

the moholy-nagy
archive project



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use case – man ray

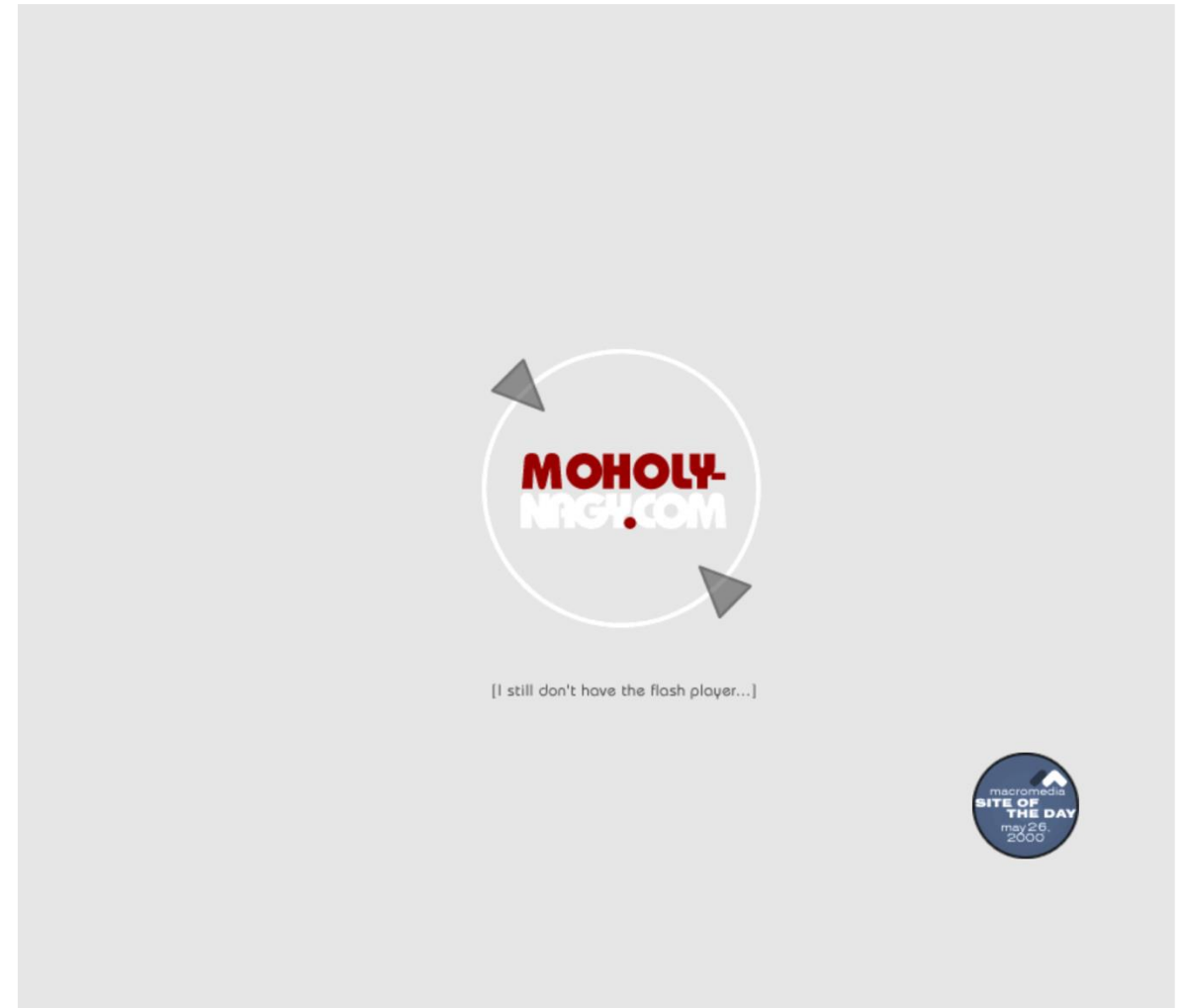
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introduction

We launched the first iteration of the Moholy-Nagy website in the Spring of 2001. Initially, the website was supposed to be a creative exercise in applying our recently honed skills in Macromedia's Flash. However, we soon realized that a big audience was out on the internet hungry for László Moholy-Nagy content. When Macromedia hosted our site as part of the "Site of the Day" on their website over a weekend, the site threw 18k individual impressions, and users filled our mailbox with queries regarding everything from proposed exhibitions to authentication requests. We were onto something.



The first website: moholy-nagy.com, 2001

introduction

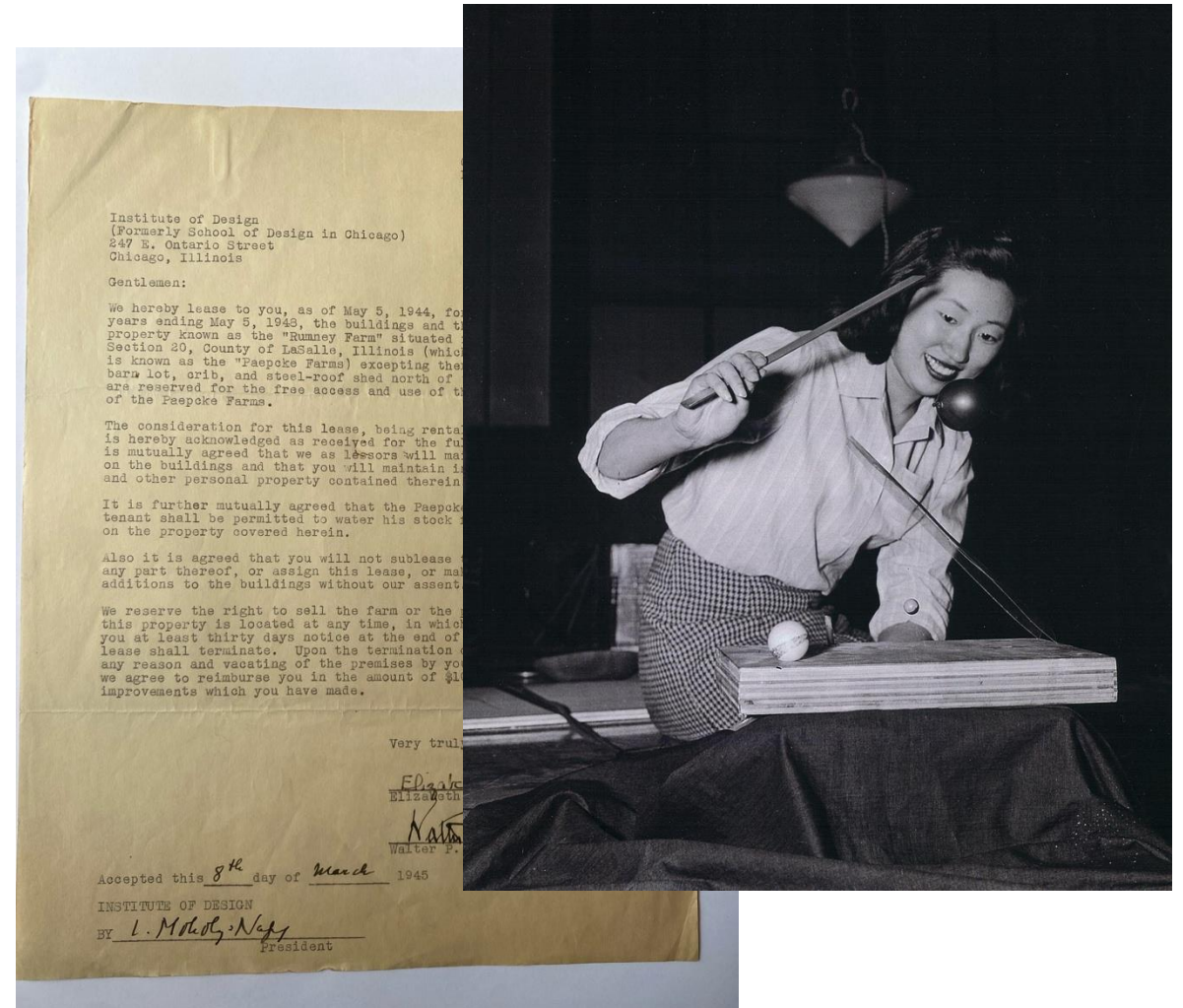
After more than twenty years online, it has become clear that interest in the work and life of László Moholy-Nagy has only intensified. While we used to receive primarily generalized questions and authentication requests, we are now frequently asked for more specialized information, including challenging authentication requests, technical questions regarding artwork, and access to the archive. It is evident that a simple website is no longer the only solution; we must make more data available online. Information for identified user groups, including curators, collectors, and academics, is essential. Fortunately, our extensive archive is a great start.



Various website iterations

project scope

The archive as it exists today started nearly eighty years ago with my grandfather's untimely death as a loose collection of Moholy's personal effects, artwork, and pedagogical documents, filed chronologically by subject. Over the years, it has grown to include an extensive collection of Hungarian, German, and English correspondence which covers most of Moholy's slow migration from East to West, the formation of the New Bauhaus, catalogs, and family communications. In addition, the archive houses a significant collection of glass negatives, 35mm negatives, and Ektachrome slides, along with reprints.

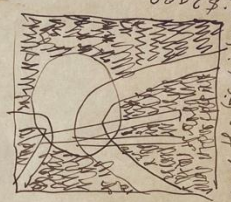


Lease agreement for ID location & student Beatrice Takeuchi

project scope

00029
and the by picture
sent and to tell me

Christmas 45
My darling
this is just my
happiest Christmas, the happiest
which I ever had.
And here is in writing:
I love you with all my
heart and you are a
wonderful writer and I
sincerely admire that you
are writing - and the criticism
which I sometimes receive
has as an underlying appre-
ciation of your doings already
My darling - a very merry
Christmas to you and a happy



A letter to the family (note the sketch)

Thursday
June 16, 1942

Lackam:

in a great hurry: when I came back from Somonauk yesterday (Monday) night I found your two Special Delivery letters. Gave Molly all the news and I guess she has answered all your questions. I was today Max around to adjust the grocery bill and exchange certain goods, get the children's things ready for camp which is no small job, and pack the station wagon for another trip to Somonauk tomorrow with most of the dark room equipment and lots of household stuff. Will stay only over the day. Back on Thursday to get the house finally closed up, and on Friday morning I leave for good because I have to break in the cook and Lotte Lindauer. On Saturday I have to drive the children up to their camp in Woodstock and the cook and the maid have to know the place by then a little.

So there is no possibility to see you when you arrive here. Molly will be ready for work on Sunday. Eugene has finally consented to go out with the untiring iron on Friday afternoon to fix workshop and darkroom. I hope to God they'll be able to get it done in a day and a half. The workshop is a chaos, but I fixed the drafting room completely and cleaned out the basement. Charlie completely unavailable. Eugene didn't feel well the last week and really looked not very good. So, let's hope that he doesn't break down before Friday. Prestini said he would be there on Monday afternoon just for his class.

Lewis decided to give us the new pump outfit for nothing. That's a bright beam. He'll make good on other repairs but in any case he should get your appreciation for his generosity. The new pump would cost \$150. -

They have not been able up till now to trace the terrific stench that develops occasionally at the kitchen front and by now has started to accumulate in the basement darkroom. Last Sunday it was so that one could not stay down there for five minutes. Lewis has promised to try again to find it. What a dope.

A propos stink: When I cleaned the dormitories I found six dead mice in the chest drawers, all obviously killed by the purple wheat. It was a heart warming task to clean that. I don't think that for our particular case this wheat is a good idea.

There are now 8 students certain in Somonauk and one negotiating hopefully. After a new careful budget plan I can only make it pay by what the students pay for board and room if we have 10. If we have more we would have a slight profit, but with less we shall have a maintenance deficit. The food prices are fantastic, but with ten I would do my best to swing it.

to Virginia

Kepes is now going definitely. Juliet and Shirley are coming out on Friday but refuse to live in the Miller house until Kepes arrives. So they'll have to take that smallest staircase bedroom. We should charge Shirley \$1.25 per day, but I didn't say anything. You'll have to arrange that with Kepes.

As for Paepcke: I think you have there an excellent point to stress

Family letters disclosing various impactful events

that Rockefeller after all is a donation too, and that the woodspring contract is a proof of success. But I'm afraid I'll not have a chance to tell him that soon. After that last conversation I didn't see him one's feeling goes, I felt very definitely that he was so frustrated and therefore ashamed and irritated. Now he thinks of the kind, but one feels those things. I think I should write him a letter, telling him that I would you of his sending the money back to the donors in case there were not part, and repeating what you wrote me. I don't think anything wrong in doing that.

I arrive without Barbara late Sunday night and will live in his room. If he feels better in the maid's room with me. I'll leave the keys for him with the janitor.

my last letter to you: there are all kinds of fruit in the refrigerator, knaeckebrot in the bread box, all sorts of fruit, corn, fruit and tomato juices in the pantry, d tea, coffee, sugar (all these by now to use with) in the cabinet in the kitchen beside the bread-cutting

our dirty washing with the janitor on Monday morning and collar-so that he can pay the laundry man when he brings it Wednesday. *save the shirts etc. there every Monday.

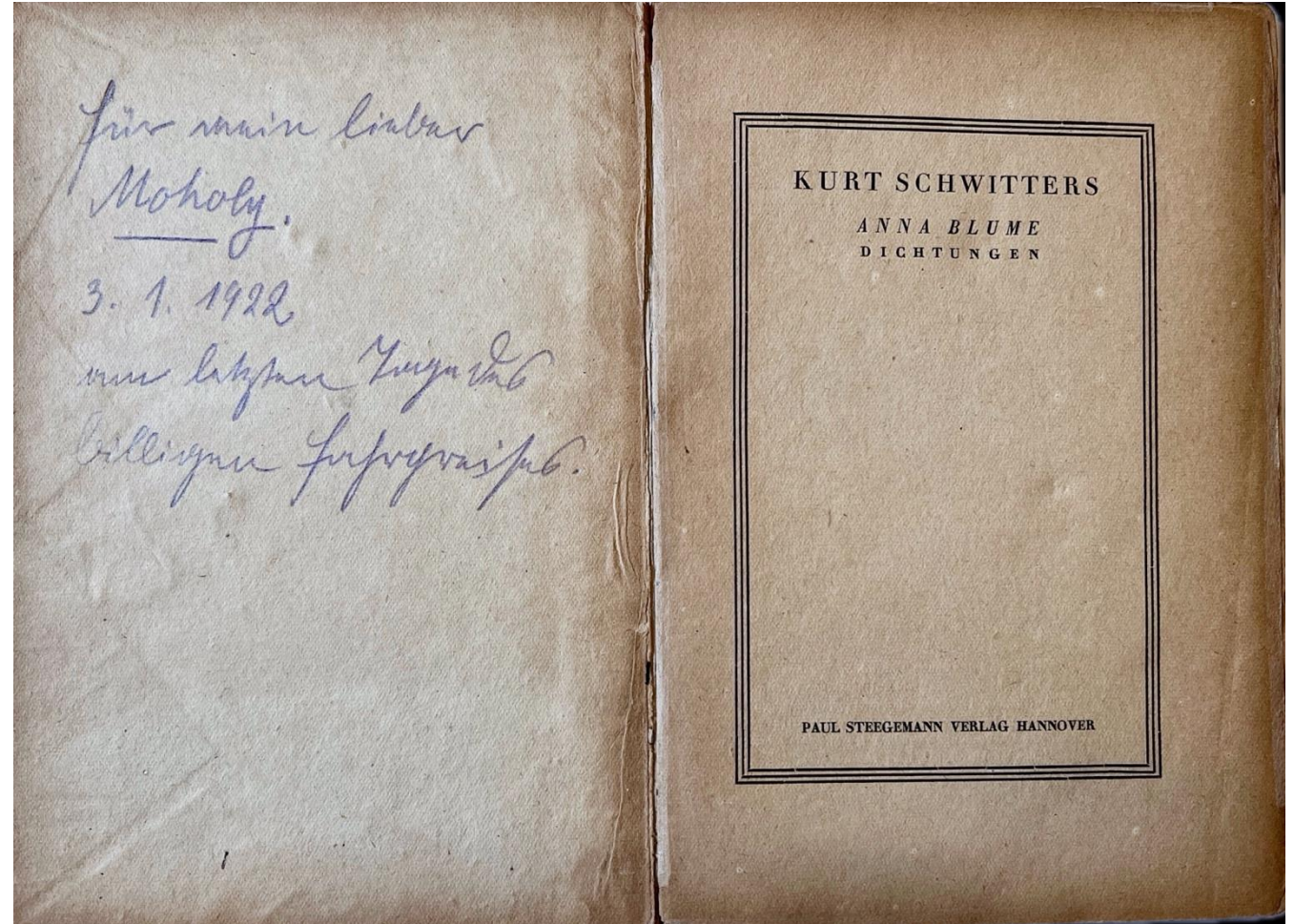
st: that's a very very sad story. I knew I had packed into the trunk. I put them right on the top in a white obviously have been stolen. I am terribly sorry.

up Sunday as soon as you are in; and your daughters have to answer your very nice letter.

project scope



A gift from Kurt Schwitters



Dedication and title page

project scope

In addition, the archive includes period-specific groupings, including Bauhaus Dessau contact prints and course materials, such as this beautiful syllabus from the metal and woodworking shop.

The archive also maintains a collection of Lucia Moholy's photographs, which offer a valuable glimpse into daily life at Dessau, documenting the school's facilities, student work, and faculty.



A contact print and syllabus from the Bauhaus Dessau period, 1919 -1933

case study

As we consolidate and organize the archive, we sometimes encounter misfiled works that, with some research, reveal a fascinating provenance.

This particular case concerns a Rayograph that was misfiled a few decades ago and recently rediscovered in the collection of Moholy's daughter, Hattula Moholy-Nagy. While the print appears to be signed, we found no additional information on the verso, which is blank.

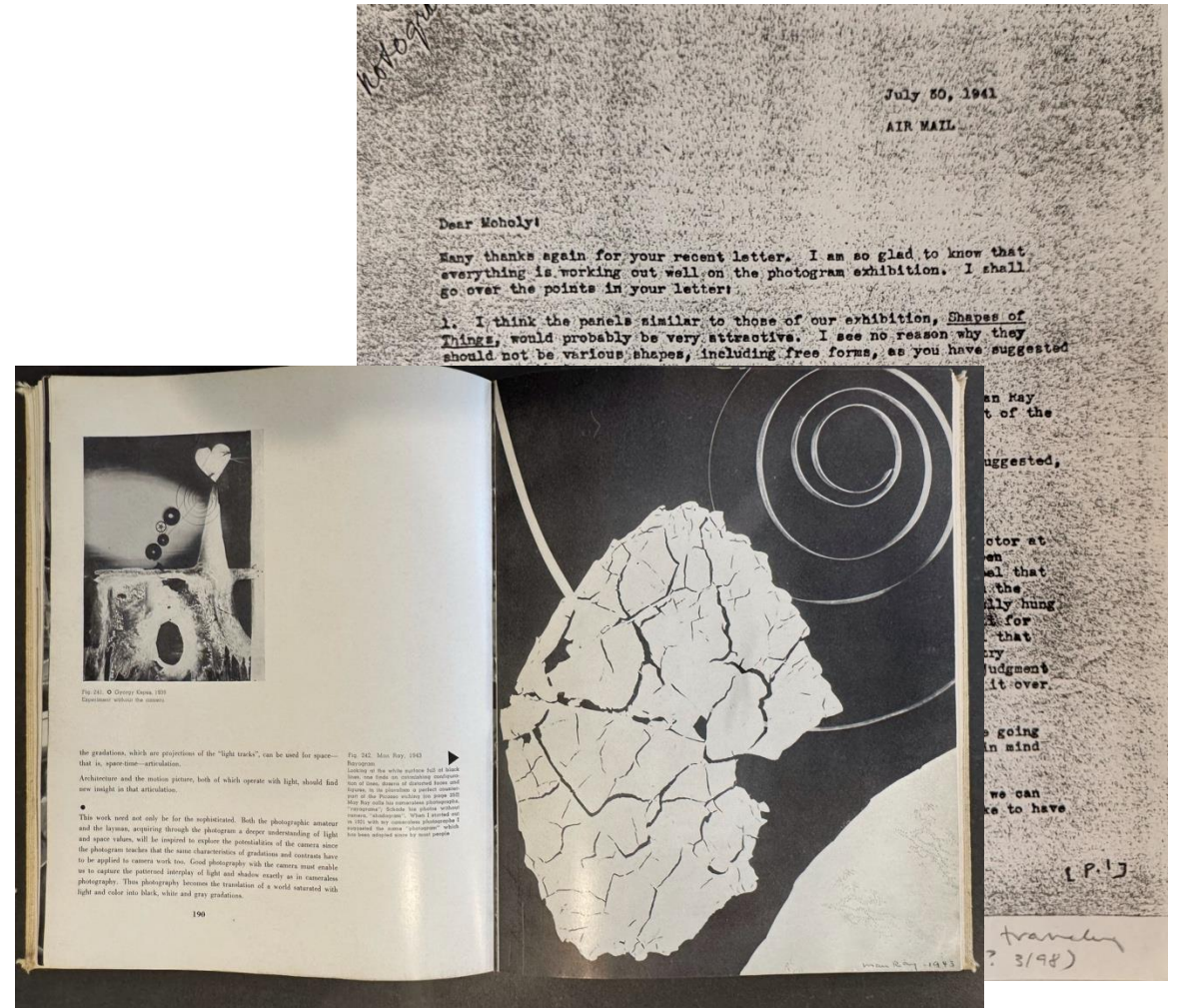


Untitled Rayograph by Man Ray

case study

Luckily, we located a reproduction of the same print in Moholy-Nagy's seminal book, *Vision in Motion*, published posthumously in 1946. This helped us define the Chicago period.

We then cross-referenced the period and known correspondence about publishing the forthcoming book. As luck would have it, we found several more letters by Man Ray and others discussing arrangements for the Rayograph.



The print as it appears in the book: *Vision in Motion*, and correspondence

case study

Now that we have established the provenance, we traveled to Paris in March to meet with Ms. Marion Myer, a Certified Expert at the European Chamber of Expert-Advisors in Fine Art (CECOA) and the President of the International Association of Man Ray.

While she could not authenticate the work, partly because they do not have a catalogue raisonné, she pointed us to Alain Sayag, a French curator specializing in Man Ray.

Her daughter, Eva, co-incidentally operates a contemporary art gallery at Art Cologne, the art fair my brother Daniel Hug directs.



Ms. Marion Meyer examining our Rayograph, 2025.

case study

Establishing a paper trail regarding the Rayograph and how the artwork changed hands is particularly important to the Estate of László Moholy-Nagy and the Man Ray Association. The discovery provides additional insights into Man Ray's oeuvre and reveals the collaborative spirit between these two groundbreaking artists.

It is a reminder that digitizing the archive and making it available to scholars, artist associations, and estates can help us make new discoveries and add new ideas to the existing dialogue.



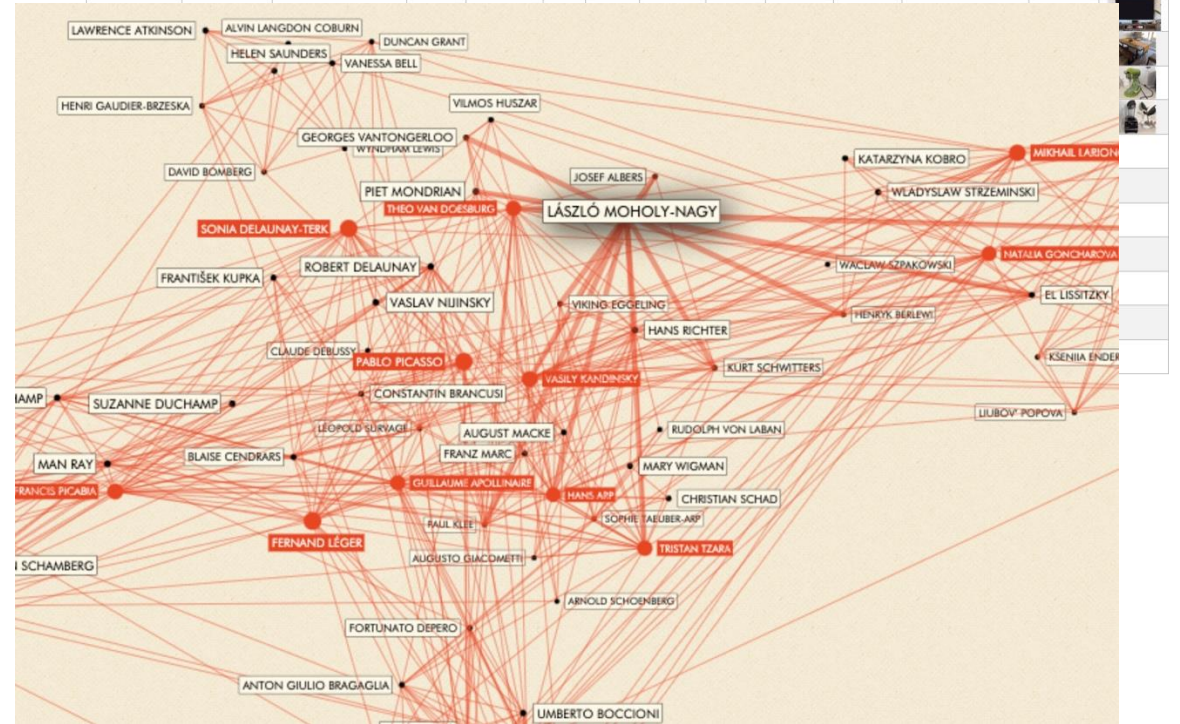
Man Ray, Katharine Kuh, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy at the opening of the Modern Art in Advertising exhibition on April 27, 1945.

data mapping

Because the archive has never been fully inventoried or digitized, several data mapping exercises are required to identify and match the physical properties of its contents with their soon-to-be-corresponding digital data fields. This process will ensure that the information can be accurately transferred from one archive (storage) to another (digital) while maintaining integrity and meaning.

It's about connecting important data points from one source to their equivalent points in the new digital system.

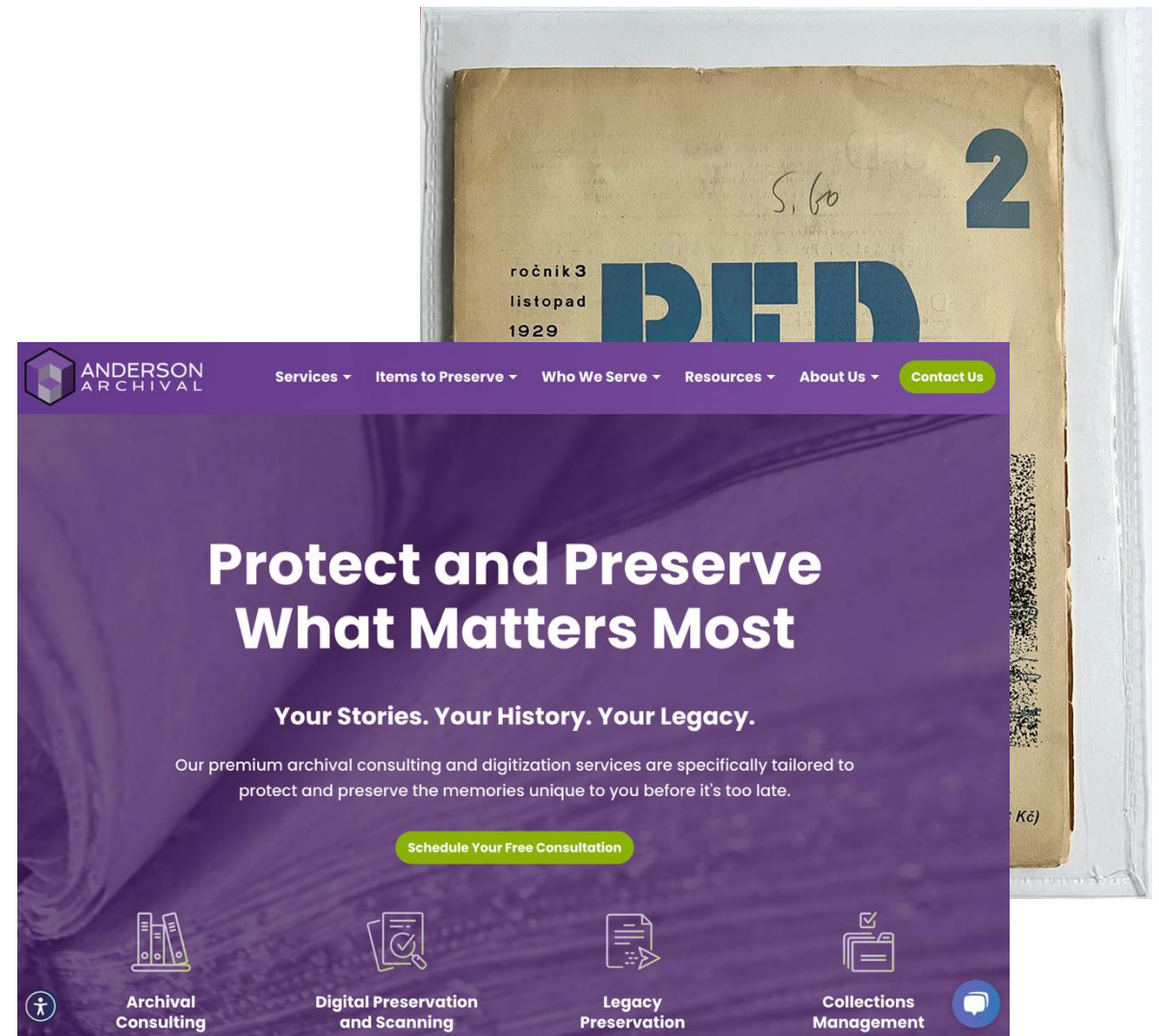
Location	Type	Description	Date	Where	Wrrty	Price	Condition	Est. Value	Model	Serial #	Notes	Photo filename	Photo Thumbnail
Dining Room	Hobbies	Painting	12/9/2022	Wayfair	1 year	\$40.00	fair	\$20.00	AABB42	797838		painting.jpg	
Kitchen	Appliances	Stove	4/3/2018	ABC Appliances	2 year	\$1,450.00	excellent	\$1,000.00	XXYY34	272266	came with the home	oven.jpg	
Kitchen	Appliances	Air Fryer	6/29/2018	Costco	1 year	\$100.00	good	\$98.00	AABB14	298990		fryer.jpg	
Kitchen	Appliances	Fridge	2/4/2018	ABC Appliances	2 year	\$1,350.00	good	\$800.00	XXYY33	254450		fridge.jpg	
Kitchen	Appliances	Dishwasher	3/5/2018	ABC Appliances	1 year	\$850.00	fair	\$600.00	AABB12	263358	bought used	dishwasher.jpg	



Screenshot of the Abstraction exhibition network diagram & Excel document.

data mapping

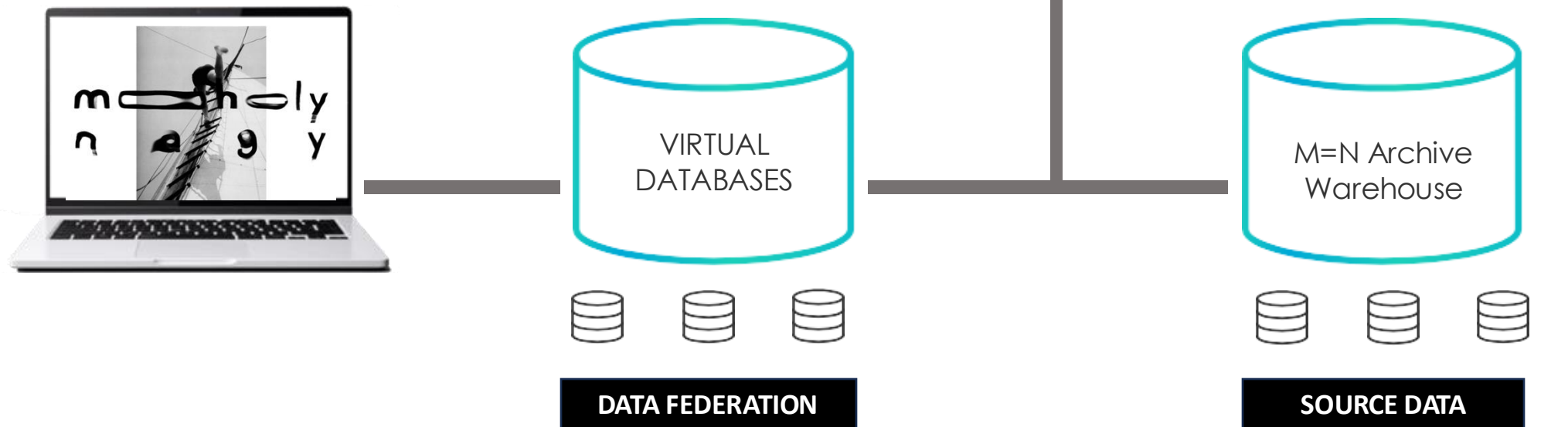
Anderson Archival was selected as our vendor due to their deep understanding of data preservation, OCR, digital access management (DAMS), and artificial intelligence. Given the historical significance and value of the archive materials, it is crucial that the digitization process does not damage the originals and that we preserve and maintain them once digitization is complete. Regarding Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software, it reads and transcribes the text from scanned pages. This will enable users of our database to perform full-text searches of the documents, making research more efficient and allowing for data clustering and tagging.



Anderson Archival website for our digitization and archive example

data aggregation

The goal of digitizing materials is to erase the silos in favor of a federated architecture that will allow a data management approach where data from multiple, independent sources is made accessible and quarriable through a unified interface. In other words, processing various queries to multiple databases through a singular user interface.



data mapping

Phase one of the project is to create a content inventory matrix of all the items selected to be digitized (started in November 2024). This includes detailing the physical location of items within the archive, the box number and label, and the folder and subfolders, when necessary.

For example, the Institute of Design catalog for the Summer Session (see photo), June 23 –August 2, 1941, is organized as follows.

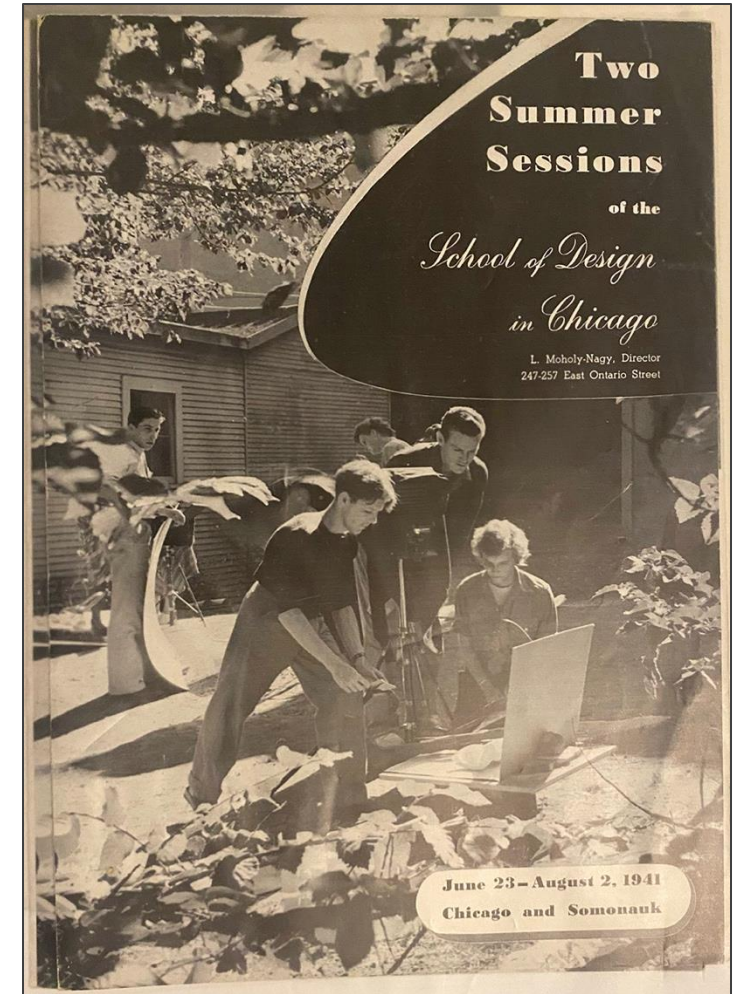
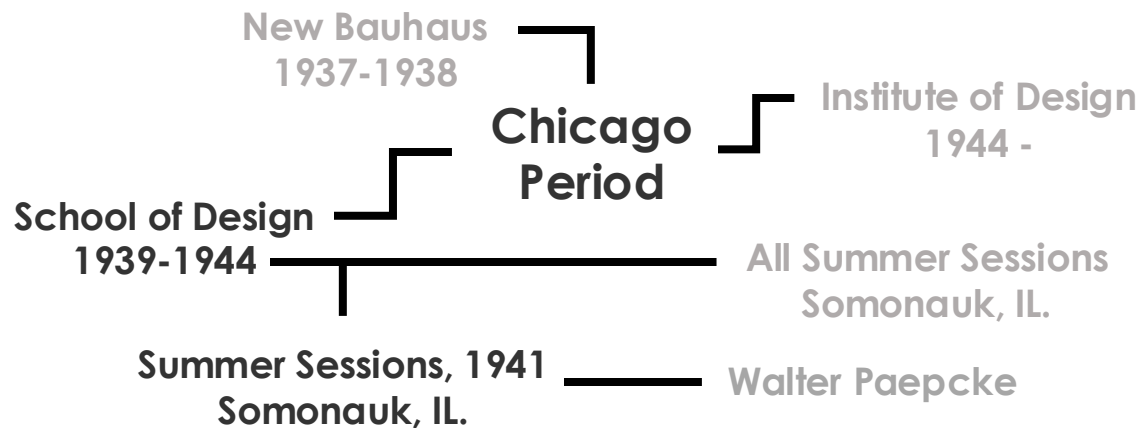
Box 13.1
Chicago
Period └─ **School of Design** └─ **Summer Sessions, 1941**
 1939-1944 **Somonauk, IL.**



Archival boxes containing correspondence & ID summer course catalog

data mapping

Once a file is digitized and tagged, we no longer need to follow a chronological or linear path to retrieve, view, and edit digitized materials. Instead, users can manipulate and cluster material using tags, search by facets, and utilize filters to narrow results. In addition, we will use tagging as a descriptive label attached to content, narrowing results based on specific criteria like dates or other attributes.



Somonauk summer course catalog, 1941

artificial intelligence

As we develop and build our digital archive, we want artificial intelligence to assist us with the growing issue of forgeries. As prices for Moholy's originals continue to rise, forgeries are becoming more sophisticated. Some of the most forged works are László Moholy-Nagy's constructivist paintings, which, in some cases, are now fetching over a million dollars at auction. Meanwhile, the Moholy-Nagy Foundation has an advisory board regularly reviews authentication requests. However, having additional tools would help eliminate some guesswork regarding atypical authentications.

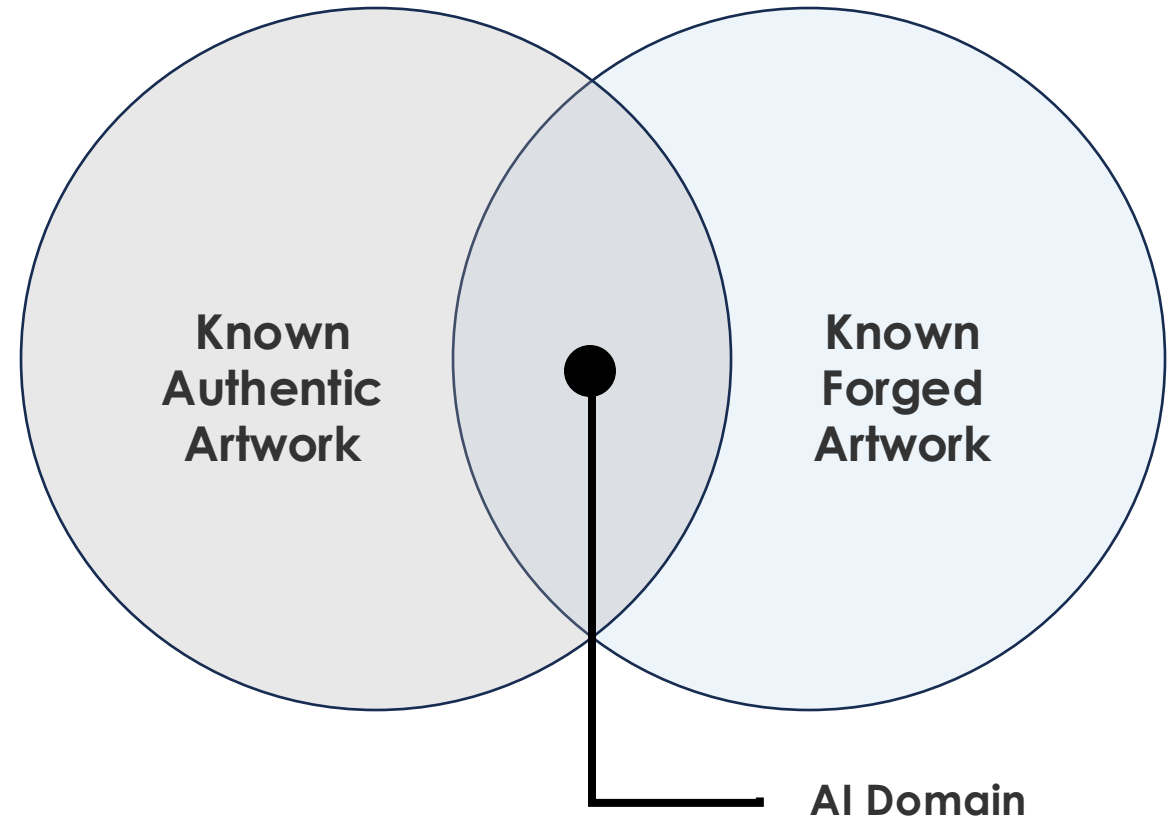


Painting Bildarchitektur 4 (Wiesbaden), 1922

artificial intelligence

The archive has amassed a robust collection of known forgeries from the present to the 1970s. The AI digital assistant will possess a programmed knowledge base of cataloged forgeries and authenticated artwork that will be cross-referenced to potential flagged forgeries through web searches, catalogs, and other known databases. Thus, the AI assistant will create its own ontology and make recommendations based on the system's empirical findings.

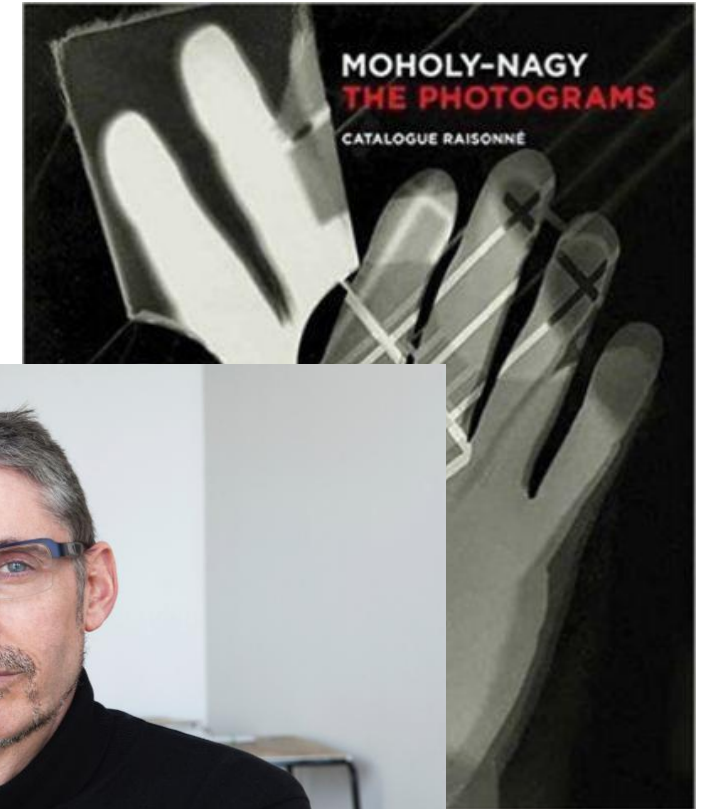
Anderson Archival has agreed to host a virtual workshop later in the design process to discuss this section of the database.



closing remarks

Digitizing the archive and creating a relational database that enables easy access of materials and manipulation of related data points through a structured format will also assist in the ongoing work of the catalog raisonné project, which Professor Oliver Botar will lead once the archive is ready.

The first contribution to the Raisonné project was published January 31, 2010, by Renate Heyne (Editor), Hattula Moholy-Nagy (Editor), and Floris Neusüss (Editor). “Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms: Catalogue Raisonné.”



Dr. Oliver Botar, Associate director, graduate programs and research. Professor, School of Art and “The Photograms: Catalogue Raisonné”

closing remarks

This overview highlights the many facets of digitizing the archive, transforming it into a more expansive online resource, and creating the online database and support tools.

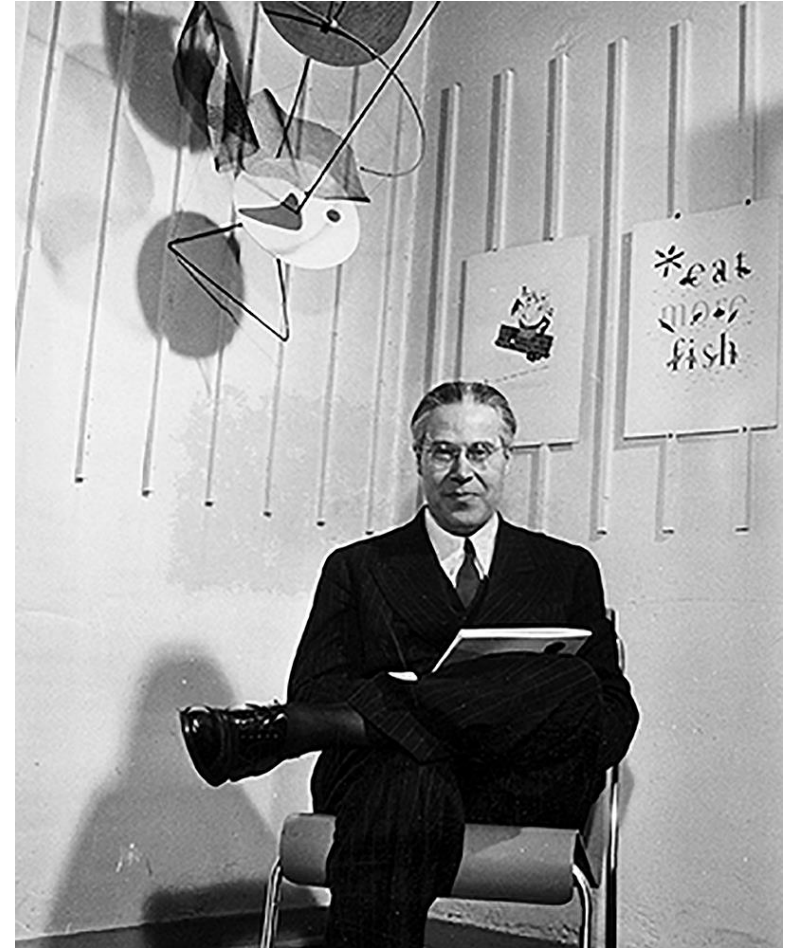
Making the digital archive available online will ultimately increase scholarship of László Moholy-Nagy and his contemporaries and foster continued interest in the work and life of one of the most versatile innovators in the fields of photography, typography, sculpture, painting, printmaking, film-making, and industrial design.



The masters on the roof of the Bauhaus studio building in Dessau, 1926

thank you

questions and answers



László Moholy-Nagy, Institute of Design, 1946