

## Exploring Mass and Kinetic Sculptures

**Time:** 1 hour

**Difficulty level:** Medium

**Messy level:** Low



Alexander Calder, *Untitled*, c. 1942, sheet metal, wire, and paint, Calder Foundation, New York. © 2021 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

To view hi-res images from the exhibition *Calder-Picasso*, visit the [MFAH website](#).

Inspired by themes in Alexander Calder's practice, including mass, movement, and material consciousness, this activity will guide you in creating a dynamic sculpture.

### Investigate the Work of Art!

1. Alexander Calder is famous for making sculptures that move. He relied on air flow to bring his sculptures to life. Looking at the artwork by Calder, identify what part of the sculpture you think is stationary (not moving) and what part of the sculpture is kinetic (depending on movement for its effect).
2. This sculpture is a modern work of art created in 1942. Thinking about sculpture you have seen before, what are some major differences between those and this work of art by Calder?
3. Mass, one of the elements of design, refers to a three-dimensional shape or the volume of an object. How does Calder's sculpture reveal mass?

### Let's Make Some Art!

Alexander Calder was an artist known for being resourceful with his materials. Having lived through the Great Depression, when times were hard and resources were limited, he always found an innovative way to make use of the materials around him. Let's see what you can find around the house to incorporate into your work of art.

### Gather These Art Materials

- Empty tin can
- Wire
- Wire cutters or sturdy scissors
- Needle-nose pliers
- Dry rice or beans to weigh down the can
- Scissors
- Black acrylic paint
- Medium-sized paintbrush
- Small scraps of paper and other reused materials that you would like to hang

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## Step-by-Step Artist Instructions

1. Set up your workspace.
2. Gather supplies.
3. Paint can black.
4. Cut two long pieces of wire.
5. Using your needle-nose pliers, make a loop at one end of each wire.
6. Twist the opposite end of the wire into a circle and place inside of the painted can. Repeat this step with the second wire. Now, pour the dry rice or beans into the can, weighing it down and holding the wires in place.
7. Shape the wires into your desired form.
8. Cut two more pieces of wire about six inches long.
9. Using needle nose pliers and the two shorter pieces of wire, create three loops: one in the middle to hang from and one on each end so that you can hang your scraps.
10. Hook the center loop onto the end of the larger wires in the can.
11. Take the scraps you have collected and poke holes into the top center so they can hang.
12. Cut a small piece of wire (about one inch long) for each scrap you want to use.
13. Thread it through the hole you created and use needle-nose pliers to create a loop.
14. Hook these loops to the ends of your short wires. Keep in mind weight and balance.
15. Check to make sure that everything is balancing properly and make necessary adjustments.

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