



László Moholy-Nagy, *Spring, Berlin*, 1928, gelatin silver print, courtesy of George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, NY © 2009 Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York/ VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

***MOHOLY: AN EDUCATION OF THE SENSES* at the Loyola University Museum of Art (LUMA)**

Q & A with Carol Ehlers, Guest Curator

In 1937, Austria-Hungarian born László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) moved to Chicago to start a new design school, the “New Bauhaus.” This exhibition, curated by Carol Ehlers, is a reflection of the school’s important and relevant aims. Moholy: An Education of the Senses will be on display from February 11 to May 9, 2010.

How would you explain the term “Bauhaus?”

The Bauhaus was, first and foremost, a school of art and design that was founded in 1919 in Weimar, Germany. Bauhaus artists were not tied to a particular aesthetic style but rather sought to develop a more holistic future society and concentrated on the interplay between art, crafts, and technology. They promoted wholly open-minded and radical creation as opposed to the mere translation of old art into new contexts and forms. As a key Bauhaus figure, Moholy-Nagy believed that teaching people *how* to explore, investigate, and be assured of their own conception of the present moment was far more important than teaching people the facts or tendencies of the past.

Reflecting the educational philosophy of the Bauhaus, this exhibition is not organized historically or with adherence to chronology. What inspired the exhibition’s more theme-driven scheme?

One concept behind the layout of this exhibit is that the viewer might experience art in the same way that a student at the Bauhaus experienced their materials. Bauhaus artists often explored the varying purposes and potential combinations of materials as a means of personal expression and cultural investigation. In this spirit of exploration, we decided that the exhibition should avoid presenting work didactically, historically, or in any way that confines viewers to a prescribed mode of seeing. These days, it is so common for museums to supply viewers with captions, audio-guides, and other supplements that tell us exactly what to think while viewing the art, but *Education of the Senses* is not about everyone walking away with the same understanding. Instead, the exhibition seeks to do exactly what its title suggests: to educate *the senses*, not to solely provide viewers with art historical

information. The idea behind the theme-driven scheme, then, is to create a more open-ended and subjective viewing environment.

Do you have a favorite work in the exhibit?

Collectively, Moholy-Nagy's works reinforce a crucial theme of the Bauhaus: that art is concerned not with categorization or separateness but with universality and the reduction of form. The pieces in *Education of the Senses* are all interrelated and seek to represent art as a desirably holistic experience. It is difficult for me to target a certain work as my favorite because I am more interested in their impact as a group.

That said, I should mention how pleased I am that we are able to include Moholy-Nagy's 1929–1930 work *Light Prop for an Electric Stage* in this exhibition. This piece single-handedly represents the artist's multidisciplinary approach, as it has been previously exhibited as a theater of light, a free-standing sculpture, and also as the primary "actor" in an experimental film. Following Moholy-Nagy's death in 1946, his widow sold the piece to Harvard University. That *Light Prop* will be returning to Chicago for this exhibit marks an important circularity.

How did Moholy-Nagy's life and work impact the art scene here in Chicago?

Moholy-Nagy arrived in Chicago in 1937 and established The Institute of Design, which is now a part of Illinois Institute of Technology. Originally called the New Bauhaus-American School of Design, the program sought to promote a progressive, experimental, and hands-on approach to art-making. Furthermore, it was in Chicago that Moholy-Nagy wrote *Vision in Motion*, his important book on art and education. Moholy-Nagy's move to Chicago and the subsequent founding of the Institute of Design has much to do with the introduction and dissemination of the Bauhaus aesthetic in America.

Though *An Education of the Senses* does not focus overtly on Moholy-Nagy's relationship to the Institute of Design, the artist's time in Chicago is linked inextricably with his students and teachings. Moholy's pedagogy changed art and design education in America. That Chicago was the platform for such teachings makes the city, decades later, the ideal location for this important exhibition.