

Composition ca. 1922–23

Paper collage on paper

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Charlotte Mack,
I953.34.5

Collage, which simply involves arranging and pasting cut paper shapes on a sheet of paper, provided Moholy with a flexible way to test out compositions he would later translate into other media including canvas, wood panels, print, and watercolor.

Untitled 1922–23

Gouache, watercolor, pencil, charcoal, and pasted paper on black wove paper

Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four Galka Scheyer Collection, P.1953.292

This collage on black wove paper relates to a suite of works on dark grounds that Moholy made in the early 1920s in part as a means by which to prepare to work with new industrial plastics characterized by their dark opacity. Moholy speculated that paintings could one day be mass produced on durable materials like plastic and that abstract pictures could enter the home like books had done generations prior.

Composition 1923

Oil on canvas

Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame,
1962.028.004

This painting was first exhibited at the Galerie der Sturm in Berlin in 1923 and exemplified a kind of painting that helped to establish Moholy's constructivist credentials. It was also included in the 1924 Bauhaus faculty show held at the Landesmuseum in Weimar, Moholy's first exhibition as a member of the Bauhaus faculty.

Untitled ca. 1924

Linoleum cut

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase

2006.6.2

Moholy made a number of linoleum cuts especially in the early 1920s and published several prints in issues of the influential avant-garde journal *Der Sturm*. Linoleum was a material that was introduced as flooring in the 1860s but soon was adopted by artists for printmaking because it was easier to work with than metal or wood printing plates. In this and other linoleum cuts, Moholy experimented with different hatched, lined, and dotted patterns to create effects of depth, translucency, and transparency even when printed against a dark ground.

Planes Cutting Planes 1926

Watercolor and graphite on paper

Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Collection Société

Anonyme, 1941.574

This watercolor, made during Moholy's time at Bauhaus Dessau differs significantly from his earlier, more static compositions. The parallelograms are arranged as if in dynamic suspension in this work, reflecting his increasing concern with capturing movement in his compositions.

Q 1922/1923

Collage with watercolor and pen and black ink over graphite on carbon paper

National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund,
1982.27.I

In 1922, Moholy argued in his essay “Production-Reproduction” that technologies invented simply to replicate existing phenomena, like the gramophone, should be made productive by using them in a way to generate wholly new relationships. In the case of the gramophone, he argued, introducing a scratch on the disc could create unexpected jumps and skips, creating new sounds by subverting the intended operation of the machine. In this work, Moholy executed a collage on carbon paper, using material developed to make duplicate copies of typed or written documents. Instead of making carbon copies, Moholy made use of the velvety texture of the surface in this collage, thus repurposing this utilitarian material as a new means of artistic exploration.



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Light Prop for an Electric Stage 1929–30

exhibition replica, constructed in 2006 through the
courtesy of Hattula Moholy-Nagy

Metal, plastics, glass, paint, and wood,
with electric motor

Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger

Museum, Hildegard von Gontard Bequest Fund,
2007.105



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G. SMIRG 1923

Watercolor and collage on sandpaper

Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum purchase and
bequest of Horace M. Swope by exchange, 67.1969

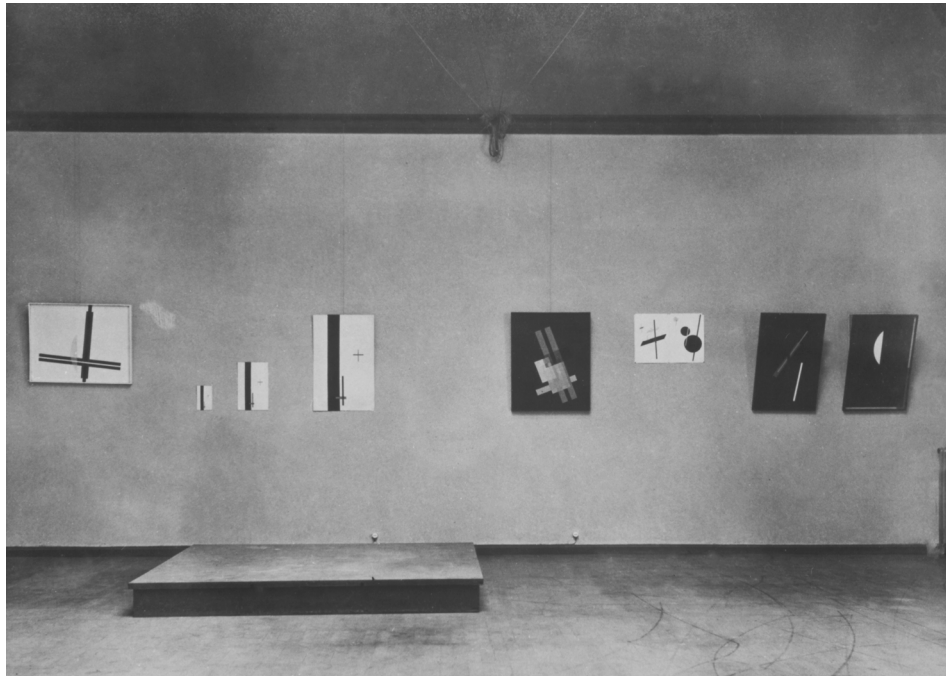
Moholy's title for this work, *G.SMIRG*, refers to the emery paper commonly used to polish and abrade metal surfaces. It was a staple of any metal and woodworking shop, readily available to Moholy in 1923 when he served as the head of the metal workshop at the Bauhaus. Here, the rough emery surface, made to be discarded, an invisible tool in the production of other finished metal goods, becomes the textured support for his delicate watercolor and collage. Working on a textured surface, Moholy seeks to activate the viewer's alertness to the tactile qualities of his painting surface and explores the use of commonplace materials in ways wholly counter to their intended uses.

Z VI 1925

Oil on canvas

Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum,
The Fredric Wertham Collection, Gift of his wife
Hesketh, 1987.78

Painted during his time at Bauhaus Dessau, *Z VI* (1925) incorporates a number of compositional elements developed several years earlier and executed in a manner that mimics industrial techniques and even materials. The two white painted discs are executed in thicker paint that imitates the hard, glossy surface of enamel. The quality of the discs recalls his *Constructions in Enamel*, shown in 1924, that comprised three identical compositions scaled to fit three differently sized porcelain enamel on steel panels. Produced at a sign factory, Moholy argued that such work paved the way for an art that could potentially be ordered by telephone.



AL 3 1926

Oil, industrial paints, and pencil on aluminum
Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four Galka
Scheyer Collection, P.1953.293

Moholy painted a number of works on aluminum during his career, a material that was lightweight and relatively newly developed for use in aviation. When the Bauhaus moved the school to Dessau in 1924, the school cultivated relationships with Junkers, a company that made airplanes, engines, and heating elements. This particular painting was executed using a range of materials including oil and industrial paints applied both by spray machine and by brush.

TRB 1 1928

Oil on plastic

Estate of László Moholy-Nagy

Over the course of the 1920s, Moholy both wrote about and worked with newly developed plastic materials. This small work demonstrates one of his approaches to plastics. He often would first inscribe the sheet as if treating it like a printing plate and would subsequently apply paints to the surface. Towards the end of the 1920s, Moholy would begin to incorporate more textures to his paintings, activating not only the sense of sight but a sense of touch as well.

G7a 1925

Galalith

Historic New England, Boston, Mass.

In 1925, the Bauhaus relocated from Weimar to the German city of Dessau, known for its industrial manufacturing. Moholy worked hard to demonstrate his willingness to engage with industrial materials in his writings and in his work. In his book, *Painting Photograph Film* (1925), he argued that paintings might one day be produced in a factory on durable new plastic supports. As if in preparation for such a future, Moholy executed this painting on an early opaque plastic support, Galalith.



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K 1 1922

Oil on canvas

Smith College Museum of Art, 1951.126

In the early 1920s, Moholy engaged painting in a manner that emulated the clean line and finish of machine made objects, arguing that even easel painting should adopt a “precise and impersonal technique.” He painted in a manner that sought to suppress every trace of his own hand and in doing so gave up the traditional markers of an artist’s signature style. Moholy believed that in the future, paintings might become manufactured objects, ready to be distributed like books for a mass audience.

Z VII 1926

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Gift of Richard S. Zeisler,
2007.112.1

Despite the early date of this painting, the surface and palette of *Z VII* bears little resemblance to his paintings from that period. Instead of the smooth, undifferentiated planes of color that characterize the paintings of the 1920s, this work features a range of textures, caught in thick layers of paint. After extensive conservation analysis, it was discovered that the canvas had been torn at some point and the work completely repainted according to the original 1926 composition but with an entirely new palette. Despite its damage, this painting became important to him in the 1930s and it was featured in color reproduction as the cover to his retrospective monograph, *Telehor* in 1936.



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Set designs for *Things to Come* 1936

Gelatin silver prints

Estate of László Moholy-Nagy

While living in exile in London, Moholy was commissioned to produce special effects for a dystopian science fiction film *Things To Come* in 1936, which was based off of a H.G. Wells novel. These are photographs of the sets he built in miniature for the film, but very little of his work was used. A few months later, he left London to take up the directorship of the New Bauhaus, established in Chicago, Illinois. The photographs would remain with Moholy in the United States and they were featured in a number of design projects, including the brochure announcing the program of the newly established school.



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Untitled (*Space Modulator*) 1946

Oil on Plexiglas

McMaster Museum of Art, McMaster

University I995.032.0002LB

Untitled (*Space Modulator*) is a superb example of Moholy's approach to painting on clear plastic supports in his late career. Moholy began by inscribing his design on both sides of the plastic and applied oil paints using a number of different techniques. Borrowing from printmaking, he applied paint to certain inscribed areas but wiped the surface afterwards to embed scratched lines with residual color. In other areas, he contrasted thickly applied, highly textured paint with drier, stippled effects. Set at a distance from the backing board, the painting creates a range of light and shadow effects under different viewing conditions.



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“Gyros” Photograph Set 1936

Gelatin silver print

Estate of László Moholy-Nagy

These photographs are of a special effects mechanism Moholy built that comprised mercury-filled glass tubes that spun against a highly reflective background intended for use in the film *Things to Come*. The sculpture was exhibited in his London Gallery show in 1936-37 and his daughter remembers the object in their home in Chicago. In the interim, however, it broke and could not be repaired. The forms of this object are found in a number of his late paintings, including *Ch XI (39)*.

Photogram 1927

Gelatin silver print

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles,

84.XM.997.64

Moholy began making photograms in the early 1920s, challenging conventional ideas about how photography operates. Instead of inserting photosensitive paper into a camera behind a lens, Moholy placed objects directly upon the sensitized sheet and exposed the ensemble to light. Produced in this process were images with the ghostly impressions of these objects, the shadows cast caught in luminous white, the areas exposed to light captured in velvety black on the sheet. After producing these original negatives, Moholy often subjected the image to further manipulation. In this case, he used the original photogram as a negative to produce this positive contact print. The results of a photogram are often unexpected and so it offered Moholy an endless source of new forms and structural relationships from which he could draw. Features of this particular image, with its sinuous, biomorphic curves produced by the imprint of perhaps a simple potato masher cradling a single egg, recur in his late paintings.

Ch XI (39) 1939

Oil on canvas

Mills College Art Museum, Oakland,

Susan L. Mills Fund, 1940.181

CH XI (39), acquired by the Mills College from the artist in 1940 demonstrates Moholy's use of techniques and forms explored in other media into his paintings. Not only does he borrow from the serpentine shapes of his wire and glass filled sculptures, he also inscribes directly on the painted surface of his canvas, using a technique he developed for his paintings on plastic.

CH Space 6 1941

Oil on canvas

Estate of László Moholy-Nagy

The paintings that begin with the designation CH often refer to work made during Moholy's time in Chicago. The forms found in this painting, the fluid ribbon and bright colored oval are mainstays of his later paintings. Not only do they draw from the aesthetic vocabulary of his color photograph, but the curves recall his earlier experiments in the photogram as well.

Leuk 5 1946

Oil and pencil on canvas

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.,
Gift of Patricia and Phillip Frost, 1986.92.66

Against a white ground, Moholy framed a few playful shapes reminiscent of a child's game of jacks within a luminous yellow enclosure. Moholy was diagnosed with leukemia in November 1945 and he would die of the disease a year later. Despite his illness, Moholy continued to work as director of the Institute of Design and remained remarkably productive as a painter. *Leuk* refers on the one hand, obviously and explicitly to leukemia. On the other hand, the title derives from the Greek λευκός, which means white, light, and bright. It is this second sense that the painting invokes with its luminous colors, playful forms, and open rendering of space.

CH For Y Space Modulator 1942

Oil on yellow Formica

Estate of László Moholy-Nagy

This brilliant yellow Formica painting features elements that are drawn from experiments in color photography Moholy conducted in the mid-1930s in which he used colored plastic light filter samples as the subject of his composition. This can be seen in the first edition of *Vision in Motion* displayed in the case to your right.



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CH for R1 Space Modulator 1942

Oil on red Formica

Estate of László Moholy-Nagy

This is one of two paintings Moholy executed on Formica, a plastic material that initially was developed for industrial and military uses but by the 1940s was beginning to be used in domestic contexts. In both paintings, Moholy makes use of the vivid, almost garish palette of this new generation of materials that had only just begun to find a place in the American home.

Photogram ca. 1924

Gelatin silver print

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 94.XM.231.4



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JAN TICHY

Things To Come 1936–2012

Three-channel digital video projection

Edition 2 of 5

Richard Gray Gallery



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VASILY KANDINSKY

RUSSIAN, 1866–1944

Line-Spot 1927

Oil on pressed pulp board

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs.

Ira Gershwin 1956.5.4

Although Kandinsky, who was also a member of the Bauhaus faculty, never came to the United States, his work had an enormous impact in America. He was included in the 1913 Armory exhibition in New York and he was one of the four artists promoted abroad by the art dealer, Galka Scheyer as *Die Blauen Vier* (The Blue Four), a group that also included Lyonel Feininger, Alexei Jawlensky (whose work is also on view nearby), and Paul Klee.

This painting was done during Kandinsky's most productive years at the Bauhaus where he discovered so many kindred spirits. Like Moholy-Nagy, Kandinsky believed in abstraction as a means of universal expression. Kandinsky, who wrote many influential tracts on the spiritual in art, believed that the tension between pictorial elements could generate "vibrations," which might engender communication between living souls.



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ALEXEI JAWLENSKY

RUSSIAN, 1846-1941

Sorrow 1928

Oil and wax on cardboard

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs.

Robert B. Baird 1963.11

Like Moholy-Nagy, Jawlensky was deeply affected by the tragic loss of life that he witnessed in the world wars. And like Moholy, his itinerant existence throughout Europe as an émigré artist unmoored from his adopted city of Moscow, meant that he came into contact with various strains of cutting-edge art, including Symbolism, Fauvism, Expressionism, and Constructivism. This painting comes from a series of canvases that he produced between 1921 and 1935, known as the *Constructivist Heads*. The format is reminiscent of traditional Byzantine icons. The reduction of the sorrowful face to a minimum of angular contour lines and modulated planes of color reflects an avant-garde belief in the universality of expression enabled by the abstraction of form into expressive essence; a credo he derived from his exposure to the art of Vasily Kandinsky, Ferdinand Hodler, and Henri Matisse.

KURT SCHWITTERS

GERMAN, 1887-1948

Marab 1936

Collage on cardboard

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase

1968.31

Moholy-Nagy met Schwitters in Berlin, when he moved there in 1920 and the two worked in close contact with one another. Collage, which provokes unexpected associations by juxtaposing and overlapping decontextualized fragments from found material, as seen here, was a tactic that Moholy often employed in his early graphic and photographic montages.

This collage is composed of torn pieces of train tickets and candy wrappers that the artist probably collected during a holiday to Scandinavia that he took in 1936 (the title of this work is a fragment of the brand name for a chocolate candy named after the Marabou stork). The next year, he fled Nazi Germany and relocated to Norway. In 1940, he was forced to flee again, this time to England, where he lived the remainder of his life.

JOSEF ALBERS

AMERICAN (BORN GERMANY), 1888–1976

Mirage (A) 1940

Oil on paper pulp board

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase for the Donald Bear Memorial Collection 1967.24

In 1922 Josef Albers was asked by Walter Gropius to join the Bauhaus faculty because of his impressive craftsmanship in stained glass. Albers and Moholy-Nagy were assigned the task of teaching the Preliminary Course in material and design, which had been taught by Johannes Itten until his departure in 1923. Along with many Bauhaus members who fled Germany in 1933 with the closing of the school, Albers took up a position at the newly founded Black Mountain College in North Carolina, importing the Bauhaus values of clean lines and powerful simplicity. Like Moholy, Albers believed in impersonal geometric abstractions that tended to minimize the expressive role of the artist's touch. Executed in 1940 while he was on sabbatical for one year in Tlalpan, Mexico, *Mirage (A)* is an early example of Albers' use of minimal forms and a deliberate choice of colors to achieve the optical illusion of simultaneous projection and recession. A renowned color theorist, this piece predates Albers most famous series, *Homage to the Square*, produced between 1950 until his death in 1976—a ceaseless experimentation with the limitless optical effects achieved by the calculated interaction of colors and shapes.

KARL BENJAMIN

AMERICAN, 1925–2012

Abstraction 1955

Oil on panel

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. Kenneth Jennings I957.I4

In the Bauhaus, pedagogy was considered a critical part of the artist's professional responsibility. Karl Benjamin, not unlike Moholy-Nagy, came upon his true calling as an artist relatively late in life. After serving in the Navy during World War II, he returned from military service in 1946 to complete a degree in the humanities at the University of Redlands. He taught elementary school for the next twenty-nine years, only discovering his own penchant for art in the course of learning how to teach it to children. In 1954, just three years after taking up painting, Benjamin was honored by a one-man exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum. He would be further recognized as one of *Four Abstract Classicists* in a 1959 traveling exhibition organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. After retiring from public school teaching in 1977, he went on to teach art at Pomona College. He also taught at Claremont Graduate School from 1979 to 1994, exerting a tremendous influence over the next generation of California artists.

Benjamin is now celebrated as one of the pioneers of hard-edge abstraction and op art. Largely self-taught, Benjamin's paintings continue the Bauhaus preoccupation with geometry and the psychology of color.

HERBERT BAYER

AMERICAN (BORN AUSTRIA), 1900–1985

Triangulation with Hidden Square 1970

Acrylic on canvas

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz 2014.I7.4

Like Moholy-Nagy, Bayer studied and worked at the Bauhaus, and believed in the necessity of the integration of art and technology. *Triangulation with Hidden Square* is a mature work, made after his emigration to the United States in 1938 and many years after he left the Bauhaus in 1928. When viewed at the appropriate distance, this rigorously designed arrangement of squares and triangles generates the optical illusion of a floating square. Like Josef Albers, Bayer's project in paint remained committed to the Bauhaus respect for the science of geometry and color and the limitless configurations these fundamental laws could generate. And like Albers and Moholy-Nagy, Bayer exerted an enormous influence on subsequent cutting-edge art in America during the 20th century and beyond.

RONALD WENDELL DAVIS

AMERICAN, B. 1937

Stalls 1970

Polyester resin and fiberglass

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Collector's Group 1980.16

Moholy-Nagy's commitment to the inter-relationship between art and technology was instrumental in the evolution of the Bauhaus away from more traditional concepts of design as craft. The Bauhaus endorsement of experimentation with the newest technologies has had enormous implications for later 20th- and 21st-century artists. In many ways, Davis is the living embodiment of this Bauhaus ethos. His long and distinguished career has been defined by constant experimentation, including a deep engagement with the latest digital technologies and with sound art.

Some of Davis's most revered paintings include the work from the 1970s such as this one. Like many artists of his generation, Davis turned away from an initial attraction to Abstract Expressionism in favor of a more impersonal, hard-edged abstraction. Like Moholy before him, Davis repurposed industrial materials such as fiberglass and plastic to update painting in a more modern idiom.

A Lightplay: Black White Gray 1930

DVD, transferred from black and white 16mm film,
Estate of László Moholy-Nagy

RONALD WENDELL DAVIS

AMERICAN, B. 1937

Cube 1 1971

Photo offset with laminated mylar overlay mounted on plastic

SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by the SBMA Contemporary Graphics Center and the William Dole Fund 1980.51

Not unlike Moholy-Nagy, Davis abandoned painting at one point in his career. After achieving the seemingly impossible—an early exhibition career that resulted in his induction in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art (and the list goes on)—in the late 1980s, Ron Davis simply stopped. He left Los Angeles behind and retreated to New Mexico, where he became fascinated with the architectural and formal properties of the Navajo Hogan. He would return to painting, refreshed and armed with new conviction right after 9/11.

On September 11, 2001, I watched the second airplane fly into the World Trade Center on television. After I cried, lit candles, and hung up my American flag on the front door of my kitchen hogan, a grave sense of my own mortality struck me. A week later, I drove to Albuquerque and bought seven hundred dollars worth of materials, something I haven't done for a very long time. I know that for me, the only way to make a difference—which really will make no difference whatsoever—is to go into the studio for the rest of my life, and vent my emotional responses to the events that have changed all our lives forever. — RON DAVIS, FEBRUARY 2002

***Prospectus and application form
for the New Bauhaus American School
of Design, Chicago*** [1937]

National Gallery of Art Library

Architektur 1 1922

Oil on canvas

The Salgo Trust for Education,
New York



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In 1999, during a conservation treatment, an awkward early painting was discovered on the reverse of this painting hidden under a layer of whitewash. It typifies the artist's earliest engagement with the art of the avant-garde. By contrast, the verso demonstrates his daring willingness to leave figuration behind and to trust the capacity of abstract forms to evince the modernity of his vision. The architecture evoked does not refer to imagined buildings or future cities; instead, this painting offers a blueprint for the reconfiguration of our vision, a vantage point lifted from the ground, made dynamic, even aerial.

Vision in Motion 1st ed.

(Chicago: Paul Theobald & Co, 1947)

Santa Barbara Museum of Art

Purchase

In 1934, Moholy began experimenting with color photography after being introduced to different new processes by his first wife, Lucia Moholy. Color photography was not only expensive, but difficult to master at a technical level. Because of these limitations, Moholy printed very few color photographs but did feature them in his publications, as he does here in his last book, *Vision in Motion*, published a year after his death.

**LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY
AND
FRANTIŠEK KALIVODA**

***telehor*, issue 1–2** 1936

Color offset print

National Gallery of Art Library,

NI.T4

František Kalivoda, a young Czech architect, film enthusiast, and editor of several avant-garde journals launched an ambitious new journal that sought to highlight recent artistic engagement with new media. He named it *Telehor*, the Hungarian name for the wireless image-transmission technology we know as television. Kalivoda selected Moholy as the focus of the journal's first, and as it turns out, only issue. However, what is striking about this publication is the extent to which Moholy seeks to justify his recent return to painting and to argue that painting too could serve as a means to achieve the transformative aims he once ascribed solely to advanced technology. The damaged, repaired painting is transformed into a color reproduction and printed on the cover of this retrospective publication, demonstrating how painting might serve as a space for exploring the possibilities of new color photographic technologies.