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Art and design

# Avant-garde Alexander Calder jewellery to go on show in UK first

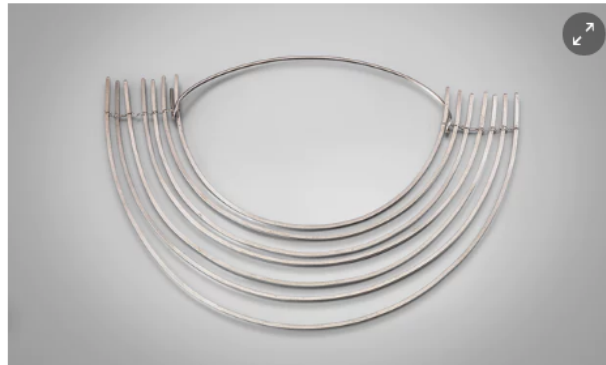
Calder, famous for his mobiles, also created bespoke pieces of jewellery for friends from variety of materials including cutlery

Mark Brown, Arts correspondent

Friday 16 September 2016 08.01 BST

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Alexander Calder, Untitled, c. 1940 Photograph: Courtesy the Calder Foundation and Louisa Guinness Gallery



Alexander Calder with some of his mobiles Photograph: CBS Photo Archive/CBS via Getty Images

They are avant-garde and often tricky to wear but the 1,800 earrings, bracelets, necklaces and brooches hand made by Alexander Calder are seen as “the pinnacle of art meets jewellery,” according to gallerist Louisa Guinness.

She is staging the UK’s first solo exhibition of jewellery by the late American sculptor, best known as the inventor of the mobile.

The jewellery was worn by Calder’s friends such as Peggy Guggenheim, Simone de Beauvoir and Georgia O’Keeffe, with the artist sometimes raiding cutlery drawers to create a bespoke piece from their knives, forks and scissors.

“It was like a secret club,” said Guinness. “People would wear it and you had to be bold and brave, it was like wearing a funny hat ... people would look at you. It wasn’t for everyone, it wasn’t for the timid.”

It is easy to look at enormous Calder earrings worn by Guggenheim, or necklaces modelled by Angelica Huston and Brooke Shields and think: ‘Too difficult surely?’



Georgia O’Keeffe wearing OK brooch (c. 1945) by Alexander Calder, 1950 Photograph: © Estate of Carl Van Vechten/Courtesy the Calder Foundation and Louisa Guinness Gallery

Guinness disagrees. “The great saying that women have ... we suffer to be beautiful. You don’t really suffer but it is not as comfortable as wearing a pair of gold studs. You feel great when you’re wearing it but you know you’re wearing it.”

Calder is probably the most famous artist who created jewellery on a regular basis. “He was the greatest because he actually, properly made it himself,” said Guinness. “He hammered on a bench, there were no intermediaries.”

His grandson, Sandy Rower, who runs the [Calder Foundation](#), said the artist started making it as a child, making jewellery out of copper wire for his sister’s doll.

During the second world war it became something of a second income for him, but Calder continued even when his superstar status meant he made enough money from his sculptures.

It was an “extremely personal” undertaking, said Calder, mostly made for friends or special occasions. The artist shunned approaches from companies such as Tiffany to make editions for them.

“He felt that the physical object, like his sculptures, were imbued literally with his personal energy and to copy it would be just that, a copy. It wouldn’t be the same thing.

“Each piece is designed by him and made by his own hand and they’re all made by hammer, not made by casting, they’re not reproducible.”



📍 Anjelica Huston wearing *The Jealous Husband* (c. 1940) by Alexander Calder in 1976  
Photograph: © Estate of Evelyn Hofer/Courtesy the Calder Foundation and Louisa Guinness Gallery



Calder, who died in 1976, is recognised as one of the greatest American sculptors of the last century and was [the subject of a major show at Tate Modern earlier this year](#).

Guinness, whose London gallery specialises in art jewellery said she was keen to show the contemporary relevance of Calder's jewellery and hoped it might inspire the next generation of artists to take up the practice.

- The Boldness of Calder at the Louisa Guinness Gallery, London, 27 September-5 November.
- This article was amended on 16 September 2016. Alexander Calder's grandson is Sandy Rower, not Calder.

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