

University of Virginia | Art Museum

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Alexander Calder Sculpture on Display at U.Va.

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A monumental sculpture by Alexander Calder, considered one of the greatest sculptors of the 20th century, was installed Saturday in front of the University of Virginia's Peabody Hall.

Calder created the sculpture, *Tripes*, in 1974 near the end of his life.

The sculpture is on long-term loan from the Calder Foundation in New York, the result of a collaboration between the Office of the Vice Provost for the Arts, the Committee on Public Art and others at the University.

In the past, the Committee on Public Art has served as the approval arm for groups at the University wishing to display artworks on Grounds. Calder's stabile is the first piece of public art the committee has proactively promoted.

"This is a significant work by a world-renowned modern artist and the hope is that it is only the beginning of an effort to bring works like this that will broaden the representation of public art on Grounds," said architectural history professor Richard Guy Wilson, chairman of the committee.

The project inaugurates a new public sculpture program at the University, said Elizabeth Turner, U.Va.'s vice provost for the arts.

"This Calder comes to Grounds as the result of an invitation Universitywide," she said. An expert on Calder's work, Turner knew the sculpture was available for loan and proposed the idea to the committee. The committee worked with Mary Hughes, the University's landscape architect and a member of the Committee on Public Art, to select a high-profile location to install the sculpture.

The Grounds Improvement Fund, an initiative that funds a whole variety of projects such as sidewalks, landscape improvements and safety issues as well as art projects, is administered by the Office of the Architect, and provided for installation and security measures for the Calder stabile, U.Va. Architect David Neuman said.

Turner praised the site selected to display the work. "We found a beautiful position for it in front of Peabody Hall and within view of the library. We want this to be something that is a part of our everyday environment and something that we can learn from in our daily life. It is unusually made and also will become a signal of innovation, which is of course a great leitmotif for us."

"This high-profile piece of art coming to such a prominent location contributes to the awareness of the positive impact public art can make on Grounds," Hughes said.

Calder's work has been described as "drawing in space." His stabile *La Grande Vitesse* for Grand Rapids, Mich., has become a symbol for the city, and was the first publicly funded abstract sculpture supported by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1969.

The son and grandson of well-known sculptors, Calder comes from a long tradition of public art creators. His father, Alexander Stirling Calder, produced many public installations and his grandfather, Alexander Milne Calder, is best known for the statue of William Penn that adorns the tower of Philadelphia City Hall.

Calder first trained as an engineer before studying at the art Students League in New York. He worked in both his native United States and his adopted country, France. There, he was influenced by artist friends Joan Miró, Man Ray, Fernand Léger and Piet Mondrian and was introduced to abstract art.

He applied his engineering training, coupled with the visual language of form, color and line of abstract art, to create planar sculpture that seems to defy gravity. He introduced the mobile to the sculpture genre, and created monumental works called stables.

“He had a new way of thinking about sculpture that was not massive,” Turner said, “a sculpture that could be stable and yet at the same time energetic—constantly changing as you move around it. Changing aspects, changing forms.”

Calder’s 12-foot-tall *Tripes*, made of painted sheet metal, is a phantasmagorical tree that changes shape and form as one walks around it. It embodies ideas of innovation, invention and freedom of thought—ideas that Thomas Jefferson himself embraced when he created the University and that are a hallmark of inquiry at U.Va.

“We are looking for new ways of thinking through problems to allow for us to see the world in a new way—to stop, to look, to take stock, and to think about something in a new way,” Turner said. “We believe this work will do that and we are so delighted that it will be here.”

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