

## Trinity College Dublin Art Collections

<b>Artist:</b>	Alexander Calder
<b>Title:</b>	<i>Cactus provisoire</i> (1967)
<b>Medium:</b>	Welded steel
<b>Location:</b>	Fellows' Square, in front of the Arts Building and facing the Old Library Donated by a graduate in 1978 for the launch of the Arts Building

b. 1898 Philadelphia; d. 1976 New York

Alexander Calder was encouraged from a young age to create by his artist parents, showing a talent for handling materials even then. He enrolled at the Stevens Institute of Technology, graduating in 1919 with an engineering degree. After being employed in various engineering and industrial jobs, he worked as fireman for a ship bound for San Francisco from New York. Off the Guatemalan coast he awoke on deck to see a brilliant sunrise and a full moon on opposite horizons, and shortly after this impressive experience committed to becoming an artist.

In 1923 he moved to New York, joined the Art Students League and found a job illustrating for the *National Police Gazette*. One assignment had him sketching circus scenes in 1925, inspiring him to create his *Cirque Calder* in Paris a year later. Built from found materials, this piece predates other performance art by forty years. He performed first for friends in Paris, and went on to present it successfully in New York and Paris. Finding that he enjoyed working with wire, he made wire portraits of friends and public figures and his inventive work earned him a solo show in the Weyhe Gallery, New York in 1928. This was soon followed by others in New York, Paris and Berlin, necessitating frequent travel during which he met Louisa James (grandniece of Henry James) whom he married in 1931.

In 1930 he visited the studio of Piet Mondrian in Paris which "shocked" him towards total abstraction, and he painted briefly in a totally abstract manner only to realize his preference for sculpture. He was thereafter invited to join the group Abstraction-Création which included friends Mondrian, Arp and Hélión. Late in 1931 he created his first truly 'kinetic' sculpture, that moved by cranks and motors, dubbed 'mobiles' by Marcel Duchamp. Jean Arp dubbed his 'non-kinetic' works stables to differentiate them. In 1933 he began producing mobiles that relied instead upon the air to move them, and that same year left Paris for Roxbury, Connecticut.

There he converted an icehouse into a studio for himself and began his association with the Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York with a show in 1934. His first daughter Sandra was born the following year and Mary then in 1939. He continued his *Cirque Calder* performances, and  
The information in this article is from [www.groveart.com](http://www.groveart.com) and <http://calder.org/historicaltexts>  
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began work on large outdoor sculptures, developing sturdier sheet metal pieces such as *Big Bird* or *Devil Fish* in 1937. Shown in the Pierre Matisse Gallery exhibit *Stables and Mobiles*, these led to major commissions for the Paris World Fair and Museum of Modern Art, New York. After being refused entry into the Marine Corps upon the United States' entry into the Second World War, he continued to create, working with wood and wire.

In 1939 the first retrospective of his work was held in the George Walter Vincent Smith Gallery, followed by a second in the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1943. Visiting his studio in 1945 Duchamp saw small works made from trimmings that Calder had been working on, he planned an exhibition at the Galerie Louis Carré, Paris for which Sartre wrote for the catalogue. In 1949 he constructed his largest mobile to date, *International Mobile* and moved towards large-scale commissions. After a show in 1950 he then began an association with the Galerie Maeght, Paris which lasted until his death.