

# PRESS RELEASE

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## SEATTLE ART MUSEUM ANNOUNCES MAJOR GIFT OF WORKS BY ALEXANDER CALDER FROM THE COLLECTION OF JON AND KIM SHIRLEY

The gift of 48 works is accompanied by a \$10 million bequest and an annual commitment to fund Calder exhibitions and research

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SEATTLE - Today the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) announced a gift of 48 major works by Alexander Calder to the museum from the collection of Jon and Kim Shirley. The gift of the Shirley Family Calder Collection is supported by a \$10 million endowment and an annual financial commitment from the Shirleys to support Calder-related exhibitions and research. The Shirleys' collection is one of the most important collections of Calder's work in private hands.

The Shirleys' gift to SAM will be the centerpiece of an ongoing series of annual exhibitions and programs. Beginning this November, SAM will present an inaugural exhibition featuring all 48 works from the collection, offering an extensive look into the life and work of Calder. The exhibition and related programming are supported by a \$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 around Calder, touching on his diverse cultural influences and his profound impact on modern and contemporary art.

The legacy of Alexander Calder (American, 1898-1976) is foundational to the history of art. Many of the ideas he explored—from the unconventional possibilities of repurposed or “found” materials to the potential of art to create an experience for viewers through movement, variable composition, performance, and sound—have proven prescient, inspiring subsequent generations of artists. In 1989, the Calder family helped to establish Atelier Calder, a residency for contemporary artists in Calder's home and studio in France's Loire Valley. More than 55 renowned international artists have participated in residencies there, including Mark Dion, Tara Donovan, Ernesto



Neto, and Sarah Sze, among many others. Drawing on this rich legacy and in honor of the Shirley gift, the Calder Foundation has committed to lending artworks and collaborating on partnerships with the Seattle Art Museum.

“Calder is an artist whose work is seemingly ubiquitous,” said Amada Cruz, Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO of the Seattle Art Museum. “In truth, we’ve lost sight of the enormous artistic innovations that he was responsible for—from pioneering wire sculpture to inventing the mobile—and the tremendous impact he has had on artists of the 20th and 21st century. The extraordinary generosity of Jon and Kim Shirley allows us to explore the many facets of this creative genius.”

The museum will dedicate its double-height gallery to Calder-related exhibitions, providing a large, signature space ideally suited to the display of both Calder’s monumental work and his more intimate pieces. Visitors will experience exhibitions and programming that delve into the many facets of Calder’s artistic practice and offer new perspectives on his work. After the inaugural show, an exhibition planned for 2024 will emphasize his impact and legacy in a group exhibition featuring leading contemporary artists from around the world. Additional shows will reexamine his work through the lens of historical periods in the artist’s career.

“I first fell in love with Calder as a young man, creating a passion that has only grown with time,” said Jon Shirley. “From the moment I bought my first work 35 years ago, I treasured the experience of living with Calder and from that point built my collection very intentionally. I visited the seminal Calder exhibition at the National Gallery in 1998 and soon thereafter decided to build a truly museum-worthy collection of his work. Kim and I are so happy to have found a permanent home for our collection at the Seattle Art Museum.”

The Shirleys have a long and distinguished history of philanthropic support of the Seattle Art Museum. Both Jon and Kim Shirley currently serve on the museum’s board of trustees, and Jon Shirley served as chairman of the Board of Trustees from 2000 to 2008. Mr. Shirley and his late wife Mary provided the founding gift that led to the creation of the museum’s Olympic Sculpture Park in 2007, a nine-acre park that is now Seattle’s largest greenspace. Mr. Shirley also made a gift to endow the park’s operations, ensuring that the stunning park, featuring monumental sculptures by Richard Serra, Louise Bourgeois, Teresita Fernandez, and Calder, would be permanently free to all. These efforts were a part of the SAM Transformation Campaign, which he co-led alongside then-president Susan Brotman to bring about the creation of the sculpture park and the expansion of the downtown museum in 2007. Jon and Mary Shirley also provided the financial support for the museum to acquire Calder’s *The Eagle* (1971), a 38-foot sculpture that has become an emblem of the city. Jon and Mary Shirley also endowed the curatorial position of modern and contemporary art now held by Catharina Manchanda.

“Jon’s generosity and civic spirit were evident in his visionary leadership in helping to create the Olympic Sculpture Park, and now the profoundly generous gift of his Calder collection will transform SAM and expand the cultural profile of Seattle,” said Charlie Wright, SAM trustee. “The collection is a beautiful example of the rigor, passion, and intelligence that he brings to collecting art. And it is our fantastic good fortune that Jon and Kim’s ultimate objective is to share great works of art with the broader community.”

The Shirleys' collection features 48 works of art (one comprising seven lithographs) and 85 publications, making it one of the most significant collections of Calder works in private hands. Renowned for the depth and breadth of its holdings, it centers around a group of spectacular hanging and standing mobiles dating from the 1930s to the 1970s. Among the most important works in the collection are *Gamma* (1947) and *Bougainvillier* (1947), made at the peak of Calder's classical style in the late 1940s. The collection also includes *Fish* (1942), a rare example from Calder's series of fish mobiles made during World War II when metal was scarce. The work is composed of a painted rod and wire structure that houses bits of glass in myriad colors as well as found materials such as metal objects and porcelain fragments. Other key works in the collection include *Vache* (c. 1930), *Little Yellow Panel* (c. 1936), *Constellation with Red Knife* (1943), *Dispersed Objects with Brass Gong* (1948), *Toile d'araignée* (1965), and *Red Curly Tail* (1970), which each exemplify different vocabularies of Calder's expansive oeuvre. In addition to the collection, the Shirleys will donate their private library of books and publications about Calder to the museum.

"Building a truly institution-worthy trove of Calder work after the artist's death took an impressive amount of dedication, research, and focus," said Alexander S. C. Rower, president of the Calder Foundation and grandson of the artist. "The Shirleys have done just that over the past several decades, amassing a wide-ranging overview of my grandfather's oeuvre punctuated by more than 30 hanging and standing mobiles. Their collection captures the dynamic energy of Calder's entire trajectory, from his earliest figurative works in wire through the monumental sculptures of his late period. In addition to donating this magnificent collection to the Seattle Art Museum, the Shirleys have endowed it with a dedicated gallery space and ongoing funding that will ensure its success long into the future. This will allow visitors to cultivate new perspectives on Calder's art in an evolving way—something no other museum has achieved."

**Image captions:** *Red Curly Tail*, 1970, Alexander Calder, 1898-1976, painted steel and stainless steel, 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. *Bougainvillier*, 1947, Alexander Calder, 1898-1976, sheet metal, rod, wire, lead, and paint, 78 1/2 x 86 in., Promised gift of Jon and Mary Shirley, © 2023 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo: Nicholas Shirley.

## **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 the University of Puget Sound 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.

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.