Standing at twelve feet, nine inches high, Alexander Calder’s *Five Rudders* (1964) is composed of a large tripod base, painted bright red, that balances a sequence of black sheet metal elements at its apex using a series of steel rods. Incorporating both a *stabile*, an abstract construction that is completely stationary, and a *mobile*, a sculptural work in which motion is a defining property, *Five Rudders* is a hybrid form known as a *standing mobile*, or a *stabile-mobile*. The bolted sheets of steel making up the base foreshadow the monumentality of some of the artist’s large-scale stabiles produced later in the decade, while the steel rods function as lever arms that support the kinetic element above. Both the name of the sculpture and the industrial materials employed in its fabrication suggest a direct link to the devices used to steer ships and aircrafts, yet the sculpture also evokes a range of biomorphic imagery, including flower petals and butterfly wings that belie the weighty character of its materials.

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1. Throughout his career Calder limited his palette to the primary colors, black, and white. While this may reflect a commitment to the orthodoxy of Neoplasticism (it was, after all, in Piet Mondrian’s studio in 1930 that he was first inspired to turn to abstraction and eventually to invent his mobiles), Calder frequently discussed his choice of color as a means of achieving greater contrast: “I have chiefly limited myself to the use of black and white as being the most disparate colors. Red is the color most opposed to both of these – and then, finally the other primaries. The secondary colors and intermediate shades serve only to confuse and muddle the distinctness and clarity.” Alexander Calder, “What Abstract Art Means to Me,” *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 18, no. 3 (Spring 1951): 8.

2. First developed in the mid-1930s, Calder refined the standing mobile in the 1940s, creating much larger variations throughout the 1950s and the early 1960s. His largest standing mobile, *La Spirale* (1958), is installed on the grounds of the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

3. Joan Marter, a leading scholar on Calder’s work, connects the bolting technique used to join the steel forms and the paddle-like shapes directly to Calder’s fascination with ships and shipbuilding. See Joan Marter, “Five Rudders, 1964,” in Joseph D. Kettner et al., *A Gallery of Modern Art at Washington University in St. Louis* (St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art, 1994), 164. Calder’s early works from the 1930s have a strong surrealist vein running through them and, even in this much later piece, the
Functioning like a weather vane, the vertically oriented black “rudders” can be placed in motion by a slight touch of the hand, or by atmospheric forces such as the wind. Because the kinetic sequences of the mobile depend on equilibrium and cannot be fixed or programmed, the movement of the rudders through space is intermittent and irregular rather than mechanically continuous or predictable. The inherent tension between stasis and motion in Calder’s sculptures was eloquently described by Jean-Paul Sartre and speaks to the effect of *Five Rudders*: “Calder establishes a general destiny of motion for each mobile, then he leaves it on its own. It is the time of day, the sun, the heat, the wind which calls each individual dance. Thus the objects always inhabit a halfway station between the servility of a statue and the independence of nature.” It is important to note that, unlike his lighter, hanging mobiles, which exhibit a playful dynamism and often include an aural element, the scale and considerable weight of *Five Rudders* produce a more limited range of motion. It is only during periods of severe weather that the speed and velocity of the separate elements become highly erratic and the rudders freely collide.

Created in 1964, *Five Rudders* in many ways epitomizes Calder’s sculptural production at this late moment in his career. Since the 1950s, the artist had devoted his greatest efforts to large-scale sculpture. Rather than making mobiles by hand, he dramatically increased the scale of his works, and, as is the case with *Five Rudders*, he

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4 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialist on Mobilist,” *ArtNews* XLVI, no. 10 (December 1947): 22. This article was originally published on the occasion of Calder’s exhibition at the Galerie Louis Carré in Paris in 1946.  
5 Mrs. Mark C. Steinberg purchased *Five Rudders* from the artist specifically for the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, known at the time as the Washington University Gallery of Art.  
6 In 1960, Calder discussed the scale of his work and his many commissions, stating, “There’s been an agrandissement in my work. It’s true I’ve more or less retired from the smaller mobiles. I regard them as sort of fiddling. The engineering on the big objects is important…. Lots of times companies or government agencies have a big vacuum in their projects that they feel ought to be filled—that’s where I come in.” Alexander Calder, in Geoffrey T. Hellman, “Onward and Upward with the Arts: Calder Revisited,” *New Yorker* 36 (October 22, 1960): 169, and reproduced in Marla Prather, *Alexander Calder: 1898–1976* (Washington: National Gallery of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 279.
entered into collaborations with foundries in France and the US to aid in the production of his sculptures, which were regularly commissioned as monumental public works. At the same time, an international kinetic art revival was underway, and Calder was positioned, along with Marcel Duchamp, Vladimir Tatlin, Naum Gabo, and László Moholy-Nagy, as one of its major progenitors.

From the mid-1950s to roughly the end of the following decade, numerous artists sought a more experiential approach to sculpture and began exploring the subtleties in the phenomenon of speed and time as an experience generated between work and spectator. Introducing actual motion into sculpture was one way to achieve an art reflective of the viewer’s shifting sensory and perceptual point of view. While Calder was frequently singled out in this period as one of the forefathers of the postwar craze for kinetic art, he was no longer considered an innovator in the field. American kinetic artist and critic George Rickey put it bluntly in 1965: “[Calder] put the word ‘mobile’ into the language. Yet once he had hit on his image, thirty years ago, he developed it little…. Calder has not clarified the form of kinetic art. It has been left to others to survey the scope of Calder’s

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7 According to Joan Marter, when working with fabricators, Calder would oversee the execution of his large works, approving all enlargements of his original maquettes and supervising the bolting and buttressing. See Joan Marter, *Alexander Calder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 229. Calder also severely restricted the number of works created from any one maquette. In an unpublished letter dated September 18, 1964, to William N. Eisendrath, Jr., then curator of the collections at Washington University, Calder assured Eisendrath that *Five Rudders* was the only larger version in existence, and that he would “see to it that it remains so. As a matter of fact the only time I have made 2 of any model is when I first made a moderate sized enlargement – and then wanted to increase that size.”

8 The postwar reception of kinetic art is marked by a split history, stemming from its scientific attitude on the one hand and its reception as merely playful entertainment on the other. For more on this, see Pamela Lee, *Chronophonia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 93–105; and Guy Brett, *Forcefields: Phases of the Kinetic* (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2000). It is important to note that there was no single leader, manifesto, or aesthetic establishing a set program for postwar kinetic art. The movement was malleable enough to include a diversity of investigations into both perceived and actual motion. While Calder experimented with mechanical energy in the 1930s, for the most part he represented those interested in the movement of an object through natural forms of energy.

9 It is generally accepted that the 1920s through the 1930s was the most significant period in Calder’s development of a personal idiom. See Marter, *Alexander Calder*, 98.
idiom and to establish his place as progenitor by their development from his postulates. As artistic production changed dramatically in the postwar period—Pop art and minimal art superseded Abstract Expressionism as the dominant artistic movement in the US, and assemblage and kinetic art flourished internationally—Calder continued with his signature style.

It was, in part, because of his predictable production that Calder received numerous commissions for public works, both in the United States and abroad, throughout the last two decades of his life. During the postwar building boom of the 1950s and 1960s, public art was in high demand, and Calder’s stabiles and stabile-mobiles evinced a certain universal appeal—abstract yet retaining a strong resonance with natural forms; resolutely modern yet lighthearted—that rarely generated any significant public dissent. His works quickly became not only popular urban landmarks, but also status symbols, as noted by Calder scholar Joan Marter, indicating by their presence in cities, corporate headquarters, sculpture gardens, and college campuses the commitment of their patrons to the public arts. Calder’s own statements about his work in the postwar period compounded the notion that his sculptures were devoid of criticality.

11 From the mid-1950s until his death in 1976, Calder devoted his greatest efforts to large-scale sculpture, making over three hundred monumental works, which were fabricated at an ironworks and designed for the outdoors. See Martha Prather, “1953–1976,” in Alexander Calder: 1898–1976, 279. The vast majority of Calder’s monumental works were stabiles, which could withstand the elements more readily than kinetic works.
12 Marter notes that Calder was also considered a safe choice for public works during the McCarthy era. Marter, Alexander Calder, 204.
13 Ibid., 232. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, for example, Calder’s monumental stabile La Grand Vitesse (1967) became a civic symbol, acting as the logo on official stationery and city garbage trucks.
or historical consciousness; according to him, he merely wanted to “make things that are fun to look at, that have no propaganda value whatsoever.”

Miwon Kwon’s identification of three distinct paradigms within the postwar history of the public art movement in the United States—“art-in-public-places,” “art-as-public-spaces,” and “art-in-the-public-interest”—is particularly helpful in situating Calder’s work within the larger sociohistorical context of the 1960s. During the initial phase of the revival of public sculpture in the ‘60s, public art was dominated by the “art-in-public-places” paradigm: modernist abstract sculptures by internationally established male artists—Isamu Noguchi, Henry Moore, and Calder—that were basically enlarged replicas of works normally found in museums and galleries. What distinguished them as “public,” other than size and scale, was the fact that they were placed outdoors, often removed from plinths and displayed directly on the ground, where access was unrestricted—parks, university campuses, civic centers, plazas, airports. In most cases, Calder produced autonomous works of art whose relationship to a given site was largely incidental; the particular qualities of the site were taken into account only insofar as they affected the aesthetic quality of the artwork as installed.

While the goals of the public art movement initially included the edification of the public and the beautification of the urban environment, by the mid-1970s many critics felt that neither goal was being met. Rather than making a genuine gesture towards public engagement, the artworks sited in public places were understood as functioning more like

15 See Miwon Kwon, One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 60.
16 Ibid., 63. Calder selected the original location for Five Rudders on Forsyth Boulevard, in front of the Museum’s home in Steinberg Hall, while on a trip to St. Louis in 1964.
advertisements for individual artists. Criteria for public art sponsorship and funding subsequently evolved to promote an integrationist approach in which the specificities of a given site were considered integral to the outcome of a work. Public art would no longer merely consist of an autonomous sculpture, but would necessarily engage in a meaningful dialogue with the surrounding architecture or landscape.\footnote{For more on the history of public art in the late 1970s and after, see Kwon, One Place After Another, 66–99; and Harriet F. Seine, Contemporary Public Sculpture: Tradition, Transformation, and Controversy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).}

Calder’s large-scale works made an undeniable, if in hindsight conflicted, contribution to the resurgence of public art in both the United States and Europe during the postwar years. Larger than human scale but not monumental, \textit{Five Rudders} has, since its original installation in 1964 outside of Steinberg Hall, become a readily identifiable symbol of the Museum. In its present location on the Kemper Art Museum’s sculpture plaza, its biomorphic imagery and dynamic forms add life to the rational elegance of the surrounding architecture. \textit{Five Rudders} stands as a prominent example of Calder’s late experiments with wind-driven mobiles and ambitious, large-scale constructions, while also serving as an important indicator of the changing conceptualization of public art in the highly volatile moment of the 1960s.