

Why Has Counterfeit Calder Sculpture Sold 75 Times At Auction?

by Joseph K. Levene & Robert Grunder

Art fraud affects art collectors at all levels, from buyers who spend a few thousand dollars to art collectors and investors who buy multi-million dollar art. Unfortunately, many art buyers find out the truth long after they were duped by a dishonest seller, and rarely receive a refund. To con artists, counterfeit art is an appealing business with a low cost of goods. The New York Times reporter Patricia Cohen, stated "between 1996 and 2008, Knoedler earned approximately \$60 million on fraudulent artworks and cleared \$40 million in profits".

Misattributed to Alexander Calder



More Aliases Than Al Capone

L'Éléphant Noir | Sun, Moon & Stars | Celestial Elephant | Black Elephant | Pink Elephant

Earlier this year, the Calder Foundation documented a series of pink and black sculptures, lithographs and textiles, all of which violate the artist's intellectual property rights, often fraudulently misattributed to Alexander Calder.

One of the misappropriated works documented by the Calder Foundation is a small metal sculpture that has sold at public auction over 75 times since 2004, at auction houses including Wright, Phillips, Drouot, Bloomsbury, Galerie Fischer, Van Ham.

Since 2004, this work has been misattributed well over 40 times as a sculpture by Alexander Calder and more than 35 times as a sculpture created after Alexander Calder.

Documented by Van Ham as Alexander Calder Pink Elephant
Sold \$3,616, 12/3/09



Alexander Calder
Title Pink elephant (Sun, moon, stars)
Description 1972/2002. Bronze, farbig gefasst. 31 x 57 x 8cm. Ex. HC 8. Monogrammiert auf der Außenseite des hinteren rechten Beines: CA(lig.). Auf der Innenseite des hinteren rechten Beines Gießerstempel ARA (Stierkopf).
Medium painted bronze
Year of Work 1972
Printing/Casting 2002
Size Height 12.2 in.; Width 22.4 in.; Depth 3.1 in. / Height 31 cm.; Width 57 cm.; Depth 8 cm.
Edition HC
Misc. Signed, Stamped
Sale of Van Ham Kunstauktionen: Thursday, December 03, 2009 [Lot 00195] Moderne und Zeitgenössische Kunst - A284
Estimate 2,200 - 2,500 EUR (3,315 - 3,767 USD)
Sold For 2,400 EUR (3,616 USD) HAMMER [Currency Converter](#)

Documented by Van Ham as Alexander Calder Pink Elephant, sold 12/3/09



Documented by Wright as Alexander Calder
L'Éléphant Noir, sold \$5,000, 10/12/10

Alexander Calder	
Title	L'éléphant noir
Description	Alexander Calder L' Éléphant Noir ARA Kunst USA, 1973/2002 enameled brass
Medium	enameled brass
Year of Work	1973
Printing/Casting	2002
Edition	ed.999
Found./Pub.	ARA Kunst ed.; George Gordon & Calder Estate, pubs
Misc.	Signed
Sale of	Wright: Tuesday, October 12, 2010 [Lot 00353] Modern Design
Estimate	3,000 - 5,000 USD
Sold For	5,000 USD PREMIUM Currency Converter

Documented by Wright as Alexander Calder L'Éléphant Noir, sold \$5,000, 10/12/10

Thus far in 2013, counterfeit Alexander Calder sculptures have been sold more than seven times by auction houses online and off, including: artnet, Chantilly Encheres, Artprecium, LiveAuctioneers, Rome & Associates and Fraise & Jabot. Thousands of dollars have been spent by innocent buyers due to deceptive selling practices; due dilligence by these firms would have revealed every one of the sculptures sold by these firms was not created by Alexander Calder nor ever authorized by the estate of Alexander Calder.

3 misattributed Alexander Calder Sculptures sold @LiveAuctioneers in June

Documented by Fraise & Jabon as After Alexander Calder Black Elephant, 4/11/13



Documented as After Alexander Calder Black Elephant by Fraise & Jabon, 4/11/13

You could say the small counterfeit sculpture misattributed to Alexander Calder has more aliases than Al Capone, and has been documented with a number of Titles:

- Elephant Noir
- Sun, Moon & Stars
- Celestial Elephant
- Black Elephant
- Pink Elephant

This small sculpture not created by Alexander Calder once fetched \$24,857 even though not conceived, designed, nor painted by Alexander Calder nor authorized by anyone from the Calder family or the estate of Alexander Calder.

Documented by Massol as Alexander Calder L'Éléphant Noir, sold \$24,857, 8/14/05

**Standing mobile NOT designed by
Alexander Calder or authorized by Artist's estate**



*As works of art, these unfortunate objects are of no interest
and have no historical place in Calder's life and work.*

Google search any one of the erroneous titles and/or or images shown in this article, and you will see counterfeit sculptures attributed to Alexander Calder continue to be sold by unscrupulous art sellers.

Many auction sellers further the deception by accompanying the misattributed Calder sculpture with a fraudulent "certificate of authenticity" also known as a "COA", allegedly written by George Gordon which also indicates that the sculpture was approved by the estate of the Alexander Calder which was never granted. The mobile elements were loosely based upon and have been misappropriated from images that Calder made related to his projects for Braniff Airlines.

As Joseph K. Levene stated in Fine Art or eBay Fake Art? "certificate of authenticity"(COA) fraud is rampant. No matter how well written, a fake COA will always remain fake". The bottom-line is that no COA can transform a counterfeit work of art into an authentic work of art, and the fraudulent certificate by George Gordon is no different. As the Calder Foundation states "As works of art, these unfortunate objects are of no interest and have no historical place in Calder's life and work".


However, one thing you will never see on these fakes is a Calder Application Number which is necessary to demonstrate that a work by Calder is genuine. Curiously, many of the auction houses that have offered this small misattributed sculpture as well as the counterfeit textiles and lithographs also have sold authentic Calder's that do have Calder application numbers.

On May 1, 2013, a black elephant sculpture fetched \$4,715 on artnet with a certificate of authenticity; estimated \$4,000–\$5,000, the counterfeit Calder attracted five bids.

artnet auctions

After Alexander Calder LOT ID: 81966
(American, 1898–1976)
L'Elephant Noir (Black Elephant), 1973

Mixed Media Sculpture Edition, Painted Bronze Stable
12.5 x 12.5 x 18.5 in. **cm.**
Stamped, stamp number on bottom of stabile.
Accompanied by publisher's certificate
Edition 790/999
Foundry/Publisher Georges Gordon Calder Airplane
Projects Inc., Cold Spring, NY and ARA-Kunst, Germany



Estimate US\$4,000–5,000

Current Bid US\$3,750 **C** Reserve met

Documented by artnet as After Alexander Calder, sold \$4,715 with 5 bids

Certificate of Authenticity "Black Elephant"



As originator of the Calder Airplane Project "Flying Colours" and holder of copyrights for all the original Calder Artworks, made by him for airplane models and the full size jets the artist painted in the 1970's, I hereby certify the authenticity of this multiple after Calder.

As collaborator and friend of Alexander Calder during the period 1972 until his death in 1976, I have zealously sought to reflect his artistic approach in every work of the Calder Airplane Project.

The work you have purchased is cast in bronze and produced by hand in a limited edition of 999 numbered copies, bearing the famous monogram of Alexander Calder.

George Gordon
Calder Airplane Projects, Inc.
Cold Spring, NY
USA

COA cannot transform counterfeit into authentic art

Summary of issues regarding counterfeit sculpture:

- Offered 2 colors, Pink & Black, neither authorized by Alexander Calder or Estate
- Offered for sale with a range of different titles
- The monograph signature "CA" that appears on sculpture is a forgery.
- There is no authorized edition of 999.
- Many purported sculptures sold repeatedly, each with same edition number.
- The certificate of authenticity (COA) from George Gordon is counterfeit, pure fiction!
- Sometimes documented with 1973-2002 date, which is impossible since Alexander Calder passed away in 1976.
- Other times, erroneously documented as sculpture created in 1972 or 1973.

Everything about this misattributed sculpture allegedly created in an edition of 999 is fiction, or to put it in art terms, a blatant counterfeit, yet numerous galleries, brick and mortar auction houses and online auctions continue to sell it.

If you purchased one of these pink or black elephant forgeries, and thought it was an authentic Alexander Calder sculpture, here's the bad news; this purported work is counterfeit, not created by Alexander Calder or authorized by the Calder estate, and will never have any value or considered as a collectible work of art. To sum it up in one word, it is "fake".