

NY CULTURE
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In the Realms of Flight and Fantasy

By LANCE ESPLUND



Courtesy L&M Arts, New York

L&M Arts' exhibition 'Tanguy Calder: Between Surrealism and Abstraction' features work by Yves Tanguy and Alexander Calder.

Tanguy Calder: Between Surrealism and Abstraction

L&M Arts

45 E. 78th St., (212) 861-0020

Through July 9

In recent years we've seen a resurgence of shows in which artists are paired. MoMA's "Matisse Picasso" and its "Pioneering Modern Painting: Cézanne and Pissarro 1865-1885" immediately come to mind. "Matisse Picasso," which

focused our attention on the simplest of connections, did no favors for either artist. And "Cézanne and Pissarro" revealed mainly that Cézanne was the greater and more innovative painter. But just because those blockbusters were badly handled does not mean artistic couplings cannot or should not be attempted. Much can be gained through the right juxtapositions, as this often gorgeous though sometimes one-dimensional exhibition proves.

L&M's museum-quality show, organized by Susan Davidson, brings together 46 works from 1934 to 1956. In some ways the connections between the biomorphic forms of the American abstract artist Alexander Calder (1898-1976) and those of the French Surrealist painter Yves Tanguy (1900-55), who immigrated to America in 1946, are both natural and obvious.

Tanguy was inspired by the Metaphysical and Surrealist works of de Chirico; Calder's roots are in Surrealism. And the two artists were friends and Connecticut neighbors. Tanguy is one of the most accomplished of Surrealist painters. His desolate landscapes, sometimes apocalyptic in feeling, are inhabited by clear, cool, silvery forms. They evoke materials that combine qualities of wood, flesh, shell, stone, flame, cloth, teeth, cloud, smoke and bone. Invoking Bosch and El Greco, Tanguy's pictures are bizarre and otherworldly. But they remain representational. They never take the leap into abstraction—the world inhabited by Calder.

This winning exhibition, with its masterpieces set off against white and gray walls, is in turns surprising and elegant. And each artist opens up the work of the other. But Calder's abstractions—far from earthbound—do more favors for Tanguy than Tanguy's forms, forever grounded in his dreamlike settings, do for Calder. In Tanguy, we are set free in a frightening and fantastical world. In Calder, we leave this world behind and take flight.