



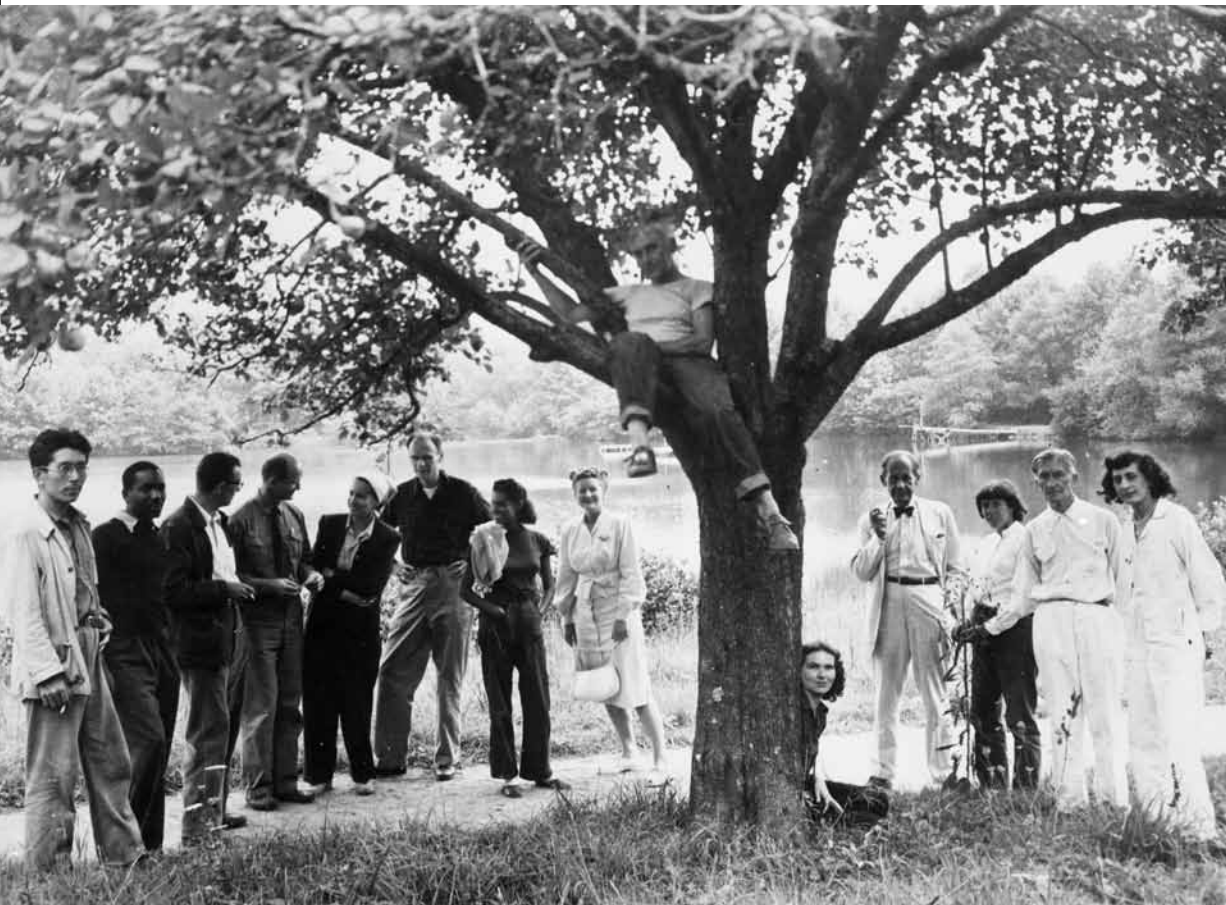
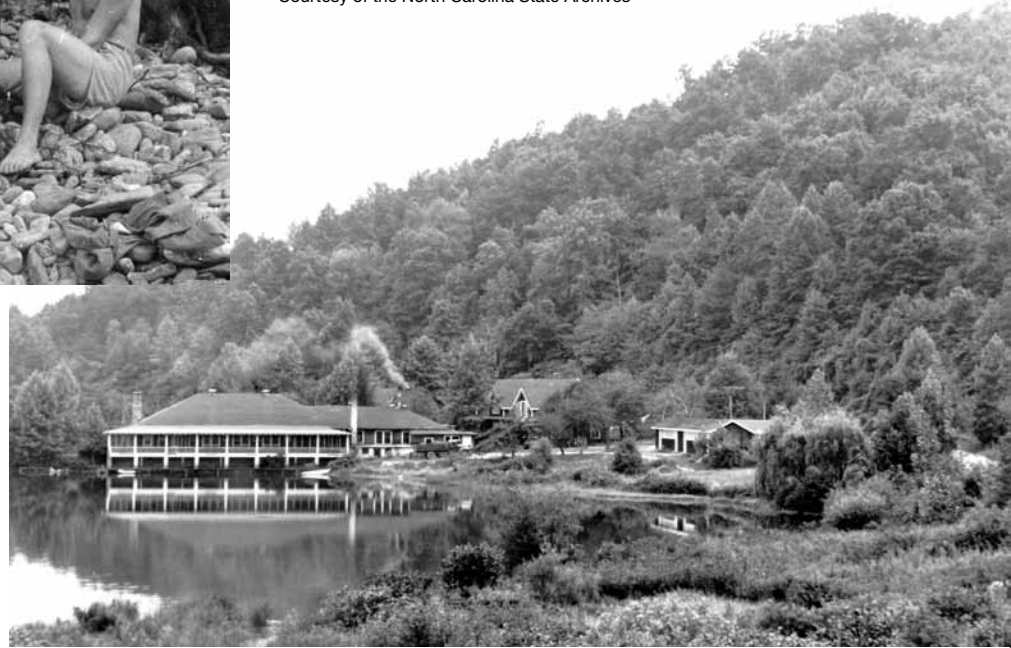
top to bottom
 BMC students bathing
 (photo by Masato Nakagawa)

BMC Lake Eden Dining Room/Kitchen Building,
 from the Studies Building

Summer Art institute faculty, 1946, from left to right
 Leo Amino, Jacob Lawrence, Leo Lionni,
 Ted Dreier, Bobbie Dreier, Beaumont Newhall,
 Gwendolyn Lawrence, Ise Gropius, Jean Varda
 (in tree), Nancy Newhall, Walter Gropius,
 Molly Gregory, Josef Albers, Anni Albers

right
 The Studies Building on Lake Eden

Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives



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 & Art Center
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 Thomas Zung



**BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE
AND ITS LEGACY**

CO-CURATED BY ROBERT S. MATTISON AND LORETTA HOWARD

SEPTEMBER 15 TO OCTOBER 29, 2011

525 West 26th Street
New York NY 10001
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LORETTA HOWARD
GALLERY



BY ROBERT S. MATTISON

Between 1933 and 1957, tiny Black Mountain College in the countryside of North Carolina was one of the most important institutions in the western world to nurture modern art. This exhibition explores the advanced art made at the college and suggests legacies of the Black Mountain experience. Founded by John Andrew Rice, Black Mountain College was conceived as an experimental institution run by the faculty with input from the students. While the institution taught languages, literature, mathematics, and science, the arts were a central part of the curriculum, especially since Rice in 1933 on advice from Philip Johnson asked Josef Albers to come from the Bauhaus in Germany to develop the arts curricula. In 1940 following Rice's stormy resignation, Albers became the Rector of the college and increased its arts orientation. One of Albers' most important innovations was the founding of a visiting artists' program, particularly during the summer sessions, which invited cutting-edge artists in a wide range of disciplines to mentor the college's students. To Albers' credit, he invited such figures as John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, Willem de Kooning, and Robert Motherwell, individuals whose aesthetics differed radically from his own. When Albers left the college in another stormy resignation in 1948-49, poet Charles Olson reaffirmed both the strength of the regular arts program and the high caliber summer invitees. Despite being plagued by power struggles among the full-time faculty and constant financial crises, the arts flourished.

The record of "firsts" by artists during their short stays at Black Mountain is remarkable by any standard. They include Cage's *Theater Piece #1*, the first multi-media "Happening," the founding of Cunningham's dance company, the construction of Fuller's first Geodesic Dome, Rauschenberg's first photographs, the first works that Cy Twombly accepted as mature, Kenneth Snelson's invention of "floating compression" sculptures, and Aaron Siskind's first use of fragmentary signage in his photographs. These breakthroughs and many others are briefly chronicled in the following pages. The question of why Black Mountain became a crucible for advanced art is important for our own age during which we are experiencing decreased institutional funding for the arts; we are rethinking arts education; and the role of artists in late modern society is being questioned.

Some observations may be valuable. Black Mountain stands out for freedom of inquiry. Artists were invited without institutional restrictions, and the interactions with the students were determined almost wholly by the artists themselves. Freed briefly from financial strains, the artists were provided with food, lodging, and a small stipend allowing them to focus on new work. The bucolic setting changed traditional habits of thinking. Community was essential to the college. The following pages are ordered by individual artist, but the text entirely concerns connections. Black Mountain's heritage is defined by the linkages between individuals. It concerns such

contacts as Cage, Cunningham, and Fuller having breakfast each morning and debating their contrasting ideas of indeterminacy and a structured universe. The discoveries made at Black Mountain were often based on cross-fertilization. Multidisciplinary approaches, so prized today, that combined the visual arts with music, literature, and theater were essential to the college. Cage's *Theater Piece #1* epitomizes the Black Mountain sensibility. The campus was an open laboratory. Classroom discussions and debates continued long beyond classes, into the dining room, through the night, and into the next day. Faculty, families, visitors, and students gathered for classic films and dances every weekend. Although this catalog provides designations of "faculty" and "student," the divisions were less clear and community was emphasized. A hand-drawn diagram by a Black Mountain student shows the entire creative community, faculty and students, packed into adjoining studios connected by a long corridor. Finally, Black Mountain provided an audience sympathetic to experimentation and removed from the critical apparatus that the artists often faced in the city.

This exhibition explores some of the critical discoveries made at Black Mountain and demonstrates legacies in terms of particular works. But the legacy of Black Mountain is far broader. It extends to artist collectives, residency programs, art communities, and university curricula. Black Mountain College still has a great deal to teach us.

left
Josef Albers, art class, Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives

Anni Albers

(faculty, 1933-1949)

"To Black Mountain College. During the start and rise of the Hitler period, we received a letter at Berlin which said, 'Will you consider coming to Black Mountain College? It's a pioneering adventure.' And when we came to that point we both said, 'That's our place.' And it turned out to be a very interesting place because it gave us a freedom to build up our own work. Josef built up his whole teaching there and his whole color work which has nothing to do with anything that we had left behind in Europe. I built up a weaving workshop..." (Oral History Interview with Anni Albers, 1968 July 5, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution).

Anni Albers founded the weaving program at BMC and made it a central part of the curriculum. She incorporated a wide variety of materials including hemp and metal fibers into her textiles. Particularly important to her development were trips to Mexico and Central America which she began in 1935. In her weaving, she merged interpretations of Mexican, Mayan, and Aztec designs with the abstract geometric tradition of modernism. In her teaching, Albers used these earlier sources to open avenues of imagination. She noted, "But I tried to put my students at the point of zero. I tried to have them imagine, let's say, that they are in the desert in Peru, no clothing, no nothing, no pottery even at that time (it has now been proven that archaeologically textile have come before pottery), and to imagine themselves at the beach with nothing. And what do you do?"

Josef Albers

(faculty, 1933-1949, Director of Art Program, Rector 1940-49)

"But you see, I am more interested to stimulate the creative process. In my basic courses I have always tried to develop discovery and invention which, in my opinion, are the criteria of creativeness. I have tried to make people aware and ready to recognize—that's again observation, the word I used before, and articulation what is then the reaction to it. The creative process as such I have tried to lead back to the most basic attitude, and that is by presenting, and there I feel very instrumental, by presenting to my students material as such without telling them what to do..." (Oral History Interview with Josef Albers, 1968 June 22-July 5, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

While the methodology of Albers' classes was viewed as too rigid by a number of students, his projects based on the inherent character of a wide variety of materials including paper, cardboard, glass, sheet metal, wire,

wood, dirt, and leaves were inspirational to many other students. Albers called these projects *Werklehre* after the term he had used at the Bauhaus. In context of the tight finances at BMC, he often sent students to scavenge for such objects. His materials assignments influenced such artists as Ruth Asawa, Ray Johnson, Robert Rauschenberg, Dorothea Rockburne, Kenneth Snelson, and Cy Twombly.

Albers' own works were experimental during his BMC period. They were widely varied in their range of form and color; and explored such media as painting, drawing, graphics, and glasswork. In addition, Albers established the summer program for visiting artists in 1944, and between that date and 1949 he was notable for inviting such artists as Willem de Kooning, Jacob Lawrence, and Robert Motherwell as well as John Cage and Merce Cunningham, figures whose artistic viewpoints were distinctly different from his own. Through these appointments, he made BMC one of the foremost teaching institutions for experimental art in America.

Ruth Asawa

(student and faculty, 1948-1955)

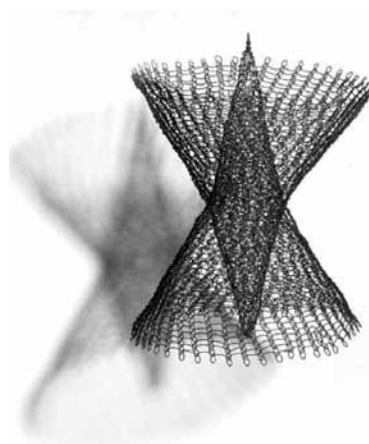
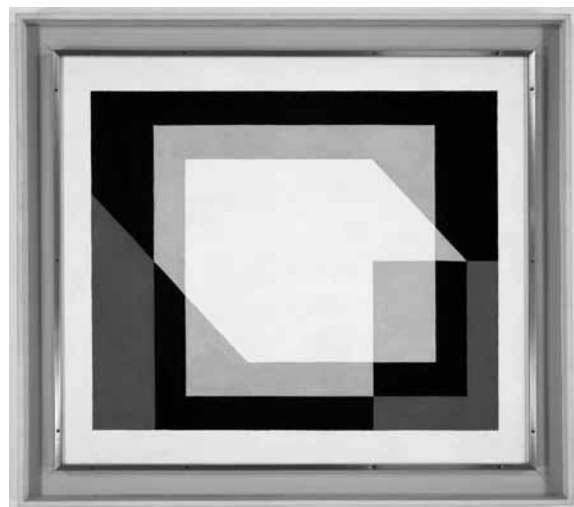
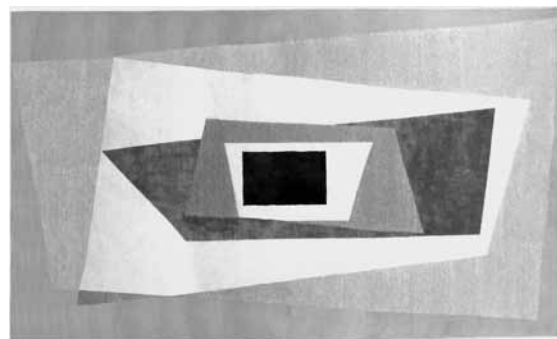
Asawa had been released recently from an internment camp for Americans of Japanese descent when she travelled to Mexico and there during the summer of 1947 met Josef and Anni Albers. In Mexico, Asawa joined a Quaker village outside of Mexico City and observing Mexican woven baskets taught herself to knit with wire. Albers convinced her to come to BMC, and she remembers, "Well, I think that Black Mountain gave you the right to do anything you wanted to do. And then you put a label on it afterwards." (Oral History Interview with Ruth Asawa and Albert Lanier, 2002 June 21-July 5, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution) At BMC, Asawa was impressed by Albers' discussions of transparency and suspension of forms. In 1948 she and her husband-to-be Lanier, who was studying architecture, formed a close friendship with Buckminster Fuller whose tension-compression structures like the geodesic dome relate to Asawa's signature sculptures. During the same year, Richard Lippold who had already developed translucent wire sculptures was a visiting artist.

top: **Anni Albers, *Untitled Tapestry***, based on 1933 design, hand knotted wool, hand twisted wool and silk 72 x 116 inches

Josef Albers, *Composure*, 1937
oil on masonite, 31½ inches x 36½ inches
Courtesy Gering & Lopez Gallery, NY

Ruth Asawa, *Untitled*, c.1950
looped brass and iron wire, 13 x 11 x 11 inches

John Cage, *Plexigrams I*, 1969
silkscreen on 8 plexiglass panels with wood base
14 x 24 x 14½ inches



Ilya Bolotowsky (faculty 1946-48)

Bolotowsky came to BMC in 1946 as Albers' sabbatical replacement. Despite the superficial similarity between his art and that of Albers, Bolotowsky brought a wider and more eclectic range of references to the students. During the late 1930s he had been a member of the Ten, a group including, Milton Avery, John Graham, Adolph Gottlieb, and Mark Rothko. In 1930s his works exhibited the biomorphic forms of abstract surrealism. Bolotowsky was also a founding member of the American Abstract Artists group in 1936, and during the 1940s, his work was strongly influenced by the neo-plastic movement, especially the paintings Piet Mondrian. The works that Bolotowsky created at BMC combine the grid structure of neo-plastic paintings with curved lines, translucent passages that suggest spatial illusion, and surprising color combinations. Bolotowsky's classes also followed a more open regimen than those of Albers. He was as likely to investigate Avery, Miró, Modigliani, and Soutine with his students as to discuss the geometric tradition. Bolotowsky allowed students to choose from a wide variety of media and gave individual critiques. Accordingly his classes became popular with students seeking greater artistic freedom including Joseph Fiore and especially Kenneth Noland. When Albers returned in 1947, Bolotowsky continued to teach painting for a year and took a competitive stance about his students versus those who studied with Albers. Shortly before leaving, he called Black Mountain "the outhouse of the Bauhaus."

John Cage (faculty, spring concert 1948, summers 1948, 1952)

Given the short time that Cage spent at BMC, the changes that he wrought in the college and the transformations that occurred in his music are nothing short of remarkable. Cage was first invited to perform at BMC in the spring of 1948. The invitation specified that the college would provide only food and housing as payment. Arriving with Merce Cunningham, Cage gave his first public performance of the *Sonatas and Interludes*, a cycle of twenty short pieces that was to become the most famous of his works for "Prepared Piano." Cage's invention of the Prepared Piano consists of altering the instrument by placing objects on or between its strings or on the hammers and dampers so as to change the timbre of the instrument. *Sonatas and Interludes* is also the most complex of the Prepared Piano pieces requiring two to three hours alone to ready the piano and involving forty-five altered notes on the instrument. The BMC students were so

mesmerized by the performance that they filled Cage's car with gifts of paintings, drawing and food in lieu of payment.

Based on this success, Cage was invited to return to BMC for the summer of 1948. That summer began Cage's lifelong friendship with Richard Lippold and a long intellectual relationship with Buckminster Fuller. Cage once described the silences in his music as resembling the open spaces in Lippold's wire sculptures. Fuller, Cage, and Cunningham shared breakfast each morning and dreamed of an avant-garde school that would travel by caravan from city to city spreading new ideas.

Among the six pieces that Cage composed that summer was *In a Landscape*, a work that uses extended temporal format to create a dream-like effect. It was written for either piano or harp and danced by Louise Lippold. *Toy Piano*, another composition, humorously raises a child's toy to a serious compositional device. Concert pianist and Cage expert Margaret Leng Tan has noted that the composition's "seemingly simple appearance belied a discreet sophistication and many delicate technical intricacies."

Cage's vaunted openness to all experiences and his gentle humor carried more serious intent as he set out to replace traditional modernism at BMC with new forms, a goal pursued through his Erik Satie Festival. Cage performed twenty-five "amateur" Satie concerts and ended the summer with a performance of Satie's play *The Ruse of Medusa*, featuring Buckminster Fuller, Elaine de Kooning, and Merce Cunningham as the dancing mechanical monkey. The stage sets were created by Willem de Kooning. The play denied logical narrative, erased the boundaries between amateur and professional performance, and embodied interdisciplinary practices, all hallmarks of Cage's later career.

Cage's promotion of the iconoclastic Satie was based on a stinging critique of Beethoven. Aggressively, he asserted Beethoven's harmonic structures were "in error, and his influence, which has been as extensive as it is lamentable, has been the deadening of the art of music." Cage's critique was a gauntlet thrown in the face of Albers and the Germanic music department. Cage's final lecture on Satie was denounced by many of the music faculty. In retaliation, Cage's students burned Beethoven sheet music and recordings. To diffuse the situation, the college Rector proposed a battle between students armed with Weiner schnitzel and with crêpe suzette, the result of which was a student food fight. Cage's revolution through humor was underway.

For reasons that might be apparent, Cage was not invited back to BMC until 1952. By

that time, Albers had departed and Cage was in the midst of creating *Williams Mix*, one of his first and most complex pieces of electronic music. For the piece, Cage employed a "library" of six hundred sounds, including urban, rural, electric and voice, that had been recorded on magnetic tape. The tape was elaborately cut into small splinters each several inches long. The choice of tape and pattern of the cut was determined by chance methods derived from the *I Ching*. The score for *Williams Mix* consisted of the angular patterns, sixteen to a page, of the cut tape. Each page looks like a complex abstract drawing. In effect, Cage invented new type of musical notation with emphasis on visual patterning. Because the reassembled tape would travel fifteen inches per second, the musical score is 192 pages resulting in a four and one-quarter minute performance. At BMC, Cage proposed that his musical composition class work with him to cut the tape, and no one signed up. So Cage continued to work on the piece with David Tudor and conceived other events during the summer, the most important of which is *Theater Piece #1*.

Theater Piece #1 lasted forty five minutes and combined music, dance, lighting, visual arts, and spoken words; each medium was conceived independently without anyone knowing what the combination would yield at any given moment. The piece involved at least a dozen performers who were assigned a place to perform through a grid plan and given a time to begin. There were no further instructions. *Theater Piece #1* served as a manifesto for Cage's interest in chance events, multi-media and multi-disciplinary procedures, shared responsibility for the creative process, and audience interaction. It is viewed as the first "Happening" and is a source for much performance art by a wide range of artists in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. *Theater Piece #1* is remembered differently by each person who viewed it, and Cage intended this effect by creating so many simultaneous events that no one would experience the same thing. The earliest written description, however, is in a journal entry dated August 1952 by Francine du Plessix Gray. A portion of it reads:

At eight thirty tonight John Cage mounted a stepladder until 10:30 he talked about the relation of music to Zen Buddhism while a movie was shown, dogs ran across the stage barking, 12 persons danced without any previous rehearsal, a prepared piano was played, whistles blew, babies screamed, Edith Piaf records were played double-speed on a turn-of-the-century machine.

Harry Callahan

(faculty, summer 1951)

Callahan joined BMC during the “summer of photography” organized by Hazel Larsen. Callahan was an inspiring mentor who had begun teaching at the Institute of Design in Chicago in 1946. He was determined, not simply to teach technique, but to challenge his students to see things “fresh.” Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Rauschenberg, Kenneth Snelson, and Cy Twombly all participated in Callahan’s class and there created some of their most inventive early works. Callahan’s own photography embodies his inventive teaching philosophy. The class projects were reinforced by viewing Callahan’s own work.

Callahan’s photograph Aaron Siskind captures the forceful yet impromptu nature of Siskind’s personality. Callahan and Siskind had known each other since 1946, and Siskind had introduced Callahan to many of the Abstract Expressionist painters with whom he subsequently became close friends. The asymmetry of the partly open double door and sharp contrasts of light and dark relate to the black and white paintings by Motherwell, Kline, and de Kooning. The contrast between surface and evocative pictorial space is one of Callahan’s continuing motifs. Callahan’s brilliant Eleanor (1951) merges two negatives to provide surreal juxtapositions of singularity and complexity, large and small, intense light and deep shadow, the human body and natural world.

John Chamberlain

(student, faculty, summers 1955, 1956)

Chamberlain remembers, “The only time I ever started getting interested in anything, or where I became interesting to anyone else, was when I went to Black Mountain College. ...You could start anywhere at any time. You could study everything or you could study nothing...” At BMC, Chamberlain’s early welded-steel sculptures were indebted to the work of David Smith. Yet these pieces already tended toward a greater complexity of parts and more volumetric rendering than Smith’s work. Chamberlain was particularly interested in the BMC poets Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, and Joel Oppenheimer. He also studied music with Stephan Wolpe. Chamberlain created his own poems through the selection and re-combination of words that caught his attention and seemed to fit together in surprising new ways. In retrospect, Chamberlain has realized that those early poems provided a methodology that he used throughout his sculptural career. In his words “Yes, I found it when I went to Black Mountain College. Curiously it’s only recently that I have noticed that I am still making sculpture in a way that

I made the poems... There is material to be seen around you every day. But one day something—some one thing—pops out at you. And you pick it up, and you take it over, and you put it somewhere else, and it fits, it’s just the right thing at the right moment.”

Merce Cunningham

(faculty, summers 1948, 1952, 1953)

The summer of 1953 at BMC was very important for Cunningham. It solidified his dance company, established the close relationship between his artistic ideas and those of Cage, and revealed the wide-ranging experimental character of his choreography. Shortly before arriving, Cunningham had premiered *Suite By Chance*. In this work, the timing and position of the movements were decided by tossing a coin, an interest in chance that Cunningham shared with Cage. Cunningham designed the dance movements as direct, precise and unemotional as possible, without narrative content. The original idea for the piece had come from him observing from a high window the chance relationship of pedestrians on a street. The second performance was at BMC where the audience was seated on all four sides of the dancers. A new multi-directional, rather than proscenium-oriented, space was pioneered in this work, and these spatial considerations can be clearly seen in Cunningham’s drawn dance notations. The music accompanying the dance was an electronic score by Christian Wolff composed by cutting and splicing magnetic tape in a manner related to *Williams Mix*. *Suite By Chance* marks the first time that the dancers that Cunningham had assembled, including Carolyn Brown, Viola Farber, and Paul Taylor, were called “Merce Cunningham and Company.”

Banjo, a second dance premiered at BMC, is a lighthearted work that refers to American folk dancing. To inspire the dancers, David Tudor composed a work that sounded like “fifty banjos going on.” *Dime A Dance* is described by David Vaughan as “a grab-bag of dance. All the dance company assembled on stage ready to dance 7 of 13 solos, duets, trios, and the like. Which seven these are is not known by any of them beforehand, but is determined by chance means in the course of seven pantomimes.” At BMC, audience members who had paid a dime were selected to choose cards from a deck; these cards determined which of the seven dances would be performed.

Septet was the most varied of the dances performed at BMC during the summer of 1953; it allowed wide-ranging experiences without the necessity of resolution. The title refers to the seven parts of Satie’s *Trois morceaux en forme de poire*, a celebration of musical diversity, which was performed during the dance. In

the spirit of Satie, Cunningham drew on movements from music hall dances, folk dances, comic performances, and such everyday gestures as shaking hands, all transformed by his own inventiveness. Cage described:

The continuity of *Septet* is not logical from movement to movement. At times it seems profoundly sad and noble, at other times playful and surprising. It provides an experience that one is unable to resolve, leaving one, as a dream often does, uncertain of its meaning...

In contrast to *Septet*, Cunningham created *Untitled Solo*, a dance in which each movement was chosen by the flip of a coin. The integration of these movements into a dance proved so physically grueling that Cunningham often despaired over its execution. Tudor who provided musical cues for Cunningham’s lengthy rehearsals comforted Cunningham in the spirit of the avant-garde by saying, “Well, it’s clearly impossible but we’re going right ahead and do it anyway.”

Jorge Fick (student, 1952-55)

One of the relatively few students to “graduate” from BMC, Fick had Franz Kline as his outside examiner. The synaptic structures of Fick’s paintings relate to Kline, and the strong contrasts of figure and ground in his work have a source in Motherwell’s art. Peter Voukos was another mentor for Fick at BMC. The organic shapes of Voukos’ ceramics and their allusion to the cycles of nature are germane to Fick’s works. At BMC, Fick began a lifelong interest in Zen Buddhism which encouraged him to seek out underlying forces in the natural world. Fick commented, “The paintings that I am doing now look like paintings of things, when they are really painting of energy. It’s the same energy nature gives us, and it’s the metaphor of the way nature give it to us that’s in the painting.” Fick’s Pod paintings cast an eye on the decoupages of Henri Matisse, much loved by the artist, as well as contemporary work by Ellsworth Kelly and Myron Stout, but Fick’s sensitivity to the growth patterns in nature is unique.





clockwise
John Cage at Piano, 1948. (photo by Clemens Kalischer)

Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, 1951, Gelatin silver print image and paper, 10 x 8 inches, signed recto in pencil
Copyright The Estate of Harry Callahan
Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York

Merce Cunningham dancing with Betty Jennerjohns
(photo by Clemens Kalischer)

left
John Chamberlain, *Erotic Eskimo*, 2006
9 x 16 x 9 7/8 inches

Joseph Fiore (student summer 1946 and 1948; faculty 1949-1956)

Along with Hazel Larsen and Ruth Asawa, Fiore became the mainstay of BMC visual arts program after the departure of Josef Albers in 1949. Fiore had attended the college for the 1946 and 1948 summer sessions. The second summer had been particularly important for him because of de Kooning's presence. Fiore oversaw the evolution of the arts curriculum from the rigid control of Albers to instruction that was more individually based. Fiore recalled, "Some people still say they felt free for the first time in their lives. They could do something on their own, not forced by anybody." Fiore was partly responsible for summer invitations to leading painters of the period and created an environment in which such artists as Kline, Motherwell, Stamos, and Tworokov could interact freely with the students. For all his teaching responsibilities, Fiore was deeply involved in his own art. His painting *Erie* (1955) consists of an intuitive balance of brush-marks in red, blue and yellow set against an atmospheric grey ground. An interaction between structure and freedom, color and value, surface and illusive depth is played out in a particularly lyrical fashion.

Helen Frankenthaler
(visitor, summer 1950)

Helen Frankenthaler was neither a student nor faculty member at BMC, however, she visited her friend Clement Greenberg who was teaching critical theory there for about one week in August 1950. Despite her short time at BMC, the few watercolors and drawings executed there have significance. Frankenthaler had just come from Provincetown where she participated in Hans Hofmann's classes, and her works there still showed the interlocking planes of Cubism. As pointed out by John Elderfield, Frankenthaler's BMC works feature freely floating imagery with no compositional hierarchies. They suggest biomorphic forms and imaginary landscapes, and they reveal for the first time Frankenthaler's interest in the art of Arshile Gorky. These drawings hint at her important painterly discoveries during the 1950s. Frankenthaler left BMC for New York City quickly because, in her recollection, there was bad food, barrack-like accommodations, and snakes!

Buckminster Fuller
(faculty, summers 1948 and 1949)

Buckminster Fuller embodies the multi-disciplinary, visionary, and often eccentric thinking that was at the heart of BMC. When Fuller came to BMC, he was at a difficult point in his ever-dynamic career. His plans for a Dymaxion car and for Dymaxion mass-produced housing had failed; he was fifty-two and unsure how to proceed. The college provided the open receptive audience that he badly needed. Fuller arrived at the BMC in an aluminum trailer packed with his "magical world" of mathematical models. Showman, engineer, and visionary, Fuller lectured for three hours immediately after arriving and captivated the community. Kenneth Snelson, who was "electrified" by Fuller's presence remembers that virtually the entire college signed up to audit his summer class, the theme of which was marvelous geometric relationships that held "the deepest secrets of nature, heretofore hidden from mankind." Along with Snelson, Richard Lippold, who was already building open-work sculptures which explored new possibilities in space and time, was captivated by Fuller. Lippold noted that meeting Fuller was like "meeting Zoraster speaking Islamic." There were detractors; renowned mathematician Max Dehn quietly noted that all of Fuller's ideas could be found in the math books in the library.

Fuller's primary project during his first summer at BMC was to erect a giant dome, 1,500 square feet and 22 feet tall, consisting of alternating tetrahedrons and octahedrons. As material, Fuller employed flimsy venetian-blind stripping, based on the theory that the strength-to-weight ratio of the structure increased with scale. The entire community including Albers, Elaine and Willem de Kooning, Richard Lippold, Dorothea Rockburne, and Kenneth Snelson were involved in attaching the parts. When the dome failed to rise, it was christened by the students, the "Supine Dome." Fuller returned the next year to complete a smaller dome using stiff tension rods, modifications that owed something to floating compression models designed by Snelson over the winter. The dome, later named the "Geodesic Dome," became Fuller's most famous invention.

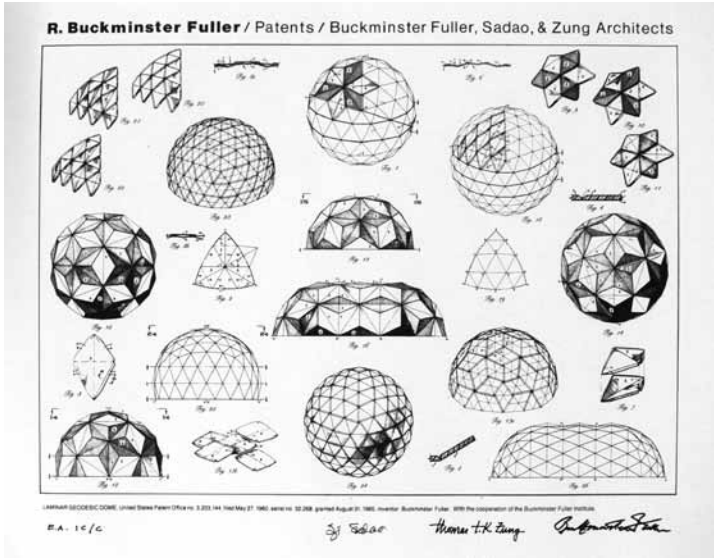
Fuller portrayed the lead in the *The Ruse of Medusa*, only the master of dynamic speaking was terrified of acting and froze on stage until coached by director Arthur Penn. Every morning, Fuller breakfasted under the campus trees with John Cage, matching his ideas of a structured universe against Cage's developing concept of indeterminacy. The two formed a lifelong intellectual friendship.

Ray Johnson
(student, 1945-fall 48, except summer 1946)

If the most important contributions of BMC are oriented around linkages between individuals and multiple disciplines, interactions between its artists, and establishment of a community sympathetic to advanced art, then Ray Johnson may its greatest beneficiary and apostle. Born in Detroit, Johnson had heard of BMC from the sister of a friend who had attended the college. In 1945, he won an art contest sponsored by Scholastic Magazine that carried a scholarship to an art school, and he chose Black Mountain College. At BMC, Johnson took classes from or had contact with Josef and Anni Albers, Bolotowski, Cage, Cunningham, de Kooning, Fuller, Lawrence, Lippold, Motherwell, Olson, and Tudor among others. He became friends with fellow students who included Asawa, Noland, and Rockburne. His BMC connection led to later friendships with other artists who had gone there, including Rauschenberg and Twombly. These connections formed the career-long content of Johnson's art. Through his complex, sophisticated collages, called "moticos," and his later "mail art" (moticos circulated by mail among his wide range of contacts), he attempted to create a virtual art community that would compare with the one in which he participated at BMC. The single period at BMC that changed Johnson's entire life was the summer of 1948 when he established relationships with Lippold, Cage, and de Kooning. Johnson's memories evoke the spirit of BMC:



above
Ray Johnson, *Untitled (F.X. Profumo)*, letter postmarked 1948, large panel c. 1953-55, style remainder c. 1970-76, collage on cardboard panel, 20½ x 15½ inches
Collection Frances Beatty and Allen Adler



clockwise
Buckminster Fuller, Geodesic Dome, Laser print on Mulberry paper, 18 x 24 inches, Edition of 100

Buckminster Fuller Architecture Class, 1948 Summer Session in the arts. The Venetian Blind Dome. Foreground left to right Buckminster Fuller, Elaine de Kooning, and Josef Albers (photo by Beaumont Newhall) Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives



I was a quiet student at BMC years ago, the summer that Bill de Kooning painted late into the North Carolina nights. John Cage presented his Erik Satie Festival and Elaine de Kooning played the lead in Satie's *Ruse of the Medusa*...I walked with Bill and Elaine one sad evening up 'the Road' when they had just heard about Gorky's death.

At BMC, Johnson, created spare abstractions which were remembered by Lippold as "mosaic-like paintings of centered, optical brilliance." Johnson redefined his career by burning these early works in Cy Twombly's fireplace in 1958. Yet his deep and continuing memories of BMC are embodied in his moticos. Untitled (EX. Profumo) (1953-55, 1970-76), referring to a Francis X. Profumo, an administrator at BMC and friend of the artist, features an envelope sent to her. The entire work seems to concern the elusive and mysterious character of memory. Amid areas of obscure darkness, yellow light rays illuminate Shirley Temple's silhouette, a symbol of youthful innocence, a passionate kiss given by Clark Gable, and a bust of the aged Homer.

Franz Kline (faculty, summer 1952)

When Kline was invited to BMC in July of 1952, he was the talk of the New York art world. His black and white compositions first shown in 1950 were seen by many as the most forceful embodiment of Abstract Expressionism and a manifestation of the modern condition. Kline's presence was particularly generative for Rauschenberg, Twombly, and the writer Fielding Dawson who became Kline's first biographer. The immediate conflict between Kline and Charles Olson, poet and the college Rector, was legendary at Black Mountain. Olson who typically dominated student attention felt usurped by Kline's dynamic presence, a reaction perhaps aggravated by the fact that Kline compact athletic frame did not rival Olson's nearly three-hundred-pound bulk. The story goes that Olson would attempt to captivate the students by connecting an idea to world history extending to prehistoric man, and Kline would immediately undermine him by relating it back to modern society. Beneath this humorous conflict is an important reality for Kline. His works are based on a profound feeling for the speed, destructive forcefulness, and dynamic energy of modern life. Kline's upbringing amid the technology of Pennsylvania coal country with its high speed trains, trestle bridges, and deep mine shafts informed his world view of the power and dynamism of the modern age. These elements became his mythology and the generative force in his art.

Kline created a single powerful painting during his month at BMC. Painting (1952, Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum) stands nearly six-foot tall, but its central presence is shattered by the two horizontal black bands, reminiscent of railroad tracks, and off-center diagonal brush marks which seem to rush beyond the canvas edges at breakneck speed. Kline once asserted, "I think destruction is a mode of creation." Despite their look of spontaneous execution, Kline's monumental canvases were based on preliminary ideas explored in small ink-on-paper works. Kline gave the ink drawings related to Painting to Cy Twombly.

Willem de Kooning

(faculty, summer 1948)

Willem de Kooning came to BMC fresh from his successful first one-person exhibition at the Charles Egan Gallery, and he was delighted by the invitation because he and Elaine had just been thrown out of their New York studio loft for non-payment of the rent. Cage had recommended de Kooning to Albers. De Kooning was at transitional moment between his black and white paintings, among the more spare works of his career, and the explosive complexity of the large scale works Attic (1949, Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Excavation (1950, Art Institute of Chicago). Asheville (1948, Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.) features rich fleshy colors and is packed with fragmented imagery including eyes, limbs, mouths, and architectural elements. De Kooning created the work through long sessions of scraping off and re-painting so that dozens of alternative readings are possible for each passage, an approach which was the antithesis of Albers' precise and reductive creative method. In the context of Asheville's sensuous coloration, De Kooning delivered a lecture at BMC on "Cézanne and the Color of Veronese" which concerned the emotional impact of color in direct opposition to Albers' avoidance of all emotion in his color theory.

The complexity of Asheville and its study must be partly due to de Kooning's contact with Cage, Cunningham, and Fuller during that summer, especially Cage's developing ideas of indeterminacy. The organic richness of de Kooning's painting may also be seen as homage to Arshile Gorky, since de Kooning learned of Gorky's suicide that summer. De Kooning provided a lifetime influence for such BMC students as Pat Passelof. Before departing, however, de Kooning was chastised by Albers because six of his ten students were leaving the college. Apparently, he had told them if they wished to paint they "should quit school, move to New York and get studios."



top
Franz Kline, Untitled, undated, ink on paper, 10 x 13 inches

Willem de Kooning, Seated Figure, c.1947
14 x 11 inches, graphite on paper, Private collection
courtesy of Mark Borghi Fine Art

Elaine de Kooning, Untitled, c. 1955-60
mixed media and collage on newspaper, 9 x 9 inches

Jacob Lawrence, Victory (War Series), 1947
goache ink on paper, 21³/₄ x 17 inches
Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery

Elaine de Kooning

(student, summer 1948)

Arriving with Bill, Elaine de Kooning was an active participant in the variety of events during the summer of 1948. She took drawing classes with Albers, worked with Fuller on raising the Supine Dome, and performed as Baron Medusa's daughter in *The Ruse of Medusa*. While Bill created Asheville which was scraped down and repainted in a process that refused resolution, Elaine painted seventeen related works. These paintings, of which Black Mountain Number 6 is a primary example, explore the mixture of biomorphic and architectonic forms that intrigued Bill, shapes that poetically suggest references to the outside world without being specific. Also, they are composed in an "all-over" manner since the entire surface of the canvas is equally activated. For Elaine, whose previous work had been more resolutely figurative, this was an important breakthrough, but in direct contrast to Asheville which concerns constant revision, each of her works represents a carefully painted solution that leads to the next canvas. In this series, Elaine's approach may have been influenced by Albers' emphasis on problem solving. Elaine's paintings were executed in enamel on paper and later mounted on canvas. Her choice of enamel, a medium that resists easy revision, complements her painting method. After Black Mountain, Elaine rolled up these important transitional works and did not exhibit them until 1958. Elaine staked out her artistic ground at BMC in her personal life as well as in her art. Both she and Bill had been involved in extra-marital affairs and reportedly spent more time apart than together during the summer. When Bill returned to New York, Elaine chose to remain for part of the fall at BMC.

Hazel Larsen (Archer)

(student, summers 1944, 1945, 1948;
faculty summers 1949-1953)

Larsen came to BMC in 1944 as one of a group of students from Milwaukee State Teachers' College, and she returned in 1945 to do a tutorial with Albers. Larsen participated in the summer of 1948 that included Cage, Cunningham, and Fuller. She was particularly inspired by the presence of Beaumont Newhall, photographer, historian of photography, and the pioneering curator of photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. After Albers' departure, Larsen became BMC's first full-time teacher of photography. Larsen's teaching emphasized visual awareness through the photographic medium. She described her

principles as "desire to take the photograph, with the photograph itself being the natural end result. It means that we are learning to see and becoming more aware of life around us." Larsen's emphasis on awareness of life through artistic creation had a profound effect on such artists as Johnson, Rauschenberg, Rockburne, and Twombly, all of whom took her classes. She remembers particularly spending hours "one-to-one" with Rauschenberg.

Larsen's own photographs are marked by direct images, cropped only through the camera lens, never during printing, and featuring sensitivity to movement and natural light. The abstract character of these images came through close-up positioning of the subject. All of these features were partly related to the fact that Larsen had been struck with polio as a child and worked from a wheelchair, so her subjects came close to and rotated around her as she clicked the shutter from a still position.

Jacob Lawrence

(faculty, summer 1946)

When Albers invited Jacob Lawrence and his artist-wife Gwendolyn Knight to teach at BMC, he arranged for them to travel by a private train car. He did not want the Lawrences to suffer the humiliation of being moved to the "Jim Crow colored cars" as they crossed into the South. Because of the racism in North Carolina—recently there had been a lynching 180 miles from Asheville—Lawrence never left the campus. Nevertheless, on the campus, he found his ideal for a vibrant artistic community. There, he developed the teaching methods that were an important component of his career. He wrote to Albers, "My belief is that it is most important for an artist to develop an approach and philosophy about life—if he has developed this philosophy he does not put paint on canvas, he puts himself on canvas."

Lawrence carefully observed Albers' painstaking creative process. He noted "that each day he would sit in a different spot and observe a different painting." Lawrence's gouache painting Victory (1947), painted shortly after his BMC experience, exhibits a tight structure of interlocking planes that reflects Albers' influence. But the feelings of dogged determination combined with exhaustion that Lawrence communicated at the end of World War II are entirely his own creation.

Richard Lippold

(faculty, summer 1948)

Lippold was invited by Albers as artist-in-residence during the 1948 summer after Albers had seen his second one-person exhibition in New York. Lippold was particularly interested in BMC because of reports given to him by Cage and Cunningham. Apparently, there was a housing shortage, so Lippold converted a hearse he had acquired into living quarters for himself, his wife dancer Louise Lippold, and their two children. At BMC, Lippold also became close to Anni Albers who was weaving metal wires into her tapestries, and the two arranged an exchange of works.

Lippold had received a degree in industrial design in 1937 from the Art Institute of Chicago. Soon afterwards in 1942, he began making his wire sculptures and felt an affinity with the translucent plastic sculptures of Naum Gabo that explore the interpenetration of line and plane. While Gabo insisted on the scientific and social basis of his work, Lippold's pieces deal with the poetry of light and space. In 1944, Lippold moved to New York City and occupied an apartment in the same building as John Cage. He and Cage shared a passion for Eastern philosophies and in his words "the combination of sensuous and spiritual qualities in Eastern art" as a way to find new directions in Western art. In a beautiful reversal, Lippold remembers speaking of the "spaces" in Cage's music and Cage speaking of the "silences" in Lippold's sculpture. Just before the BMC summer, Lippold created a series of Five Variations within a Sphere exploring the possibilities for lyrical invention within that most symmetrical shape. Lippold gave wire sculptures to Cage and hung them in Cage's apartment which Lippold had designed. Cage reciprocated by dedicating the last of the *Sonatas and Interludes* to Lippold.

While Lippold had a great interest in Fuller's analysis of the structural properties of materials, Lippold's sculptures used precise engineering structures to attain a lyrical view of space and light. Although Kenneth Snelson's work is usually associated with Fuller, his intuitive invention of form and the surprising defiance of gravity in his sculptures has associations with Lippold. Ruth Asawa's suspended works gather ideas from Albers, Fuller, and Lippold. Although Ray Johnson's works look nothing like Lippold's, Johnson's exploration of space, time, and memory through his "mail art" is related conceptually to Lippold's interests.

Robert Motherwell

(faculty, summers 1945, 1951)

Motherwell was invited by Albers to teach at BMC in 1945 on the basis of his growing reputation as a notable avant-garde painter and probably as a direct result of his first one-person exhibition at Art of This Century in New York. Already deeply involved in aesthetic theory as well as in contact with the exiled European modern artists, Motherwell brought a sophisticated viewpoint to BMC. During those years, Motherwell was exploring the concept of "felt content" in abstract art, an evolving theory that he certainly taught and that would concern him throughout his career. For Motherwell, one of the media that revealed "felt content" was collage. In an important 1946 essay, "Beyond the Aesthetic," for an issue of *Design* magazine devoted to Black Mountain College, Motherwell wrote, "the sensation of operating physically on the world is very strong in the medium of papier collé or collage, in which various kinds of paper are pasted on the canvas. . . Without reference to likeness, it possesses feeling because all decisions in regard to it are ultimately made on the grounds of feeling." Motherwell's intuitive and expressive approach to materials provided an alternative to Albers' strictly formal and structural use. Motherwell's example became particularly important when he again taught at BMC in the summer of 1951, and his students included Rauschenberg, Twombly, and Susan Weil. Motherwell has not been given proper credit for this influence.

During 1951, Motherwell created his mural paintings for the Millburn Synagogue, and recent study of a historic photograph indicates that he actually painted some of the murals at BMC. The Millburn project provided an important model for uniting the works of several artists in an architectural environment. Also, Motherwell was finishing his most important early publication *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, and he must have discussed the ideas behind the book at BMC. This book influenced a generation of artists including Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.

Robert De Niro Sr.

(student, 1939-40)

De Niro had spent the summer in Provincetown at Hans Hofmann's school before enrolling at BMC for the year of 1939-40. After De Niro's experience with the more improvisational style of Hofmann, he found Albers "too cold and too scientific." In essence, Albers showed him the direction he did not wish to pursue. De Niro

moved to New York in 1941 and continued taking classes Hofmann. Subsequently, he became close to de Kooning, Kline, and Philip Guston and showed with them at the Egan Gallery 1950-54. Partly inspired by Hofmann's broad references to the history of art, De Niro came to regard his paintings as uniting the Old Masters with a modern sensibility. His *Studio Interior with Chair and Guitar* (1955) and *Vase of Flowers* (1965) are painted with the improvisational freedom of Abstract Expressionism but also reference artistic predecessors that De Niro loved, especially Courbet, Manet, and the Spanish 17th century masters.

Kenneth Noland

(student, 1946-48, summer 1950)

Noland, who was interested in art from childhood, was born in Asheville only twenty miles from BMC. When he returned from the war, he enrolled at BMC through the G.I. bill, one of a number of students to come to the college through that program. When Noland arrived in 1946, Albers was on sabbatical and Noland's first courses were taken with Ilya Bolotowsky whose freer approach to abstract geometry had an effect on the young artist. Yet in comparison to Bolotowsky's work, Noland's painting *V.V.* shows a desire to experiment more radically with shape variations, painterly texture, rich color, and spatial illusion. The work suggests three spatial boxes that through color and shape configurations can be read alternately as receding or advancing. The spatial complexity of this little work is remarkable and foreshadows the rich variety of Noland's career. Noland studied with Albers during one semester of 1947 and credited him with "a certain logic and visual frame of reference," yet ultimately rejected his color theories as too rigid and "scientific." While Albers' *Homage to the Square* series uses the square within a square to analyze color and value relationships, Noland's *Targets* employ centralized configurations--ones deliberately separate from the canvas shape--to allow exploration of color in a more intuitive and personal fashion. Through staining, overlapping of edges and expressive brushwork, Noland's works convey a physical experience of space. (One does wonder if the circular motif of Albers' Black Mountain College logo influenced Noland's choice of the target motif.) Returning to BMC in 1950, Noland met Greenberg and Frankenthaler. He admired Frankenthaler's "freedom to draw with the brush" and became close friends with Greenberg. That meeting was essential to a generation of artists, including Noland, Morris Louis, and Jules Olitski.



top
Robert Motherwell, *Untitled*, 1986
oil on paper, 29 x 23 inches, Art © Dedalus Foundation, Inc./
Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Kenneth Noland, *Soft Touch*, 1963, magna on canvas
69 x 69 inches

right
Robert Rauschenberg
Portfolio 1, 1952, gelatin silver contact print
mounted to rag board, 5^{5/8} x 3^{1/4} inches
Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York
Robert Rauschenberg Estate/Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY



Portrait of a Young Man

Pat Passlof (student, summer 1948)

Passlof came to BMC with the intent of studying with Mark Tobey. Tobey became ill and was replaced at the last minute by de Kooning. In addition to working with de Kooning, Passlof was able to participate during that summer in Cage's *The Ruse of Medusa* and Fuller's attempt to erect the Supine Dome. For Passlof, the contact with de Kooning was a life-changing experience. She studied with him two additional years in New York, and he introduced her to many artists of the Abstract Expressionist generation. Passlof's painting *Pacific* shows her early sophistication. The painterly process is everywhere evident as the artist has scraped down and layered paint to create an abstract evocation of a seascape.

Robert Rauschenberg

(student, fall 1948, spring 1949, summer-fall 1951, spring-summer 1952)

In 1948 after reading an article in *Time* magazine about Albers' disciplined approach to art, Rauschenberg and Sue Weil enrolled at BMC. Because of the wide-ranging freedom of Rauschenberg's ideas, he and Albers were often at odds. Rauschenberg remembered, "I found his criticism in class so excruciating and devastating that I never asked for private criticism. . . ." Yet, Albers' *Werklehre* projects that emphasized intense looking and discovering the inherent properties in a wide range of materials had a lifelong impact on Rauschenberg. As opposed to his difficult relationship with Albers, Rauschenberg developed a friendship with Hazel Larsen to whom he has acknowledged an early debt. In fact, Rauschenberg's first consistent works at BMC were his photographs.

By his 1951 summer at BMC Rauschenberg was already rapidly maturing as an artist, and his return coincided with the summer of photography organized by Larsen and including the presence of Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. Rauschenberg's *Portfolio I*, featuring a collection of images dating from 1952, shows experiments in asymmetrical balance, depth-of-field, reflections, and manipulation of the negative during the printing process that rivals the techniques of those master photographers and speaks to Rauschenberg's lifelong commitment to the photographic medium. With ambition characteristic of his career, Rauschenberg proposed at BMC a project in which he would photograph America "inch by inch."

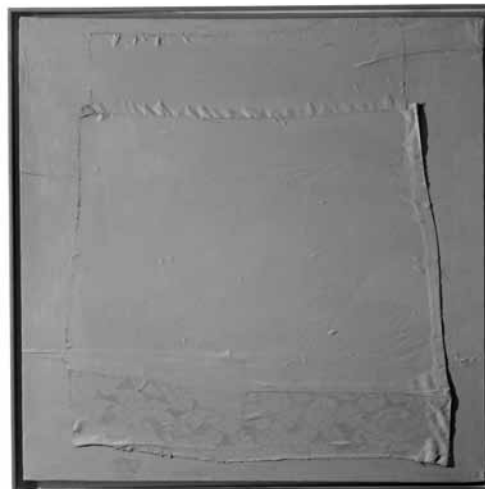
During the summer of 1952, Rauschenberg's most important relationship was with John Cage and Merce Cunningham. Cage's interest in chance discoveries, his willingness to incorporate all types of sounds into

music, and his exploration of the nature of silence had a profound effect on Rauschenberg, as did Cunningham's growing interest in everyday movements in dance. Rauschenberg's White Paintings (1951) featuring uninflected surfaces that are responsive to random changes in their environment parallel Cage's investigations. The White Paintings were included in *Theater Piece #1*, organized by Cage, and Cage dedicated his musical score *4' 33"*, which featured the sounds of the everyday environment during that measured time, to Rauschenberg. The White Paintings were followed by Rauschenberg's Black Paintings in which the artist intended to show, in opposition to the White Paintings, how much he could incorporate within a monochromatic field. Rauschenberg's *Untitled [matte black with fabric]* features a richly textured surface in which three types of fabric are embedded, including layered damask. Its configuration of a square within a square may be seen as a freely conceived response to Albers' rigorous *Homage to the Square* series. Some of the Black Paintings also contain asphalt tar in their surfaces. Dorothea Rockburne remembers her first meeting with Rauschenberg. They were assigned a work project to re-tar some building roofs. She recalls, "Bob whispered to me I have a car! We took off to town, and that tar was later used in Bob's paintings."

Dorothea Rockburne

(student, 1951-55)

Born in Montreal, Rockburne had studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts where Jean-Paul Riopelle had recommended that she go to BMC. Rockburne remembers BMC above all for its intense artistic vitality, "Everyone was always creating. Although it seemed very loose, it was the most competitive place I have ever been, including New York." Instead of traditional studio classes, Rockburne first took the Light, Sound and Movement Workshop which combined projected images, painted backdrops, music, and dance. Later she studied drawing with Joseph Fiore and painting with Franz Kline. She took photography with Larsen, and Rauschenberg and Twombly were fellow students who became lifelong friends. Rockburne participated in Merce Cunningham's dance program and had Viola Farber as a roommate, and she performed in Cage's *Theater Piece #1*. All of this encouraged Rockburne's inherent interest in interdisciplinary thinking. The most important connection that Rockburne made was with Max Dehn. Famous for his work in topology and geometric group theory, Dehn was the only professor of mathematics at the



top
Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled* (matte black with fabric), 1952
oil and fabric on fabric, 30 1/8 x 30 inches
Courtesy Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

Aron Siskind, *North Carolina 30*, 1951, silver print, 14 x 11 inches

Kenneth Snelson, *Spider Web*, 1948, photograph
Courtesy Kenneth Snelson

college. Rockburne remembers, "He opened a whole world to me; it was daring and magical." After class, Rockburne and Dehne would take long walks through the countryside, and he told her he would "teach her mathematics for artists."

In New York after Black Mountain, Rockburne was involved in the Judson Dance Theater and other interdisciplinary projects. Even more significantly, her interest in mathematics has informed the range of her mature work. In Gradient and Field, the relationship, like a mathematical set, between the sheets of paper that differ in size, opacity, and placement is hypothesized by the connecting horizontal line, the gradient. This piece demonstrates Rockburne's approach to her art through the mathematical concept of a set theory—the totality of all points satisfying a given condition. She has said, "I was trying to find out for myself the nature of an object and what the function of a particular set would be."

Arthur Siegel (faculty, summer 1951)

Born in Detroit and already having taught photography, Siegel won a scholarship to study with László Moholy-Nagy at the Institute of Design in Chicago. In 1945 Siegel was appointed by Moholy-Nagy to direct his pioneering course "New Visions in Photography." Siegel already knew Harry Callahan from the Detroit Camera Club and soon met Aaron Siskind in New York. Siegel came to BMC for two weeks in July during the "summer of photography" to give four lectures on the history of modern photography. Siegel was cited in the Black Mountain Bulletin of 1951-52 for his "concentrated investigations of color photography." Indeed, Siegel's close-up images of worn objects, which function between abstract forms and investigations of detritus in modern life, are particularly notable for their expressive colors. Siegel also made important experiments with "photograms." The influence of these photographs, particularly on Rauschenberg and Twombly, has been underestimated.

Aaron Siskind (faculty, summer 1951)

In 1948 Albers organized an exhibition of forty of Siskind's photographs at BMC. While Siskind's work during the 1930s had been of a documentary nature, he began in the early 1940s to take close-up images that abstracted their subjects so as to emphasize internal structure, picture plane, and surface texture. His choice of dilapidated objects gave the works an appearance close to the energized surfaces of Abstract Expressionist painting. During the mid- and late 1940s,

Siskind was closest to these painters, and his photographs were particularly admired by Kline, de Kooning, Motherwell, and Tworkov. In fact, he was the only photographer included in the famous Ninth Street exhibition with these artists.

While at BMC, Siskind was given a second exhibition of his work. This exhibition included new works taken on trips through North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The new photographs were a breakthrough for Siskind because they began to investigate his best known subject, fragmented images and letters from torn posters on aging walls. On the one hand, the graphic and seemingly monumental character of the letter fragments looked back to the aggressive brushwork of the Abstract Expressionists, especially to Franz Kline. On the other hand, these photographs signaled dialogue between artistic concerns and the objects in everyday life that inspired Ray Johnson, Rauschenberg, Rockburne, and Twombly among others.

Kenneth Snelson

(student, summers of 1948 and 1949)

An art student in Oregon just after the war, Snelson was already attracted to Russian Constructivism and geometric art of the early modern period, including that taught at the Bauhaus. Accordingly, he came to BMC during the summer to study with Albers. Buckminster Fuller arrived unexpectedly to replace an architecture professor, and Snelson recalls being most captivated by Fuller's visionary approach which tied "together form and structure, plus that strange mysticism." Already demonstrating advanced skills in three dimensional structures, Snelson became Fuller's studio monitor during that summer.

Snelson returned to Oregon during the winter of 1948/49 and invented a series of "floating compression" structures like Floating Wood Compression Column. These works are based on a closed structural system composed of three or more compression rods held within a network of tension wires so the parts are mutually supportive and the struts do not have to touch one another. For Snelson the compression/tension pieces were related to the natural world, and Snelson's breathtaking close-up photographs of dragonfly wings and spider webs show his early investigation of structures in nature as models for his art. Snelson brought his sculptures back to BMC in the summer of 1949 and showed them to Fuller, who appropriated the idea and named it "tensegrity." Snelson has based a varied and inventive career around

his key invention. We are accustomed to large manmade structures that rely on compression and accordingly are massive. In dramatic contrast, Snelson's works like Audrey I and Easter Monday are structurally open, extend into space, and seemingly defy gravity in manners that combine poetry and science, and they astonish us.

Theodore Stamos

(faculty, summer 1950)

Between 1949 and 1955, Stamos focused on his Teahouse series of paintings. These works personify the artist's deep response to Asian art, particularly to the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) landscape paintings that he had studied at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and to the artist's own evocation of the forces of the natural world. The rolling hills surrounding the college inspired Stamos' visionary approach to nature as he later wrote about one of his works, "The painting was done during the summer of 1950 while I was teaching at Black Mountain College. My studio looked over some beautiful farmland and mountains that were almost always shrouded in veils of mist that somehow gave me the feelings that the mts. in China must be similar and as ominous." During the summer of 1950, Stamos met Clement Greenberg, who was teaching criticism at BMC, and Helen Frankenthaler who briefly visited the college.

Cy Twombly (student, summer 1951, winter 1951-52, August 1952)

On the advice of Rauschenberg, Twombly decided to enroll for the summer session of 1951. Twombly came to BMC with the intent of studying with Motherwell, and he has dated the earliest works he accepts as mature to that period. These paintings which rely on aggressive paint handling, powerful contrasts of black and white, and rough-edged primal forms have a relationship to the paintings of Franz Kline, whom Twombly would meet during the next summer at BMC, to de Kooning's black and white canvases, and above all to Motherwell's abstracted personages and to his *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*. Motherwell admired Twombly's work and in a 1952 statement identified him as "the most accomplished young painter whose work I happen to have encountered;..." Motherwell further characterized the spirit of Twombly's paintings as "org[i]astic; the sexual character of the fetishes half-buried in his violent surface is sufficiently evident." Twombly shared with the Abstract Expressionists a profound interest in the archetypal character of tribal art. He has identified his paintings with suggestions of

forceful but awkward personages, as derived from the relief patterns of Lorestan bronzes (Iran, Early Iron Age). Twombly's fascination with tribal art was encouraged by the deep interest among several BMC faculty members, an involvement extending back to the Albers' first trips to Mexico. Poet Charles Olson was profoundly involved with "primitive" art particularly the glyphs that derive from early Mesoamerican tribes. After visiting Twombly's BMC studio in 1952, he wrote, "...the dug up stone figures, the thrown down glyphs, the old sorrels in sheep dirt in caves, the flaking iron: these are his paintings."

The dark powers of primal art were not Twombly's only occupation at BMC. During the summer of 1951, he and Rauschenberg fell in love as Rauschenberg was in the process of separating from his wife Sue Weil. In a dramatic gesture of romantic longing, Twombly swam to the center of Lake Eden. Apparently, however, he overestimated his aquatic abilities, and other students had to dive in to save him from an end in the mode of Percy Shelley.

Jack Tworkov (faculty, summer 1952)

Tworkov arrived to teach at BMC with his wife and two daughters. While Tworkov had been closely involved with the Abstract Expressionists, especially Willem de Kooning for a decade, he differed in emphasizing a slow and deliberate working process. Tworkov alternated between a variety of media including drawing, painting, and collage and between figuration and abstraction, allowing the influences of each mode to spill over into the next. He also had a deep interest in sculpture, music, poetry, and dance. At BMC, Tworkov developed drawings that led to his series of paintings *House of the Sun*. These drawings were based on Tworkov's interpretation of *The Odyssey*. For several years Tworkov had used classical literature to fire his imagination. The *House of the Sun* drawings and paintings feature open brushstrokes that move across the surface with greater fluidity than Tworkov's previous works. This sensibility is also embodied through subtle grey tones in *Daybreak* (1953). The translucent layering of painterly passages and wide brushstrokes which connote atmospheric phenomena in all these works suggest Tworkov's imaginative identification with the natural world. These works explore metaphors for nature that foreshadow works made by Twombly decades later, and they parallel discoveries in freedom of movement being made by Merce Cunningham. It is appropriate that Tworkov gave Merce one of the key studies for the *House of the Sun* series. At BMC, Tworkov was particularly close to Rockburne and Rauschenberg.

Susan Weil (student, summer and fall 1948, spring 1949, summer-fall 1951)

Weil recalls, "I had enrolled in Black Mountain College in North Carolina to study with Josef Albers, and by the end of the summer Bob [Rauschenberg] had decided to go there as well. Black Mountain College was very small. There were almost as many faculty members as there were students. Students, teachers, and other workers from the college would drop in on classes. Sharing thoughts, ideas and experiences with a mix of people enriched Bob and myself in a myriad of ways, and would influence our collaborations with others for the rest of our lives." Weil's experiments with materials and their limits began in the context of BMC. In *Secrets*, she wrote her feelings on a piece of paper then tore it up and glued the pieces together in a random sequence. The work reflects Albers' experiments with materials as well as the visual placement of words with which Charles Olson was experimenting. More broadly, it embodies the modern sensibility that knowledge must always be fragmentary. *Secrets* is an important predecessor for the mural-scale painted collages of fragmentary body parts in Weil's recent work like *Configurations* (Blue and Orange).

Emerson Woelffer

(faculty, summer 1949)

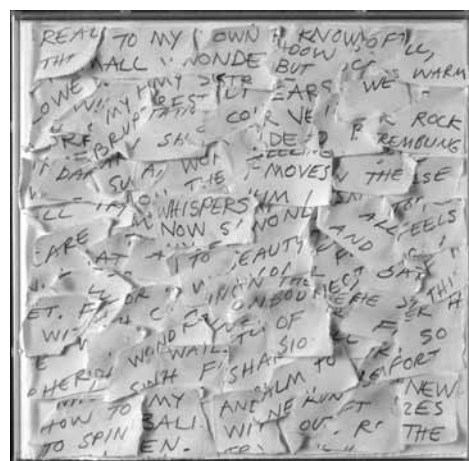
Born in Chicago, Woelffer had originally studied the works of European expressionist artists, including Kandinsky, Klee, and the German Expressionists at the Art Institute of Chicago. During the mid-1940s, his works began to exhibit biomorphic shapes that seemed to be engaged in a primordial struggle. These paintings also exhibit an awareness of the works of Rothko, Pollock, and particularly Arshile Gorky. Woelffer was well aware of the search for archetypal imagery in Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist art. Coming to BMC in 1949, he was attracted to the faculty's interested Pre-Columbian archaeology. Woelffer began his *Bird* series at BMC, of which *Figure with Bird* is a major example. These works suggest violent struggle that is released by flights of imagination. Woelffer became so involved with Mesoamerican art that he lived temporarily in the Yucatan before becoming a pioneer of Abstract Expressionism on the West Coast.

top

Jack Tworkov, *Daybreak*, 1953, oil on linen, 79 x 69 inches, Art © Estate of Jack Tworkov/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY, (photo by Chris Watson)

Emerson Woelffer, *Figure With Bird*, 1949, oil on canvas, 51 x 29 inches

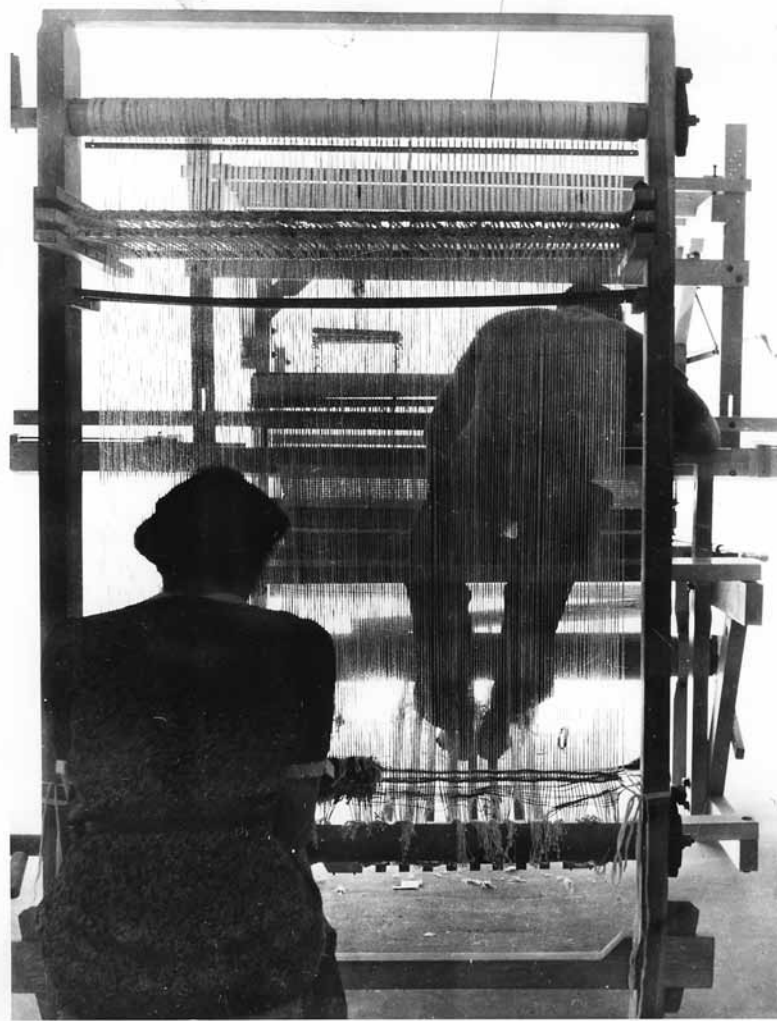
Susan Weil, *Secrets*, 1949, pencil, torn paper, collage 10 1/2 x 10 1/2 inches



clockwise
 Two BMC weavers on rug loom (photo by John Stix)
 Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives

Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight (photo by Beaumont Newhall)
 Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives

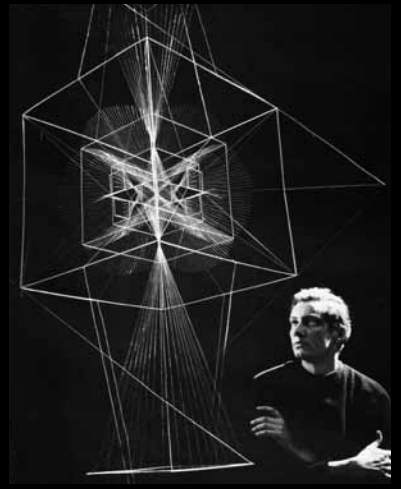
Buckminster Fuller and Merce Cunningham performing *The Ruse of Medusa* 1948
 (photo by Clemens Kalisher)



front cover
 from the top left to right
Anni Albers by Hazel Larsen Archer
Josef Albers by Hazel Larsen Archer
Ruth Asawa by Hazel Larsen Archer
Hazel Larsen Archer by Hazel Larsen Archer
Kenneth Noland by Jacqueline Gourevitch
Willem de Kooning by Hazel Larsen Archer
Robert Rauschenberg by Hazel Larsen Archer
Cy Twombly by Camilla McGrath
Merce Cunningham by Hazel Larsen Archer
Pat Passlof courtesy Pat Passlof
Dorothy Rockburne courtesy Dorothy Rockburne
Robert Motherwell
 Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives
Franz Kline by Marvin P. Lazarus
Susan Weil and **Robert Rauschenberg** by
 Hazel Larsen Archer

back cover
 from the top left to right
John Cage by Hazel Larsen Archer
Josef Albers and Robert De Niro Sr.
 Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives
Richard Lippold by Sanders Robert
Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, 1951, Gelatin silver print
 image and paper, 10 x 8 inches, signed recto in pencil
 Copyright The Estate of Harry Callahan
 Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York
Joseph Fiore by Hazel Larsen Archer
Kenneth Snelson courtesy Kenneth Snelson
Ilya Bolotowsky with student by Beaumont Newhall
Emerson Woelffer Courtesy Manny Silverman Gallery
Theodore Stamos by Leo Amino
Ray Johnson by Hazel Larsen Archer
Buckminster Fuller by Hazel Larsen Archer
 Painting excursion left to right **Clement Greenberg**,
Leo Amino and **Theodore Stamos** by Cora Kelley Ward





LORETTA HOWARD
GALLERY