



Alexander Calder was born in Pennsylvania in 1898. His parents were both artists. His father was a sculptor and his mother painted portraits. They knew it was difficult to earn money as an artist, so they encouraged their children to create art, but they discouraged their children from becoming artists.

Calder's talent could be seen even in his first sculpture, which he created when he was four years old. As he continued to sculpt, Calder became interested in sculpture that moved. When he was twelve he created a duck that rocked when tapped and a train that ran down a track.

He originally followed his parents' advice and studied engineering in college. Calder wasn't happy in any of the jobs he worked after college, though, so he decided to become an artist after all.

While he studied at the Art Students' League in New York, Calder worked as a freelance artist for the National Police Gazette. For one assignment he spent two weeks sketching scenes from the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus. This project marked the beginning of his lifelong fascination with the circus.

Calder moved to Paris in 1926 where he began to build toys that moved. These toys eventually became his own miniature circus. He packed his circus into suitcases and performed in the U.S. and in Europe.

By 1931 many of Calder's sculptures contained motorized moving parts. These became known as mobiles. In 1932 Calder began to experiment with hanging mobiles and in 1934 he began making outdoor pieces that were set into motion by wind. Around the same time Calder was also experimenting with self-supporting, static, abstract sculptures. He called these stabiles to differentiate them from the mobiles.

During World War II Calder attempted to join the armed services but was rejected. He continued to sculpt, but switched to wood glass and ceramics because aluminum and other metals he commonly used were in short supply.

Although he is most well-known for his mobiles and stabiles, Calder painted throughout his career. He also illustrated books, made pin and ink drawings, studied printmaking, and designed jewelry.

In 1973 Calder painted a plane for Braniff International Airways. The plane became a "flying canvas." In 1975 he painted the first BMW Art Car.

Calder died in New York, NY on November 11, 1976. He was one of the Early Modern Era's most innovative artists who pioneered work in kinetic art and whose works are precursors to multimedia art today.