

## Art Press

**Alice Anderson Memorise Calder**

By Annabelle Gugnon, translated by Chloé Baker, November 22, 2019



'Free Composition', 2019. Performance at Atelier Alexander Calder. Acrylic on paper, 11 x 3 m.  
Courtesy Alice Anderson Studio / Atelier Calder, Saché

**For thirty years the studio built by Alexander Calder in Saché in the Indre-et-Loire region has welcomed artists in residence. Alice Anderson, visual artist and Franco-British dancer born in 1972, is currently living there. Annabelle Gugnon paid her a visit.**

Alice Anderson left London to settle in Alexander Calder's studio in Saché. For the duration of a three-month residency, until December 15, she moved home to the American sculptor's, to occupy the studio he envisioned and had built in 1962 on the hill of Haut Carroi, overlooking the Indre valley. Anderson, whose practice combines performance, dance, sculpture, drawing, painting and video, immediately felt that she had been welcomed by the sculptor himself. He, however, passed away in 1976. But the design of the studio reflects Calder's thinking, his way of working there, his genius of space, light and setting matter in motion. The studio is 30 metres long, 10 wide and 12 high, on two floors with a vast paved platform outside where Calder tested his mobiles and his stabiles by measuring them against the environment. He designed and drew up the blueprint for this workshop, and then called on the best workers in France, whose progress he monitored daily. The magisterial work of the wooden frame, for example, was undertaken by the Compagnons du devoir et du tour de France based near Saché, Tours, and whose know-how goes back to the construction of cathedrals.

## MONOCHROME HARLEQUIN

Facing due south, with a glass opening facing the northern light, the workshop is at the meeting place of different lights with, on the eastern side, a bay overlooking the oak forest and the residential house. On the western side a smaller window opens onto the vineyard across the small road that leads up to the sunflower fields and down to the village of Saché, two kilometres away, a distance that Calder travelled every morning to buy and read the Herald Tribune. Entering the studio for the first time, Anderson was

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Alexander Calder. 'Feuille d'arbre'. 1974. Steel. 626 x 400 x 357cm. (Ph. Guillaume Blanc / Atelier Calder).

captivated by the huge dove-grey front door: “But it’s a sculpture!” she exclaimed. Calder composed this sliding coach door with triangles, squares and diamond shapes welded to one another in a harlequin monochrome. It is 2.95 metres high and 2.85 wide. The visual artist wished to “memorise” it. This verb is at the centre of her practice. Touched by the mutations engendered by technology, transhumanism and the dematerialisation of the world, she feels the need to record in three dimensions the present world, its objects, its architectures, its geometric shapes. She performs this contemporary archaeology with performance rituals. She has created her own method of memorisation: while dancing for a long time with or in front of the object, she wraps it in copper wire until it is entirely covered. It then becomes a sculpture. Of course Calder’s line drawings and wire portraits come to mind, heralds of his mobiles (which he called “my objects” or “a thing by me”). Once this long relationship is established, another danced ritual will allow Alice Anderson to separate from the object. Several years of creation have made her memorise many forms, ranging from a tiny button to a life-size Ford Mustang via computers, guitars, watches, etc. according to her own choice, that of her collaborators or that of the public, who are sometimes invited to perform at her side. 181 Kilometres is the memorisation of the shape of the sphere she created. It is two metres in diameter. Produced in 2015 for the Saatchi Gallery in London, it required a performance that lasted several weeks. Copper wire in hand, like an extension of herself, Alice Anderson walked turning from morning till night, until the thread became a monumental globe. This performance, close to a Zen meditation, gave rise to unsettling perceptions. “Repetition always opens the way to the unknown,” says Alice Anderson. Likewise, the memorisation of the Saatchi studio door gave rise to astonishing visual phenomena – “like smoke”, she says – where a monochrome ranging from turquoise to Egyptian blue prevailed, from cobalt to aquamarine. In addition, the final sculpture of the door will be a spatial composition where the diamond and triangle shapes, duplicated to their exact size, will be separated and will form a flight of seven meters in height and five in width. Some will be memorised with copper wire and others with blue wire. The introduction of coloured threads is one of the transformations brought about by Anderson’s residence in Calder’s studio. It isn’t the only one. “This studio is a fundamental, very inspiring experience for me. It’s as if the space of the location placed me in the universe, in tune with Calder. This is the first time I’ve measured myself in such a vast space that nothing stops. Everything is thought through, the slightest window, material, dimension, Calder left nothing to chance,” says Anderson. Every morning she dances and performs on the bare oak floor. The first Free

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Door at Atelier Calder with works by Alice Anderson. Courtesy of Alice Anderson Studio, 2019  
Alexander Calder's studio in Saché. Photograph: Guillaume Blanc / Atelier Calder.

Compositions made here – copper-coloured drawings on black paper – have taken on an astonishing scale, an unprecedented rhythm that unfolds over ten metres. Anderson has changed dimensions. Calder's magic has operated ...

#### STUDIO EXPERIMENTS

The workshop has been operating for thirty years. The residence opened its doors in 1989. In 2020 Tarik Kiswanson, Josephine Meckseper and Barthélémy Toguo will occupy the premises in turn. The Atelier Calder has already welcomed over sixty artists, including Sarah Sze, Tadashi Kawamata, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Sarkis, Laurent Saksik and Jeppe Hein. The latter, by inviting a troupe of thirty-five artists, transformed the studio into

Circus Hein (2009-10), a tribute to the Little Circus that Calder realized between 1926 and 1931. It is here also that Thomas Saraceno designed Cloud Cities (2010) after being awarded the Calder Prize. This biennial award, launched in 2005, is endowed with \$50,000 and an invitation to spend three months in the workshop. Alexander Calder's family wishes to keep this place open to creation. It is a tribute to their grandfather, whose life and career were marked by his studios. The first was the one his parents, a sculptor and painter, set him up in when he was 8 years old, in the cellar of their home in Pasadena, California. The second was at the Stevens Institute of Technology, where Calder completed his mechanical engineering studies. Workshop experiences formed the core of this New Jersey school's educational method. Later, in 1931 in Paris, Calder's visit to Piet Mondrian's studio was decisive. Seeing the series of primary colour papers glued to the wall, Alexander Calder suggested to Mondrian to move them in space. The idea didn't inspire Mondrian. Calder would carry it out and use colour to invent movement in sculpture. Another decisive studio in his life: that of Pierre Tal Coat, a huge barn next to a priory. A stay with the painter in western France in 1961 gave Calder the impetus to draw the plans for his own studio, and begin to build it. For twenty years Alfred Pacquement, former director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne de Paris, chaired the association for the management of the Calder studio. In October 2019 he handed over the baton to Laurent Le Bon, president of the Musée Picasso in Paris (where a Calder-Picasso exhibition was held in 2019). And though the anniversary of the thirty years of artists' residency at the Atelier Calder wasn't even greeted by a press release and even less by festivities, memory remains strong in Saché. Calder's spirit has just opened a door for Alice Anderson.