

PRESS RELEASE

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SEATTLE ART MUSEUM ANNOUNCES *CALDER: IN MOTION, THE SHIRLEY FAMILY COLLECTION, INAUGURATING A MULTI-YEAR INITIATIVE OF EXHIBITIONS AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS CENTERED ON ALEXANDER CALDER'S GROUNDBREAKING CREATIVITY*

Opening November 8, *Calder: In Motion* Celebrates Major Gift of 48 Seminal Works from Every Decade of the Artist's Career from the Collection of Jon and Kim Shirley



SEATTLE - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) today announced the first in a multi-year series of exhibitions and outreach programs centered on a transformative gift from the museum's longtime supporters Jon and Kim Shirley. Opening on November 8, *Calder: In Motion, The Shirley Family Collection* will be the first comprehensive public display of 48 seminal works from every decade of the American artist Alexander Calder's career, including iconic mobiles, stabiles, standing mobiles, wire sculptures, a constellation, and works on paper, as well as a significant oil painting.

The exhibition will offer an extensive look into the prolific output of Calder (1898-1976) and will be accompanied by a new catalogue and robust programming made possible by the Shirleys' gift, including school visits and family programs serving Seattle's diverse public, driven by partnerships with community organizations. The inaugural exhibition, *Calder: In Motion*, is curated by José Carlos Diaz, Susan Brotman Deputy Director for Art, and will be on view through August 4, 2024. As part of an initiative including annual exhibitions, programs, and artistic and institutional collaborations centered on Calder, the exhibition will help establish SAM as a national destination for scholarship on the artist and public appreciation of his profound impact and continuing influence. The multi-year program was established with the goal of expanding knowledge, appreciation, and access to these critical works.

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“SAM is thrilled by the possibilities and the impact of the Shirleys’ gift,” said Amada Cruz, Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO at Seattle Art Museum. “In addition to the annual exhibition series, which will provide so many exciting avenues for scholarly exploration and contemporary connection, the Shirleys’ generous financial support will make possible robust public programming and outreach initiatives that will help us achieve our goal of truly inclusive access.”

“Calder was a pioneer of wire sculpture, the creator of the mobile, and a true creative genius, gracefully employing industrial materials to redefine the notion of sculpture,” said exhibition curator and SAM deputy director José Carlos Diaz. “We look forward to sharing these wonderful works with our visitors in a series of galleries that highlight the dynamic and ever-changing qualities of his art. We hope visitors will walk away with a greater appreciation for the artist and a greater understanding of the themes that animated his work throughout his career. This is the first of many exhibitions at SAM that will highlight Calder’s art and its ongoing impact.”

Calder’s experimental approach was informed by his travels throughout the US and Europe, particularly France; appreciation for contemporary entertainment, such as the circus and modern dance; and admiration for fellow artists, both those who came before him and his contemporaries. Throughout his career, he surrounded himself with a creative circle that encouraged his continual push against limits, leading to the development of his groundbreaking mobiles, among other works. His abstract mobiles quickly evolved from primarily motorized sculptures to his signature free-floating works powered by air currents.

Calder: In Motion will thematically highlight pieces from every decade of Calder’s career, dating from the 1920s to the 1970s, including superlative examples of his famous mobiles and stabiles. The show will also include examples of Calder’s works on paper and an oil painting, among other media, representing the expansiveness of his oeuvre. The exhibition will feature sections devoted to his artistic experimentation, natural forces and dynamics, and the artist’s lasting contribution to modern art.

Visitors will be welcomed into the exhibition by a pairing of the early wooden sculpture *Femme Assise* (1929) with *Mountains* (1:5 intermediate maquette, 1976), a model for one of the artist’s final commissions before his death in 1976. This pairs one of the artist’s earliest works in the exhibition with one of his latest.

To accentuate the artist’s exploration of height, scale, and movement, the exhibition will be installed in the museum’s double-height galleries—a unique space for large-scale works, with several overlooks from the floor above. The exhibition design will capture a sense of movement, with an S-shaped, curved wall that wraps around the 22-foot-tall sculpture *Red Curly Tail* (1970) and divides the galleries into a series of vignettes illuminating the exhibition’s themes and highlighting the elegance and lyricism of Calder’s work.

The second gallery includes several works that may surprise visitors familiar with the artist. These works include the oil painting *The Yellow Disc* (1958), a medium that Calder engaged throughout his career but isn’t nearly as well-known as his sculpture; *Untitled (Métaboles)*, 1969, a mobile that the artist created as part of a stage set for a ballet; and *Fish* (1942). The latter, a significant work from a rare series of mobiles created during and after World

War II when metal was scarce, is made of wire framing and found materials, including porcelain fragments and bits of colored glass.

The central gallery will trace Calder's career, highlighting his achievement through works that range from the miniature to the monumental. The expansive *Toile d'araignée* (1965), an airy, monochromatic mobile will hover over several works below, including the masterful standing mobile *Bougainvillier* (1947) and the large-scale *Red Curly Tail* (1970). Also on view will be the hanging mobile *Gamma* (1947), eleven miniature standing mobiles, and a limited edition of the book *Fables of Aesop: According to Sir Roger L'Estrange* (1931), for which Calder created original illustrations.

The final gallery will consider the artist's legacy, with works that demonstrate Calder's accomplishments throughout his most productive decades and the impact his work has had on the development of modern art. This gallery will include *Untitled* (1936), *Little Yellow Panel* (ca. 1936), *Jonah and the Whale* (ca. 1940), *Untitled* (ca. 1942), *Constellation with Red Knife* (1943), *Yellow Stalk with Stone* (1953), *Untitled* (maquette, ca. 1960), and *Squarish* (1970). This gallery will also serve as a bridge into the museum's modern and contemporary galleries, which feature permanent collection works by contemporaries of Calder and others influenced by his practice.

Calder: In Motion will introduce numerous perspectives within the galleries. An audio guide will feature Jon Shirley's reflections on his 35-year journey of collecting. Contemporary artists will be featured in the interpretive labels, touching on Calder's influence on their work. The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated color catalogue, also titled *Calder: In Motion, The Shirley Family Collection*. It features contributions by José Carlos Diaz; Jon Shirley; Alexander S. C. Rower, president of the Calder Foundation and grandson of the artist; and Elizabeth Hutton Turner, art historian.

Visitors to the exhibition will be encouraged to visit SAM's Olympic Sculpture Park, where Calder's *The Eagle* (1971) is installed and complemented by the striking background of Elliott Bay. The six-ton, 38-foot-tall sculpture was donated to SAM on the occasion of the museum's 75th anniversary by Jon and Mary Shirley. An important example of Calder's monumental stabiles, *The Eagle* has become an emblem of the downtown Seattle waterfront and the ongoing revitalization of the city's vibrant downtown and waterfront.

Public programs and events that explore Calder's artistic practice are planned for both the Seattle Art Museum and the Olympic Sculpture Park throughout the run of the exhibition. These will include talks, tours, performances, art-making workshops, and a family-friendly festival. Following *Calder: In Motion*, the second exhibition in the multi-year series will feature internationally renowned contemporary artists who have been profoundly influenced by Calder. Later exhibitions will undertake in-depth reexaminations of specific historical periods in the artist's career.

About Seattle Art Museum

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and

rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020, following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a "museum without walls," free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.

About Alexander Calder

Alexander Calder (b. 1898, Lawnton, Pennsylvania–d. 1976, New York City), whose illustrious career spanned much of the twentieth century, is the most acclaimed and influential sculptor of our time. Born in a family of celebrated, though more classically trained artists, Calder utilized his innovative genius to profoundly change the course of modern art. He began in the 1920s by developing a new method of sculpting: by bending and twisting wire, he essentially “drew” three-dimensional figures in space. He is renowned for the invention of the mobile, whose suspended, abstract elements move and balance in changing harmony. From the 1950s onward, Calder increasingly devoted himself to making outdoor sculpture on a grand scale from bolted steel plate. Today, these stately titans grace public plazas in cities throughout the world.

About Jon and Kim Shirley

Jon A. Shirley was born in San Diego, California, graduated from The Hill School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania and attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He began a 25-year career at the Tandy Corporation as a store department manager and rose to vice president of computer merchandising. In 1983 Shirley left Tandy to become president, chief operating officer and a director of the Microsoft Corporation. In 1990 he retired from Microsoft but remained on its board of directors until 2008. Jon was chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Seattle Art Museum from 2000 to 2008 and remains an officer and trustee. He is a member of The David Rockefeller Council and the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art and The Chairman’s Council of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Kimberly Richter Shirley is a retired attorney and certified public accountant whose professional career specialized in providing legal and financial expertise to not-for-profit organizations and startup companies. Kim received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Wellesley College and her Juris Doctor degree from Seattle University School of Law. Kim is a trustee of the Seattle Art Museum, the Tate Americas Foundation and the University of Washington Foundation and is a former trustee of the Pacific Northwest Ballet. She is a member of the University of Washington Henry Art Gallery Advisory Council and the Wellesley College President’s Advisory Council. In 2023, President Biden appointed her to the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

Jon Shirley and Kimberly Richter married in 2016. Together they actively support arts, education, and human service organizations and are committed collectors of modern and contemporary art with an emphasis on sculpture. Jon and Kim are members of the Collectors Committee of the National Gallery of Art and the Tate International Council and North American Acquisitions Committee.

About the Shirley Family Calder Collection Gift

In April 2023, longtime Seattle Art Museum supporters Jon and Kim Shirley donated a \$10 million endowment and one of the most important collections of works by Alexander Calder in private hands to SAM. The gift of the Shirley Family Calder Collection includes 48 seminal works, representing all decades and mediums in which the American modern master worked. The Shirleys’ gift to SAM is the centerpiece of an ongoing series of annual exhibitions and programs that will center around Calder, his diverse cultural influences, and his profound impact on modern and contemporary art. The inaugural exhibition, *Calder: In Motion, The Shirley Family Collection*, and related programming are

supported by an additional \$1 million gift from the Shirleys, who have also promised an annual gift of \$250,000 to \$500,000 to support future programs, events, and Calder-related research. Annual exhibitions in the future will center on Calder, touching on his diverse cultural influences and his profound impact on modern and contemporary art.

Image captions from left to right:

Moon and Waves, 1963, Alexander Calder, 1898-1976, gouache and ink on paper, 29 1/2 x 41 in., Promised gift of Jon and Mary Shirley, © 2023 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo: Nicholas Shirley.

Red Curly Tail, 1970, Alexander Calder, 1898-1976, sheet metal, rod, bolts, and paint, 192 x 275 x 144 in., Promised gift of Jon and Mary Shirley, © 2023 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo: Nicholas Shirley.

Gamma, 1947, Alexander Calder, 1898-1976, sheet metal, wire, and paint, 58 x 84 x 36 in., Promised gift of Jon and Mary Shirley, Photo courtesy of Calder Foundation, New York / Art Resource, New York, © 2023 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.