

Alexander Calder

1898 – 1976

“Sculpture that Moves”



Slide 1

NOTE TO PRESENTERS:

Ideas of things to bring with you to the classroom:

- CD with slideshow presentation
- “Elements of Art” Board – in PTA Room
- Visual aides “crib mobile” and Pieta statue or any statue from home (please be sure to return it to box)
- Hand out for “Art in the Classroom” Take Home to each child (may need to make additional copies)

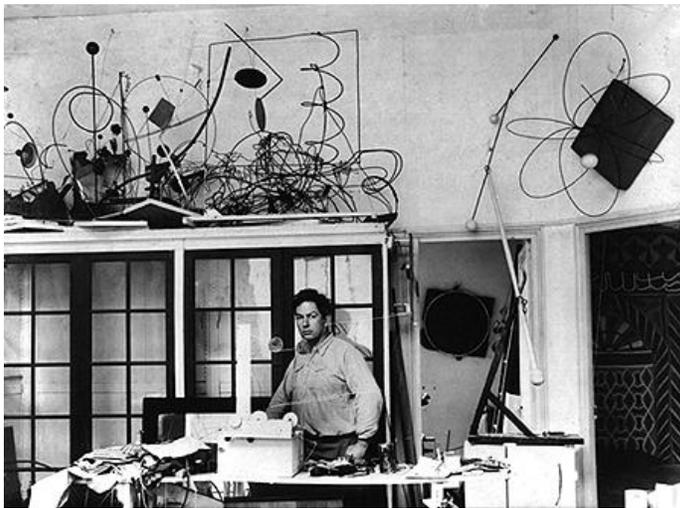
10/8/2012

The information presented here is a suggested format to follow. Please adapt this presentation to your style and class.

THE BIG PICTURE: Alexander Calder

“Just as one can compose colors, or forms so one can compose motions”.

“Alexander Calder”



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The artist in his studio

PERSONAL DATA

Name: Alexander Calder (To help kids remember his name say, “he’s not hotter he’s CALDER”.)

Born: July 22, 1898 in Lawnton, Pennsylvania

Died: November 11, 1976 in New York City. (I don’t usually tell them when he died unless they ask.)

Childhood: Calder was born over 100 years ago. His grandfather and father were sculptors and his mother was a painter, so he came from a very artistic family.

Type of Artist: **American abstract painter and sculptor**

Before we talk about Alexander Calder’s life, let’s talk a little about the type of artist he was.

What is ABSTRACT art?

The last time you learned about an artist we talked about some new words to describe the type of art we looked at. Can anyone remember the word we used to describe art that describes feelings instead of pictures?



Untitled

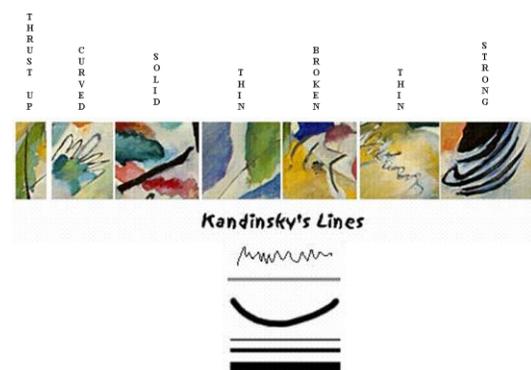
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Answer: That's right, abstract art.

In abstract artwork the artists tries to create a picture that shows how they feel on the inside instead of what they see on the outside. In abstract art the lines and colors are the most important elements. Abstract art does not represent reality as we see it. Sometimes it is difficult for people looking at the painting to actually see the picture the painter has painted.

(Review the information on line and color quickly, since they went over this in the last presentation. You just want to make sure they remember it because it is important when discussing Calder's work)

Do you remember when we talked about another artist named Kandinsky? We talked about how lines, shapes and colors can represent feelings? Well Alexander Calder used lines, colors and shapes to show feelings also. But his art looks completely different. Lets take a look.



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- Can they describe how the lines make them feel?
ANSWER: i.e. thin/weak, thick/strong, curved/action

ANSWER: He probably used some different tools like brushes, pencils, or different colored paints like a dark/light blue, etc.

Do you remember what we said about colors having “feelings?” Who remembers some of the colors we talked about and what feelings they show?

(you don't have to go over all of the colors, pick the ones Calder used most like red, black, yellow and blue.)

yellow: “warm,” “cheeky and exciting,” “disturbing for people,” “typical earthly color,” “compared with the mood of a person it could have the effect of representing madness in color [...] an attack of rage, blind madness, maniacal rage. Loud, sharp trumpets, high fanfares

blue: deep, inner, supernatural, peaceful “Sinking towards black, it has the overtone of a mourning that is not human.” “Typical heavenly color” light blue: flute
darker blue: cello
darkest blue of all: organ

green: mixture of yellow and blue
stillness, peace, but with hidden strength, passive
“Green is like a fat, very healthy cow lying still and unmoving, only capable of chewing the cud, regarding the world with stupid dull eyes.” Quiet, drawn-out, middle position violin

white: "It is not a dead silence, but one pregnant with possibilities." "Harmony of silence", "pause that breaks temporarily the melody"

black: “Not without possibilities [...] like an eternal silence, without future and hope.” Extinguished, immovable "final pause, after which any continuation of the melody seems the dawn of another world"

gray: mixture of white and black
“Immovability which is hopeless” soundless

red: alive, restless, confidently striving towards a goal, glowing, “manly maturity”
Light warm red: strength, energy, joy; vermilion: glowing passion, sure strength
Light cold red: youthful, pure joy, young
"sound of a trumpet, strong, harsh” Fanfare, Tuba deep notes on the cello high, clear violin

brown : mixture of red + black
dull, hard, inhibited

orange : mixture of red + yellow
radiant, healthy, serious middle range church bell, alto voice, “an alto violin, singing tone, largo”

violet : mixture of red + blue
“morbid, extinguished [...] sad

- Does everyone have the same feeling about a color?
ANSWER: No. People have their own feelings. That is why 2 people can look at the same painting and see totally different things!

Now let's talk about something new.

WHAT IS A SCULPTURE?

What is a Sculptor? Who can tell me what a sculpture is? (A statue, something you can walk around, touch, feel, 3 dimensional.)

Does anyone know what 3 dimensional means? Something that has height, width, and depth.

How is sculpture different from a painting?

Can you touch paintings? (No) **Can you touch a sculpture?** (yes)

Can you walk around a painting?

What are sculptures usually made of? (Stone, clay, wood or metal)

Have you ever seen a sculpture? Maybe in a fountain or a park?

Hold up an example of a “traditional” sculpture. Either a statue from home or the Pieta statue from the Art History box.

Is this a sculpture? Why? (It is 3 dimensional)

Now hold up a mobile.

How many of you had something like this when you were babies?

Do you know what this thing is called? (a mobile)

What makes a mobile so interesting? (movement, color, shapes, texture)

Who wants to guess what the word MOBILE means? (movement)

Is this mobile a sculpture? Alexander Calder would say yes. In fact, he came up with the idea of the mobile. Before Alexander Calder created the mobile, nothing like this existed.

Are both of these images sculpture? (yes) **How are they the same?** (both 3 dimensional, both images of heads, both have texture, and shape)
How are they different? (one is made of marble and one with wire)



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THE LIFE OF Alexander Calder

Alexander Calder liked to build things from the time he was a small boy. He liked to create toys and gadgets from materials he had lying around the house; like scraps of wood, wire, cork, and glass. He particularly enjoyed making toys, animals and people out of wire. He was always encouraged to create and from the age of 8 had own workshop. At the age of eleven he presented his parents with two of his first sculptures, a duck and a tiny dog. But there was something very unusual about these sculptures. They moved!



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When Alexander was a young man he worked at a lot of different jobs before deciding to become an artist. He worked on a ship and a logging company, and even went to engineering school to learn how to make things work. But once he settled on art he moved to Paris, France where a lot of young artists lived. One day the Ringling Brothers Circus came to town. He went to the circus and became fascinated with it. He went everyday for two weeks and drew sketches of the animals, acrobats and other people were performing there. Like many abstract artists, Alexander Calder was very good at drawing things “realistically” (ask if they know what that means and if not explain).



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He was so fascinated with the circus that he decided to create his own miniature circus with performers made out of wire that actually moved! The circus collection is now in a museum called the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.



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Now Alexander Calder was a colorful guy. He loved color, particularly RED. He once said that he liked red so much that he could paint every room in his house red. He liked to create art that was colorful so he used a lot of bright colors in his art, like red, yellow, green and blue. He liked to paint as well as sculpt. We already saw his paintings of the circus. Let's take a look at some of his other paintings and drawings.

But he chose to work abstractly. This painting is called “lightning”. Look at the lines and colors, and the shapes. Think about all the things we’ve talked about. What do you see when you look at this?



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Lightning, 1955
Oil on plywood

- **Can anyone guess from the title what this painting is about?**

Have the children tell/point out to you what they see.

- **Does anyone get a “feeling” from this painting?**

ANSWER: “violent” with the sharp, jagged and strong lines.

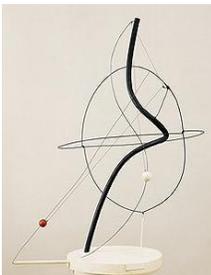
If you were in this painting, where would you feel safest and why?

ANSWER: The circle is calm, protected, closed. Unaffected by outside.

Do you think this painting has a lot of movement? (yes) Why? (Power in lines and strong movement across canvas from small to large gives feeling of action coming towards you)

Alexander was also fascinated with movement. Particularly after watching those acrobats at the circus! He decided to try and create art that could also move. So, he started experimenting with wire, and different colored shapes to see if he could create a “picture” that would move in space. He invented a new art form called a **mobile**. The word mobile means movement. No one had ever done anything like this before. He made people think very differently about sculpture. His first mobiles moved with cranks and motors.

A Universe

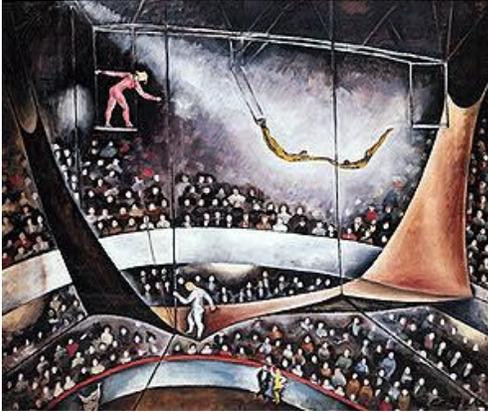


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Calder wasn’t happy with these sculptures. He liked the movement, but not the way they were attached to a base at the bottom.

He kept working and came up with the idea to use the wind and **balance** to move his sculptures.

Can anyone tell me what the word balance means?



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This is one of his circus paintings.

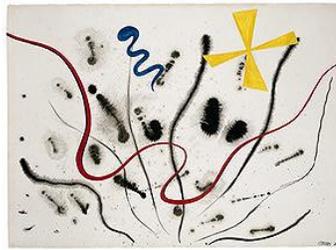
See the acrobat standing on the swing? What would happen if he leaned to far back? (Fall off)

What keeps him on the swing? (his balance)

Well this same idea is what makes Calder's mobiles seem to float in the air. The shapes are all perfectly balanced.

What would happen to this mobile if one of the shapes was too heavy?

(It would not be balanced and not hang properly)



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Does this mobile remind you of a painting we saw earlier? Calder's mobiles were very similar to his paintings and drawings. By using the weight of the shapes to balance the sculpture he was able to get the delicate movement he wanted. As if the shapes are floating in the air.



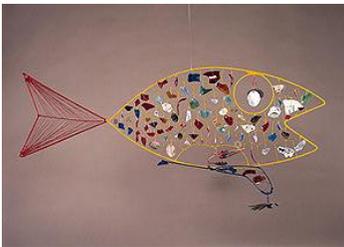
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How about this one? Do you see any shapes that remind you of a specific animal? (called “Elephants head”)



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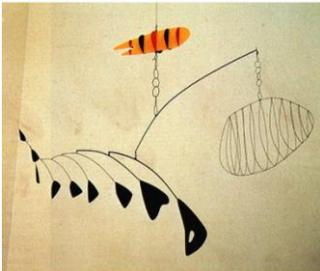
This one is pretty obvious. It’s called “finny fish”.



The mobile may not look real but the movement suggests a whole world under the sea.

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This mobile is called **“The lobster trap”** and shows the shape of a lobster moving around a trap.



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Try to imagine some of the movements of the lobster trap. Which parts look like they would go up and down? Which might spin in a slow gentle circle? Which might flutter or ripple like the tail of a lobster or the fin of a fish?

Alexander Calder made all different kinds of mobiles. Some were very large, some were very colorful. Some were made to decorate outdoor spaces like public parks. He called his art that didn't move **Stables**.

Does anyone want to guess what that word means? (doesn't move)

This sculpture doesn't move but looks like it could. Why do you think that is?

(strong action lines and curves similar to paintings)

Why do you think he chose black?

(stark, strong against background)



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and some were made to hang inside.



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This sculpture hangs under a huge glass window.

Do you think the artist was thinking about the sky behind his sculpture when he created this? (yes)

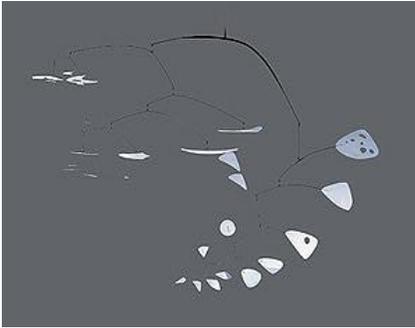
What does it look like to you? Imagine it slowly circling. (birds circling)

He liked to create interesting combinations in his mobiles; like one black shape hanging among many red shapes, or a flower shape among many squares and circles.



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He liked to use many circle like shapes so that as the mobile moved it created the effect of a flurry of free floating dots dancing in the air (like a snow storm!)



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Alexander Calder became famous throughout the world for bring movement to art. Most important to Calder, however, was that art should be fun and make you feel happy!



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Did this make you laugh?

You just made Alexander Calder very happy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

<http://www.calder.org>

<http://www.artcyclopedia.com>

<http://www.nga.gov>

ART IN THE CLASSROOM

Today we learned about an artist named

Alexander Calder.

He was an American Sculptor who was well known for creating a new form of sculpture called MOBILES.

He used BALANCE and air currents to make his sculptures move.

You can create your own mobile by going to

[http: www.nga.gov/kids/zone](http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone)

Just click on Interactive art zone/mobile maker

www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/mobiles

You can also make a mobile using pipe cleaners and foam pieces that you can get at the craft store.

