OBJECTIVES

Students will:

• Learn about American sculptor Alexander Calder, his work and his great influence on art of the 20th Century and beyond

• Become familiar with the vocabulary of contemporary sculpture and be able to recognize the differences between: abstract and representational, mobile and stabile, organic and geometric forms, two-dimensional and three-dimensional artwork

• Be able to identify primary colors and become familiar with the use of color as an element of art

• Create a sculptural maquette using color paper and wire inspired by the work of Alexander Calder and his personal connection to the universe

VOCABULARY

Abstract, branches, cantilever, circus, geometric, icon, illustrator, maquette, mechanical engineer, mobile, motion, organic, primary colors, representational, solar system, sculpture, sculptor, stabile, standing stabile, three-dimensional, two-dimensional

(see glossary for definitions)
and bent wire into unusual organic shapes. This was a big change in his art. He liked his abstract sculptures and decided they should be in motion. He attached motors to some of his sculptures to make them move, but wanted to find other ways to achieve movement. He began to make sculptures that would hang from the ceiling and the shapes in the sculptures moved and changed positions in the wind! These new sculptures were called mobiles.

Calder made sculptures called stabiles as well. They did not move. They looked different from different directions as people walked around them. Next, Calder combined two of his art forms. He put a mobile on top of a stabile and called them standing mobiles. Moving parts of a mobile were attached to a base that did not move.

As he got older, Calder’s work got bigger and he began making giant pieces of art for public spaces outdoors. He would plan for the large sculptures in his studio by first making maquettes, or small scale models. These models would help Calder figure out how to build his big sculptures. One of his largest sculptures in Italy is 60 feet tall!

Calder’s art made him happy and he loved spending time with his wife, daughters, and grandchildren. He died in 1976 at the same time his work was being shown in an exhibition in New York City.

Alexander Calder is considered an American icon, one of the most inventive and beloved artists of his time. His sculptural work has influenced artists for generations and continues to grace and delight audiences, and enlivens public spaces around the world.

-Discuss It!

Take a look at Alexander Calder’s sculpture, Polychrome Dots and Brass on Red, 1964 (page 7).

- How do you feel when you look at this?
- Does it look like it would move? (moves)
- Do you think this is a stabile or a mobile? (both: called a standing mobile; also a maquette or model)
- What is this? Is this recognizable to you? (abstract: universe, solar system, nature, tree, frond)
- Calder was very influenced by the universe and by nature. What kinds of shapes do you see? (organic, geometric)
- How big do you think this is? (2” x 6 1/8” x 2 1/4”)
- Is it flat (or two-dimensional), or can you walk around it (three-dimensional)? (3-D)
- What materials did Calder use? What kinds of tools do you think he used? (sheet metal, brass, wire, paint, wire cutters, metal sheers, pliers)
- Color is very important in Calder’s sculptures. What colors do you see here? (red, yellow, blue: primary colors, also white and brass) (note: white is not a color, it is the absence of color)

Now take a look at Alexander Calder’s sculpture, Untitled (maquette), 1947 (page 8).

- How does this image, Untitled (maquette), make you feel? (sits low to the ground, heavy & dark, presence of large, black chunky pieces)
- How do you think Calder made this piece balance? (equal distribution of weight: equilibrium) (discuss use of cantilever)
- If you were to give this a name, what would you call it?
MAKE IT!
Using the universe and Alexander Calder’s work as inspiration, create your very own stabile or standing mobile maquette using the materials provided.

Draw shapes that you think would be interesting for your sculpture. Make sure to consider all sides of the final piece. Assemble the pieces using a slot method to create an abstract sculpture (or colored tape if needed). Use small wire rods (or wood skewers) to add branches to your maquette, or to cantilever smaller, more delicate pieces. Let your imagination run wild and create a piece you would want to see in a museum, an outdoor public space, or displayed in a country you have always wanted to visit.

MATERIALS
- Book: Alexander Calder and His Magical Mobiles (SAM Library)
- Color copies of image of the universe (page 6)
- Color copies of image Polychrome Dots and Brass on Red (page 7)
- Color copies (B&W copies okay) of Untitled (maquette) (page 8)
- Pre-cut 3” and 5” wire rods or wood skewers (available at most art supply stores)
- Finished examples of maquettes (completed by teacher)
- Card stock in red, blue, yellow (color on both sides)
- Empty paper towel rolls (one for each student)
- Colored masking tape
- Kid friendly scissors
- Pencils and erasers

BEFORE YOU START
Consider:
- How big (or small) will my maquette be?
- How will I use the universe as inspiration?
- How will I make all of the pieces work together and balance on their own?
- Will I extend or cantilever out from the body of my sculpture?
- Which primary colors will I use?
- Don’t be afraid to let parts of your sculpture rest on the floor! (Also, remember that the base of a stabile or standing mobile sits on the ground.)

HOW TO
First, the instructor introduces all tools and materials and highlights proper use and safety. Next, a demonstration should be given on how to utilize the slot method of connecting pieces, as well as how to puncture through paper or cardboard with wire and/or skewers.

1. Cut a paper towel tube to create a base for your maquette. It can be as tall or short as you like.
2. Sketch different shapes on the colored card stock. Use different colors and sizes keeping the universe or solar system in mind.
3. Use scissors to cut out your shapes.
4. Attach shapes with colored tape or cut slots at the bottom of each shape to interlock corresponding slots at the top of the base or paper.
5. Continue to build your sculpture. Don’t let the base be the only starting point for adding more pieces.
6. If desired, use the wire rods (or skewers) as cantilevers in your design.
7. Make sure your sculpture is balanced and can stand on its own permanently and without any help!

8. Using your maquette or model as an example to work from, pretend you are building a large scale version of your sculpture to put it in a museum where lots of people can see it. Reflect on your work and write a descriptive paragraph about your piece and how it relates to the solar system. This is called an artist’s statement. There are a variety of ways to put together an artist’s statement. This is the format you will use for this activity:
   a. A title for your sculpture and the year
   b. Your full name
   c. The materials you used
   d. Dimensions
   e. A descriptive paragraph

Example:

**Cosmic Maquette**, 2009
Paper, colored tape, wire
Natalie Sloan
5 x 5 x 6

Using Alexander Calder’s work as inspiration, I have created a sculptural model called a maquette using red and blue paper. The shapes that I have chosen remind me of the moon and the earth. When I look at it I think about space and how gravity works. The pieces fit together with slots, but I can almost imagine the parts of my sculpture orbiting one another. I would like to build a large version of my maquette and display it on the moon!
GLOSSARY continued

Two-dimensional: refers to artwork having only height and width, such as a drawing on the surface of a piece of paper which is “flat”

Universe: the entire celestial cosmos

BIBLIOGRAPHY


The Life and Work of Alexander Calder by Schaefer, Adam. (Chicago, IL: Heineman Library, 2003.)

ONLINE RESOURCES

The following web sites not only examine Alexander Calder the person, but also provide useful images of his work.

Calder Foundation
www.calder.org
This site includes complete biographical information clearly divided into periods as well as high quality, full screen images of many of his works accompanying each period.

National Gallery of Art
www.nga.gov/exhibitions/caldbro.shtm
This site offers an excellent online tour of a Calder exhibit at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
www.sfmoma.org
To get to the provided information on Calder, go to the home page and enter “Calder” in the search field. The site contains great quotes and information that accompany the images of his work.

WEBOGRAPHY


Glossary of definitions. (Merriam Webster), www.merriam-webster.com

How to Write an Artist’s Statement. (Self-Representing Artists), www.ebsqart.com/ArtMagazine/za_400.htm

ALEXANDER CALDER: A BALANCING ACT
Pre-Visit Activity: Grades K-3

The Universe
ALEXANDER CALDER: A BALANCING ACT
Pre-Visit Activity: Grades K-3

Polychrome Dots and Brass on Red, 1964
Sheet metal, brass, wire and paint
Alexander Calder
American, 1898-1976
2 x 6 1/8 x 2 1/4 in.
Collection of Jon and Mary Shirley, T2009.56.29
Photo: Julian Calder, © 2009 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
ALEXANDER CALDER: A BALANCING ACT
Pre-Visit Activity: Grades K-3

**Untitled (maquette)**, ca. 1960
Sheet metal, wire, and paint
*Alexander Calder*
American, 1898-1976
21 x 9 x 27 in.
Collection of Jon and Mary Shirley, T2009.56.26
Photo: Julian Calder, © 2009 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York