



The Arts at Black Mountain College

By Mary Emma Harris

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It was at Black Mountain College that Merce Cunningham formed his dance company, John Cage staged his first "happening," and Buckminster Fuller built his first dome. Although it lasted only twenty-four years (1933-1957) and enrolled fewer than 1,200 students, Black Mountain College launched a remarkable number of the artists who spearheaded the avant-garde in America of the 1960s. The faculty included such diverse talents as Anni and Josef Albers, Eric Bentley, Ilya Bolotowsky, Robert Creeley, Willem de Kooning, Robert Duncan, Lyonel Feininger, Paul Goodman, Walter Gropius, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, and Charles Olson. Among the students were Ruth Asawa, John Chamberlain, Francine du Plessix Gray, Kenneth Noland, Arthur Penn, Robert Rauschenberg, Kenneth Snelson, Cy Twombly, Stan Vanderbeek, and Jose Yglesias. In this definitive account of the arts at Black Mountain College, back in print after many years, Mary Emma Harris describes a unique educational experiment and the artists and writers who conducted it. She replaces the myth of the college as a haphazardly conceived venture with a portrait of a consciously directed liberal arts school that grew out of the progressive education movement. Proceeding chronologically through the four major periods of the college's history, Harris covers every aspect of its extraordinary curriculum in the visual, literary, and performing arts.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Launched in the depths of the Depression, Black Mountain College had fewer than 1300 pupils over its 24-year lifespan. Yet this haven of experimentation in the North Carolina hills counted among its students and faculty Franz Kline, Walter Gropius, Josef Albers, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert De Niro, Buckminster Fuller, Merce Cunningham and Willem de Kooning, among others. Based on some 300 interviews as well as primary sources, this revealing study by an art historian traces the school's evolution from a small, innovative liberal arts college with a general curriculum to a creative community of practicing artists. Despite bitter internal conflicts and a certain insularity, Black Mountain risked constant financial worries to maintain a democratic openness and willingness to "let things happen." This attractively illustrated chronicle documents the gamut of creativity, from painting to weaving, ceramics, dance, graphic arts and photography.

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From Library Journal

Few colleges have had as much influence on American culture as Black Mountain College, an educational establishment open for only 24 years. Through a holistic approach and concentration on the arts, the college aimed to prepare students for life in a democracy. Education at the college encompassed not just academics but every aspect of life, from growing food to making furniture. Harris, an art historian, has done a superb research job, documenting in detail the life of the college from its founding in 1933 to its closing in 1957. The book is lavishly illustrated with scenes of the college, its students, and some of their work. Also included is an appendix listing those involved with the college: Charles Olson, John Cage, Buckminster Fuller, and Merce Cunningham are among the notables. Nancy R. Ives, State Univ. of New York at Geneseo

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Review

"Katz manages to evoke a world of cross-media artistic possibility that seems as vast as it was often joyous."
Publisher's Weekly

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Megan Martelli:

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