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**The Hammer Museum Presents**  
***Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957***  
**On view February 21 – May 15, 2016**



(Los Angeles, CA)—This February, the Hammer Museum presents the West Coast debut of ***Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957***, the first comprehensive U.S. museum exhibition on Black Mountain College (BMC), a small experimental school in North Carolina whose profound impact continues to influence art practice and pedagogy today. The exhibition chronicles how Black Mountain College became a seminal meeting place and dynamic crossroads for many of the artists, musicians, poets, and thinkers who would become leading practitioners of the postwar period. Figures including **Anni and Josef Albers, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, Elaine and Willem de Kooning, Buckminster Fuller, Ruth Asawa, Robert Motherwell, Gwendolyn and Jacob Lawrence, Cy Twombly, Franz Kline, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley**, among many others, taught and studied at the college during this period and are featured in the exhibition.

***Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957*** presents a rich and varied mixture of materials in the areas of painting, sculpture, weaving, and pottery, including **over 250 objects by nearly 100 artists**. True to the interdisciplinary nature of the school, the exhibition features two soundscapes, a grand piano, and a dance floor for live in-gallery performances, in addition to documentary photographs, archival ephemera such as books printed on campus by BMC poets, and audio recordings of poetry readings. The exhibition is organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston (ICA) and curated by **Helen Molesworth**, the ICA's former Barbara Lee Chief Curator and current Chief Curator at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and ICA **Assistant Curator Ruth Erickson**.

"We are thrilled to bring *Leap Before You Look* to the West Coast, honoring the values of the renowned experimental Black Mountain College and heralding its role in shaping major concepts, movements, and forms in postwar art and education," said **Ann Philbin, Director of the Hammer**. "The exhibition, so thoughtfully presented by Helen Molesworth, underscores Black Mountain College's interdisciplinary emphasis on inquiry, experimentation, and discussion, and reflects some of our deeply held beliefs in art and its capacity to expand one's internal horizons and encourage participation in community."

"Black Mountain College is an important historical precedent for thinking about relationships between art, pedagogy, democracy, and globalism—influences that can still be felt today," said **Helen Molesworth, Chief Curator of MOCA**.

Images (L-R): Josef Albers, *Leaf Study IX*, c. 1940, leaves on paper, 28 x 24 ¾ inches. (c) The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/ Artists Rights Society New York. Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging 4 Art; Hazel Larsen Archer, *Merce Cunningham Dancing*, c. 1952-53, gelatin silver print, 8 ¾ x 5 7/8 inches. Estate of Hazel Larsen Archer and Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center.

Founded in 1933 by John Rice, Black Mountain College placed the arts at the center of a liberal arts education and believed that doing so would better educate citizens for participation in a democratic society. BMC was strongly influenced by the utopian ideals of the progressive education movement, particularly the theories of John Dewey. The exhibition is organized into thematic sections, following a loose chronology, allowing each gallery to elucidate various aspects of BMC's practice, pedagogy, and philosophy:

- The exhibition first focuses on **Anni and Josef Albers**, who came to Black Mountain College from the Bauhaus in Nazi-era Germany, when Josef Albers was hired to become BMC's first head of the arts curriculum. Given the centrality of his pedagogy, and Anni's writing and weaving, to the BMC experience, the section is dedicated to their work, including prints, paintings, photographs, and weavings made during their tenure at the college from 1933 to 1949.
- In the *Teaching and Learning* section, didactic tools that exemplified the college's mission to teach through hands-on experimentation are on display, including the collaborative work of students and teachers, such as jewelry made by student **Alexander Reed** with **Anni Albers** using every day materials like corks, paper clips, and bobby pins. Models and studies for **Buckminster Fuller's** geodesic dome, first erected at BMC, are included alongside an examination of the role architectural building played at the college.
- In the *Modernisms* section, works by European artists such as **Xanti Schawinsky**, **Lyonel Feininger**, **Ilya Bolotowsky**, and **Josef Breitenbach** are presented alongside paintings by a younger generation of American artists including **Elaine and Willem de Kooning**, **Robert Motherwell**, **Gwendolyn and Jacob Lawrence**, and **Franz Kline**. In this section, the exhibition explores the concept of cosmopolitanism as a framework for understanding the unique position of BMC as a conduit between European and American avant-gardes that shaped the development of postwar artistic practice, movements, and teachings well beyond the college itself.
- The *Haptic* section of the exhibition includes a shuttle-craft practical loom used in **Anni Albers's** workshop. Profoundly interdisciplinary, BMC gave rise to one of the twentieth century's most legendary artistic collaborations: that of **Merce Cunningham**, **John Cage**, and **Robert Rauschenberg**. The exhibition features a sprung dance floor for live dance performances; a grand piano that will on occasion be "prepared" according to Cage's specifications; and a freestanding set decoration by Rauschenberg titled *Minutiae* (originally 1957). Sections of the exhibition emphasize both dance and music, including video and photographic documentation of performances and scores by John Cage. There will be live performances of Cunningham works performed on the stage in the gallery, including a rare opportunity to see the solo *Changeling* (1957), last performed by Cunningham in 1964, which will be performed by former Cunningham dancer Silas Riener. Full schedule of performances are available at [hammer.ucla.edu](http://hammer.ucla.edu).
- Other sections of the exhibition examine the college's critical role in the development of experimental literature in the United States, a period when poetry and pottery took on especially significant roles at BMC. The poet **Charles Olson** reimagines poetry as a field of action, ideas that became a catalyst for a generation of young American poets, many of whom Olson invited to teach at BMC, including **Robert Creeley** and **Robert Duncan**. At the same time, the BMC pottery shop was formed and a series of influential ceramic artists taught at BMC, including **Robert Turner**, **Karen Karnes**, and **Peter Voulkos**.

The Los Angeles presentation of *Leap Before You Look* is at the Hammer Museum from **February 21 to May 15, 2016** and coordinated by **Anne Ellegood**, Hammer senior curator, with **MacKenzie Stevens**, curatorial assistant, and **January Parkos Arnall**, curatorial assistant, Public Engagement.

*Leap Before You Look* is accompanied by a fully-illustrated, 400-page catalogue published by the ICA in association with Yale University Press. The catalogue includes an essay by Molesworth focusing on the interrelated themes of art pedagogy, progressive education, democracy, and cosmopolitanism. Molesworth has invited contributions from more than 20 scholars, both senior and junior, who possess specialized knowledge of a variety of topics from the history of weaving and ceramics to modernist music and American poetry. The catalogue's diversity of voices mirrors the mixture of objects in the exhibition and the spirit of BMC. Authors include Harry Cooper, Eva Diaz, Steve Evans, Jennifer Gross, Jonathan Hiam, Katherine Markoski, Nancy Perloff, Jeffrey Saletnik, Alice Sebrell, Jenni Sorkin, Gloria Sutton, and many others.

The Hammer Museum is offering nearly **two dozen FREE public programs** to accompany and expand upon the exhibition, including screenings, poetry readings, exhibition walkthroughs, performances, workshops, panels and lectures. Visit [hammer.ucla.edu](http://hammer.ucla.edu) for a full list of related programs.

#### CREDIT

*Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957* is organized by The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston and curated by Helen Molesworth, chief curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles with Ruth Erickson, assistant curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. The Hammer's presentation is organized by Anne Ellegood, senior curator, with MacKenzie Stevens, curatorial assistant and January Parkos Arnall, curatorial assistant, Public Engagement.

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Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this exhibition do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

#### ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM

The Hammer Museum at UCLA offers collections, exhibitions, and programs that span the classic to the contemporary in art, architecture, and design. The Hammer's international exhibition program focuses on wide-ranging thematic and monographic exhibitions, highlighting contemporary art since the 1960s and the work of emerging artists through Hammer Projects and the Hammer's biennial, *Made in L.A.* As a cultural center, the Hammer Museum offers nearly 300 free public programs a year, including lectures, readings, symposia, film screenings, and music performances at the Billy Wilder Theater which also houses the UCLA Film & Television Archive. The Hammer is home of the Armand Hammer Collection of American and European paintings, as well as the Armand Hammer Daumier and Contemporaries Collection and the Hammer Contemporary Collection. The Hammer Contemporary Collection focuses on art of all media since 1960 with an emphasis on works of the last ten years, works on paper, and art made in Los Angeles. The museum also houses the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts—comprising more than 45,000 prints, drawings, photographs, and artists' books from the Renaissance to the present—and oversees the Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden at UCLA. Free admission to the Hammer Museum is made possible through the generosity of benefactors Erika J. Glazer and Brenda R. Potter.

**HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION**

Admission to all exhibitions and programs at the Hammer Museum is free and open to the public.

Visit [www.hammer.ucla.edu](http://www.hammer.ucla.edu) for current exhibition and program information and call (310) 443-7041 for tours.

Hours: Tuesday–Friday 11a.m.–8 p.m., Saturday & Sunday 11a.m.–5 p.m. Closed Mondays and national holidays.

The Hammer is located at 10899 Wilshire Boulevard in Westwood, Los Angeles. Parking is available onsite for \$3 (maximum 3 hours) or for a \$3 flat rate after 6 p.m.