

Alexander Calder

High Wire: Calder's Circus at 100

Oct 18, 2025 — Mar 9, 2026 | Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, US

'High Wire: Calder's Circus at 100' celebrates the centennial of one of Alexander Calder's most iconic works and one of the most beloved works in the Whitney's collection, *Calder's Circus* (1926–31). In 1926, Calder began constructing his miniature multi-act spectacle while living in Paris, using commonplace materials—wire, fabric, cork, wood, string, and found objects—to create a cast of acrobats, animals, and other circus performers including clowns, a sword swallower, and a ringmaster. The figures were brought to life through performances that Calder staged for audiences of artists and friends, among them Marcel Duchamp, Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, and Isamu Noguch. These dynamic performances were set to music, complete with lighting and narration by Calder, and could last up to two hours—representing a radical new form of performance art. Calder stored the *Circus* in a set of five suitcases and would continue to present the work on both sides of the Atlantic.

A touchstone for Calder's artistic development, *Calder's Circus* reveals his early fascination with movement, balance, suspense, and ephemerality—concepts that would shape his pioneering invention of the mobile and define his sculptural practice in the decades that followed. This exhibition situates the *Circus* within Calder's experimental engagement with this popular form, drawing connections between its energetic interplay and his later abstract works. This exhibition offers a rare opportunity to experience the full scope of a work that continues to enchant audiences and illuminate the foundations of Calder's visionary practice.

'High Wire: Calder's Circus at 100' is organized by Jennie Goldstein, Marion Boulton "Kippy" Stroud Curator of the Collection, and Roxanne Smith, Jennifer Rubio Assistant Curator of the Collection.