

us are hard to take in. Or, once taken in, it is hard to keep the wall in perspective for two reasons: one, because the break of the Romans with Britain was a clean one. Around A.D. 400 the Romans left for good, and their memory faded so fast that, in the centuries that followed, the great illiterate majority thought the wall was the work of giants: "there were giants in the earth in those days," it was written in *Genesis*, so it must have been so. Second, the Latin legacy that included the documentation of the empire under the Christian church was disrupted by paganism and the disorder of centuries before it was taken up by antiquarians in the sixteenth century. Bede, the monk of Jarrow, near the eastern end of the wall, who died in 735, wrote in *A History of the English Church and People* that, before they departed, the Romans built a stone wall to replace a turf rampart built by the emperor Severus from sea to sea: "This famous and still conspicuous wall was built from public and private resources, with the Britons lending assistance. It is eight feet in breadth, and twelve in height; and, as can be clearly seen to this day, ran straight from east to west." No mention of Hadrian, and little agreement with the time scale established by modern scholarship.

History is written by the winners, said George Orwell. The Romans certainly were winners, as appears in their accounts of Hadrian. But that is all. Perhaps Britannia was simply not very important to Rome and not worth a historian's trouble to write more. This makes the wall all the more extraordinary. It has become stuff of the imagination, proof of the world we have lost, though we walk beside it to this day.

## MY WAY

### CALDER IN PARIS

SEYMOUR I. TOLL

Alexander Calder (1898–1976), always known as Sandy, was the youngest of three generations of renowned sculptors, each of whom was named Alexander Calder. Their places in the history of American art and the patrimony of Philadelphia's civic sculpture are unique. Sandy's mobiles and stabiles gave him the stature of a major international figure in twentieth-century art, and few artists have matched the diversity of his works, which include mobiles, stabiles, bronze, wood, and wire sculpture, theater sets and costumes, decorated jet planes and cars, drawings, oil paintings, gouaches, books, jewelry, tableware, kitchen utensils, tapestries, and rugs.

The founder of the dynasty, Alexander Milne Calder (1846–1923),

emigrated from Scotland to Philadelphia in 1868. He did the incomparable sculptural ornamentation of Philadelphia's enormous City Hall, a twenty-year project of some 250 works he began when he was twenty-six. At the top of its clock tower is his masterpiece and the city's ultimate icon: the colossal bronze statue of William Penn, Philadelphia's Quaker founder. City Hall visually anchors the lower end of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. In the next generation Alexander Stirling Calder (1870–1945) sculpted the most beautiful fountain in Philadelphia, the Swann Memorial Fountain near the midpoint on the parkway. Like his father, Sandy, the youngest Calder, was born in Philadelphia, and his mobiles and stabiles left an indelible imprint on its civic art, especially his mobile *Ghost* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which dominates the upper end of the parkway. When that mobile was installed, a local touch of irreverence honored the generational progression of Calder sculpture up the parkway by naming the collection "The Father, Son and Unholy Ghost."

The two cities in the three Calders' tale are Philadelphia and Paris. In addition to their roots in Philadelphia (they are buried in nearby Bala Cynwyd), all had lived in Paris. Sandy's father and mother (a painter) studied there, and Alexander Milne may have also done so. In *Three Calders: A Family Memoir* Sandy Calder's sister, Margaret Calder Hayes, writes, "it was the experience of Paris at a crucial, formative stage that puts its seal on the way each of these men approached his work." The one whose art was most deeply affected by exposure to Paris was Sandy. He believed that his experience there in the late 1920s and early 1930s decisively affected his career. As he put it, "I got the first impulse for doing things my way in Paris."

The centerpiece of writing about Sandy is his own *Calder: An Autobiography With Pictures* (1966). Its account of his Paris years is an essay in how the nutrients of time and place can get into the marrow of an American artist's work. Oversized and lavishly illustrated, the book at first glance looks as if it ought to be docked on a coffee table, but any sampling of the text invites a complete reading. Sandy dictated the work to his son-in-law, Jean Davidson. Creating the book this way, Calder made the reader his listener. The transcribed text has the inviting qualities of amiable relaxed speech—a pastiche of constant candor, occasional run-on thoughts, brief lapses of memory, and dashes of earthiness.

The book makes Calder readily knowable and appealing because of the steady presence of his plain self. The literary historian and critic Malcolm Cowley, a friend, suspected that the French may have perceived Calder as "the Noble Savage, one who disregards social conventions and judges everything by his instinctive standards. . . . He made ribald jokes, not suggestive ones. He liked to draw the outlines of opulent breasts or buttocks in copper wire, or with his blunt hands in the air; at parties he liked to goose dignified ladies; his hands were roaming, but not his eyes." Cowley also made a point

of Calder's marital fidelity. He was a one-woman man and the woman was his wife, Louisa. They were the jolliest of party-givers and loved dancing, and she was an enthusiastic accordionist.

His decisive Paris experience occurred during the years 1926–1933. His treatment of it in the autobiography is as matter-of-fact as a plumber's account of an apprenticeship. He had no time for finely spun art theory or criticism. Another friend, the playwright Arthur Miller, said, "Calder was absolutely uninterested in talking about the whole damned thing. Either he did it or he didn't do it." Paris is a major and minor theme in Calder's career. The lesser one is the tangible material of a number of Paris exhibits and works such as his mobile *Spirale* on the grounds of UNESCO's headquarters. The dominant motif in how his way of doing things originated in the Paris experience developed when he made six round trips between Paris and New York. Considerable factual detail and abstractions, such as the design of motion and the ignition of modernist ideas and child psychology, churn across those seven years of transatlantic shuffling, but there is a clear narrative line. Between 1926 and 1933 Sandy Calder, always a boy in spirit, worked and played in a Paris where its *esprit des artes* and his idea-sparking coterie of international artists fired and directed his imagination for life.

He was born in Lawnton, now a part of Philadelphia. He was skilled with his hands and deft with tools. From his earliest years his parents supported and encouraged his enthusiasm for making things. Motion intrigued him since his early childhood. As a boy he made ingenious moving objects, one of the earliest of which was a two-pronged wire fork with a trigger ejector he used to kill garden slugs. In Arizona (where their father was recuperating from tuberculosis) he and his sister caught horned toads that Sandy hitched with harnesses of thread to carts made of match boxes.

He spent his Paris years, like the rest of his adult life, in the spirit of boyhood. He was habitually unbuttoned. His sister wrote that "His red flannel L. L. Bean shirts and baggy blue jeans became his trademark." His writing and speech were no fancier than his dress. A fair sample of his plain talk is preserved in a recorded 1950s TV exchange between him and an awed interviewer who deferentially asked about a work in progress: "How do you know when you're finished?" Calder replied, "When it's dinnertime."

He described the primary quality of his way of working as "the state of mind. Elation." When a reporter asked if he ever experienced sadness, he answered, "I haven't got the time!" James Johnson Sweeney, an early and leading Calder proponent and scholar, believed that play was the source of Calder's work. To Arthur Miller "he seemed more like someone at play than an artist."

Calder was a visionary junk collector. As a child he saw shining constructs in adults' trash heaps. "I spent my childhood as a boy in the midst of my family, always enthusiastic about toys and string, and always a junkman of bits of

wire and all the prettiest stuff in the garbage can." His lust for trash never cooled. When he was an adult, he told a friend, "I like broken wine glasses on stems, old carpets, old spring beds, smashed tin cans, bits of brass imbedded in asphalt, and I love pieces of red glass that come out of taillights." He coupled his junk-collecting with an urgent need to know what makes things tick. Being with his friends was another of Calder's essential needs. During his Paris years his artist friends were his "gang," whose influence he credited as being decisive in shaping his career. His cognitive skills were at their keenest when he was creating barnyard humor. Authentic simplicity and earthiness were the essential qualities of his charm that sustained his friends' delight in him.

With no vocational focus in 1915 Calder finished Lowell High School in Berkeley, California, where the family was living when his father was acting chief of the Sculpture Department of the San Francisco World's Fair of 1915. Many years later he recalled why he decided to attend Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey: "I wanted to be an engineer because some guy I rather liked was a mechanical engineer, that's all." He earned a mechanical engineering degree, and the class yearbook prophetically recorded his sunny puckishness: "Sandy is evidently always happy, or perhaps up to some joke, for his face is always wrapped up in that same mischievous, juvenile grin. This is certainly the index to the man's character in this case, for he is one of the best natured fellows there is."

Following his graduation in 1918 he drifted through several engineering jobs and was a fireman in the boiler room of the steamship *H. F. Alexander* in 1922; then he worked in a logging camp in Washington state. His checkered work history never troubled him even though he had no exciting jobs. A Canadian engineer his father knew had a serious talk with Sandy about a career and advised him to do what he wanted to do, which was painting. In 1922 he began night drawing-classes at New York's Forty-Second Street Public School, and the next year he committed himself to painting as a career. Until 1926 he studied in the city at the Art Students' League, where his principal teachers were John Sloan and George Luks of the realist Ashcan School. "I tried several of the professors, nearly all, except the most constipated."

At the Art Students' League he showed a distinct talent for brush-drawing animals in the Bronx and Central Park Zoos, and he was also skillful at single-line drawing. In 1923 he found his first artist's job with the *National Police Gazette* as a freelance illustrator doing single-line drawings of city scenes. A year later his *National Police Gazette* press-pass got him into the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, where he worked around the clock for two weeks doing whimsical sketches of colorful scenes. Elizabeth Hutton Turner, who was the senior curator and project director of the Calder-Miró exhibit at the Phillips Collection in 2004–2005, considered the circus "Calder's great beginning—one that would leave a deep impression on his

life and work. Calder discovered a modern subject and an aesthetic that could sustain him emotionally as well as intellectually."

In 1925 he made his first wire sculpture, a sundial designed as a rooster on a vertical rod. The next spring his zoo drawings were published as *Animal Sketching*, and that June he decided to go to Paris. He had no sharply focused objective, but his parents and grandfather had gone there, and he was setting out to be an artist like them: "So Paris seemed the place to go, on all accounts of practically everyone who had been there, and I decided I would also like to go." His parents concurred. In June 1926 he paid for his passage by signing on as a day laborer on the British freighter *Galileo* bound from Hoboken for Hull, England.

In late July 1926 he arrived in Paris, which had attracted Americans since the early twenties. They were traveling to Paris in unprecedented numbers. It was an exceptional bargain because third-class passage on transatlantic liners was remarkably cheap, and inflation had weakened the franc to the point in 1926 that a dollar was worth fifty francs. In his *Life among the Surrealists* (1962) Matthew Josephson estimated that nearly all the young American expatriates he knew in Paris during the twenties could make ends meet on sixty to eighty dollars a month. That kind of income put them in modest circumstances comparable to, say, those of a Paris clerk. Twenty cents bought a Montparnasse crêmerie lunch that included an omelette, wine, and strawberries.

In February 1924 the *American Review's* European edition jokingly called Paris the "capital of America." Even at the flood tide of tourists, however, there were never vast numbers of resident Americans; in 1927 the American Chamber of Commerce put the figure at 15,000. For the few seriously interested in new directions in arts such as painting, writing, music, and dance, the city's singular appeal was its avant-garde preeminence in the West. At the time anything American fascinated the French. Paris harbored American culture, high and low. In the mid-twenties, for example, Nadia Boulanger's composition students Virgil Thomson and Aaron Copland were beginning their careers. Black jazz bands and the Charleston were in, and the Americans' favorite café, the Café du Dôme, stocked Quaker Oats. While Scott Fitzgerald in Paris was boozing and whining about "1,000 parties and no work," Stephen Vincent Benét was there writing *John Brown's Body*, and Hemingway's literary career was underway.

During his time in Paris Calder lived in four apartments and studios. All were in the thirteenth and fourteenth arrondissements, Left Bank quarters in the south of Paris below and to the west of today's skyscraper, Tour Montparnasse. Various artists and craftsmen lived in this area, which lacked architectural or social distinction. In his early weeks in Paris he rented a seventh-floor walk-up in the Hôtel de Versailles at 60 Boulevard, Montparnasse. Aimless at first, he sat on an outdoor bench at the nearby Café du Dôme to watch

the passing scene. After running across a New York painter who was a friend, Arthur Frank, Calder soon began meeting others and becoming familiar with café interiors. He was living on his wits and on the seventy-five dollars a month his mother was sending him until he could support himself. In late August 1926 he rented a studio room at 22 rue Daguerre, a small hotel below the Cimetière du Montparnasse. The room, up a flight of stairs in the rear of the building, was poorly heated and had a skylight on which water vapor from a gas stove receptacle condensed and dribbled down his neck. "I still considered myself a painter and was happy to be in my own workroom, in Paris." Using planks and packing cases, he built his own furniture and a small workbench.

As Paris began teasing his imagination, Calder bought tools, steel, and soft wire at a nearby hardware store on Avenue d'Orléans, and he started creating small animals out of wood, wire, scraps of silk, cotton, and velvet. What had been childhood playthings of simple flexibility were now quickening into animals whose lifelike movements Calder captured by articulating them. He wrote to his parents, "When I'm in my chambre all I can think of is toys." He sold toys to local merchants who used them in window displays to attract customers.

He considered himself a painter and bought oils and canvas, but rather than study painting he began drawing classes at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière late that summer. In September–October 1926 he earned extra funds working for the Holland American Line on a transatlantic roundtrip voyage on the *SS Volendam* during which he sketched shipboard life to illustrate an advertising brochure for its student Third Cabin Association.

In the first few months he took French lessons and befriended English-speaking artists who soon began introducing him to European colleagues. That autumn he met Clay Spohn, a California painter, who, after seeing Calder's small animated figures with wire heads, arms, and legs, suggested he make them solely of wire. Calder liked the idea; the result was a top-hatted black boxer and his first Josephine Baker, the seductive black showgirl who at the time was probably the most popular American in Paris. These figures were the earliest expression of what became his elaborate wire sculpture.

Four more representations of Baker followed, each suspended from a string Calder jiggled to mimic her gyrations. He had worked with wire as a child, but sculpting with it was a new form combining his skill in line drawings, animating toys, and painting popular subjects. The painter Fernand Léger, who became a close friend in Paris, said that in wire sculpting Calder "used every contortion to keep his childhood in sight." Among his wire-sculpture subjects were President Calvin Coolidge, the humorist Jimmy Durante, and Babe Ruth, as well as such friends as Léger himself and Joan Mirò.

After several exhibitions he became known as *le roi du fil de fer*. Calder, the wire king, told his sister, "I think best in wire," and he enjoyed twisting

occasional ribaldry into those thoughts. On his wire *Cow* he ran a long wire to its tail to lift it. Turning the cow's head, he yanked the wire which raised the tail and a spiral brass cow pie plopped to the ground. While visiting the sculptor José de Creeft, he slipped into the kitchen with pliers and wire and made a wire dog with a hind leg fastened to a sink faucet. When the water went on, the leg went up. In one of his Paris studios he rigged a toilet to wave an American flag when the lid was opened or closed.

Calder's thoughts in wire and his growing menagerie of articulated toys soon converged into *Cirque Calder*—a miniaturized, modern version of the circus. During the 1920s the circus was thriving in a remarkable revival throughout Europe, notably in Paris where it had been a long established institution. Baedeker's *Paris and its Environs* (1924) notes that "circuses still flourish in Paris" and lists four that performed throughout the year. In the *Cirque d'Hiver* and later the *Cirque Médrano*, the beloved clown acts of the three Fratellini brothers did much to sustain Parisians' loyalty to the tradition. Like the theater, circus performances received regular press reviews by critics who were expert in the field.

By the autumn of 1926 Calder had organized his toy human and animal performers into the *Cirque Calder*. The next year he began two-hour performances as word about them spread through artistic and intellectual quarters and into the Paris circus community as well. To help pay his studio rent, he occasionally charged admission. A common scene at a Calder studio in the late 1920s was a crowd of twenty or thirty of his friends in the arts community jammed together on a studio bed and makeshift benches. In photographs of a *Cirque Calder* party, all members of the audience appear dressed as if they were in a theater or concert hall. Women tucked their fashionably bobbed hair under cloches, and their hemlines uniformly fell below the knee. Men wore ties and three-piece suits, and their shoes were polished. Calder's outfit was an open workshirt, orange tweed knickers, and unpolished shoes.

As the wine went round and began to deliver its promise, Calder warmed his audience for the show. Kneeling on the floor amidst his circus gear and performers, he was poised to play by turns roustabout, ringmaster, sound-effects man, and spotlight and gramophone operator. As ringmaster he announced each act, and throughout the show he belted out circus sounds such as lions roaring and seals barking.

Before each act, in his circus-barker baritone, he addressed the audience with a salutatory *Mesdames et Messieurs je vous présente*, announced the act, blew a whistle, turned on the gramophone, and began the show. A cowboy leaped on a galloping horse, another rode a bucking bronco. Rigoulot, a weightlifter, raised and lowered a huge barbell. Stretcher-bearers carried off an injured performer. A belly dancer wriggled. Drivers flogged horses in a chariot race. A sword-swallower inserted his weapon. A lion burst from its

cage, paused to answer nature's call, and Sandy rushed to shovel the droppings and cover the soiled spot with sawdust. He completed the show by setting up nets and two trapezes, then flipped a husband-wife team between them.

Calder performed his circus in an eighteen-minute film released in 1961. It is shown regularly at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, at which the circus is a prominent exhibit. In the film Calder's wife, Louisa, operates the phonograph. Undiminished by the passage of more than thirty years since his time in Paris, the intensity of his focus and engagement in the show reflect a boyish joy in pure play. His explanation of the elaborate minispectacle was quite simple: "I've always been delighted by the way things are hooked together. . . . I love the mechanics of the thing—and the vast space—and the spotlight." A more comprehensive view is that it may also have been about a man nearing thirty whose whistling, roaring, neighing, barking, and rollicking with his homemade circus toys as he put them through their impish acts amounted to a textbook case of boyhood *redux*. Or boyhood never outgrown.

Add to these high jinks Calder's skilled recycling of junk into animated lives and his dexterous management of circus-animal excrement, the insistent question is raised: what did all this monkey business have to do with his emerging in Paris as a major twentieth-century artist? James Johnson Sweeney viewed the circus as "a laboratory in which some of the most original features of [Calder's] later work were to be developed." If some of that work came from the circus, Sweeney believed that all of it was derived from play. "He plays with forms, colors, lines, movements." The enthusiasm of the early professional observers of *Cirque Calder* outran their ability to articulate what was going on. In June 1927, for example, a prominent Paris circus critic, Legrand-Chabrier, was completely charmed and wrote a smashing review. Nevertheless, on behalf of the audience, he confessed, "And we are, we spectators, like those children from the neighboring houses who often come begging to see the American gentleman's circus." He wrote that Calder's small apartment was the realm of "a colossal boy the age of a man."

On his return to the United States in the fall of 1922 Calder signed a contract with a Wisconsin toy manufacturer to design a series of animal action toys, and a New York ad agency commissioned a wire sculpture. In February he had his initial one-man show of wire sculpture in New York's Weyhe Gallery, where he sold his first Josephine Baker.

In March, at the New York Society of Independent Artists' show in the old Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, his wire sculptures were an eleven-foot suckling *Romulus and Remus* and *Spring*, a seven-foot woman holding a green flower. For anatomical sport he bought wood and rubber doorstops at the five-and-ten to serve triple duty as the breasts of *Spring*, the she-wolf's dugs, and the penises of *Romulus and Remus*.

When he returned to Paris in November 1928 he rented a ground-floor studio at 7 rue Cels. He soon appeared at the Café du Dôme, and within a

week threw the first of a number of enthusiastic parties. One of his guests was "a small man in a bowler hat," the painter Jules Pascin, a Bulgarian-born American citizen who was a friend of Calder's father. It was also in late 1928 that the Catalan painter Joan Mirò dropped in to a circus party. He and Sandy quickly developed enthusiasm for one another's work and became lifelong friends. James Johnson Sweeney believed that Mirò probably influenced Calder's interest in "chance rhythms and chance forms."

Members of Calder's expanding circle of artists were professionally and commercially invaluable to him. Their fresh ideas stimulated his imagination; their business savvy got him into the Paris art market. Through Pascin's influence Calder mounted his first solo Paris show in late January 1929 at the Salon de Société des Artistes Indépendants.

While drinking on the terrace of La Coupole, Pascin wrote an irreverent introduction for an exhibit of Calder's wood-and-wire sculpture at Galerie Billiet-Pierre Vorms that also was scheduled for late January. He praised the artistic gifts of his friend, Calder's father, and wrote about Calder  *fils*: "I met his son, Sandy Calder, who at first sight disappointed me. In all frankness, he is not as handsome as his father. But now, having seen his work, I know that he will shortly make a name for himself despite his ugly mug and that he will exhibit with smashing success alongside his father and other great artists such as I, Pascin." Calder sold a few things, and he received favorable criticism and gained increased visibility.

In late January 1929 he exhibited *Romulus and Remus* and *Spring* at the French Salon des Indépendants show in the Grand Palais. In a continuing display of the French gift for exquisitely refined gesture, crowds of delighted visitors pulled on *Spring's* doorstep breasts. Newspaper coverage of Calder's work was a young artist's fantasy. There were thirty references to it in the Paris press, and soon he was famous. Although critics were bewildered by the results of his radical break with traditional forms and didn't know how to classify his work, they cheered it: "Call it what you will. . . . Here is a new language." A headline read, "IT'S CRAZY! REPLACING PENCIL AND COLOR WITH WIRE!"

Sacha Stone, a Berlin photographer who had seen *Cirque Calder* at the rue Cels studio, suggested that Calder take the show to Berlin. In mid-March he hauled wood-and-wire sculptures in a large cumbersome open bundle to Berlin for an April exhibit at Galerie Neumann und Nierendorf. A newspaper photograph of him and his awkward load foretold what would become the standard image of Calder on the road. In Berlin he was the featured subject of a film in the series entitled *Artists at Work*.

By mid-April he was back in Paris. Among the favorable accounts was the Paris *Tribune's* story on May 23, 1929, that the bicycle-riding Calder "looks fitter than ever" and "he seems to have created quite a sensation in the German capital where he sold a number of works." It rated him "the best known and most frequent visitor to Montparnasse." In a second film produced in

Paris in May he posed the notorious model Kiki of Montparnasse in his rue Cels studio, where he did her portrait in wire. As word about Calder spread through Paris art circles, he had a growing need to be with his "gang" as he called them. They included the poet Desnos, Kiki, and such artists as Man Ray (Kiki's lover), Pascin, and Foujita. The Coupole Bar was their usual hangout.

He left Paris for New York in June 1929 on the *De Grasse* where he met Louisa Cushing James, a beautiful blue-eyed great-niece of the brothers William and Henry James. Louisa's father, Edward Holton James, a politically radical writer, had unsuccessfully brought her to Europe to meet its young intelligentsia. When asthma laid him low during the return voyage, the unchaperoned Louisa danced her way across the Atlantic with the smitten Sandy. Eighteen months after their shipboard meeting she married Sandy, whose sister later wrote that Louisa "proved a perfect companion for Sandy, accepting his unusual ideas, the twists and turns of his development, with appreciation of his talent, humor and ingenuity."

For jaded passengers on a liner plowing through the raw North Atlantic, any smoke-filled bar is more inviting than an open deck. But, for strollers bundled in a new shipboard romance, icy spume can be heartwarming. Although Calder's account of their meeting lacks any suggestion of romantic sentiment, he did respond to her. Rather than conjure a passionate vision, the wind made Louisa's "hair [take] the form of snakes and I dubbed her Medusa." The name stuck.

Calder arrived in New York hauling five valises bulging with his circus. In December he had two exhibits, and a note in the November 30, 1929, issue of the *New Yorker* reported his availability for circus performances. One of those performances became a vignette of twentieth-century literature, an unflattering account of Calder at work. In his posthumously published novel *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940) Thomas Wolfe spends three chapters sneering at a fictionalized Calder (Piggy Logan) and his circus. An historical account of the episode appears in *Aline* (1979), Caroline Klein's biography of Aline Bernstein.

At the Fifty-Sixth Street Galleries show Calder met Mrs. Bernstein, a prominent theatrical designer, whose husband, Theodore, was a successful Wall Street financier. When she was almost forty-five, Aline's chance meeting on shipboard with the twenty-five-year-old Wolfe, then an unpublished author, began an eight-year liaison. During that period she was his ardent literary proponent as well as his lover.

To bring in the year 1930 she decided to have a belated housewarming and turn-of-the-decade party at the Bernsteins' newly decorated Park Avenue apartment. For the evening's pièce de résistance she invited Calder to perform his circus. Some of the well-dressed guests were monied people whose portfolios Aline's husband managed. Most were Aline's prominent literary and theater friends, such as the man of letters Alexander Woollcott and

the actors Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, a married couple. In character Thomas Wolfe showed up tipsy.

Calder arrived at the Bernsteins' place schlepping his five circus-packed valises and a gramophone. He wore a dark turtleneck sweater, football players' canvas pants, and basketball players' kneepads to kneel on during the show. After he wrestled the valises into a bedroom, he returned to the living room, where a horrified Aline watched as he set about roughly rearranging living-room furniture, shoving around sofas and chairs to create the effect of circus bleachers. Tossing books from their cases, he covered the empty shelves with circus posters, which he also hung from the silk curtains and pinned on the drapes.

Isamu Noguchi, a sculptor friend, slipped into the apartment unnoticed by Aline. Playing Harpo to Calder's Groucho, he trailed him into the living room where Calder spent a half hour setting up the circus. A maid who answered the doorbell was shocked when a host of Calder-invited friends walked past her into the living room. One of them opened a valise packed with peanuts and handed them out to the Bernsteins' guests. To complete his authentication of the *mise-en-scène*, Calder took sawdust from a canvas bag and spread it around his hosts' new cream-colored carpet. Then he began the show.

At the end of January 1930 Calder exhibited his wire sculpture in Cambridge at the recently formed Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, and he performed the circus for faculty members and students. When he arrived in Cambridge for a week he had brought nothing to show. Using pliers and a roll of wire slung over his shoulder, he created his sculpture on the spot.

In March he returned to Paris and rented a studio at 7 Villa Brune. Among the invited circus guests who brought boxes to sit on were Fernand Léger, Le Corbusier, Jean Arp, Theo van Doesburg, and Piet Mondrian. In February 1931 they formed an international group called *Abstraction-Création* that Calder joined four months later. What began as the playful *Cirque Calder* had become Calder's elaborate entrepreneurial hustle. In his fully staffed circus troupe were fifty-five people and various animals, all fourteen inches and under; party-gate receipts paid the rent. As he wrote from Paris to his sister, he had seen and heard enough to understand that "it's absolutely essential to stay, and put oneself across for all one's got, to get anywhere as far as Paris is concerned. And as it is the merchandising centre for Art, besides other features, it's here I want to be."

His rapidly developed friendship with Mondrian would be the most influential of Calder's many modernist associations in Paris. After Mondrian had seen the circus, in October 1930 Calder and an American artist friend, William ("Binks") Einstein, visited the Dutch artist's nearby studio at 26 rue du Départ. The place was uncluttered, and on its stark white walls were colored cardboard squares and rectangles. The effect on Calder's imagination was

immediate and radical. He suggested that Mondrian might try moving the colored pieces, but Mondrian thought his painting was already "very fast." "The visit to Mondrian gave me the shock that converted me. It was like the baby being slapped to make his lungs start working."

Here was Calder's revelation of *abstraction*, until then a term for him that evoked neither meaning nor feeling. He began experimenting with abstract painting and drawing; then he returned to sculpture. The engineer in him imagined how he could make the many colored pieces move in different directions at varying rates, a revelation he called an *explosion* that changed the direction of his plastic work. Experimenting with hand-cranked and motor-driven sculpture, he began to consider space and motion as abstractions independent of the figure. He was trying to "compose motions."

Sandy and Louisa were married in December 1930 at her home in Concord, Massachusetts. When he thought about their honeymoon voyage to France on the *American Farmer*, Calder, ever the closet romantic, recalled that "the bunks were uncomfortable but there was all the ice cream you could stand." By the end of January the couple had moved into his studio at 7 Villa Brune. In a letter to his parents written several weeks later, he assured them that Louisa "is quite a peach and also seems to be a good cook."

In late April of 1931 artist friends arranged the first exhibit of Calder's new abstract work at the Galerie Percier. He gathered planks from the Villa Brune, laid them on champagne boxes, and painted everything white. Fernand Léger wrote the catalogue's introduction. India ink drawings and the objects were spread throughout the gallery and on the overhead walls were wire portraits of Joan Miró, Kiki, Léger, Amédée Ozenfant, and Medusa. In his enthusiastic review on May 2, 1931, in the Paris *Tribune*, the artist and journalist Don Brown wrote:

Blasé amateurs, artists and critics, wearily wandering up and down the Rue de la Boetie in search of something new and refreshing, dropped into the Percier gallery by ones and twos yesterday afternoon while *The Tribune* reporter was there. After one glance around, they took off their hats, fanned themselves, looked at one another in pleased surprise, and appeared refreshed. . . .

Calder's work obviously amuses and refreshes those who see it, but he is not being taken as a joke in France, as one may learn by reading the introduction to the catalogue of his show, which is by F. Léger who writes in part:

"Before his recent works, which are transparent, objective and exact, I think of Satie, Mondrian, Marcel Duchamp, Brancusi, Arp, those incontestable masters of an inexpressive and silent beauty. Calder belongs to this line.

"He's a 100 per cent American.

"Satie and Duchamp are 100 per cent French.  
"What a small world it is!"

Louisa's inheritance from her maternal grandmother made life financially comfortable for the newly married couple. Subletting the studio at Villa Brune, they rented a house in May with a top-floor studio at 14 rue de la Colonie in the 13th arrondissement near the Place d'Italie. They white-washed the walls, painted the woodwork a glossy black, and settled down to enjoy life, which included large circus parties.

In October 1931 Harrison of Paris, an innovative, well-heeled small press, published a limited edition of *Fables of Aesop According to Sir Roger L'Estrange* with fifty illustrations by Calder. As the autumn came on he had begun creating moving objects driven by motor or by hand crank. One evening Marcel Duchamp came to see his work and was so intrigued that he arranged a Calder show in February at Galerie Vignon near the Madeleine. When Calder asked what he might call his kinetic sculpture, Duchamp immediately replied, "mobile." In addition to something that moves, in French the word also means *motive*. Shortly before the show the Alsatian painter-sculptor Jean Arp asked Calder, "Well, what were those things you did last year [for the Percier show]—stables?" Thus artist friends named the two most famous children of Calder's imagination.

The Galerie Vignon show which ran for a week in mid-February 1932 displayed thirty works. Half the moving pieces were motorized, the rest hand cranked. Soon bored by their repetitious motions, Calder redesigned them to allow free movements by air currents or direct contact. Through methodical tinkering, the design engineer within the playful Calder had realized the spontaneity that is the mobile's genius. His description of the masterwork was pure elation: "a mobile is a piece of poetry that dances with the joy of life and surprises."

In May 1932 Sandy and Louisa returned to the United States. He had exhibits at Julien Levy's Madison Avenue Gallery in May and June and at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in August. The next spring he was in a group exhibition at the Galerie Pierre in Paris with the modernist artists Arp, Héliou, Miró, Pevsner, and Seligman. That was followed by his one-man show in Pierre Colle Galerie in Paris. Renting their Paris house in May 1933 to Gabrielle Picabia, the artist Francis Picabia's first wife, the Calders returned to the United States that June.

In 1943 Calder stated the principle that had guided him in his Paris years and would for the remainder of his long and productive career. He believed in working simply, in greatly respecting materials, and in doing it with "an adventurous spirit in attacking the unfamiliar or unknown. . . . Disparity in form, color, size, weight, motion is what makes a composition, and if this is

allowed, then the number of elements can be very few. . . . Symmetry and order do not make a composition. It is the apparent accident to regularity which the artist actually controls by which he makes or mars a work."

In his autobiography, correspondence, and interviews it is clear that his being in Paris decisively influenced the development of Calder's career as an artist. Gertrude Stein got it right in observing that "Paris was where the twentieth century was." With their imaginations unfettered, such artists as Picasso, Stein, Stravinsky, Joyce, and Hemingway set off modernism's string of fantastic fireworks, and Calder was there for much of the show. He was in a town where the living was cheap, the influence of his modernist gang immediate, and his imagination was stimulated enough for him to abandon painting for new ways of creating his art. From the outset Paris was upon him with his circus. Then, at his friend Clay Spohn's suggestion, he took single-line drawing, ran it through the mill of his imagination, and for the first time the extrusion was three-dimensional wire sculpture. "I think best in wire," he said, and here is some of his earliest and most exciting thought. He foresaw motion as "the next step in sculpture."

In his straight talk Calder summed up what he and the Paris experience had done for his art: "The 'wire sculpture' and the wood sculpture came to me rather naturally, but the impulse to work in an abstract manner came to me through living among, and knowing, those who were working in that field." Like Calder most of them were foreigners, and all were with him in Paris when it mattered.

## BAGHDAD-BY-THE-BAY

ROBERT LACY

Recently, walking around Lake Calhoun here in Minneapolis where I live, I found myself behind a woman with a weimaraner dog. It surprised me a little. You don't see many weimaraners anymore. They're no longer fashionable as they once were, back in the fifties.

In the spring and summer of 1959 in San Francisco I knew a girl with a weimaraner. She called it Heidi. It had the gray suede pelt and pale blue eyes that made the breed so irresistible to young women in those days. The girl and I took the dog with us just about everywhere we went, until one day up in North Beach it jumped out of the backseat of the girl's convertible and we lost it, never to be seen by us again. The girl's name was Lois. You run into few girls named Lois these days.

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