Alexander Calder (1898-1976)
Untitled, 1952
Carved wood
8 7/8 x 3 1/8 x 1 3/16 inches (22.5 x 8 x 3 cm)
This work is registered in the archives of the Calder Foundation, New York
Ex-collection:
Collection Renée Nitzschke
Private collection, Luxembourg
Private collection, Germany, until 2015

Introducing the element of movement, first through performances, motorized works, and finally hanging works, Alexander Calder fundamentally redefined sculptures and changed the course of modern art with his extraordinarily balanced and poetic creations.

Known as "Sandy," Alexander Calder was born into a long line of sculptors based in Philadelphia. His father designed the Swann Memorial Fountain and his grandfather designed the William Penn sculpture now standing atop Philadelphia's City Hall. Calder started to construct objects from a very young age. His interest initially led him to mechanical engineering and applied kinetics, which he studied in college before he turned to art in 1922, when he took evening drawing classes at New York Public School, ensued by further art education at the Arts Students League with John Sloan and George Luks. His early works involved moving toys and figures that would become *Calder's Circus*. A visit to Piet Mondrian's Paris studio in 1930 inspired Calder to shift from figuration to abstraction permanently. His early abstract creations were a continuation of his "circus" objects, as the sculptures usually relied on the movement of motors. After the mid-1930s, Calder gradually gave up motors. His sculptures increasingly relied upon the movement of air, which resulted in his signature hanging works called "mobiles" — a term coined by Marcel Duchamp in 1931.

Created in 1952, *Untitled* is part of an "open door system" that Calder made to help an elderly woman to get into her apartment. Carved in wood as a handle, it was to be connected to a string that would help pull open a door, as demonstrated by Calder's "Construction Manual" sketch, showing how the pulley system should be installed and used. (Figure 1) This springs out from Calder's early interest in mechanical engineering and applied kinetics. He also installed mini versions of such a "pulley system" in some of his "circus" objects, such as the "elevator system" in his 1945 *Dollhouse*. (Figure 2)

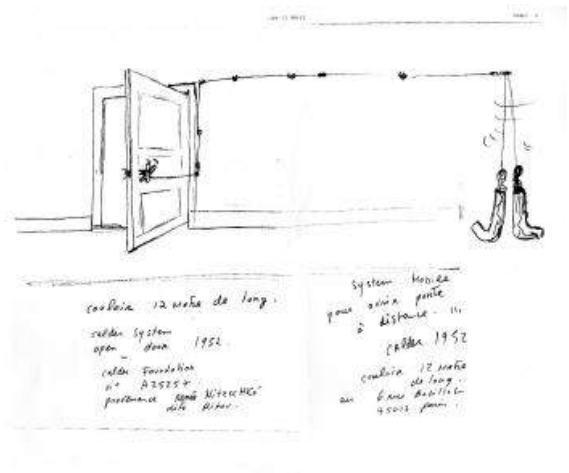

Figure 1. "Construction Manual" by Alexander Calder

Figure 2. Detail of *Dollhouse*, ca. 1945