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In Focus: László Moholy-Nagy

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In Focus: László Moholy-Nagy

GUEST EDITORS *Maria Kokkori, Joyce Tsai and Francesca Casadio*

Readers of *Leonardo* are especially familiar with the work of László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946), given his place as an early pioneer of kinetic art, a theorist of technology, a photographer, an educator and a visionary prophet of art in the age of innovations in image, text and sound transmission. He believed that the artist should embrace modernity, which involved not only new ideas of space and time and forms redolent of advanced science and technology but also encompassed a direct engagement with developments in industry. The recent exhibitions *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present* (2016–2017), *The Paintings of Moholy-Nagy: Shape of Things to Come* (2015) and *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts* (2014) have revealed a side of his work that has been understudied. His engagement with the physical materials that serve as the substrate of his art underpins the broader theoretical enterprise for which he is better known. With few romantic attachments to traditional media, his approach mirrored scientific knowledge and industrial developments by readily adopting new materials he felt were more suitable for his endeavors, however unorthodox, as they became available.

Moholy-Nagy experimented with oil paints, newly developed metallic alloys and plastics alike, making use of their specific qualities in other media, including his photograms and photographs. His fascination with the scientific developments of his age also informed his artistic practice. New developments in theoretical physics, including the popular dissemination of Einstein's Theory of Relativity, the fourth dimension and n-dimensional geometry, led him to rethink assumptions about linear time and the permeability, impermanence and immateriality of matter. He became fascinated with visualization technologies and, among the reproductions of artworks in his books, he also published scientific microscopic and telescopic photographs as well as images of his own paintings under high magnification to highlight texture.

This special section of *Leonardo* grew out of a deep examination of the artist's work over the course of the past several years, conducted by art historians, conservators and conservation scientists on the occasion of these major exhibitions of his work. The contributors to this section have placed special emphasis on research that offers new ways to interpret the materiality of Moholy-Nagy's artwork, seen at times under high magnification, as chemical formulations, as objects in transition and under duress. The work under scrutiny is inscribed within history and participates in a lively continued reception that extends to contemporary art production. We hope this collection of articles will inspire other researchers in pursuit of new knowledge, fully in line with *Leonardo's* mission of creating and celebrating opportunities for the powerful exchange of ideas among practitioners in art, science and technology.

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Contents

ÉVA FORGÁCS: “This Is the Century of Light”: László Moholy-Nagy’s Painting and Photography Debate in <i>i 10</i> , 1927	274
MARIA KOKKORI AND ALEXANDER BOURAS: Metallic Fractures: László Moholy-Nagy and Kazimir Malevich	287
SYLVIE PÉNICHON, KRISTA LOUGH AND PAUL MESSIER: An Objective Revaluation of Photograms by László Moholy-Nagy	292
ANNIE BOURNEUF: Interfaces and Proxies: Placing László Moholy-Nagy’s Prints	297
JOYCE TSAI, ANGELA CHANG, MATTHEW BATTLES AND JEFFREY SCHNAPP: László Moholy-Nagy’s <i>Light Prop</i> as Design Fiction: Perspectives on Conservation and Replication	311
JOHANNA SALVANT, JULIE BARTEN, FRANCESCA CASADIO, MARIA KOKKORI, FEDERICA POZZI, CAROL STRINGARI, KEN SUTHERLAND AND MARC WALTON: László Moholy-Nagy’s Painting Materials: From Substance to Light	316
CAROL S. ELIEL: The Spirit of Experimentation: Barbara Kasten and László Moholy-Nagy	321
ELIZABETH SIEGEL: Recollections and Reflections on László Moholy-Nagy	325

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