrait of Edgar Varese, while continuing to draw and to create circus scenes. Next he worked in wood, creating The Horse, The Cow, female nudes, and Old Bull, between 1928 and 1930, eventually becoming interested in the movement of objects, some with motors. Calder discovered what he wanted: ?to paint and work in the abstract? (Calder, p.133). He created relief paintings such as White Panel (1934) and applied himself thereafter to creating sculptures based on the plastic dynamics of asymmetry. Calder discovered the leaders of avant-garde, the Abstraction-Creation group. Under their influence, Calder began to look into Boccioni and Moholy-Nagy?s theories, using sculptures in motion.

In 1933, Calder completed Object with Red Discs, a sculpture he described as a ?two-meter rod with one heavy sphere, suspended from the apex of a wire. This gives quite a cantilever effect. Five thin aluminum discs project at right angels from five wires, held in position by a wooden sphere counterweight? (Calder, p.149). Thus the idea of the mobile was born in 1934. By 1939, Rusty Bottle proved that Calder was capable of ?exploring all the consequences of his plastic investigations.? In his autobiography he said, ?I had been working on things that went round and round, driven by a small electric motor- some with no motors- some with a crank? (Calder, p.126) That same year, Calder unveiled Dancing Torpedo Shape in painted wood and wire and equipped with a small motor.

In creating his Constellations in 1943, Calder explored the plastic possibilities of mobiles; he used small pieces of wood, which he shaped and sometimes painted. From this point on, Calder?s ambition changed direction. He wanted challenging creations. His mobiles took up the challenge by responding to two objectives. The first was to display objects in the air, giving the viewer the experience of finding new skies filled with moving and colored constellations. Calder accomplished this in Acoustic Ceiling (1954), or in the mobile .125. The second objective was to combine the two complementary principles of his sculptural work. The Crinkly with Red Disc (1973) and Carmen (1974) are some examples. Calder?s humor brought out the works, Le Bougnat (1959), The Pagoda (1963), Le chien en trois couleurs (1973), Black Flag(1974), the Critters series, and Le soleil sur la montagne (1975). Calder also cut fantastic animals from sheet metal, creating La vache and Elephant (both 1970) and a mobile entitled Nervous Wreck (1976), which represents the red skeleton of a fish.

Calder also drew caricatures and illustrations for various periodicals and designed toys. These experiences enhanced Calder?s works. In 1926 he published Animal Sketching, a textbook to teach drawing to beginners; he explored wood sculpture, creating The Horse (1928), and he made bronze castings, such as The Cat (1930). His wire sculptures, such as the four Josephine Bakers, the heads Edgar Varese and Fernand Leger, Acrobats, and Brass Family, were his new generation of works. Calder?s sculptures prove that he had observed and learned from Mondrian, Pablo Gargollo, Julio Gonzalez, Laslo Mohly-Nagy, Roman Clemens, Naum Gabo, and Antoine Pevsner. Little Ball with Counterweight (1931), Cruise/Universe (1931), and Spherique I/The Pistil (1930) were linear sculptures, which extended his creation of wire portraits. During World War II, Calder reached his artistic maturity, creating works that made him famous throughout the world.

Alexander Calder is one of my favorite artists because his work stands out from others. He has a unique style that catches the eye of the viewer. Out of all the artists that I have studied, Calder is the one that catches my attention. Calder is today known as the father of the American invention–the mobile. He also is credited with the invention of the stabile. He is not only an artist, but also a sculptor and inventor.