

James Johnson Sweeney, "Alexander Calder's Mobiles," *Mobiles by Alexander Calder*, exh. cat. (Chicago: The Renaissance Society of The University of Chicago, 1935).

Alexander Calder's Mobiles

In the last decade or so a long face has again become an essential of appreciative deportment in the presence of a work of art. For that reason Mr. Calder's work is embarrassing. There is an element of the piper of Hamelin's tune in the purring and jiggling of a roomful of his "mobiles" that calls the child out of us in spite of ourselves. We grin and enjoy it. Then our conscience begins to trouble us. Something must be wrong: this is not the way one usually feels in a roomful of sculpture. Nevertheless in a roomful of Calder's we are conscious of a definite heightening of vitality that does associate itself somehow or other with the space-relationships, the architectonics, the line- and color-organizations, as well as the rhythms of the objects.

Calder's idiom has the fibre of simplicity; his work bears an integral relationship with our contemporary environment.

Further, into the plastic expression of the period he has introduced a new element—that of time. In several of his mobiles he has, as it were, underscored certain suggested compositional rhythms by actual kinetic ones. And here his work offers an interesting parallel with that of the fountain sculptors, of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Rome and Florence. Just as out of their playing with water and their free and often fanciful solutions of technical problems, grew what we recognize today as some of the earliest hints of the baroque style in sculpture; so Calder's realizations, vividly vernacular to the present age as they are, offer, at the same time, more probabilities of relationship with the plastic expression of the next, than does the work of any other American sculptor today.

James Johnson Sweeney
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