Movement and music—both time-based activities—can be difficult to express in static media such as painting, drawing, and photography, yet many visual artists feel called to explore them. Some are driven to devise new techniques or new combinations of media in order to capture or suggest movement. Similarly, some visual artists utilize elements found in music—rhythms, patterns, repetitions, and variations—to endow their compositions with new expressive potency. In few places did movement, music, visual arts, and myriad other disciplines intermingle with such profound effect as they did at Black Mountain College (BMC), an experiment in higher education in the mountains of Western North Carolina that existed from 1933 to 1957. For many artists, their introduction to interdisciplinarity at the college resulted in a continued curiosity around those ideas throughout their careers. The works in the exhibition, selected from the Asheville Art Museum’s Black Mountain College Collection, highlight approaches to rendering a lasting imprint of the ephemeral.

Artists such as Barbara Morgan and Clemens Kalischer seek to capture the motion of the human form, evoking a sense of elongated or contracted muscles, or of limbs moving through space. Others, like Lorna Blaine Halper or Sewell Sillman, approach the challenge through abstraction, foregoing representation yet communicating an atmosphere of dynamic change. Marianne Preger-Simon’s drawings of her fellow dancers at BMC from summer 1953 are not only portraits but also a dance of pencil on paper, created in the spirit of BMC professor Josef Albers’s line studies as she simultaneously worked with choreographer Merce Cunningham. Each of these artists ultimately reflects on the temporal nature of movement and music. Also represented in the selection of more than 50 prints, textiles, drawings, paintings and sculptures featured in the exhibition are influential artists such as Anni Albers, Ruth Asawa, Ilya Bolotowsky, John Cage, Buckminster Fuller, Kenneth Noland, Robert Rauschenberg, Kenneth Snelson, and Jack Tworkov. A selection of related photographs and archival objects offers intimate perspectives on the school’s unique collaborative atmosphere. Even now, decades after the school’s closing in 1957 due to financial woes, internal divisions, and decreasing enrollment, its powerful influence continues to reverberate.

A Lasting Imprint is organized by the Asheville Art Museum (AAM), Asheville, North Carolina and features key works from the museum’s Black Mountain College Collection. The AAM has been collecting works of art and materials related to Black Mountain College for over 25 years in recognition of the college’s importance to Western North Carolina and to the development of American art. In addition to collecting works produced by key BMC artists during the years the school was active, the AAM also seeks to acquire works by those artists from other periods in order to represent a broad spectrum of their development. The Museum has been fortunate to continually grow its Black Mountain College Collection through gifts from students, faculty, and their families and strategic Museum purchases. Noted scholar and author Mary Emma Harris of the Black Mountain College Project provided essential guidance to the development of the Asheville Art Museum’s Black Mountain College Collection.

Sponsored by The Guild of the Knoxville Museum of Art
Black Mountain College formed in 1933 as an alternative to the prevailing educational institutions of the time. It favored a democratic framework in which the formal lines between faculty and student were often blurred. Faculty and students dined together, worked together, and lived together. Classes were frequently held at unusual hours to make time for the work program (in which students assisted in the construction and maintenance of the campus) during the day, which often meant that some lectures continued throughout the night. As the school evolved, so did its methodologies, and over time, many individuals who had originally enrolled at Black Mountain College as students became faculty, as was the case for Hazel Larsen Archer and Joseph Fiore, both of whom are represented in this exhibition. Archer, who enrolled as a student in 1944, became the school’s first full-time faculty member in photography in 1949. On her educational philosophy, Archer wrote that “I believe, more and more, that the educational process is almost a hands-off affair; not without guidance, of course, but providing the time and the opportunity for the opening and widening of channels for growth.”
Influential artist and educator Josef Albers first made his mark at Germany’s renowned art and design school, Bauhaus, but fled to the United States with his wife Anni in the early 1930s with the rise of the country’s Nazi movement. He joined the BMC faculty in 1933 and served as one of BMC’s leading voices for more than two decades. Albers is perhaps most celebrated for using printmaking as a vehicle for capturing his groundbreaking experiments with color and form. In his various print folios, Albers created austere compositions in which he explored the potential of subtle adjustments and juxtapositions to suggest variations in hue or the illusion of depth.
Joseph Fiore (Cleveland, Ohio 1925-2008 New York City)

**#9 Red Abstract**, 1950

Oil on Masonite

24 1/8 x 31 7/8 inches

Asheville Art Museum, Black Mountain College Collection, Gift of the Falcon Charitable Foundation

Joseph Fiore came to Black Mountain College to study in 1946 and was appointed to the faculty in 1949 as Josef Albers’ replacement. He remained there as a teacher until the school’s closure in 1957. While Fiore was a prolific painter, he also sang in the school’s chorus and took musical composition from John Cage in 1948. **#9 Red Abstract** represents the height of his experimentation with abstract painting while at BMC. After his tenure at BMC, Fiore and his wife Mary moved to New York and began spending summers in Maine, which inspired him to devote increasing attention to painting landscapes from direct observation.
Movement

Movement was a key area of study and experimentation at Black Mountain College, whether mark making, sculpting, dancing, or other creative actions. Dance classes and theater productions featured famed choreographer Merce Cunningham, whose performances combined intense physicality and intricate movements, often blurring the lines between dancer and audience while challenging limitations of the stage. Classes in painting, drawing, textiles, and ceramics taught by Josef and Anni Albers, Karen Karnes, and Joseph Fiore were designed to convey notions of movement through gesture or repetition. The suggestion of movement is further reinforced in the titles of several works featured in this exhibition.
Elaine de Kooning (Brooklyn, Pennsylvania 1918-1989
Southampton, New York)

*Torchlight Cave Drawings No. 1*, 1985
Aquatint on paper; edition 13/25
20 x 25 1/2 inches
Publisher: Crown Point Press, San Francisco
Asheville Art Museum, Black Mountain College Collection, gift of Michael J. Teaford & Robert K. Benites

Elaine de Kooning was a talented painter and printmaker whose incorporation of themes from psychology and anthropology made her a prominent figure in the New York School of abstract painting in the late 1940s and 1950s. As a BMC student, she participated in art making, acted in plays, and was part of the team that helped R. Buckminster Fuller construct his first geodesic dome on campus.

Produced long after her time at BMC, this evocative aquatint is one of eight prints featured in her *Torchlight Cave Drawings*, a suite that demonstrates the artist’s unique fusion of abstraction and primitive imagery inspired by her interest in prehistoric cave paintings. As the artist once explained, “I’m an escape artist. Because I like the idea of escaping from style, but when I look at all of my work, there begins to be a unity...You don’t have to look for a style, you can’t escape a style.” De Kooning is wife of Abstract Expressionist painter Willem de Kooning.
Barbara Morgan (Buffalo, Kansas 1900-1992 Sleepy Hollow, New York)

*Mart*ha Graham - *Lamentation (Oblique)*, 1935 (printed later)

Gelatin silver print on paper
12 x 9 5/8 inches
Asheville Art Museum, Black Mountain College Collection, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Nat C. Myers Fund for Photography

Barbara Morgan began her art career as a painter until 1935, when she shifted to photography. The camera enabled the artist to combine her interests in dance, the iconic power of gesture, and recording fleeting movements. In 1944, she was invited to teach as part of a summer session at BMC and lectured on “the role of Light in Photography.” She also conducted an outdoor workshop in which she stressed aesthetics rather over technique.

Here, she captures the angular leaping figure of famous dancer and choreographer Martha Graham. Many of Morgan’s compositions embrace abstract design concepts, an approach that set her apart from the majority of American documentary photographers of the day such as Ansel Adams, Walker Evans, and Dorothea Lange. After her husband’s death in 1967, Morgan lost interest in the human figure and shifted her attention to creating abstract photograms, photomontages and landscape images.
Repetition

Professor of art and design Josef Albers led his Black Mountain College students in exercises based in repetition, another key concept represented in the school’s teachings and in many of the works on display in this exhibition. *Wave*, a graphite drawing by Albert Lanier, is an example of an exercise Albers assigned to all of his design students. By drawing one wavy line over another until the page was filled, and then observing the resulting illusion of a rippled surface, he effected a disciplined study of human perception. *Basket*, a delicate sculptural work by Lanier’s wife and fellow student Ruth Asawa, takes repetitive line making into three-dimensional space. The piece is an early example of her signature looped wire technique, which she called “drawing in the air.”
**Ruth Asawa** (Norwalk, California 1926-2013 San Francisco, California)

**Basket**, 1948-1949

Woven Copper Wire on copper wire

4 1/2 x 7 1/2 x 7 3/4 inches

Asheville Art Museum, Black Mountain College Collection, Museum purchase with funds provided by 2010 Collectors’ Circle with additional funds provided by Frances Myers

At the age of 16, Ruth Asawa and her family were sent to Japanese American internment camps in California and Arkansas before their eventual release. Unable to enroll in traditional art schools because of her race, Asawa gained entrance to BMC in 1946, where she studied under Josef Albers, Ilya Bolotowsky, Buckminster Fuller, and Merce Cunningham. After a trip to Mexico in 1947, she became intrigued by the looped wire baskets used to hold eggs at the market. This simple form and the common material were the catalyst for the creation of her internationally known wire sculptures, some of which are displayed as elaborate nested forms dangling in space.
Josef Albers (Bottrop, Germany 1888-1976 New Haven, Connecticut)

**Formulation: Articulation Folio I, Folder 14, 1972**

Screenprint on paper; edition 369/1000

15 x 40 inches


Asheville Art Museum, Black Mountain College Collection, gift of The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

Throughout his long and prolific career Josef Albers remained fascinated by the nature of visual perception. In this and other compositions he presents interlocking color shapes that manipulate perspective and raise questions as to what is foreground and what is background. This series of prints also represents his interest in the optical and psychological effects of color.
Music

Along with the visual arts, poetry, and dance, music was a key part of BMC’s curriculum. Noted musicologist Heinrich Jalowetz began teaching there in 1938, and in 1944 organized the first Summer Music Institute, which focused on “Musical Interpretation.” In typical BMC collaborative spirit, the school’s independent areas of study increasingly intersected and overlapped, often resulting in groundbreaking collaborative productions. In 1948 legendary avant garde composer John Cage made his first extended visit to the campus, and during that summer presented Erik Satie’s *The Ruse of the Medusa* in the college’s dining hall. Incorporating set design, choreography, and theater, the musical production elevated the school’s experimental climate and interdisciplinary spirit to new heights.
Anni Albers (Berlin, Germany 1899-1994 Orange, Connecticut)

*Orchestra III* from the *Connections* portfolio, 1983
Screenprint on paper; edition 25/120
Publisher: Fausta Squatriti, Milan Printer: Muggiò, Milan
26 3/4 x 18 7/8 inches
Asheville Art Museum, Black Mountain College Collection, gift of The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

Anni Albers based her screenprint compositions such as this on woven textile patterns she developed while working as a weaving instructor at BMC. Albers believed that craft practice was a valuable tool for shaking loose habits of mind that hindered creativity. She theorized that because students had little previous instruction in working with material such as fiber, they would be less conditioned to rely on their teacher for answers and more likely to trust their own experience. Intentional or not, even Albers’ choice of screenprinting as a printmaking technique reflects her fascination with fiber.
Robert Rauschenberg (Port Arthur, Texas 1925-2008 Captiva, Florida)

John from the Ruminations series, 1999
Intaglio in two colors with photogravure on Lana Gravure paper; edition 40/46
29 1/2 x 38 7/8 inches
Publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York
Asheville Art Museum, Black Mountain College Collection, 2015 Collectors’ Circle purchase

Milton Ernest “Robert” Rauschenberg was an American painter and graphic artist whose early works anticipated the Pop art movement of the 1950s and 1960s. He is well known for his “Combines,” a series of large artworks in which he blends everyday objects with paint and other art materials in order to blur the distinctions between painting and sculpture, and create new statements about art and its relationship to material culture.

Prints from his series Ruminations, represented here in John, take the form of dense compositions filled with imagery of important figures from his past. In a manner designed to echo the manner in which the human mind blends various fragments of memories, Rauschenberg combines disjointed imagery from vintage photographs of family and friends, many taken by the artist himself. The title John references Rauschenberg’s time as a student at BMC, where in summer 1952 he and composer John Cage formed a close friendship that would last their entire lives. The two portraits of Cage that appear in John were taken at BMC, likely by Rauschenberg.
Rhythm

Rhythm is defined as “a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound.” How, then, might this concept translate from the auditory and kinesthetic—or physical—into the visual? Through exposure to other disciplines while at Black Mountain College, many artists incorporated not only what they saw, but also what they heard into what they created. Variances in rhythm were essential to the aesthetics of modern dance as taught by Merce Cunningham, modern music in the compositions of John Cage, and to modern art works constructed by Cage, Josef Albers, and Ilya Bolotowsky. In its later years, Black Mountain College also saw a flourishing of poetry and writing, where rhythm came forth in written and spoken words. The integration of various expressions of rhythm came across visually in the form of pattern, contrasting tones or colors, and sensations of vibration or movement.
Lorna Blaine Halper (Boston 1924-2012 Pawling, New York)

**The Golden Section**, 1947-1952

Oil on Masonite

13 3/8 x 21 1/2 inches

Asheville Art Museum, Black Mountain College Collection, gift of the artist

Lorna Halper was a student of Josef Albers at BMC and learned from her mentor lessons about color theory and proportion. In this study from Albers’s class, she presents an abstraction named for an ancient mathematical system designed to help artists and architects create compositions based on ideal geometric shapes and proportions. The Golden Section, or Golden Ratio, also appears in certain spiral forms found in nature, a fact that may help explain Halper’s character *Spiro* that appear in many of her later works, two of which are on view in the adjacent gallery. Halper attended BMC beginning with the 1945 Summer Art Institute and remained through spring 1948.
Sewell Sillman (Savannah 1924-1992 Lyme, Connecticut)

Two Orbs (AKIN) 2, 1969

Acrylic on paper
24 1/2 x 36 1/4 inches
Asheville Art Museum, Black Mountain College Collection, gift of the Sewell Sillman Foundation

After serving in World War II, Sillman briefly studied at Georgia Tech before following his friend Albert Lanier to BMC in 1948. Sillman recalled that BMC “...gave me a chance to get rid of absolutely every standard that I had grown up with... It was like a snake that loses its skin... What was left was someone who had absolutely no idea in the world what to do.... It was marvelous.” Sillman initially continued his architectural studies with design visionary Buckminster Fuller, but his introduction to Josef Albers led Sillman away from architecture to what would become a tireless exploration of geometric abstraction. Unlike Albers’ carefully calibrated and reductive studies, Sillman’s drawings and paintings often feature networks of delicate lines constructed in a manner reminiscent of textile designs woven on a loom. Others, such as Two Orb (AKIN) 2, suggest computer-assisted designs featuring portals that lead the viewer beyond the picture plane.
Notes and College Publications from the Theodore Dreier Archive

The ephemera in this case come from the Asheville Art Museum’s Theodore Dreier Sr. Document Collection. Dreier co-founded Black Mountain College with John Andrew Rice in 1933 and remained an essential part of the College’s faculty and administration until the 1948-1949 academic year. Dreier’s documents provide a glimpse into the daily activities of the college during its eventful 24-year history, and aid in reconstructing timelines within which personal ephemera, artworks, and memoirs may be integrated.

Among the significant moments represented in the collection include a document listing the arrival of Alma Stone, the first African American student at BMC in 1944, almost 10 years to the day before the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court Ruling, and the following year the arrival of visiting faculty Roland Hayes and Carol Brice, both African American, for the school’s Summer Music Institute.
BMCBN Vol. 2 No. 6 April 1944
Art Institute, Summer 1944
Barbara Morgan faculty info detail

BMCB Vol 1 No. 3 February 1943
Learning and Living Photographic bulletin
(Will Hamlin)
Music and drama spread detail