

POETRY IN MOTION

Architect Santiago Calatrava creates a microcosm of Alexander Calder's most diminutive sculptures, in an elegant expression of size and scale at Dominique Lévy gallery.

BY MAIKA POLLACK

It's a perfectly unexpected pairing.

Santiago Calatrava, he of fantastical bridges and billowing buildings, and Alexander Calder, the profound sculptor who was as much a mathematician as artist—both sculptors in their own right. Gallerist Dominique Lévy brought these two talents together for her new show, *In "Multum in Parvo,"* on view now at her Madison Avenue gallery. "I wanted to involve someone whose sensibilities had the poetry I find in Calder," says Lévy. "It just seemed a perfect match."

Presented in collaboration with the Calder Foundation, Lévy asked Calatrava to create an immersive environment in which to show more than 40 rare Calder sculptures of the smallest scale. Ranging in height from a few inches to 30 inches, most of these pieces have never been exhibited before. To show the works, Calatrava has created biomorphic columns and mirrored stanchions that bring the tabletop kinetic Calders into view.

Calatrava, who architecture critic Paul Goldberger once called "the most crowd-pleasing architect since Frank Gehry," is perhaps best recognized for his buildings reminiscent of spindly sea creatures whose frozen forms seem to undulate and spiral in defiance of the laws of dry-land physics. His fundamental unit of structure might be the diatom, a single-celled underwater organism with a dazzling array of hallucinogenically intricate forms.

While his architecture is captivating, it was his collaboration with Frank Stella at Neue National galerie in Berlin, that sealed the deal for Lévy for this poetic pairing.

But despite the grand scale of the architect's other projects, part of the charm of this show is its delicacy. The title, "*Multum in Parvo*," refers to the tiny size of the Calder sculptures, and the effect of Calatrava's architecture to multiply, magnify and otherwise set off the miniature mobiles in lapidary settings. Some Calders are matchbox-sized and were made for mailing. Another group of six are maquettes come from a never-realized proposal for the Smithsonian. Size, here, is a shorthand for fantasy, and seems to have freed the artist to create exceedingly whimsical kinetic conjurings. *Caged Stone and Fourteen Dots* (1948) is like a little red tree—at a modest 30 inches, it is one of the tallest Calders in the show. *La Cuillere ("The Spoon")* (1954) is a truncated red spoon with a three-point mobile balancing on one end—it is only three inches tall.

Many of the works, with their black bases and single points of contact to a cloud of whirling, colorful dots look like tiny landscapes orbited by exotic planets. Cantilevering, Calder reminds us, is not just part of the language of architecture but part of the structure of tropical flowers, yoyos, contemporary cocktails and modern dance. That these little fantasies are conjured from bits of wood,

metal, wire, lead, paint and string, is part of the work's sleight-of-hand magic.

Calatrava's fantastical supports for Calder evoke hat-stands stuck in snowscapes, fish skeletons and tropical ferns. On one floor the stands radiate out from a single point like a lily pad pond. The pale, branching forms punctuated with circles enter into conversation with Calder's sculptural language. The Calatrava pieces, with their gentle bespoke tailoring of circumference and height to each Calder is a relief from the more conventional constraints of glass vitrine or shelf.

There has been a tendency toward such combinations of art and architecture, sculpture and space in gallery exhibitions lately—for example, in Gagosian Gallery's Chamberlain and Prouvé, show, which paired the modernist architect and the Minimalist sculptor. In the case of Lévy's project, the use of architectural exhibition design in a gallery space as a way to show Calder evokes the salon of another modern art doyenne: Peggy Guggenheim's *The Art of This Century* gallery, for which the Austrian designer Friedrich Kiesler created a Surrealist gallery space with curving walls and biomorphic seats. Such spaces move the viewer toward an immersive experience of the work of art. For the tiny Calders, which read like little Mondrians in motion, it is as if we have been invited to step through the looking glass into a world where less is more.



Alexander Calder's
Haverford Variation, 1944