MCA DNA

Alexander Calder

This exhibition provides an opportunity to view the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago's in-depth holdings of the work of Alexander Calder (American, 1898–1976), which reveal how the seminal artist's ideas developed over a fifty-year career. Dating from the 1920s to the 1970s, the works in the exhibition include varied examples of Calder's mobiles, sculptures, and works on paper. Calder is credited for creating what we call a "mobile" today, a term coined by fellow-artist Marcel Duchamp as a French pun meaning both "mobile" and "motive." Not only do Calder's kinetic works consciously depart from the traditional notion of an artwork as a static object, but since the early 1930s, they have integrated ideas of motion and transformation as aesthetic factors. In addition, Calder's creative reuse of discarded materials continues to resonate with contemporary artists. While words like *recycling* and *reuse* have a different context today than they did in Calder's day, as well as a new sense of urgency, it is inspirational to witness the artist's pioneering attitudes toward what many of his contemporaries thought of as garbage and to observe how these attitudes are echoed in artworks on view elsewhere in the museum.

The core of the collection comes from the Ruth and Leonard Horwich Family Loan, which MCA Chicago has housed, cared for, and displayed since 1995. The Horwiches, who became friends with the artist, ultimately acquired more than two-dozen major artworks. Beyond his relationship with the Horwiches, Calder continued—and continues—to be a major presence in Chicago. In 1974, as part of the inaugural ceremonies for Calder's public-art masterwork—the monumental *Flamingo* (1973) located on Federal Plaza in the Loop—Mayor Richard J. Daley declared a "Calder Day" and a circus-themed parade transported the artist down State Street to the dedication. As part of these festivities, the MCA also mounted a major exhibition of Calder's works, and his art has been a steady presence in the MCA galleries ever since. The MCA DNA series showcases work that is core to the museum's collection and that resonates within the contemporary art world and culture at large.

MCA DNA: Alexander Calder is organized by Michael Darling, James W. Alsdorf Chief Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.