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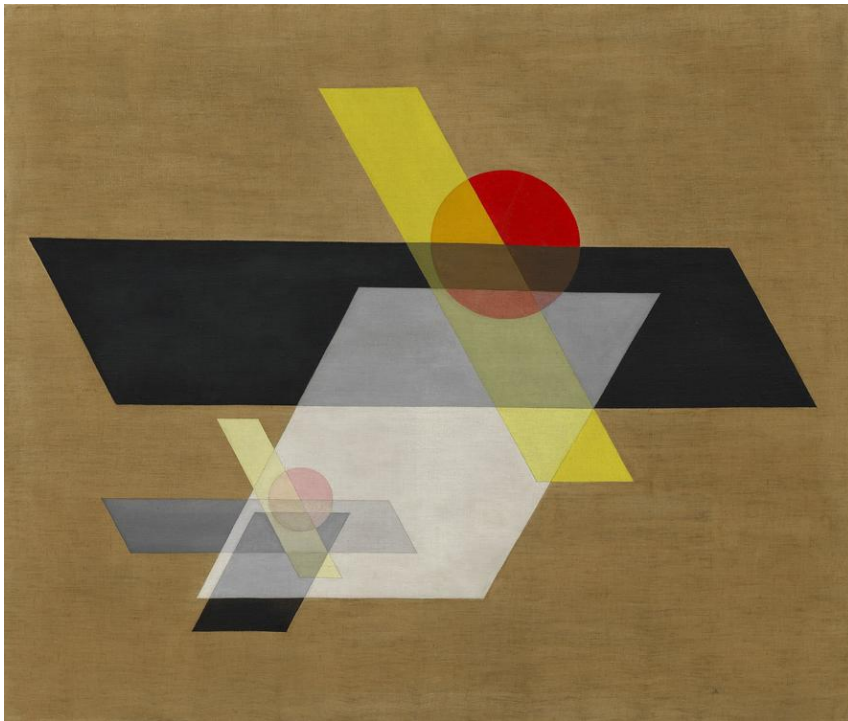
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U.S. | NEW YORK | NY CULTURE

At the Guggenheim, a Multimedia Pioneer's Vision of the Future

Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy broke barriers in a spectrum of disciplines, including painting, photography, graphic design and film



László Moholy-Nagy's 'A II (Construction A II),' 1924. Oil and graphite on canvas. PHOTO: HATTULA MOHOLY-NAGY/VG BILD-KUNS

By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**

May 25, 2016 6:22 p.m. ET

For László Moholy-Nagy, an artist who imagined a new vision for the future nearly a century ago, the time has come for another turn in the spotlight. The Guggenheim Museum on Friday is opening the first major U.S. retrospective devoted to him in 50 years.

From the beginning of his career in the 1920s, Moholy-Nagy was known for working in a variety of media, including painting, photography, graphic design, film and sculpture. He used industrial-era materials such as glass, plastics and electric light, which he would make dance in motor-driven contraptions.

“He was an artist who was successful working across disciplines very fluidly,” said Karole Vail, a Guggenheim curator and co-organizer of the show, which runs to September. “He broke down barriers. He is uncategorizable.”



László Moholy-Nagy, 'CH BEATA I,' 1939. Oil and graphite on canvas. PHOTO: HATTULA MOHOLY-NAGY/VG BILD-KUNST

Moholy-Nagy, who died in 1946 of leukemia when he was 51 years old, was born in Hungary. He began his career in Germany as a formative member of the Bauhaus school, where ideas about the future of art and design abounded.

There, throughout the 1920s, he made geometric paintings, abstract photographic works and more utilitarian creations like strikingly designed letterhead for interoffice correspondence.

All of those feature in the Guggenheim exhibition, which surveys the artist's early years as well as the decades that followed, when Moholy-Nagy moved to Chicago and continued to explore new methods for making art.



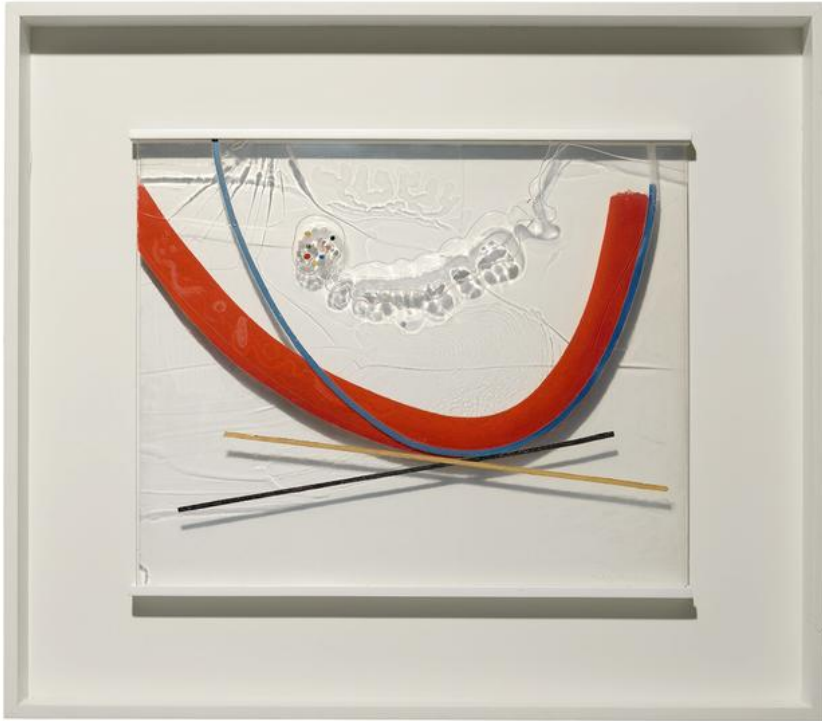
László Moholy-Nagy, 'Construction AL6 (Konstruktion AL6),' 1933–34. Oil and incised lines on aluminum. PHOTO: HATTULA MOHOLY-NAGY/NG BILD-KUNST

“He wanted to move away from the canvas because he had this boundless curiosity,” Ms. Vail said last week while installing the exhibition.

As a painter, Moholy-Nagy took an early liking to translucent plexiglass, which he would warp into undulating shapes and then adorn with paint. “When the work is lit to maximum effect, you see all these amazingly intricate patterns in what he did,” Ms. Vail said, pointing to shadows cast past a painting called “B-10 Space Modulator” onto a wall.

Other works, like “Light Prop for an Electric Stage” from 1930, include mirrors and mechanical gadgetry to transform beams of light into moving shapes. While showcasing the light on its own terms, Moholy-Nagy also filmed it for use in his photography and cinema work.

According to Gary van Wyk, who curated a show on the artist and his influence now on view at Alma Gallery in Chelsea, Moholy-Nagy was working in multimedia years before such a practice would become routine. If his open-mindedness now feels familiar, Mr.



László Moholy-Nagy, 'Papmac,' 1943. Oil and incised lines on Plexiglas. PHOTO: HATTULA MOHOLY-NAGY/VG BILD-KUNST

'He was interested in design for better living, and he wanted to make a difference in how people lived and would see the world.'

—Karole Vail, a Guggenheim curator and co-organizer of the show

van Wyk said, “that in itself is an index of how important he was to modernism.”

Ms. Vail noted Moholy-Nagy’s prescient use of industrial materials like plastic and aluminum as well as experimental techniques for pieces known as photograms, where he used photosensitive paper and light to create images without a camera.

“Today we don’t think twice about artists working with absolutely anything, but back then,” she said, “it was astonishing.”

All of Moholy-Nagy’s work served his idea of a “new vision” that would be appropriate for a dawning age of multimedia saturation and overstimulation.

“There’s an immediacy about his work that is very appealing, a sense of possibility that is important for today,” Ms. Vail said. “He was interested in design for better living, and



A photogram from 1926 PHOTO: MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA/HATTULA

he wanted to make a difference in how people lived and would see the world.”

Decades after his death, Moholy-Nagy’s multidisciplinary approach is still remarkable, according to Jeffrey Ladd, whose New York-based publishing project Errata Editions reissued the artist’s “60 Photos” as part of a series of influential photography books.

“There are plenty of people who experiment as a painter, filmmaker, photographer, graphic designer or industrial designer,” Mr. Ladd said. “But there are very few artists who cover this enormous spectrum and are good at everything.”