

Calder Makes Some New Gadgets, Puts 'Em On Exhibit

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BY WAVERLEY LEWIS ROOT

Montparnasse trooped across an all but frozen river yesterday to attend the vernissage of Sandy Calder's exposition of *mobiles* at the Galerie Vignon, 17 Rue Vignon. It was worth the trip.

No one can predict what Calder may do next; the only sure guess is that it will be something interesting. Then, after it's done, the logicity of Calder's progress is so apparent that you wonder why prediction wasn't possible.

When I first met Calder in New York, some seven or eight years ago, what most impressed me were his swift simple sketches, spots for a magazine, if there had been a magazine good enough for them, which in two or three lines filled a whole page with movement. What Calder was interested in then, as now, was motion. An engineer, he knows the phenomena of motion in its purity, and he likes to work in the materials of machinists—wire, pulleys and metal.

He transferred the motion he had been putting in his sketches to his wire sculpture. In the interest of the new medium, some of the motion may have gotten sidetracked. There wasn't much, for instance, in his *Romulus and Remus* at the Salon des Independants two or three years ago; but there was still a far from static note in the two wire infants tugging desperately at the door-stops, which depended from the belly of the wire wolf.

Calder's motion went into his famous circus—into that and some other toys which are not included in the Cirque Calder. I missed a chance to be a prophet five years ago when a worried editor looked at the photographs which accompanied a story I had written about Calder and decided to lose the article. I had suggested then that Calder was catching in his toys an essence of animal and human motion that was more important than the medium it was being expressed in, and that a sculpture of motion might well be within the pos-

sible. That sculpture of motion is what Calder is showing now.

It is the right age for it. When geometry was the basis of science, sculpture—static sculpture—was the typical art. The typical art of today, an age in which imaginary dimensions have become part of common thinking and in which mathematicians have so completely understood the infinite that they have discovered with surprise that we inhabit a finite universe, is music, the only four-dimensional art that has thus far succeeded in gaining general attention. The color organ of Thomas Wilfred has added the fourth dimension to painting. Calder's *mobiles* may very well be the beginning of four-dimensional sculpture.

Calder began to branch out in this direction years ago, when, for example, he built a toy duck dragging a recalcitrant worm out of the ground. The hammer motion of the duck's head and beak, the perfect reduction to its simplest terms of a natural movement, was what might have been a development of what Calder is doing now. But instead he has gone from the more to the less complicated. Beginning with natural motions—the galloping of the horses in his chariot race, the seductive wriggles of his hula-hula dancer, the frenzied gait of his stretcher-bearers—he is now dealing with motion qua motion, non-representative, existing for its own coldly humorous mathematical sake.

Perhaps he abandoned representation for abstraction partly because, at the same time that he was developing his circus, he was making abstract pieces of sculpture (if the simple arrangement of planes in three dimensions may be called sculpture), with wire, tin, strings, and bits of wood. To these abstractions he has now applied motion.

There is no point in trying to describe the present exhibit. It can't be done. If I write that the largest moving design on view is a tremendous black pendulum swinging across a red wooden frame, of which the far corner is occupied by a turning black and white piece of tin, a revolving black spiral of wire, and a pair of white wooden balls revolving slowly and suspiciously around the spiral, you aren't going to be able to reconstruct the impression.

Only two of his arrangements seem to have any representative quality, possibly conscious, and hence to be capable of description. One, two slightly quivering sticks surmounted with balls, might be the controls of a vibrating airplane or automobile; the other, a wire framework from which depended fine weighted wires which impart a delicate quivering to the whole figure suggests to me, and probably to no one else, a rearing horse.

I am no art critic. I do not know the long words used to express ecstasy about abstractions. I make no pretense to what is called understanding of them, and I hope, if I ever do have the misfortune

to find valuable gray matter encumbered by critical obfuscations, to keep them to myself and not to loose them on an unsuspecting public. All I can say is that these patterns, with the shifting relations of their component parts, interest as mechanical movements interest; mathematicians would probably find a special fascination in them; people with a sense of humor will no doubt smile with, not at, them. I don't know why these designs often seem humorous, but they do. And knowing Sandy Calder, and knowing the deep vein of hilarity that runs through most of his work, I have no doubt that that is a correct reaction, if there is such a thing as a correct reaction to art.

But now that Calder has passed from the synthetic to the essence, from human motion to mechanical movement, I hope that he will some day take a backward-forward step, and apply his pure movements to the production of more complicated representative human movement.

An artist with the analytic eye for movement that Calder possesses, and with his technical ability to reproduce it, can do truer and more revealing portraits of humans and animals than the sculptor or the painter. It is to be hoped that he has not jumped that part of his art without bridging it, for perhaps there is now no one else capable of doing portraiture in motion. That could be a very important branch of portraiture, for a woman's walk is always more revelant of her character than her face; and she can't rouge her walk.