

## GAGOSIAN

# BlackBook

### 2022 Must See: Alexander Calder's 'Flying Dragon' in Paris' Place Vendôme

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When Alexander Calder's *Flying Dragon* sculpture was installed at Paris' Place Vendôme this past October, we unfortunately thought it best to not recommend anyone getting on an airplane to anywhere in Europe, with word that a new coronavirus variant – Omicron, of course – was on the rise in South Africa, and surely headed our way. Things are still a bit tricky in terms of traveling – but Gagolian, who are responsible for the exhibit, have thoughtfully extended the installation to March 20, allowing for the hopeful possibility of a late winter's “art visit” to the French capital.

It coincides with the opening of a new Gagolian gallery at 9 rue de Castiglione (also on the Vendôme), which happens to be showing the pithily titled exhibition *Calder: 1975 and “Flying Dragon”*. It will feature the original maquette, plus fascinating archive images of the sculpture in the midst of production, and several smaller Calder sculptures from that time – possibly hoping to emphasize the sheer monumentality of *Flying Dragon*.

The gallery has also released a new video, with Gagosian Director Serena Cattaneo Adorno illuminating on both the immensity of the work – nine meters tall, seventeen meters long, and six meters wide – and also its ability to seemingly transfigure itself as the observer’s perspective shifts.

“As a viewer,” she explains, “what is of great interest is that it really transforms itself as you’re walking around it. Because of its scale and its proportions, you can’t really grasp until you are walking around it that there is a different shape that’s formed every time you look at it.”

That it is indeed been placed into the Place Vendôme goes beyond mere spectacle. The 18th Century architectural masterpiece by Jules Hardouin-Mansart also has a distinctly contemplative quality about it, inspiring long bouts of meditation on its striking dimensions. And with *Flying Dragon* set so closely against The Vendôme Column, there is not only an extraordinary visual contrast, but also an ideological one – with Calder’s work a tribute to nature, and the column a monument to war.

Amazingly, Calder was already 77 years old when the sculpture was completed (he died a year later), merely confirming his vitality as an artist to the very end. To be sure his *Jerusalem Stabile* was completed and installed in that city in 1976; and *L’Araignée rouge*, a commission for the Paris business district La Défense, was completed and installed in that same year. But despite his arguable over-cooptation by the contemporary pop culture world, the placement of his *Flying Dragon* in the Vendôme is a decisively powerful reminder, nearly five decades after his passing, of the continuing and significant relevance of his work in its own right.

N.B. Should you be making Paris plans, we highly recommend booking into the nearby Madame Rêve hotel, a new 82-room boutique stunner located in the former Louvre post office building.

