Kamen’s installation consists of 83 floor. Each flower has a precise number of petals arranged on the stem. The individual flowers differ in complexity and height, which adds texture to the overall field. There is also a deep significance: the number of petals relates to an element’s orbital pattern, while the number of stems is based on its electrons. The serpentine design of the garden pulls visitors in and encourages close inspection. From the center of the spiral, the flowers grow larger and more complex. Examples of the old-fashioned periodic chart help viewers match flowers with their corresponding elements. Alexander’s synthesizer soundscape captures the frequencies of each element in a dreamy creating large installations, she is known for her collaborations.

In an effort to elucidate the artistic process and the collaborations that were central to the installation’s success, this presentation of Kamen’s garden included a video interview with the artist in her studio, an example of a Mylar flower that could be touched, and Dearie’s hand-drawn floor plan. Additional drawings appear in the exhibition catalogue. Five wall-mounted sculptures representing the original elements—earth, fire, water, air, and cosmos—were exhibited in an adjacent gallery. Made of Mylar, the elements appeared as geometric forms unwrapped. Sprouting from the wall, these first elements formed an interesting contrast to the garden growing on the gallery floor.

A Balancing Act

“Alexander Calder: A Balancing Act”

Seattle Art Museum

“Alexander Calder: A Balancing Act,” a selection of sculptures, prints, and maquettes chosen by Seattle Art Museum curator Michael Darling from the collection of Jon and Mary Shirley, followed the precedent of 2005’s “The Surreal Calder” at the Menil Collection by including black and white photographs of the artist by Herbert Matter. In Seattle, the photographs fleshed out a small survey that contained only one masterpiece, Bougainvillier (1947, which the Shirleys also lent to Houston). Installed on a protective white-painted platform, however, its power as a stable—as Miro dubbed Calder’s freestanding works with suspended elements—was somewhat diminished.

Surprisingly, the unexpected “felicity” (to use Clement Greenberg’s term for Calder) of the smaller tabletop stabiles and maquettes, along with silver, gold, and brass wire jewelry, stood out best in this show. Necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rings, and bracelets revealed the inner formal core of Calder’s oeuvre—line. Sinuous, organic, comical, and occasionally sinister, the jewelry requires the human body for its ignition (as in Robert Motherwell’s legendary portrait of ICA curator Janet Kardon wearing one of the pins). Other small works, including Cow (1930), Hen (1943), and Untitled (1947), pointed up the playful intimacy of Calder’s hands-on approach compared to the later, monumental works.

Among the mobiles, Dispersed Objects with Brass Gong (1948), Gamma (1947) with its 35 separate elements, and Untitled (prop for the ballet “Métaboles”) (1969) expressed the essential aspects of Calder’s mid-century reputation as a pioneering Modernist sculptor: a sensitivity to kinetic movement that side-steps Constructivist mechanics; a nature-based imagery of leaves and trees, reductive allusions akin to late-period Matisse; and a vocabulary of forms originating in the same abstract wing of Surrealism that appealed to the Abstract Expressionists.