

Los Angeles Times

CRITIC'S CHOICE

Review: Alexander Calder in joyous mode at L&M Arts



By David Pagel

May 6, 2012 3:05 p.m.

Just about everyone loves Alexander Calder (1898-1976).

Casual observers enjoy the playful weightlessness of his mobiles, a genre of sculpture he may not have invented but owns so completely that it's almost impossible for another artist to make a mobile and not be compared, unfavorably, to Calder. Art specialists, who usually pooh-pooh such popular sentiments, also admire the elegant economy of Calder's streamlined forms and his graceful spatial arrangements.

At L&M Arts, a fantastic two-gallery exhibition (and a large, outdoor sculpture) gives visitors from all walks of life even more reasons to be drawn to Calder.

In a tall, skylighted gallery, six works from 1938 to 1955 are all delicate elegance. From a distance, their organic shapes and spindly lines draw your eyes through space, filling it with gentle movements. Up close, you see hands-on craftsmanship, the ingenious ways Calder bent and twisted the wiry armatures of his works, winding and weaving them through thin sheets of hand-painted metal and affixing them to homemade hooks, rivets and chains. The intimacy of a tinkerer's workshop is palpable, heartwarming to amateurs who love making stuff with their hands.

In a larger gallery, brighter colors, bigger sculptures and more acrobatic arrangements reveal Calder's fun-loving side. Every one of its eight sculptures, made from 1964-1975, is a casual masterpiece that makes you happy to be alive. Twenty-four framed gouaches cover a long wall and add to the celebratory atmosphere, their supersaturated reds, yellows and blues too joyous to miss out on.

L & M Arts, 660 S. Venice Blvd., (310) 821-6400, through June 16. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lmgallery.com

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