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I don’t want to write the usual words of appreciation about an important artist who has recently died, nor do I want to enshrine Moholy’s memory in admiring adjectives. That he was a pioneer both as artist and teacher is already an established fact. Chicagoans scarcely need be reminded of his enormous versatility as painter, photographer, writer, designer, typographer and above all as Director of his beloved school, the Institute of Design, for in these varied activities Moholy made himself felt throughout the entire country. Because he was ahead of his time there were always those who labeled him a “crackpot”; because he was persistently articulate he acquired the usual contingent of enemies. But I think it is important to remember that Moholy was more interested in ideas than in people. His entire direction as an artist was curiously consistent and lucid. From beginning to end he was concerned chiefly with two plastic elements, light and space, both of which evolve logically from modern urban vision. We must also realize that his art was one of subtle proportion where stress and strain were resolved with classical restraint.

This brief note is not intended as an explanation of Moholy’s educational theories or his work. Both of these are best explored in his own writings. What I rather want is to recapture a few memories of Moholy in Chicago. I was fortunate enough to meet him a day or two after his arrival during the summer of 1937 and I remember with what excitement we argued at that first meeting. He already felt that the great day for the easel painting was over and that new mechanistic inventions as well as new architectural forms, based on steel and glass, were to make unnecessary the small framed wall decoration. With his customary intensity he built up his argument—an argument based on his ever-fresh understanding of contemporary life. And in this connection I remember even more sharply an evening when he and I were walking together on the near north side. We had just left his school which was then called the School of Design in Chicago and which at that time was housed in the Chez-Paree building (an anomaly that never failed to charm me). Moholy had just finished teaching his evening class and he was now heading for home after his usual
fourteen hours of unbroken work. The average man might have been depleted, but not Moholy, for, volatile as ever, he suddenly became aware of the garish moving lights of the city and with characteristic enthusiasm he expounded on the beauty of our mechanistic surroundings. What impressed and moved me was the little black lunch kit he was carrying as always, humble evidence of time gained for work. I can think of no one who dedicated his life more passionately or joyously to his work.

And then there were Moholy’s jokes. How many times I heard him tell the famous story of his first London party when in broken English he thanked his aristocratic hostess for her hospitality. For that matter, his English was always rather picturesque and though his two little daughters mastered an admirable middle western twang, he never lost his heavy Hungarian accent.

I also like very much to remember the Moholy’s first apartment on Astor Street where the long entrance corridor was lined with his early work from Europe, dark, precise paintings concerned already with the American problems of artificial light and aerial space. Compare these with his prolific Chicago “œuvres”—constructions, paintings, space modulators on plastic, to mention only a few. The American works differ not in their emphasis, but in their means. Brighter, healthier, gayer, shall I say even more positive, certainly more uninhibited, for Moholy was one of the amazing Central Europeans who actually grew to love and understand America. I recall his funeral where a crowded auditorium in his own school was touchingly decorated with his latest works, all of which breathed an optimism and health totally unrelated to the sick body which had produced them.

How is it possible to pay just tribute to the magnificent courage with which both Moholy and his wife lived through that long last painful year when he and all his friends knew that the fatal illness could not be stemmed? That he continued to teach, paint and design with added intensity and concentration is best proved by the School he founded and the art he produced. Singleness of purpose coupled with heroic faith can work wonders.

I suppose we grow attached to people not alone for their virtues, but even more for their faults and weaknesses. Moholy had his share of both and I miss him for both. But it is for his vitality, his intelligence and for his unbelievably high courage that I miss him most.
When whole nations, even continents, are violently shaken by bloodshed and turmoil, destruction and famine, it cannot be expected that an artist, whether a writer, musician or a creator of plastic forms*, can continue honestly to work in an established form. The old ways of life which created these forms are as irretrievably lost as a building transformed into rubble. These changes are often anticipated because of ever-rising tensions. The conventionalists go on nostalgically as they did before the great upheavals, ignoring the changes which an inexorable fate has wrought around them. They are the uncowageous ones, the ones who blindly grope through an unrealistic existence or, sometimes, try to cheat actuality and the inevitable fate by insulation from the living, stirring world they live in: the “ivory towers,” a familiar sight.

Then there are the courageous ones who often saw the tragedy of war at first hand and have come to realize that death is final and notwithstanding death there must be a new life, which can never be identical to nor even approximate the old one. This is just plain, basic biology. To accept this fact in all its starkness needs courage, real courage, and a deep-rooted vitality.

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy was a man of such courage and the convictions which come of it. He was one of those who will pass their beliefs on to the next generation and the generation thereafter.

Moholy-Nagy was a student of law when he was drafted at the outbreak of the First World War. As a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army, he was wounded in 1917. In the hospital, as a pastime, he began shyly, almost timidly, to draw little illustrative postcards. But his mind was an inquisitive and searching one which was loath to drop any undertaking until a satisfactory solution had been found. In his work he can be accused only twice of having given up: first in his studies in jurisprudence (and that only partly, since he did achieve a minor degree in law), then in his efforts in poetry (he shared them with many another adolescent) which began

*The definition artist is either too inclusive for use in the present sense or too narrow, since the creative artist is usually identified with painting, and occasionally sculpture.
at the age of thirteen and ended after his school years. Moholy had one basic trait: a will to express himself, to communicate with his fellow men. He was quick to perceive, to understand, and, despite constant self-criticism, he had a tremendous desire for communication. Endowed with a natural versatility, he was quick to become proficient in anything he undertook. He also possessed a great faculty for concentration. All these various elements of his character summed up to a will to become an artist. Moholy, however, could not confine himself to the narrow confines of an academy, so he taught himself to draw. Nature became his principal teacher. He was an indefatigable draughtsman in this early period. Being always interested in people, he first drew figures and portraits, numerous large heads which, in his expansive way, filled the paper almost entirely. The study of these early drawings is particularly interesting as they give the key to Moholy's later work. In their outline pattern they remain realistic and conventional in composition. The plastic realization of the figure or head, however, is totally unconventional and unnaturalistic. There are those who claim Moholy could not draw. Of course he could draw; the sureness of his compositional conception shows it clearly and wherever an unconventional line appears it is placed there without the slightest hesitation. The whole surface of these early drawings is covered with a peculiar web of closely related lines. Many of them have no relation to the natural form, but without them one effect could not be obtained: the surface vibrates, as if controlled by mysterious factors from within and without. The surface is pushed and pulled, it shows stress and strain as seen in magnified, thinly polished sections of metals, of bone structures, which in their turn are close to the logical structures of the engineer. Later, Kandinsky also sought to comprehend these stress and strain relationships in his abstractions which have an inherent affinity to microscopic visions. Moholy's early drawings also reveal one prime source of influence, namely the artists who developed, or more or less consciously moved in the direction pointed out by l'Art Nouveau (Jugendstil): Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Edvard Munch, the Norwegian, the German and Austrian painters and illustrators. They show the restless, undulating line which is so characteristic of them all.

However, they were the older artists, and Moholy, naturally, sought the company of those of his own age and generation. The war had shocked them into action, action against traditionalism and all its meaningless ornament. They were mostly in their early twenties and action seemed more important than logic. Dadaism began and Moholy, who had gone to Berlin from Vienna in 1920, found himself suddenly in the midst of all the youthful tension, frustration, confusion and hope of the young ex-serviceman who, after facing the horrors of modern warfare, sought a new life. The conventionalities of traditionalism, styles, natural forms, yes logic itself,
31 Dr. Ference, 1919

54 Divided Collage, 1923
were dropped, all in one cause: life, dynamic expression, a revolt against the past. But soon this almost hysterical will to survive and motion for motion's sake ran into new channels, worked out by the newcomers to the art world themselves, built by themselves of their own volition. Without these channels there seemed only the limitlessness of insanity. They felt that living in a time of cylinders, rods and wheels (had not many of their comrades been crushed by the relentlessness of the wheels of war machinery?), the basic geometric forms had taken on a new meaning, as indeed they had.

Moholy was fascinated by the experiments of Kurt Schwitters who pieced together small pieces of paper in an ever changing kaleidoscopic harmony of shapes and colors. Together they worked and tried and constructed, each for himself, yet in communal effort. Kurt Schwitters, now living in England, remained his friend for life.

Moholy continued to gain confidence in his artistic abilities and although limited to a group of people who understood what was happening to the art of our time, he found high recognition as one of the leaders among the new art groups. His restless nature always drove him on. He had hardly begun to use an established method, such as drawing, painting, or printmaking, when he began to experiment with the medium in which he was working, fusing it with such unconventional methods as photography. He combined materials and introduced new ones, such as plastics. He sought actual three-dimensionality in his pictures rather than use the conventional trick of perspective. A geometric, balanced composition was found and then, impulsively, yet with wilful logic, it was cut diametrically in half. The two halves were placed into new relationship to each other through the simple method of parallel axial displacement. Whenever Moholy, forever trying something new and different, saw the result of his work, he seemed to contemplate it with an almost childlike astonishment as well as with the satisfaction of an honest job well done.

Because of his many-sided talent and indomitable will to "try out," Moholy had an unusual knowledge of materials. Throughout his work we find a high degree of craftsmanship. He also knew how to stimulate others and it was only natural that Moholy began to teach. Constantly learning himself, he taught others to continue to learn. This statement represents, in a way, his whole philosophy of life: "learn to continue to learn."

And thus this courageous man, starting life again in a new country, set out by founding a new art school. A born leader, he always kept his sights well leveled toward the basic principles which underlie human creativeness. When he knew that his life's time was unduly limited, he cooly, yet with all the passionate warmth of his character and enthusiasm, planned the continuation of his beliefs, his knowledge, his faith. To the last he was a man of great courage who, rising beyond himself, found consolation in the fact that his spirit and his work will live on.
Chronology

1895  Born on July 20, in Bacsarosod, Hungary, the son of a wheat farmer. Later attended the Gymnasium in Szeged.

1913  Enrolled as law student in University of Budapest. Was interested in literature, contributed to progressive little magazines but had not begun to paint.

1914  Called into Austro-Hungarian Army and sent to Russian Theatre of War.

1915  While recovering from shell shock he made his first drawings.

1917  Received a severe wound, mutilating his left thumb. Made his first grease crayon portraits and with a group of friends published the first revolutionary art quarterly in eastern Europe.

1919  Discharged from the army, he returned to Budapest and received his bachelor's degree in law but never practiced.

1919  Became interested in Russian artists, particularly Malevitsch and Lissitzky. Edited with friends the Buch Neuer Kunstler, first anthology of German modern art and poetry.
1920 Went to Berlin. His painting was now purely abstract, he worked in collages and photograms. Exhibited in Sturm Gallery.

1922 Walter Gropius appointed him professor and he became head of the metal workshop of the Staatliche Bauhaus. From then until 1926 he did much experimental work in photography and with Gropius published the Bauhaus Bücher, each volume presenting a particular phase of the Bauhaus work. Published his books Malerei, Fotografie, Film and Vom Material zur Architektur (later issued in America as The New Vision).

1928 Rising of fascistic German politics brought about so many restrictions that Gropius resigned from the Bauhaus and Moholy-Nagy went with him. All this time he had made a brilliant career for himself as designer for the State Opera and the Piscator Theatre. Worked with experiments in sound films. From then until 1934 he traveled extensively in Europe. Concentrated in his design work on new methods of advertising, exhibited in Holland, Germany and Hungary and the Guggenheim Foundation in New York began to buy his paintings, also made documentary films.

1934 Moved to Amsterdam. Designed the Fair for the manufacturers of artificial silks.


1936 Created the special effects for Korda's film The Shape of Things, by H. G. Wells.

1937 Came to the United States in July. Became Director of New Bauhaus in Chicago, founded by Association of Arts and Industries. Financial difficulties forced the Association to close the school. After a one-term interval Moholy-Nagy opened his own School of Design. He worked also as designer for Spiegel, Inc., for Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, Parker Pen Co., etc.

1946 Died of leukemia on November 24 in Chicago. At the time of his death he was President of The Institute of Design, Director of The American Designers Institute, of the Congrès Internationale d'Architecture and member of many progressive civic and art groups.

1947 His book Vision in Motion published.
Paintings and Constructions

The paintings and constructions in the exhibition were selected only from the work done after Moholy-Nagy's arrival in Chicago.

1 Chicago RHO. 1938. 45 x 35 in.
2 Dotted Rhodoid, CHI. 1938. 44 x 34 1/8 in.
3 Chicago B. 1939. 31 x 39 in.
4 Chicago 9. 1939. 31 x 38 3/4 in.
5 SIL 2. 1939. 31 1/4 x 35 in.
6 SIL Plexiglass Sculpture. 1939. 31 x 20 in.
7 Chicago P. 1940. 44 3/4 x 35 in.
8 Chicago PLI. 1940. 45 x 35 in.
9 Chicago 4. 1941. 49 x 49 in.
10 Chicago B4. 1941. 51 x 41 1/4 in.
11 Chicago Space 6. 1941. 48 1/8 x 48 1/4 in.
12 Black over Red (on wired glass), Chicago. 1946. 28 x 35 1/2 in.
13 Horizontal Snake Form. 1946. 14 1/4 in. high.
14  **Leu No. 1.** 1946. 50 x 50 in. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Walter Paepcke.

15  **Nuclear 1, CH.** 1946. 38 x 30 in. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Leigh Block.

16  **Plexiglass (Lo.), Chicago.** 1946. 35 3/4 x 28 in. high.

17  **Plexiglass 20.** 1946. 26 x 20 in.

18  **Plexiglass 21.** 1946. 26 x 20 in.

19  **Plexiglass and Chromium Rod, Po.** 1946. 47 in.

20  **Somonaik.** 1946. 39 1/2 x 46 1/2 in.

20a  **Two-Piece Standing Construction.** 1946. 17 3/4 in. high.

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**Drawings, Prints and Other Media**

21  **Female Nude Standing.** 1918. Pencil. 17 1/2 x 12 1/4 in.

22  **Portrait of the Artist’s Mother.** 1918. Etching. 3 1/2 x 3 in.

23  **Reclining Female Nude.** 1918. Black grease crayon. 9 1/2 x 12 1/4 in.

24  **The Big Five. (Die Grosse Fünf.)** 1919. Linoleum cut. 6 3/4 x 6 1/8 in.

25  **Children.** 1919. Collage with water color. 25 1/2 x 19 3/4 in. This was Moholy-Nagy’s first collage.

26  **Collage.** 1919. Collage with India ink. 13 3/4 x 10 3/4 in.

27  **Collage for a Child Inscribed Für Norm.** 1919. Collage with tempera and pen and ink. 13 3/4 x 10 3/4 in.

28  **Composition: Diagonals.** 1919. Water color. 7 3/8 x 10 1/2 in.

29  **Composition in Diagonals.** 1919. Linoleum cut. 4 1/4 x 7 3/8 in.

30  **Composition with Wine Glass.** 1919. Linoleum cut. 9 1/2 x 8 3/8 in.

31  **Dr. Ference.** 1919. Black grease crayon. 25 3/8 x 19 in.
32 Portrait of the Artist’s Mother. 1919. Black grease crayon. 25\(\frac{3}{8}\) x 19 in.

33 Self-Portrait. 1919. Drypoint. 3\(\frac{3}{8}\) x 3 in.

34 7\(\frac{1}{2}\), 1919. Collage on yellow paper with tempera and India ink. 16\(\frac{7}{8}\) x 22\(\frac{7}{8}\) in.

35 Sketch for Time Machine. 1919. Print from pressed charcoal drawing (?). 8\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 6\(\frac{1}{2}\) in.

36 A and 11: Dadaist Collage. 1920. Gouache and India ink. 19\(\frac{1}{2}\) x 14\(\frac{3}{4}\) in.

37 Collage with Bridgelike Form at Bottom. 1920. Collage with water color and ink. 13\(\frac{1}{8}\) x 9 in.

38 Dadaist Sketch with Bottle, Wheel, Animal Head, Perambulator, the Word Otaro, Etc. 1920. India ink. 7 x 9\(\frac{3}{8}\) in.

39 Dadaist Sketch with the Word Organisation. 1920. Collage with water color and India ink. 13\(\frac{1}{8}\) x 10\(\frac{1}{8}\) in.

40 Die, Dadaist Collage. 1920. Collage with water color, pen and ink. 13\(\frac{1}{8}\) x 10\(\frac{1}{8}\) in.

41 Dr. Schäfer. Berlin. 1920. Black grease crayon. 25\(\frac{1}{2}\) x 19\(\frac{3}{8}\) in.

42 Collage on Glossy Black Paper. 1921. Collage with water color. 14\(\frac{1}{8}\) x 17\(\frac{1}{8}\) in.

43 Collage with a Silver Disc and Blue and Yellow Half-Moon Forms. 1921. Collage on red paper. 25\(\frac{1}{2}\) x 19\(\frac{3}{8}\) in.

44 Composition Crossed by Two White Diagonals. 1921. Linoleum cut. 4\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 3\(\frac{3}{4}\) in.

45 Composition of Diagonals with Dotted Rectangles and Squares, 1921.
45 Composition of Diagonals with Dotted Rectangles and Squares. 1921. Linoleum cut, 4¾ x 5¾ in.

46 Composition of Vertical Forms Based on a Crescent. (Study for Kestner Portfolio.) 1921. Linoleum cut, 7½ x 5½ in.

47 Composition with Black Square and Two Diagonal Rectangular Forms. 1921. Linoleum cut, 8 x 6 in.

48 Composition with Lines Converging to the Left. 1921. Linoleum cut, 4¾ x 5¾ in.

49 Composition with Three Half-Moons and a Diagonal Rectangle. (Study for Kestner Portfolio.) 1921. Linoleum cut, 5½ x 5½ in.

50 Composition with White Half-Moon at Left. (Study for Kestner Portfolio.) 1921. Linoleum cut, 5½ x 5½ in.

51 Composition with Circle in Center, Half-Circle at Bottom, Tall Crosshatched Rectangle at Right. 1922. Etching, 5¾ x 4½ in.

52 Basket. 1923. Photogram, 10½ x 14⅛ in.

53 Composition of Textures and Two Circles. 1923. Photogram, 7½ x 14½ in.

54 Divided Collage. 1923. Collage with water color, 13 x 9½ in.

55 Horizontal Collage in Two Parts. 1923. Collage with air brush, India ink, water color and pencil, 12½ x 12½ in.

56 Kestner-Mappe 6: Konstruktionen. (Kestner Portfolio No. 6: Constructions.) Hanover, 1923. Lithographs. There were fifty numbered copies of the portfolio, of which this is No. 1. It contains a colophon and eight lithographs. The sheets are all 23¾ x 17⅛ in. Following are descriptions of the lithographs:

a. Composition on Red Ground with Diagonals and Two Rectangles at the Right.

b. Composition on Black Ground with Large White Half-Moon.

c. Composition on Greenish Gray Ground with Intersecting Lines Forming Diamond at Bottom.

d. Composition with Square Standing on End at Bottom.

e. Composition with Large White Half-Moon and Small Black and Gray Half-Moons.

f. Composition with Four Black, White and Gray Half-Moons.

h. Small Composition of Horizontal and Vertical Forms.

h. Small Composition of Horizontal and Vertical Forms.

Owned by The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Mrs. Ernest A. Hamill, II.

57 Composition with Intersecting Diagonals. 1925. Etching, 5½ x 7⅛ in.
58 Composition with Intersecting Diagonals.  
1925 (?). Linoleum cut. 4 7/8 x 5 5/8 in. 
This print is similar to an etching made in 1925  
(No. 57).

59 K + Sp 1. 1925. Collage with air brush, water  
color and pencil. 19 3/4 x 13 1/8 in.

60 Photogram. Positive and negative. 1925. 10 1/4 x  
9 1/3 in. (positive); 10 1/4 x 9 1/3 in. (negative).

61 Vertical and Horizontal Composition with Cir- 
cele to the Left. 1925. Etching and drypoint.  
8 1/2 x 6 5/8 in.
   a. First State: The circle is lightly shaded.
   b. Second State: The circle is covered by many  
horizontal and vertical lines. The lines in  
the red-like form at the top of the center  
vertical are much lighter, as well as most  
of the work on both the central horizontals  
and verticals.

62 Self-Portrait. 1926. Photogram. 9 1/3 x 7 in.

63 Collage with Red Circle. 1928. Collage with air  
brush. 13 3/4 x 10 1/4 in.

64 Collage in Pink, Gray, Black and Orange with  
Vertical Lines. 1931. Collage with water color  
and pencil. 10 3/4 x 8 1/4 in.

65 Composition with Symmetrical Circles. 1932.  
Water color and pen and ink. 15 1/4 x 11 1/2 in.

66 New Year’s Card. 1932. Collage with photogram.  
11 7/8 x 15 5/8 in.


68 Composition. 1934. Tempera and chalk on black  
sandpaper. 10 3/8 x 6 7/8 in.

69 Composition with Red, Blue and Yellow Cir- 
cles. 1939. Crayon and pencil. 9 3/16 x 8 1/2 in. 

70 Sketch for Metal Sculpture. 1937. India ink  
and color crayon. 13 3/4 x 9 1/8 in.

71 Collage with Square and Ball in Center. 1940.
Collage with color crayon. 11 3/8 x 8 3/8 in.

72 Composition in Blue and Red. 1941. Silk screen  
print. 18 1/4 x 22 1/4 in.

73 Composition in Yellow and Red. 1941. Silk  
screen print. 18 1/4 x 22 1/4 in.

74 Composition with Egg Shape. 1943. Charcoal  
and color crayon. 11 x 8 1/2 in.

75 Sketch for Bennett Sculpture. 1943. Oil, pen  
and ink and color crayon. 11 x 8 1/2 in.

76 Composition with Balls. 1945. Color crayon and  
pencil. 11 x 8 1/2 in.

77 Composition with Yellow Rectangular Area  
and Circles. 1945. Water color and India ink.  
15 x 20 in.

78 Ropes. 1945. Color crayon and pencil. 11 x 8 1/2  
in.

79 Composition with Red Oval and White Dots. 
1946. Water color. 14 9/16 x 18 in. (Reproduced on  
cover.)

80 Three Ovals. 1946. Tempera and pen and ink.  
14 1/8 x 16 in.
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