





# CALDER 1

THE PACE GALLERY • 32 E 57 NYC • OCTOBER 21-DE

## CALDER '41

Alexander Calder never fit into a mold. Soon after leaving his family's business, the artist, Calder left New York for Paris, where he became part of the avant-garde during the late 1920s and early 1930s, a time of intense artistic experimentation, and intrigued varied artists with his dynamic and playful *Cirque Calder* performances and with his inventive sculptures. Calder remained in Paris for many years, Calder remained in the philosophical camp. The Abstraction-Création movement was founded, but he still continued to associate and exhibit with the group, nearly unheard-of by the many rival factions of the time. He was based on opposing schools of thought. Writing in 1931, he once implored his friend—only half-jokingly—“to join the Surrealists, the Neo-Romanticists, the Conciliators, or the garagistes.”<sup>71</sup> These formative experiences, significant commissions and a deft assurance of his own vision resulted in a breathtaking output of work in 1931.

In the fall of 1930, during a visit to Piet Mondrian in Paris, Calder “felt” abstraction for the first time, and he returned to New York to paint in the abstract, but soon realized that sculpture was his medium of expression. In early 1931, he created his first abstract sculpture, opposed to his non-kinetic abstract works, which were static. The idea was radical, and unlike anything that had been done before, employing motors to create motion, but soon the idea was truly singular art form: sculpture that moved with the air currents. The art world was both mesmerized and skeptical. Calder's revolutionary works, so much so that, upon his return to New York in 1933, Pierre Matisse, the legendary art dealer, organized Calder's first exhibition with Matisse as his dealer. Calder continued to exhibit there almost annually for the next decade.

Opposite:  
Yucca (1941, p. 42) and Myrtle Burl (1941, p. 21).  
Roxbury studio, 1941







New York, 1937



New York, 1937

Spanish Pavilion,

sculpture. Some experiments were explored and abandoned, like the “paintings that moved,” which Calder developed in the mid-1930s. These mobiles, whose moving elements either hung within the confines of a Calder-made frame, or from a cantilever in front of a painted board that sat flush against a wall, were an attempt by the artist to create a type of three-dimensional sculpture that gave the viewer an impression of looking at a painting whose components were perpetually in flux. Though many of these objects succeeded in what Calder tried to achieve, he found their possibilities limited and eventually released them from the confines of the rectangle.

Calder favored other ideas. He experimented with the idea of creating sculpture in monumental form and, working from a maquette, he proportionally enlarged from the smaller sculpture *Devil Fish* (fig. 1), the largest work he had made to that date. Immediately afterwards, he enlarged another, and created *Big Bird* (fig. 2). These two works, together with their maquettes, were exhibited for the first time in his exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1937. Alongside, Calder displayed a variety of other maquettes, anticipating that patrons might visualize other possibilities, and perhaps request of him a large-scale version of one of the other, smaller works. These two sculptures were the forebears of Calder’s much later, monolithic works that are now familiar presences in city plazas worldwide. The movement implied in the undulating curves of *Devil Fish* and *Big Bird* is apparent, though the two are actually stables.

Though it took many years before this idea caught on with the public, Calder did receive two significant commissions in the 1930s. In 1937, Josep Lluís Sert, architect for the Spanish pavilion at the World Expo in Paris, commissioned Calder to create a fountain for the space. As the only non-Spanish artist invited to participate, Calder made *Mercury Fountain*, his first overtly political work. The site-specific fountain, placed in situ to Picasso’s *Guernica* (fig. 3), was comprised of a large pool of mercury, which, through a pumping system, spilled down through a series of pools. Atop the fountain hung a mobile element, a dangling piece of wire spelling out “Almaden,” a town in Spain known both for its mercury mines and for offering fierce resistance to Francisco Franco’s Fascist takeover of the country. Finally, to close out the decade, Calder was asked for a large mobile to hang over the central staircase of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for which he created *Lobster Trap and Fish Tail* (fig. 4).



fig. 3

By 1941, a new confidence had emerged in Calder's a deft hand when it came to his sculpture, and experimentation never waned, his investigations As one reviewer noted that year in a review of Matisse Gallery, "the latest mobiles are bigger somehow more important than any he has shown with an offer for another major commission—Ballroom in Caracas, Venezuela, from his patron Harrison (fig. 5). Calder painted the mobiles's his custom with most early maquettes; however, unpainted aluminum, creating a so-called "light" made on occasion throughout his career. A light in this exhibition (pp. 34–35) cascades down certain times of the day, a ray of sun can seem metal elements with its light. At these moments seamlessly with the industrial materials and polished. Several light-reflecting mobiles always hung from room at home in Roxbury, Connecticut, where them, creating a "ceiling" of diffuse light across

Biomorphic shapes are widespread in Calder's 1941 they recur with frequency. He returned other mobiles whose elements pour forth from feature in this show, and their unruly and varied to serve as an antithesis to the meticulous "form" The masterpiece *Vertical Foliage* (pp. 22–23) and leafy falling ivy, though the monochrome the viewer into remembering that the work, intended to represent actual vegetation; that personal observation on the part of the individual use an actual item from the natural world—a of a myrtle tree. Calder took the hunk of wood colored, flag-like elements into its heart, fashioning Surrealist object. *Tree* (pp. 24–25), formed by and an ethereal mobile that hangs in delicate eight feet high. Well known for his pioneering materials, Calder has composed the mobile of *Tree* also represents a further examination in his sculpture.



fig. 4

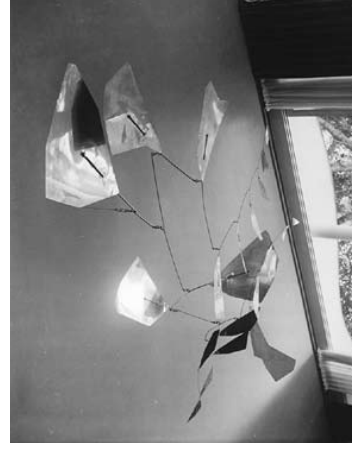


fig. 5

fig. 4:  
*Lobster Trap and Fish Tail* (1939), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1949

fig. 5:  
*Mobile* (1941), Hotel Avila Ballroom, Caracas, Venezuela, 1941

Opposite:  
*Mobile* (1941, fig. 5), *Untitled* (1941, pp. 30–31), *Un effet du Japonais* (1941, pp. 16–17), *Giraffe* (1941, p. 13), and *The Great Yucca* (1941, pp. 33, 42), Roxbury studio, 1941





Calder enjoyed working on a grander scale, and the success of some of his earlier commissions encouraged him to carry on. The maquette for *Red Petals* (p. 36) was a prototype for a much larger work. In this case, Calder had received an important commission from the Arts Club of Chicago for a large-scale work. The maquette is unique in that the artist designed two separate and distinct mobiles to hang on the small stabile base, each being a separate investigation of variable motion. He enlarged the maquette to an eight-foot-tall version the following year (fig. 6) and pointed out later that *Red Petals* was made “for a little octagonal room lined with rosewood. As I became professionally enraged when I see dinky surroundings, I did my best to make this object big and bold—to dwarf these surroundings.”<sup>4</sup> The large *Red Petals* is also notable for the materials of which it is comprised. As it was completed in 1942, after the United States had entered the war, Calder shied away from purchasing raw sheet metal to form the sculpture. Instead, he chose to make use of used and discarded items, and *Red Petals* incorporates both a hunk of metal from an old boiler bought at a junkyard, and scraps of an aluminum boat Calder had once made for use on the pond on his property in Roxbury.

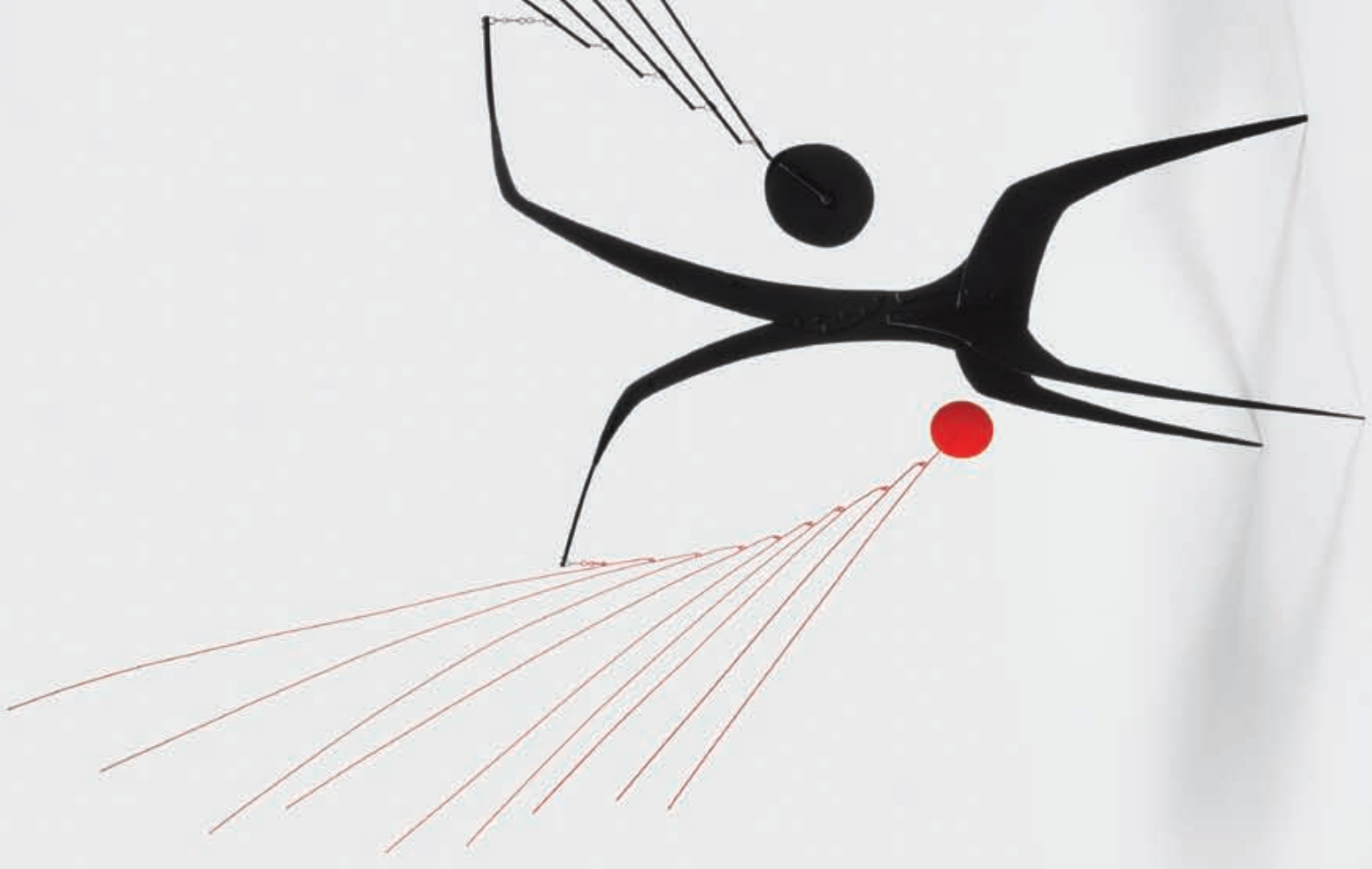
In December 1940, the Marian Willard Gallery in New York exhibited Calder’s jewelry, which he had been making since the late 1920s, in a major show that was a great success. Throughout the following year, Willard sent pieces to exhibitions around the country, and as a result, Calder worked on jewelry prolifically in 1941. Perhaps for this reason the sculpture *The Dragonfly and the Bee* (p. 41) shares a kinship with the jewelry. The rare figurative standing mobile is composed of brass wire, of which many of the jewelry pieces are also made. The wire has been mainly hammered flat, and Calder left evident the marks of his tools upon the soft metal. Willard decided to try to repeat the success she’d had in 1940 with Calder’s jewelry and presented another exhibition of it in December 1941. As it turned out, the exhibition opened on Monday, December 8, the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the day war was declared on Japan.

Writing about Calder’s mobiles a few months prior, a reviewer commented, “they’re about as far away from the ugliness and horror of war as you can get. And that’s no small virtue.”<sup>5</sup> She may well have been referring to *Boomerangs* (pp. 18–19), the sublime centerpiece of this exhibition. One of the most unique works Calder made in 1941, and indeed, one of the most singular of his entire career, this majestic mobile incorporates rare chain-link connectors by which its elements are attached to its hanging rods. He employed these chains in

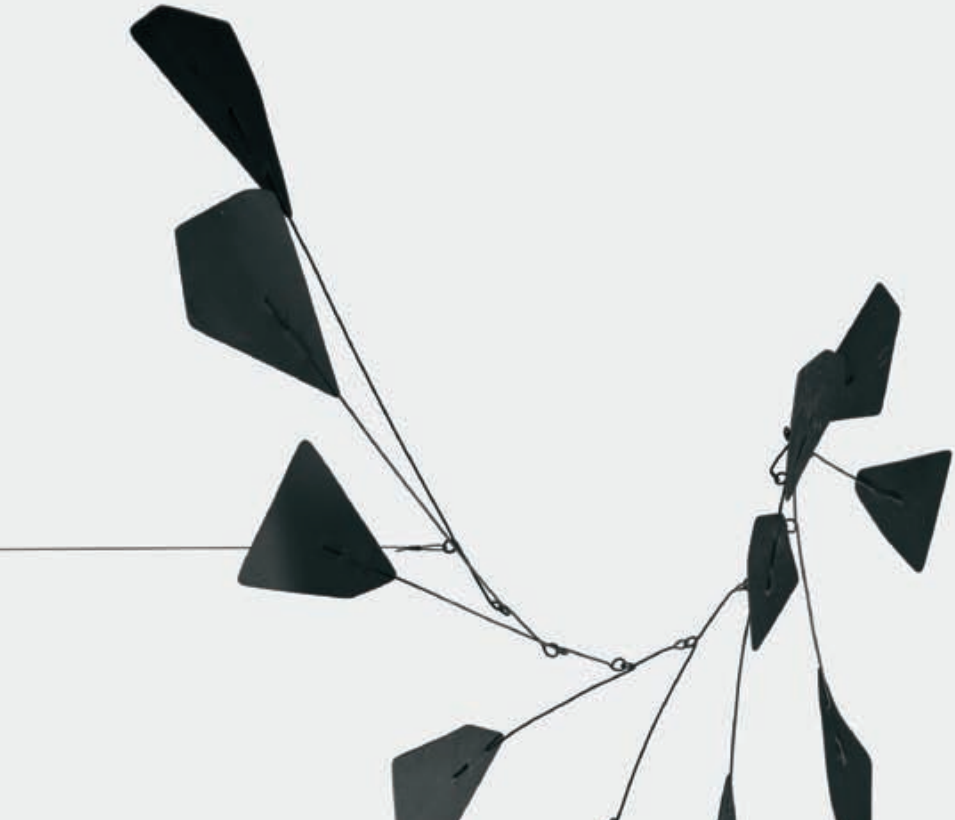












maquette) · 1941 · sheet metal, wire, and paint · 13 x 31 x 3 1/2"



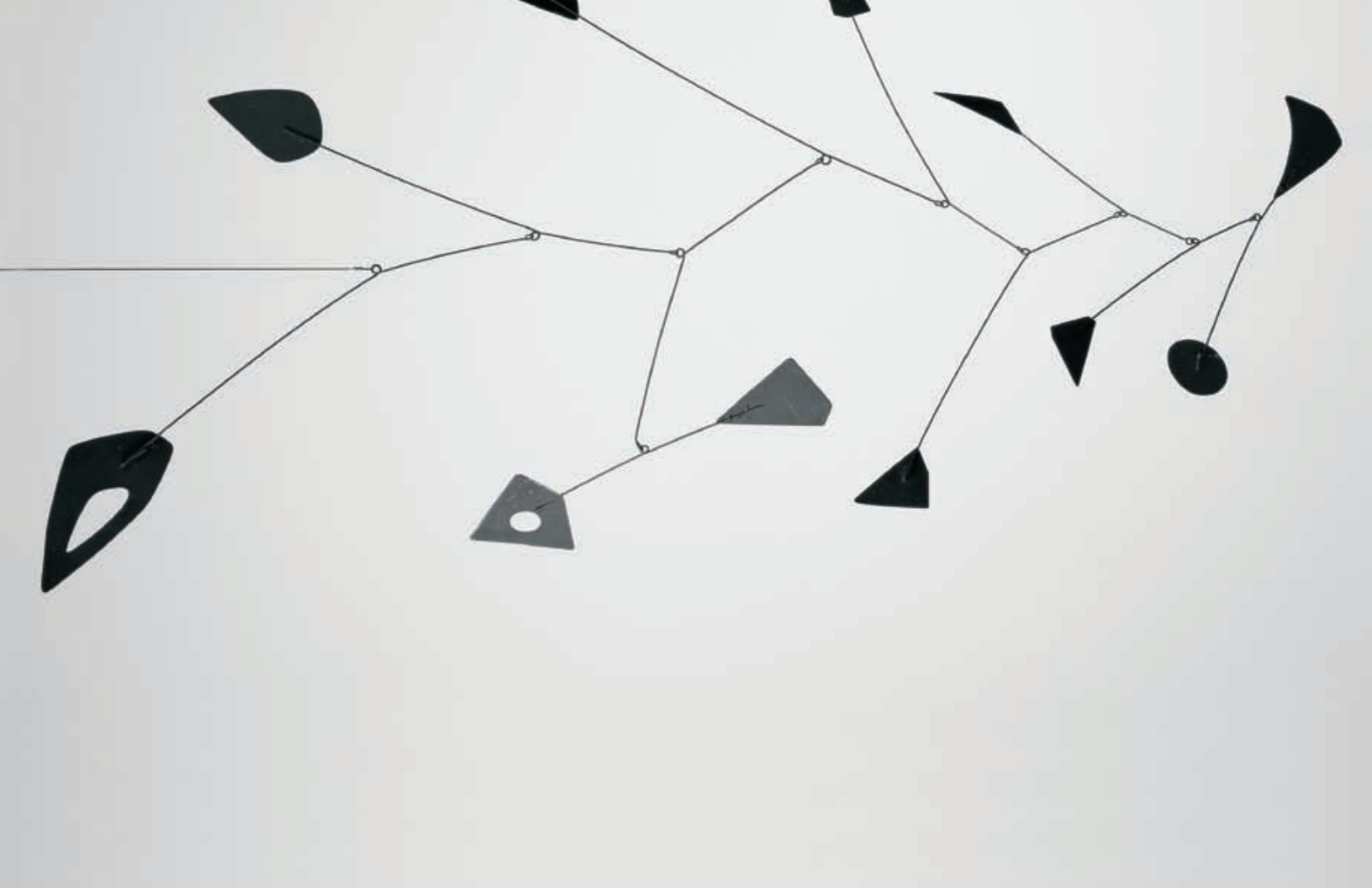
Myrtle Burl · 1941 · wood, sheet metal, v



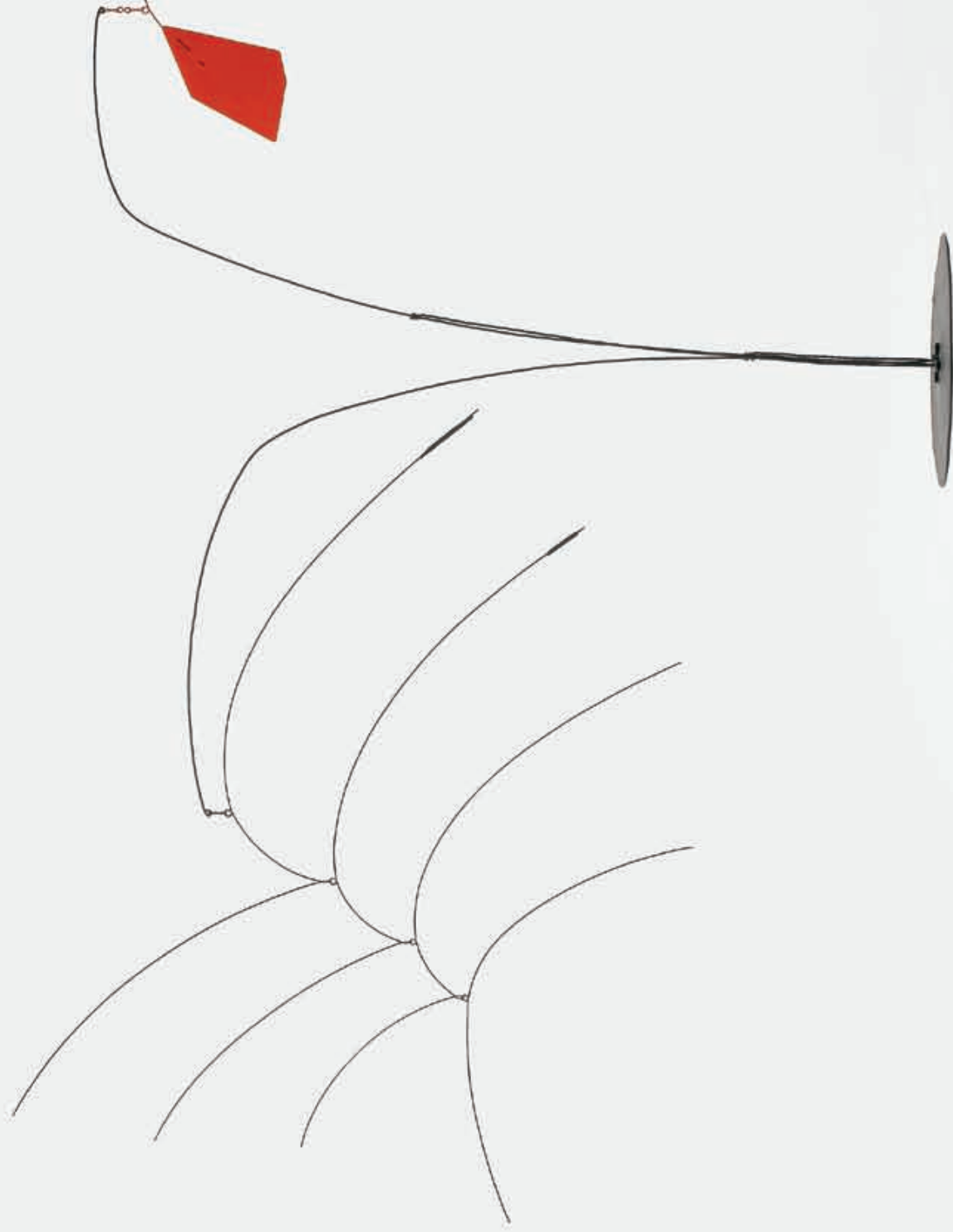




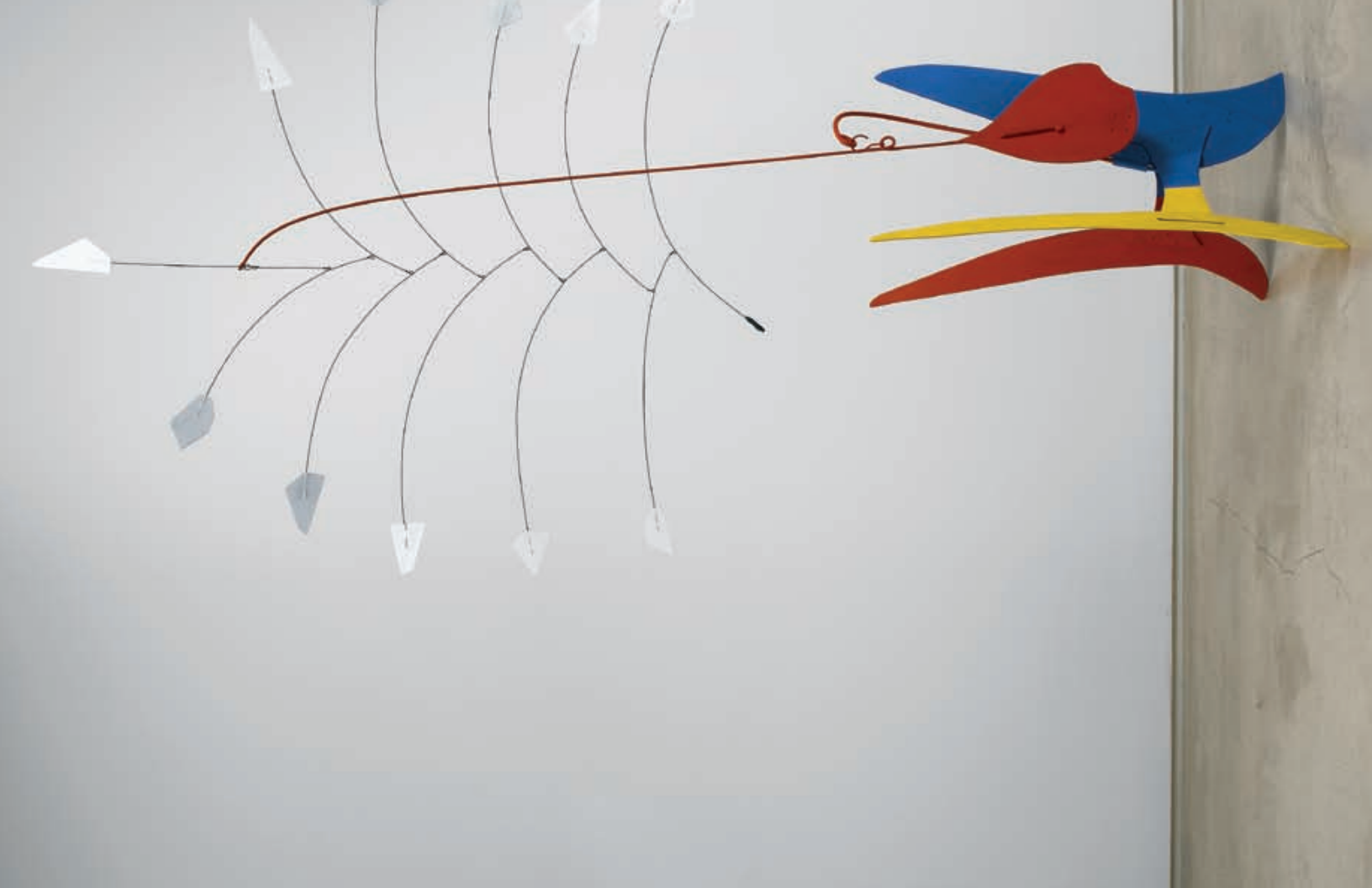
Tree • 1941 • sheet metal, wood, glass, mirror, plastic, wire.









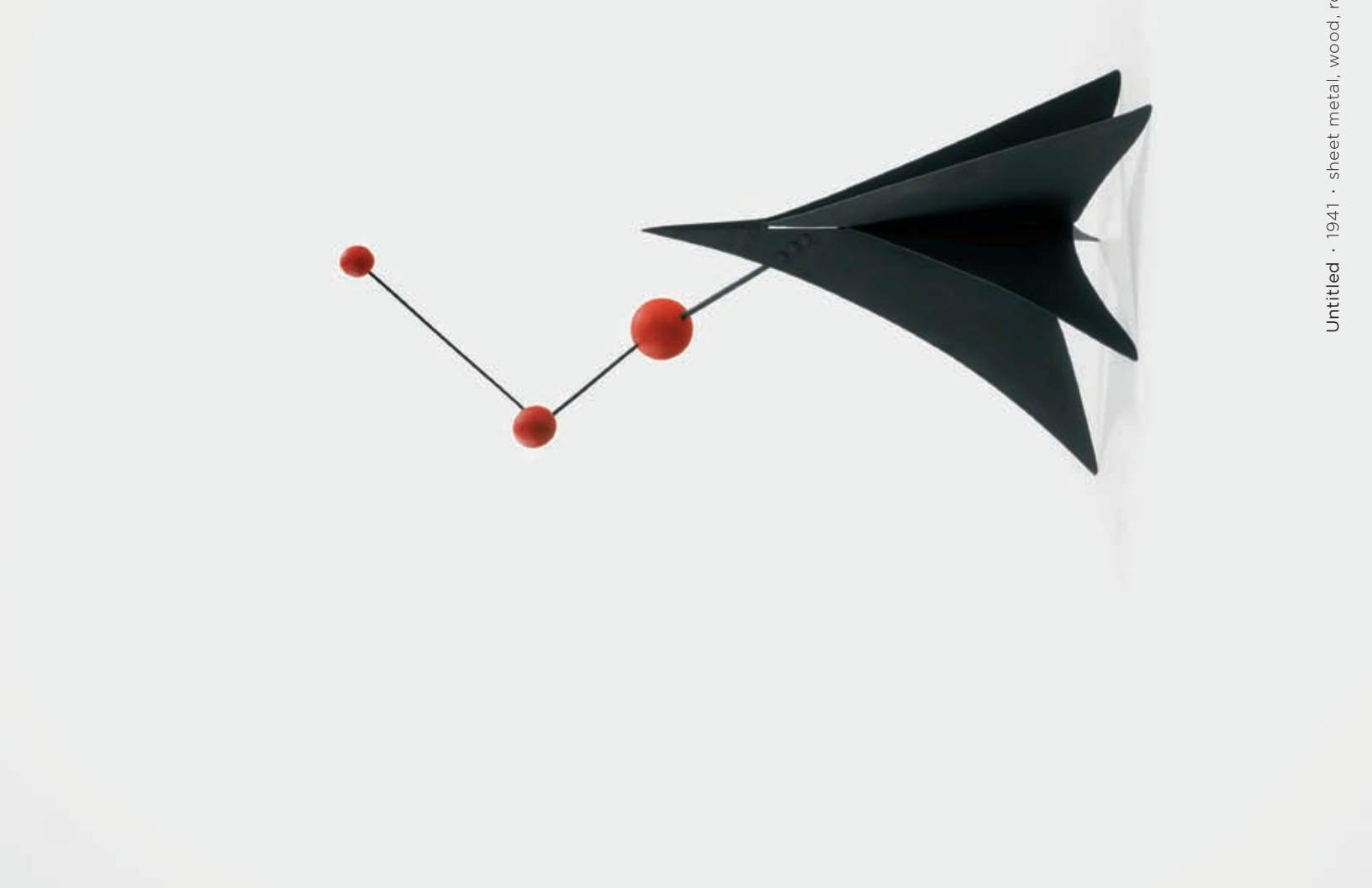








Untitled • 1941 • sheet metal, wire, and paint • 16 x 12 x 6"



Untitled • 1941 • sheet metal, wood, r







## LIST OF WORKS

|                                                                    |                                                                                        |       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
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| 1941                                                               | 1941                                                                                   | 194   |
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| pages 18–19                                                        | Calder Foundation, New York; Gift of Anna<br>Maria Segretario and Holton Rower, 2008   | 47)   |
| Boomerangs                                                         |                                                                                        | pag   |
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Opposite:  
The Great Yucca (1941, p. 33) and Yucca (1941).  
Roxbury studio, 1941



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Herbert Matter; pp. 3, 6–8, 10, 13, 42

© The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY; p. 11 (fig. 4)

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Page 1: Calder, Catalogue drawing of *Giraffe* (1941, p. 13), *The Great Yucca* (1941, pp. 33, 42), *Tree* (1941, pp. 24–25), *Untitled* (1941, pp. 30–31), and *Myrtle Burl* (1941, p. 21), *Alexander Calder: Recent Works*, Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 1941

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