



Calder's Portraits: 'A New Language'

Barbara Zabel

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Celebrated for mobiles and stabiles that enliven city squares and museums around the world, Alexander Calder (1898-1976) is not widely recognized as a portraitist. Throughout his career, however, Calder created portraits of a wide variety of subjects: well-known entertainment and political figures, sports stars, artist friends, family members, and himself. Some of these portraits are traditional likenesses in oil on canvas or ink on paper, but most explore new conceptions of form and identity in the medium of sculpture. Executed over a fifty-year period from the early 1920s to the 1970s, Calder's portraits reveal a real talent for portraiture, for encapsulating individual character traits in both representational and abstract art, and in two and three dimensions. Calder recorded his friendships in a remarkably vivid and generous way. Through his relationship with his subjects he continually defined and redefined himself, and his *oeuvre* in the genre of portraiture became a life narrative.

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