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Article: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy: Characterization of his Photographic Work at The Art Institute of Chicago and His Working Practices (Abstract)

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# **Laszlo Moholy-Nagy: Characterization of his Photographic Work at The Art Institute of Chicago and His Working Practices**

**Mirasol Estrada**

*Presented at the PMG session of the 2014 AIC Annual Meeting in San Francisco, California.*

László Moholy-Nagy, a groundbreaking artist and one of the precursors of the German Bauhaus, came to Chicago in 1937. He was invited by the Association of Arts and Industry to direct the New Bauhaus, which later became the Institute of Design. There he created a stimulating experimental environment for the photographic arts and his legacy and influence on students remains to this day.

A thorough understanding of Moholy-Nagy's body of work is incomplete without a study of his working practices. As photography was central to his aesthetic and gave direction to many of his artistic activities, this research project aimed to establish a history of the material choices and working practices Moholy-Nagy made throughout his photographic life.

The collection at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) has a modest but representative group of Moholy-Nagy's photographic work, including straight photographs, solarizations, photocollages, cliché verres, and photograms. These photographs show a wide variety of formats, tonal ranges, surfaces, coatings, paper tints, notations, and signatures. Why is Moholy-Nagy's body of work so diverse? Which photographic processes did he use to express particular ideas? What were the motives for his material choices? What was the master's influence on his pupils, whose work is also within the AIC collection?

The physical properties and the materials of these prints were characterized and cross-references with historical and archival references to his working processes. They were also examined under various source of illumination, using different observational tools. With the AIC Conservation Science Department, X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy and reflectance Fourier-Transform Infrared Spectroscopy was carried out to further understand the physical characteristics of the collection.

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