The photographs of Josef Albers : a selection from the collection of the Josef Albers Foundation

An exhibition organized by the American Federation of Arts

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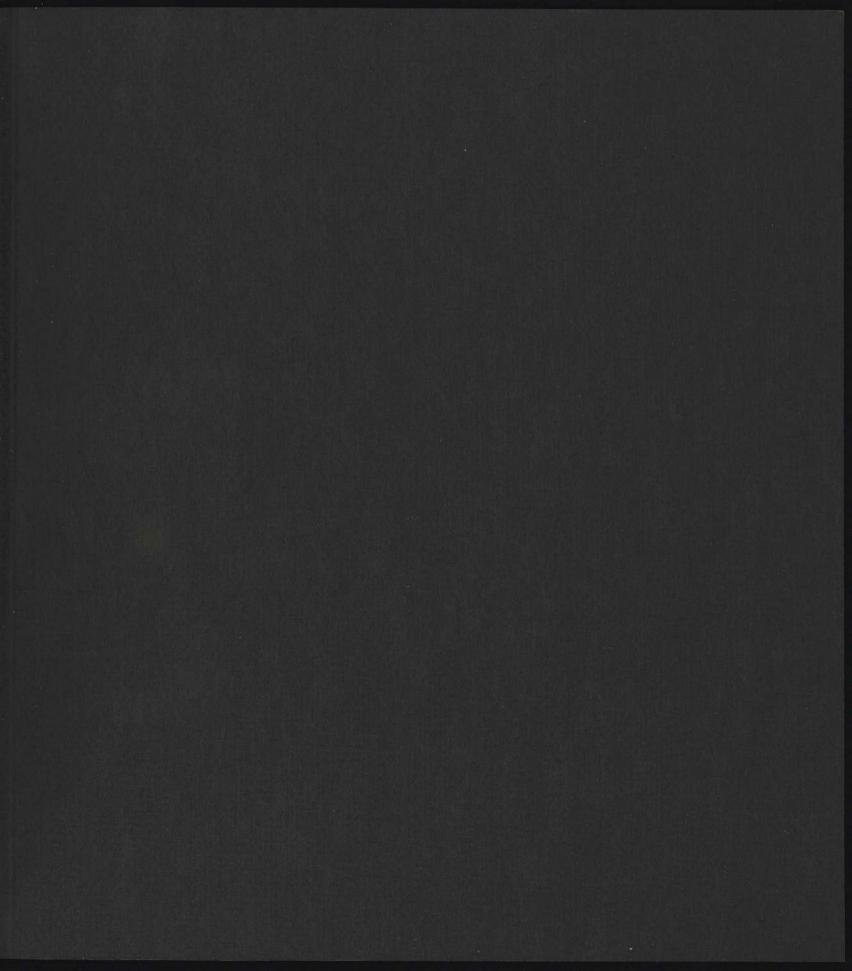
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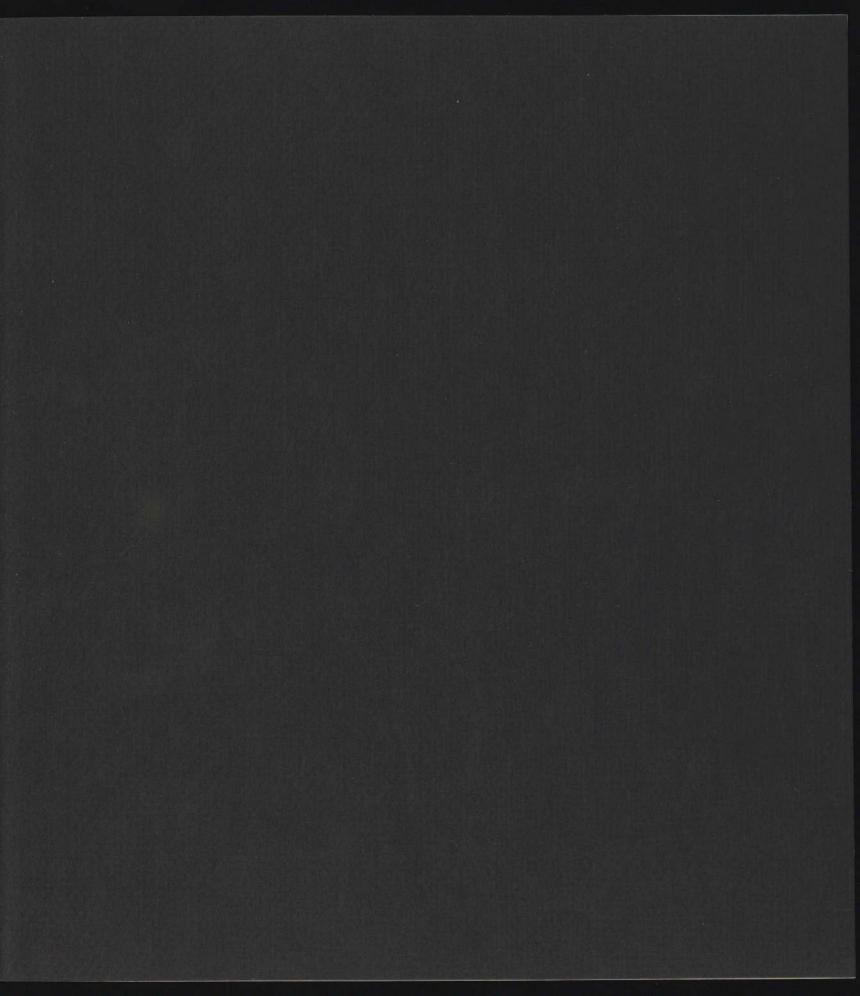
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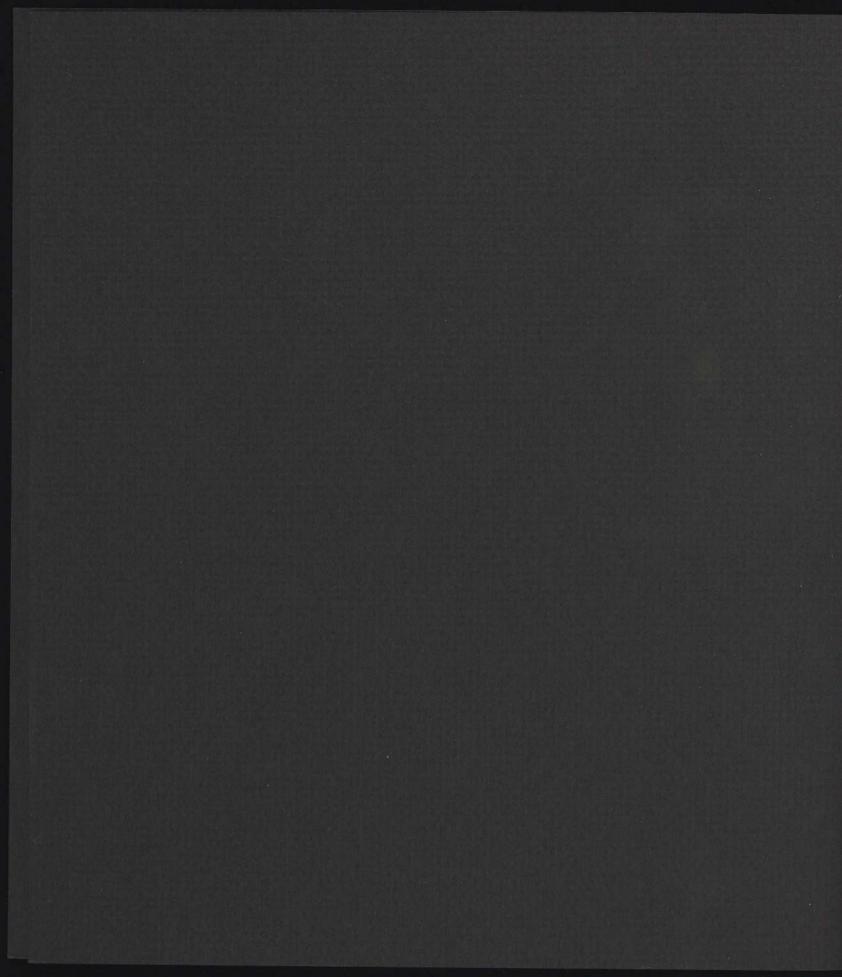
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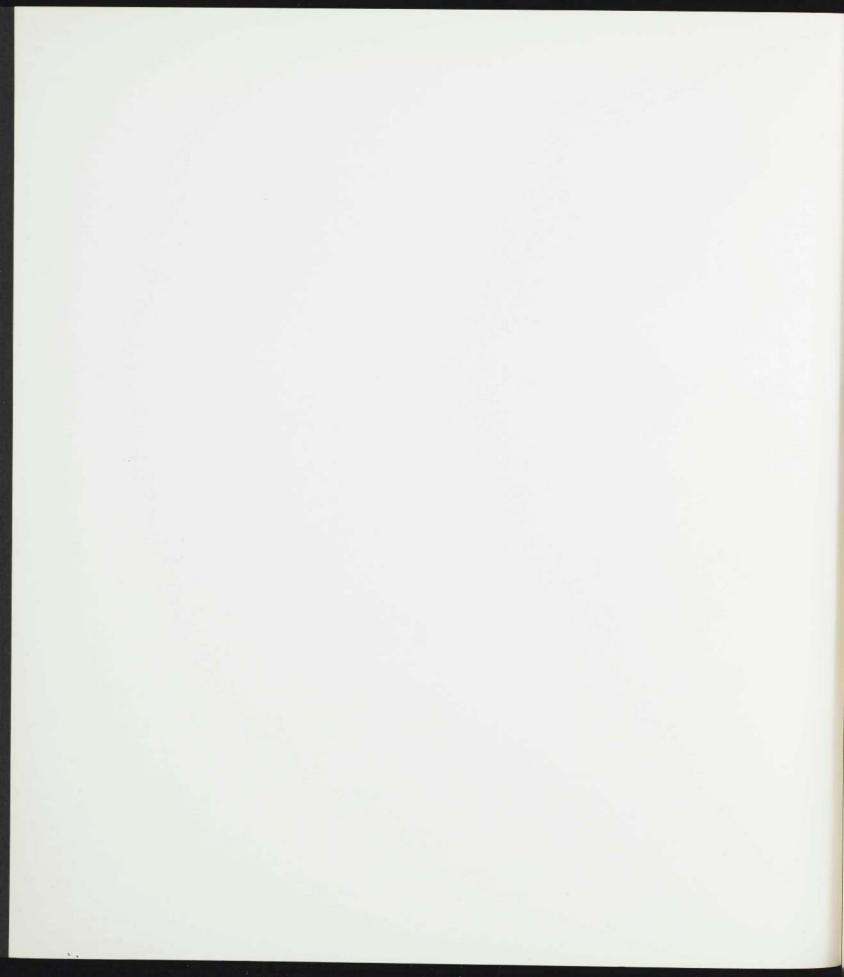
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A SELECTION FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE JOSEF ALBERS FOUNDATION









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Archive MoMA 1474

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Northwestern University Evanston, Illinois

Des Moines Art Center Des Moines, Iowa

Allen Memorial Art Museum Oberlin College Oberlin, Ohio The Museum of Modern Art New York, New York

The Denver Art Museum Denver, Colorado

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Montreal, Canada

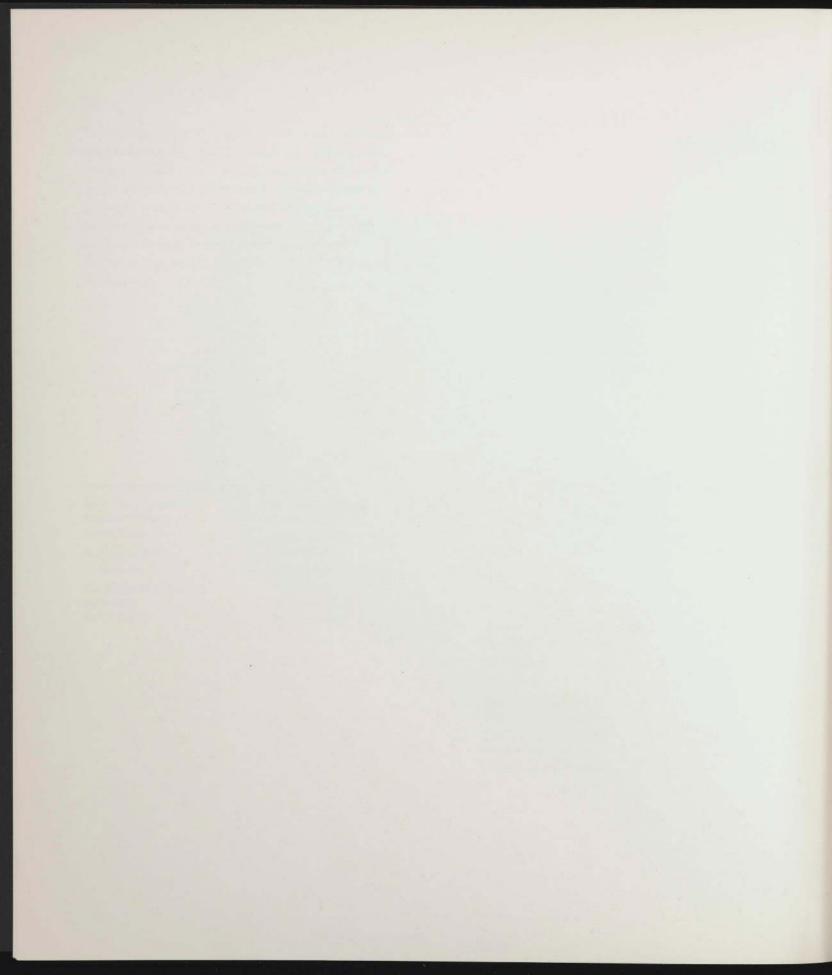
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Acknowledgments

As both an artist and a teacher, Josef Albers has been a major international influence on modern art. Best known for his paintings and graphics, Albers was a disciplined thinker for whom the infinite possibilities of and relationships among color, light, and proportion were a lifelong interest. His series Homage to the Square is thought to best exemplify these explorations.

Less well known are the hundreds of photographs that Albers produced. These were taken in the 1920s and 1930s, first while he was studying and working at the Bauhaus and later while teaching at Black Mountain College. In photographs of nature and architecture, as well as in portraits—some of which are of close friends and associates such as Klee, Ozenfant, and Kandinsky—the artist experimented with a variety of techniques.

The AFA is particularly pleased to have organized this exhibition because it marks the first occasion for museum audiences and scholars to view a little-known aspect of this important artist's work. We are especially grateful to Nicholas Fox Weber, Director of the Albers

Foundation, for bringing this material to our attention. The AFA also wishes to thank the guest curator John Szarkowski, Director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, for encouraging us to pursue the project from the beginning, selecting the photographs in the exhibition, writing the catalogue essay, and arranging for a presentation of the exhibition at his institution. We would also like to acknowledge Catherine Evans, Joyce Carp, Sarah McNear, and Catherine Bowdren for assisting Mr. Szarkowski, and Kelly Feeney for assisting Mr. Weber.

At the American Federation of Arts we wish to express our appreciation to Jeffery J. Pavelka, Director of the Exhibition Program, and Amy V. McEwen, Exhibition Coordinator, for overseeing the organizational and administrative aspects of the project. Other AFA staff to whom we are indebted include Jane S. Tai, Associate Director; Laura Nierenberg, Assistant Scheduler; Dagmar Huguenin, Exhibition Assistant; Albina De Meio, Registrar; Guillermo Alonso, Associate Registrar; and

Sandra Gilbert, Public Information Director. For their varied skills and support, we thank Mary Ann Monet, Jennifer Dalsimer, and Ruth Jacobson.

We also wish to thank Betty Binns and David Skolkin of Betty Binns Graphics for the handsome catalogue design; Richard Goodbody for the photography; and Beth Kent and the production staff of Virginia Lithograph for their commitment to the quality of this publication.

The AFA wishes to express its appreciation to the National Endowment for the Arts for its generous grant to the exhibition and publication as well as to The J.M. Kaplan Fund, the DeWitt Wallace Fund, and the Henry

Luce Foundation for their support of the project through the AFA's Revolving Fund for Publications.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to Anni Albers and Nicholas Weber for agreeing to lend the works in this exhibition for the international tour, and to the museum curators and directors who in arranging presentations of the exhibition in their institutions have demonstrated their commitment to the photographic arts and to this important American artist.

WILDER GREEN
Director
The American Federation of Arts

Preface

mong the last art works that Josef Albers created toward the end of his life were the two screenprint series Gray Instrumentation I and II. In the Homage to the Square format that he had been exploring for a quarter of a century, he now made twenty-four new examples, all in the black-white-gray spectrum. Here were stunning juxtapositions of warm brown grays against cooler, steely tones, of rich coal-like blacks against paler versions of themselves. The possibilities that he found in this allegedly limited arena and the lush relationships that he could extract from those possibilities were apparently limitless, and profoundly effective.

It was not totally surprising, therefore, shortly after Albers's death in 1976—a couple of years after he had created the *Gray Instrumentation* prints—to find that fifty years earlier he had been exploring black, white, and gray in a totally different medium. In a storage room where the artist had kept the miscellany of a long and productive lifetime, there were hundreds of photo-

graphs, most taken when he was at the Bauhaus. He had been a student there from 1920 to 1925 and then a master (he was one of the first students to be so elevated) until 1933, when the pioneering institution closed under pressure from the Gestapo.

A handful of Albers's photographs were known during his lifetime. A dozen or so had been lent to the Museum of Modern Art, a slightly larger number given to the Busch-Reisinger Museum in Cambridge. But the size and richness of the collection in Albers's estate—both of individual photographs and of photo-collages—was extraordinary.

In their discipline and in their embrace of visual nuance, the photographs are similar to the rest of Albers's work. In addition to their exploration of the chromatic possibilities of black, white, and gray, they reveal his lifelong preoccupation with taking different approaches to the same problem. In them we see some of Albers's characteristic visual gamesmanship, his exaltation in the play of parallel lines, and his desire to extract the greatest possible richness from deceptive simplicity. They have both the spareness and the vast formal complexity that mark all of his art.

During the same time that Albers was working most seriously as a photographer-the late 1920s and early 1930s-he was also making, both in glass and in gouache, a large series called the Treble Clefs. Like his photographic portrait collages-and like the Kinetic and Variant and Homage to the Square series that were to come later on-the Treble Clefs also show his interest in investigating a single visual issue in several ways. Here too we see the extraordinary degree of movement that can be achieved through the proper juxtapositions of carefully resolved tones of black, white, and gray. And here is the typical Albers attitude-quiet, graceful; never startling or aggressive, but, rather, pensive. They are oddly playful and serious at the same time. While many of his contemporaries-the Brucke artists and other Expressionists in Germany, and, later, the Abstract Expressionists in New York-made art that virtually accosted its viewers, Albers created objects that elicit a calmer response, and then, quietly, demand a complex interaction as the looker is taken in by all of the subtle complexities. Resultant of careful contemplation and planning, yet seemingly light-hearted, the photographs are consistent with the rest of Josef Albers's achievement.

Shortly after finding the treasure trove of photographs, I informed John Szarkowski of what we had. Baited by the idea of portraits of Klee and Kandinsky, as well as by the studies of breaking waves and trees in winter and other such work, Mr. Szarkowski made the journey to New Haven. It took little time for his scholarly demeanor to be softened by a broad smile. "These are not just a painter's photographs," he explained. "They are the works of a first-rate photographer." It was occasion for a martini at lunch, "to celebrate a major achievement and a great body of work."

To have a man as knowing as John Szarkowski curate this exhibition is indeed a pleasure for those of us at the Josef Albers Foundation. And to have the American Federation of Arts put its diligent and ever helpful staff to the task of organizing and making arrangements for the show has been a source of great pleasure. We are very happy to see, after all these years, the photographs of an artist as diverse, and visually acute, as Albers, at last get their due. And we are thrilled to have this work brought forth by such a splendid team.

NICHOLAS FOX WEBER Executive Director The Josef Albers Foundation

Bauhaus as a student in 1920, the second year of the school's fifteen-year existence. He was thus the same age as Johannes Itten, the head of the basic course of study, and only five years younger than Walter Gropius, the school's director. Albers had studied in three other art schools and been certified as a teacher since he was twenty. He had worked extensively in painting, printmaking, and stained glass, and during his Bauhaus years—he joined the faculty in 1923 and remained with the school until its dissolution in 1933—he was also active in furniture and product design and in typography. By 1928, when he seems first to have considered the creative potentials of photography, he was a mature artist with unusually broad resources.

Albers's active interest in photography appears to have lasted for about five years, from 1928 until 1932. He produced a body of work that deserves attention because of its intrinsic quality, and as an original (and until now virtually unknown) contribution to a period of extraordinarily rich experiment in the history of photography.

Although Albers continued to make photographs casually and sporadically during the rest of his life, the later work seldom seems motivated by serious artistic ambition. The investigations of Angela Tau Bailey suggest that Albers's experiments in photography may have come to a point of resolution by 1932,² when he mounted that part of his photographic work that he wished preserved and established the final form of the collages reproduced here. In the same year political pressures caused the closing of the Dessau Bauhaus, and after a brief and tumultuous final year in Berlin the school closed for good. Josef and Anni Albers were the first of the Bauhaus artists to move to the United States, and by November of 1933 they were at Black Mountain College, in North Carolina. It would appear that Albers

Angela Tau Bailey. "Josef Albers as Photographer", unpublished paper on file in the Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y.

² Ibid. Bailey does not claim that her evidence conclusively fixes 1932 as the date when the selected work was mounted, but her arguments for this date are persuasive.

did not again take up the camera as a tool of serious artistic endeavor, nor did he seem to have made any concerted effort to publish or exhibit the work considered here, which was rediscovered in a storage room in New Haven by Katherine and Nicholas Fox Weber shortly after Albers's death in 1976.³

Albers's career at the Bauhaus, as student, teacher, and Master, spanned all but one of that institution's fifteen years-in Weimar, Dessau, and Berlin. Almost all of his significant work as a photographer was done during a relatively brief period within these years, and it would seem logical to consider the work within the context of Bauhaus photography. The Bauhaus, however, was not a self-contained world, but rather one element in an international ferment that was attempting both to redefine the substance of art and to construct a new pedagogical system that would produce new artists, new patrons, and a new audience. The international character of the enterprise is illustrated by Albers's own photographs, which include portraits of El Lissitzky, whose teaching responsibilities at Moscow's Vkhutemas (The Higher State Art Studios) were similar to those of Albers at the Bauhaus, and of Amédée Ozenfant, the French Purist who had just decorated Eric Mendelsohn's music room.

The Bauhaus was not an independent whole, nor was it a completely coherent element of the international movement, except in its official pronouncements. Walter Gropius, in his bold and stirring (if slightly arrogant) prospectus for the original Weimar Bauhaus, projected not a school but a community of artists/designers/craftsmen who together served, according to their talents, a unified field theory of art that Gropius chose to call architecture. It was a splendid vision, but one that occasionally seemed threatening to Feininger, Klee, Kandinsky, and the other Bauhaus painters who had already formed their own agendas. Even among the

painters, the spirit of community was sometimes strained. Albers is known to have had limited admiration for the work of Moholy-Nagy who, although a painter, sometimes gave the impression that painting could be done better with colored light and whose term "pigment painting"—for easel painting—suggested a clearly pre-industrial mode of expression. Moholy-Nagy was also the prototypical Bauhaus photographer; he was, in fact, one of the central figures of twentieth-century photography. It is conceivably more than coincidence that Albers's serious interest in photography begins at the point when Moholy-Nagy left the Bauhaus.

Gropius's original prospectus did not include any mention of photography, and it was not until 1928, during the short-lived directorship of Hannes Meyer, that Walter Peterhans was retained to found the new department of photography. In keeping with the general thrust of Meyer's priorities, Peterhans taught photography as a practical craft, rather than a method of free artistic exploration, and his influence is difficult to detect in the work from the school's latter years, except perhaps in the clean, dry documentation of the furniture and other objects that the workshops were then producing in marketable quantities. What is now thought of as Bauhaus photography relates to the example of Moholy-Nagy and his collaborator and wife, Lucia, who without reference to the formalities of the curriculum had made photography an essential part of the consciousness of the school.

What was new in photography in the twenties might be divided into two parts, with each part seen as the expression of a distinct intuition into photography's basic nature. One of these intuitions focused on subject-matter and tested the camera's ability to record and intensify its most subtle, unexpected, or ephemeral aspects. August Sander in Germany, the aging Atget in France, and Alfred Stieglitz and Charles Sheeler in America exemplified this conception. The alternative intuition, new since the First World War, defined the problem in functionalist terms and hoped that an answer

³ Conversation with Nicholas Weber, Executive Director of The Josef Albers Foundation, April 1987. Mr. Weber also pointed out that Albers had given thirtyone photographs to the Busch-Reisinger Museum in the 1950s.

might come through the investigation of the basic nature of cameras and photographic materials. Alvin Coburn, Man Ray, and Christian Schad explored this route, but none of them with the intelligence and single-mindedness of Moholy-Nagy. The first of these approaches was implicitly interpretive, and dependent on intuition. The second sought objectivity, and claimed kinship with science. It was during the twenties a particularly attractive stance in Germany and Russia, where individualism had earned an especially bad name, and where historical necessity and collective truths seemed more useful standards than ineffable visions.

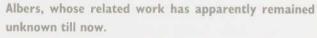
Most published Bauhaus photographs, excepting those of the Moholy-Nagys, describe Bauhaus products or Bauhaus parties. The remainder are remarkably constant in their obedience to functional principles; they describe, repeatedly, several ways in which cameras and photosensitive materials can be used. These exercises emphasized the exploration of the unfamiliar vantage point, radical framing or cropping, chemical or optical distortion, camera-less photography (the photogram), and several varieties of montage, especially the double exposure. The basic typology of Bauhaus photography does not include social documentation, after August Sander; or activist propaganda, after John Heartfield or Hannah Höch; or private lyricism, after André Kertész; or reportage, after Muncaesi or Erich Salomon. It would be difficult to deduce from the collected product of Bauhaus photography any knowledge of Weimar, Dessau, or Berlin, of the countryside that surrounded these cities, of the people that lived in or around them, or of what they did for a living or for fun.

The larger part of Albers's work as a photographer will not come as a surprise to those familiar with the new photography that arose in Europe during the twenties—a photography that had become the common property of advanced photographers by the time of the Stuttgart Film und Foto exhibition of 1929. Albers's photographs review with understanding and style a number of the shared preoccupations of the time: he

made the apparently compulsory pictures of dolls and shop window mannequins, of the effects of cast shadows on three-dimensional forms, of street patterns from above and heads from below (or lighted from below), of the shapes of laundry hanging against the sky. He apparently did not attempt several of the other standard exercises of the time. He did not make (or save) photograms, double exposures in the camera, prints made from more than one negative, or collages in which photographs are combined with drawing or found images.

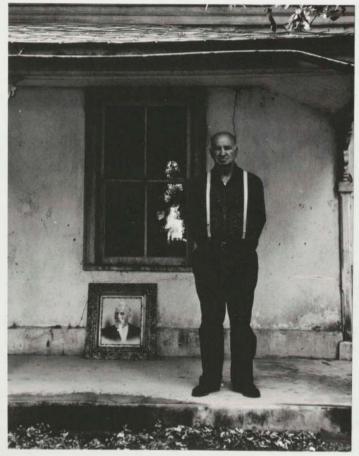
He did, however, produce two or three score of collages of a fundamentally different nature than those of Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky, Max Ernst, etc., and for which I can find no clear precedent. These collages assemble two, several, or many individual photographs on a single mount and derive their meaning from the interaction of discrete images, rather than from their visual integration. Albers's strategy might seem the simplest and most fundamental method of extending and enriching the meaning of a single photograph, but in fact the idea has been rarely pursued, even in the half century since Albers experimented with its possibilities. Dorothea Lange, in the latter years of her life, sometimes mounted her pictures in pairs and was deeply interested in the "third effect" that was produced by the juxtaposition of two independent images. The two halves of her pairs sometimes described different aspects of the same subject matter and sometimes different subject matter that related to the same conceptual idea (Fig. 1). In the early sixties Ray Metzker began to explore related problems, emphasizing the formal rather than the allusive possibilities of combination (Fig. 2). At about the same time Paul Vanderbilt began his series of long, linear collages made from his own photographs and from reproductions cut from magazines; these have been concerned less with pictorial than with symbolic connections. In more recent years the diptych and its extensions have interested a number of photographers of note, including Eve Sonneman, Robert Cumming, William Wegman, and John Divola. Surely none of these was influenced by

Figure 1 Ancestor Worship. Toquerville, Utah. 1953 Dorothea Lange 1953 The Museum of Modern Art



Albers's collages have had no influence on the subsequent history of photography. It would seem that he did not share them with his colleagues or offer them for exhibition or publication, perhaps because they did not quite satisfy him or because he did not care to confuse the public's perception of him as a painter.

If these pictures have had no progeny, what was their ancestry? We distrust with good reason the notion of a wholly original idea. If confronted by one, how would we know it to be an idea? The Albers photo-collages do seem to represent an intuitive leap of some magnitude, but it





is reasonable to assume that they were not wholly without precedent.

If asked what photographic work before Albers presents on a single sheet two or more pictures in service to one idea, one might think first of Eadweard Muybridge. But his composites are serial and illustrate a temporal plot that can be read logically only in one direction. The same is true of F. Holland Day's serial self-portraits as the crucified Christ, and of Duane Michals's dream sequences, and the early photo-stories of *Life* magazine. The individual pictures in such sequences do not interact, like prize fighters or dancers, but succeed each other, like marchers in a parade.

The universal, omnipresent diptych during the years of Albers's childhood was of course the stereograph. Stereo cards existed in houses of even modest pretension. As held in the hand, the two halves of these cards were seen to describe almost, but not quite, the same facts. This documentary proof that the truth had more than one aspect surely fascinated millions of children and may have persuaded a few to explore—in various ways—the relativity of vision.

A more immediate source of Albers's intuition might have been the new popular picture magazines, which were especially vigorous and inventive in Germany. The designers of these magazines combined photographs on their double-page spreads in ways that utilized sequence, repetition, contrast, and symbolic juxtaposition. The example reproduced here (Fig. 3) illustrates in a particularly literal way the idea that a collection of photographs might reveal a cumulative truth. Here photographs of individual children are superimposed to produce generalized types and what was perhaps assumed to be a deeper truth. Within the journalistic venture the camera was often a useful servant of psuedoscience and psuedohistory. Nevertheless, the visual syntax that the magazines developed proposed possibilities that independent artists could turn to their own purposes.

I do not know what supporting documents may exist

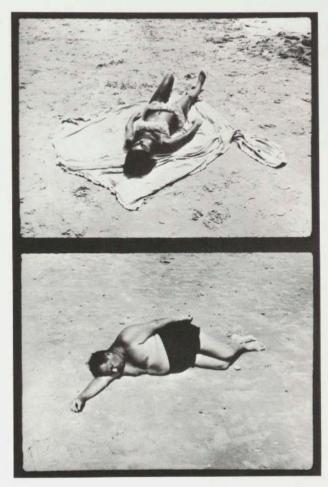


Figure 2 Untitled Ray K. Metzker c. 1969 The Museum of Modern Art



Figure 3

12 ten-year old vegetarians, 12 ten-year old meat-eaters, 10 good students, 10 poor students. Artist Unknown Muenchner Illustrierte Presse 1932, no. 42

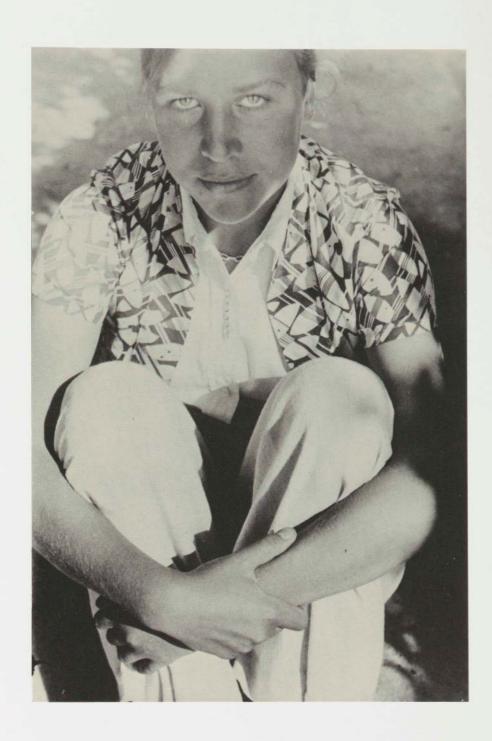
Twelve Faces in One:

that could help us better understand the sources and motives of these remarkable pictures. They deserve and will doubtless receive further study; material in the archives of the Josef Albers Foundation may in time help clarify their historical status. In the meantime, the pictures themselves are now finally available to the community of artists, who might decide that even at this late date these pictures can bear progeny.

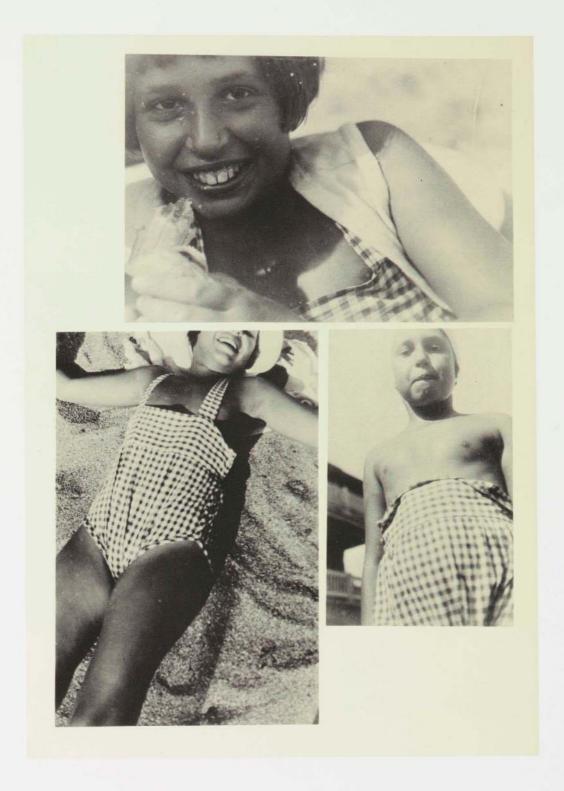
JOHN SZARKOWSKI Director, Department of Photography The Museum of Modern Art

Catalogue



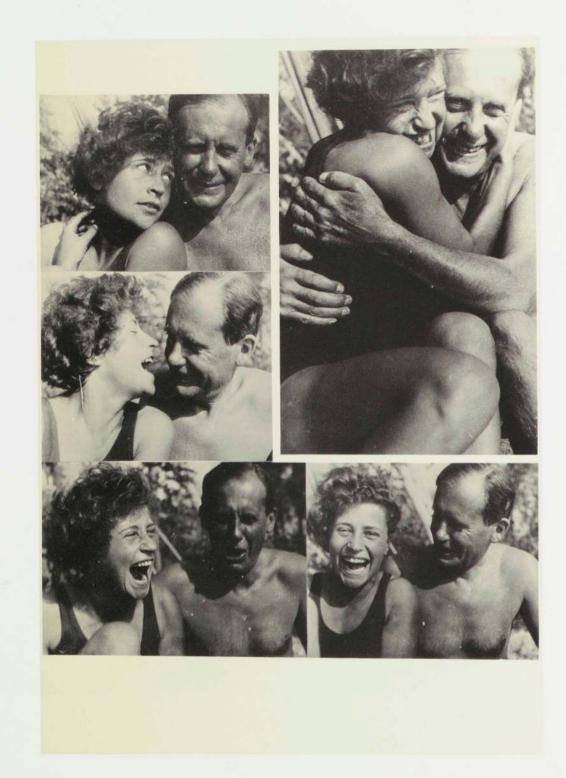






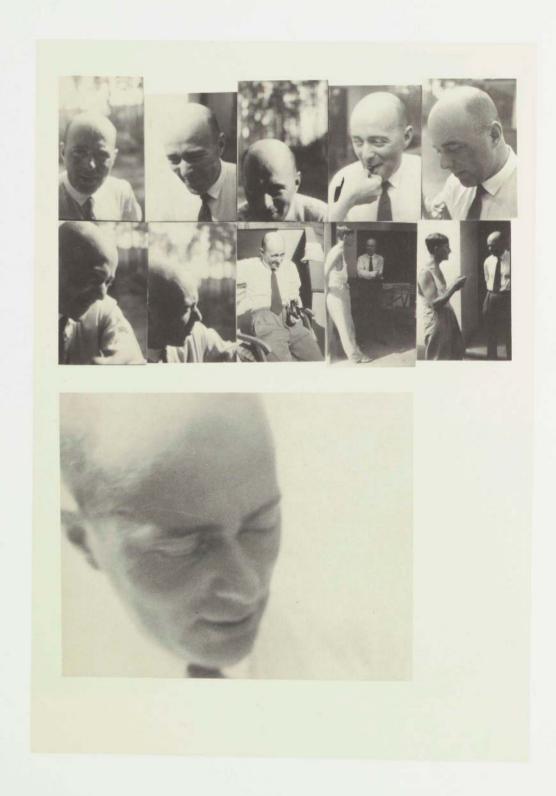


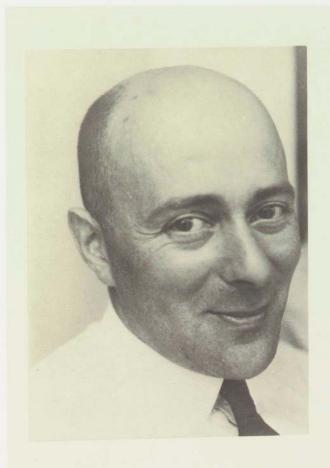






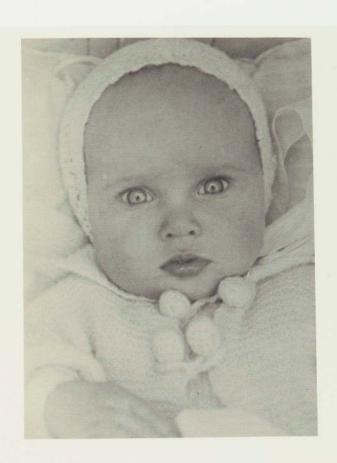














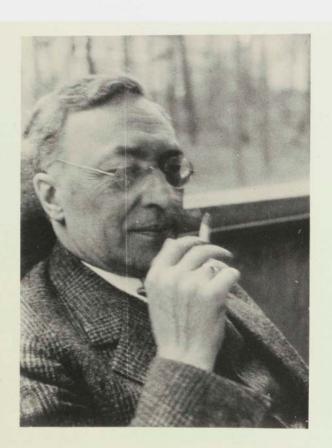


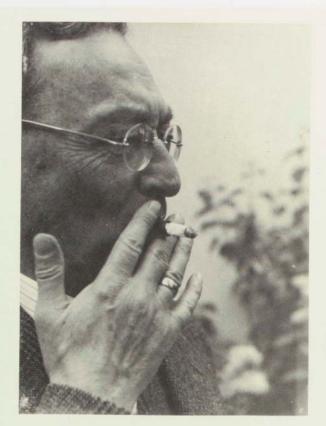


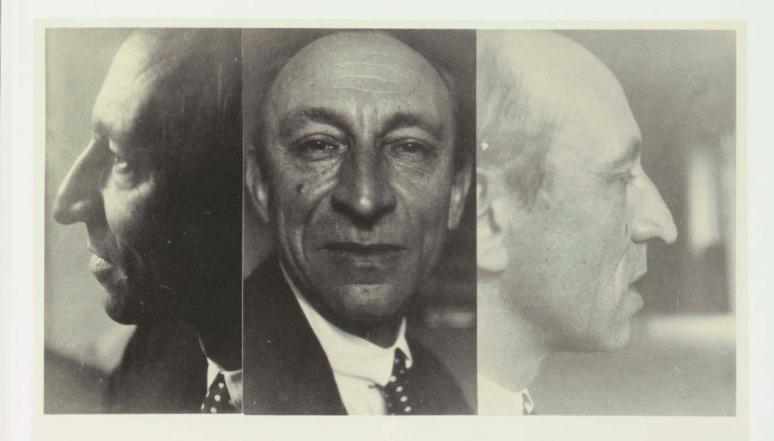


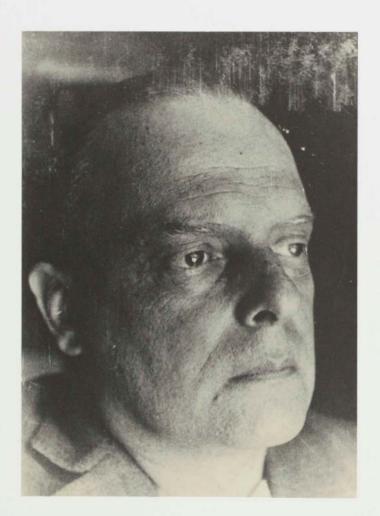






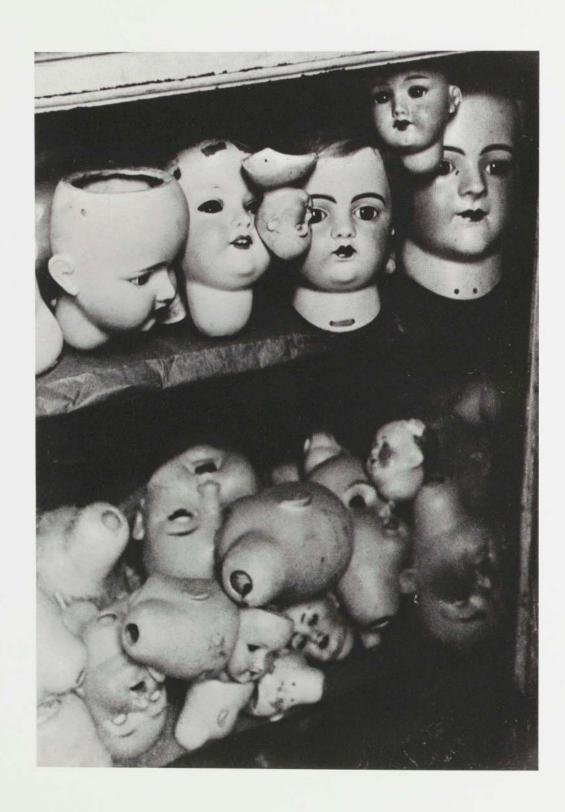


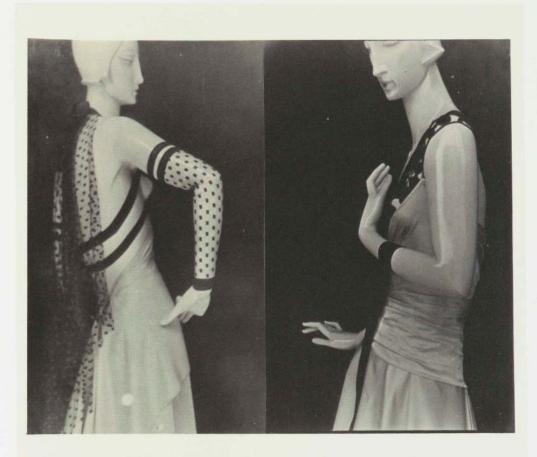




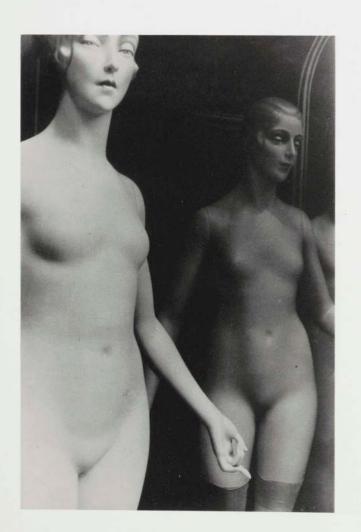


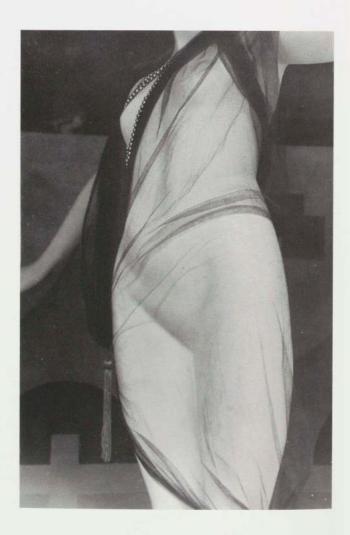














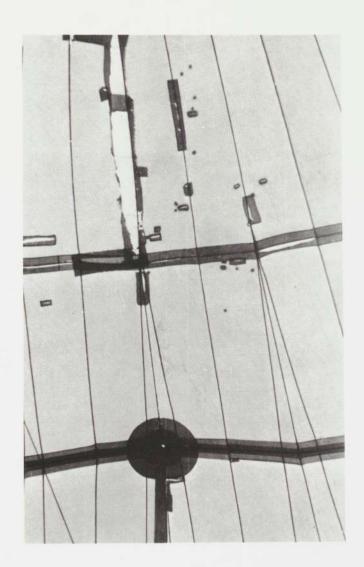




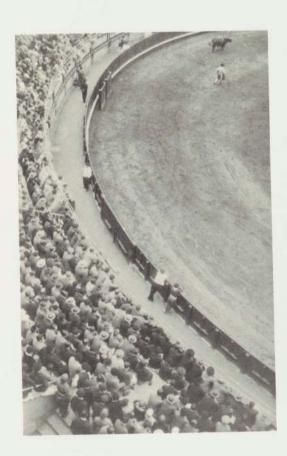








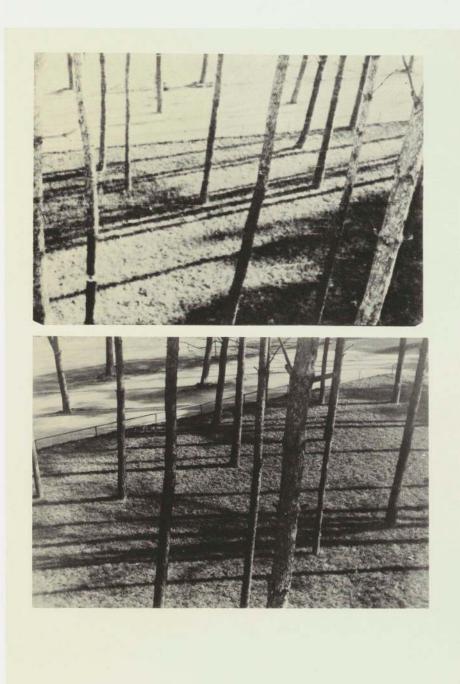










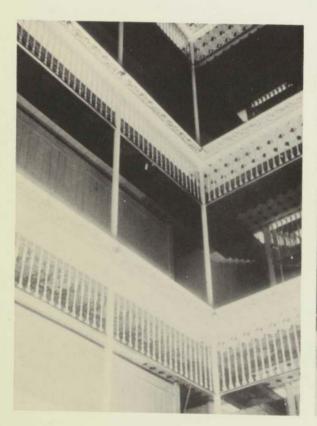




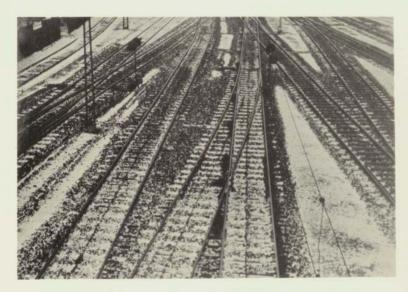


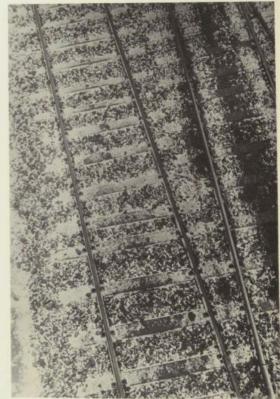






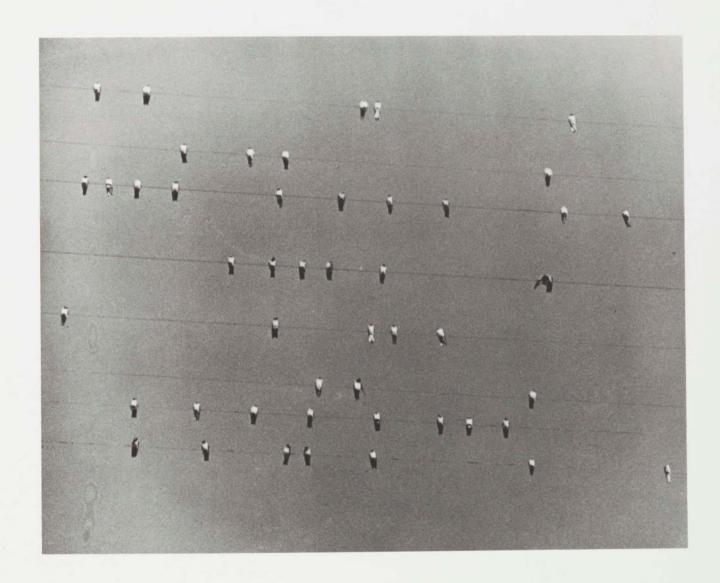














Checklist for the exhibition Catalogue

All prints are gelatin silver developing-out prints and are believed to be approximately contemporaneous with the negative. Photographs not dated are believed to have been made between 1928 and 1932.

- I Seated woman. $8\% \times 5\%$ in.
- 2 Susanne, Biarritz (I). 1929 Susanne Biarritz 29 Collage photograph, 1929 16½ × 11½ in. (mount)
- 3 Susanne, Biarritz (II). 1929 Susanne Biarritz 29 Collage photograph, 1929 16/2 × 111/6 in. (mount)
- 4 Klee, Dessau. 1929 Klee Dessau XI 29 Collage photograph, 1929 1111/16 × 167/16 in. (mount)
- 5. Klee in his studio, Dessau. 1929 Klee im Atelier Dessau XI 29 Collage photograph, 1929 1111/16 × 167/16 in. (mount)
- 6 Pius + Schifra, Ascona. 1930 Pius + Schifra Ascona VIII 30 Collage photograph, 1930 111/16 × 161/16 in. (mount) Pius (Walter Gropius)
- 7 Anja Schawinsky on the beach at Ascona. 1930 Anja Schawinsky Ascona-Lido VIII:30 Collage photograph, 1930 1111/16 × 167/16 in. (mount)
- 8 El Lissitzky. 1930 El Lissitzki VI 30 Collage photograph, 1930 1111/16 × 167/16 in. (mount)
- 9 El Lissitzky, Dessau. 1930 El Lissitzky Dessau VI 30 Collage photograph, 1930 11% × 167/6 in. (mount)

- 10 Marli Heimann, all during an hour. 1931 Marli Heimann III—IV: 31 Alle während I stunde
- Collage photograph, 1931
- II Lilli Sachsenberg. 1930 Annemarie Hennings. 1929 Lilli Sachsenberg Sommer 30 Annemarie Hennings Sommer 29 Collage photograph, 1929/1930 1111/16 × 167/16 in. (mount)
- 12 Lake Stössen, Summer 1929 Bale (?) (Stössensee) Sommer 29 Collage photograph, 1929 1111/16 × 161/2 in. (mount)
- 13 Hanne, sailing. 1930 Hanne V/VI 30 beim Segeln Collage photograph, 1930 111/16 × 167/6 in. (mount) Hanne (Hans Farman, brother of Anni Albers)
- 14 Kandinsky. 1929/30
 Kandinsky. Frühjahr 1929 Meister auf Terrasse bei HM May 30
 Collage photograph, 1929/30
 11146 × 161/6 in. (mount)
- 15 Ozenfant. Summer 1931 Ozenfant Sommer 31 Collage photograph, 1931 1111/6 × 161/2 in. (mount)
- **16** Paul Klee. 81/8 × 61/2 in.
- 17 Surprise.
 Überraschung
 9 × 6½ in.
- 18 Woman with veil. 91/4 × 73/4 in. (image)

- 19 Dolls. 9% × 613/6 in. (image)
- 20 Mannequins.

 Erdmannsdorfer Puppen

 Collage photograph

 16% × 11% in. (mount)
- 21 Silent gesture.

 Stille Geste (on reverse)

 9 × 6½6 in.
- 22 New Nike.

 Neue Nike (on reverse)

 91/16 × 6 in. (image)
- 23 Mannequin with sweater.

 Mit Sweater (on reverse)

 9 × 61/4 in.
- 24 Hanging clothes (I). $4\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{3}{4}$ in.
- 25 Hanging clothes (II). $5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{7}{6}$ in.
- 26 Hanging clothes (III). 4% × 6% in.
- 27 Biarritz 1929 Biarritz 29 Collage photograph, 1929 16½ × 111½ in. (mount)
- 28 Tent. c. 1936? (later 1930s) 3% × 2% in. (image)
- 29 Bullfight.
 Collage photograph, c. 1930
 1111/6 × 161/2 in. (mount)
- 30 San Sebastian Summer 1930 San Sebastian Sommer 1930 Collage photograph, 1930 1111/16 × 161/2 in. (mount)

- 31 Porto Ronco, Lake Maggiore. 1930 (top)
 Very early. 1930 (bottom)
 Porto Ronco, Lago maggiore VIII 30 (top)
 Ganz früh, VIII 30 (bottom)
 Collage photograph, 1930
 16% × 111% in. (mount)
- 32 At home. 1928/29
 Bei Haus 2 28/29
 Collage photograph, 1928/1929
 165 × 1115 in. (mount)
- 33 Road in Paznauntal. 1930 Autostrasse, Paznauntal VII 30 Collage photograph, 1930 16½ × 11½ in. (mount)
- 34 In front of my window. 1931/32 Vor meinem Fenster 1931/32 Collage photograph, 1931/1932 1111/16 × 161/2 in. (mount)
- 35 Hotel staircase, Geneva. 1929 Hoteltreppen Genf 29 Collage photograph, 1929 1111/16 × 161/2 in. (mount)
- 36 End of winter, Dessau. 1931 Dessau Winterende 31 Collage photograph, 1931 1111/16 × 1614 in. (mount)
- 37 Tidewater, Biarritz. 1929 Brackwasser Biarritz VIII 29 Collage photograph, 1929 1111/16 × 161/2 in. (mount)
- 38 Birds. c. 1936? (later 1930s) 711/16 × 911/16 in. (image)

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