

2. Two Appreciations of László Moholy-Nagy

Herbert Bayer and Walter Gropius wrote these appreciations of László Moholy-Nagy in 1965, at the request of Kálmán J. Vámos, who was preparing an article on Moholy-Nagy for the Hungarian art journal *Művészet*.¹ While Dr. Vámos had also asked the artist's widow, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, and the Hungarian-American architect and fellow Bauhaus alumnus, Marcel Breuer, for such appreciations, it was these two which proved to be the most interesting, and they appear here for the first time. The editors would like to express their thanks to Dr. Vámos for his offer of their publication.²

These statements are lent particular importance due to the facts that it was Walter Gropius—that towering figure of 20th century Modernist architecture—that hired Moholy-Nagy to the staff of the Bauhaus in 1923, and that it was Bayer and Moholy-Nagy who were the most influential figures in the development of the “Bauhaus” style of Modernist typography and book design.

1. The article appeared in 1967, in an abridged version. “Emlékezés Moholy-Nagy Lászlóra (1895–1946)” vol. 8, no. 6, pp. 14–15. Letters from Kálmán J. Vámos to the editors of *Hungarian Studies Review* (14 April 1988) and Oliver Botar (3 May 1988).
2. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy had published her definitive statement on her late husband in her biography of him: *Moholy-Nagy, Experiment in Totality* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harper and Brothers, 1950). It should be noted here that some of the ideas contained in the Gropius text were expressed in his other statements on Moholy: his opening speech for Moholy's exhibition at the London Gallery (London, 31 December 1936), his eulogy at Moholy's funeral (Chicago, 27 November 1946), and his introduction to Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's biography. (The first two texts are reprinted (in a Hungarian translation by Júlia Gál) in Ferenc Bodri, “Walter Gropius Moholy-Nagy Lászlóról (Dokumentumok)” [Walter Gropius on László Moholy-Nagy (Documents)]. *Magyar Epitőművészet* (1973), pp. 60–61.

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ON LASZLO MOHOLY-NAGY

I first met Moholy-Nagy in his studio in Berlin. He was then 27 years old. His vitality and his artistic work in action made a deep impression on me almost instantaneously. I offered him right away a Chair in the Bauhaus. What the Bauhaus has achieved cannot be thought of without bringing back into one's mind the fiery spirit of Moholy, the Great Stimulator.

His greatest effort as an artist was devoted to the conquest of a new conception of space, and he commanded his genius to venture

into all realms of science and art to unriddle the phenomena of space. In painting, sculpture and architecture, in theatre and industrial design, in photography and film, in advertising and typography, he constantly strove to interpret space in its relationship to time, that is, motion in space. This I consider to be his great contribution to leadership in art. His whole work was a mighty battle to prepare the way for a new vision in that he attempted to extend the boundaries of painting and to increase the intensity of light in the picture by the use of new technical means. In his own words, a creation in space meant to him "an interweaving of parts of space which are anchored in invisible but clearly traceable relations and in the fluctuating play of forces".

Moholy was far ahead of his time, a basic innovator in contemporary art. The importance of his tremendous contributions in art will guarantee his place in history.

WALTER GROPIUS

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August 17, 1965

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Moholy-Nagy was already an established painter when he came to the Bauhaus. As a "constructivist" he brought an individual and new orientation to the Bauhaus.

Seen today from a distant perspective, he became one of the most forceful agents toward the formulation of ideas, in the exploration of new areas, toward the moulding of the Bauhaus as a school, and particularly in the dissemination of the Bauhaus philosophy and of new concepts of art in general (to mention only his editorship of the Bauhaus books).

It was Moholy who opened the eyes of a generation to the new aspects and possibilities of photography and film. He inspired many with his interests and his concern with typographic communication was equally influential.

As an educator, he made a fundamental imprint on design schooling in the United States. One of his great contributions, as a

thinker and writer ahead of the times, is the brilliant chapter on space in his book "Vision in Motion".

The lack of direction in art today obscures temporarily the recognition of his contribution to art in a new context. The arts of the world have suffered a great loss in his untimely death, but future history will reestablish him as one of the moving forces in the concept of a new vision in this century.

Herbert Bayer
October 6, 1965