

László Moholy-Nagy

This exhibition brings together two artists from different eras whose works reflect on modernity and technology. In the early twentieth century, **LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY** had a utopian vision that modern technology would improve life for the masses. "Everyone is equal before the machine," he claimed. From the perspective of our time, **SIMON STARLING** reflects on that utopianism and the consequences of modernity. The works in this exhibition reveal how the mechanical eye of the camera creates a unique form of perception that relates to the social impact of machine culture.

The photographs of **LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY** in this exhibition highlight his experiments with abstraction and light, and theories about perception known as "the new vision." Also a painter and sculptor, he believed that photography created profound new ways of experiencing space and was an essential form of communication: "It is not the person ignorant of writing but the one ignorant of photography who will be the illiterate of the future." Favoured a birds eye view, he distorted perspective to create unfamiliar spatial relationships. His concern with abstract effects was elaborated with photograms - photographs made without a camera. The dynamic spatial tensions in these works record the fleeting motion of light on transparent forms. In the mid 1930s, Moholy began to experiment with colour photography through the format of 35 mm colour slide film. Using long exposure times, he was able to capture the virtual volume and expressive energy of light patterns from traffic headlights and reflections cast by a light machine. Through colour photography he could exploit the sheer spectacle and optical sensation of light.

Featured in this exhibition is an experimental film that vividly expresses Moholy's fascination with the material qualities of light through spatial projection. *Ein Lichtspiel schwarz weiss grau*

(Lightplay: Black-White-Grey) is based on the luminous effects created by projections from a kinetic sculpture, *Light Prop for an Electric Stage*. Built by a Berlin electric company in 1930, this light-generating machine (called a light-space modulator) took almost ten years to complete, and was conceived for the purpose of making the film. The reflective surfaces of the translucent and transparent materials, typical of his sculptural constructions, created abstract light effects, similar to those of the photograms. Included in the exhibition are Moholy's two-dimensional interpretations of his sculptural ideas: the drawing of a 'space modulator', portrait of a 'material construction', and colour photograph of an illuminated Plexiglas sculpture.

SIMON STARLING's works have often involved performative sculptural acts and labour intensive processes that transform physical materials as histories of place. In *Shedboatshed (Mobile Architecture No 2)*, 2005, for example, he dismantled a wooden shed, turning it into a boat loaded with the remains and paddled the boat down the Rhine River to a museum where it was remade as a shed. There is a similar poetic circularity to the economies of production in the installation *Wilhelm Noack oHG*, a 35 mm black and white film projection and projector apparatus. Here, footage of an old metal workshop and its production are conceptually intertwined. The film's content mirrors and fuses with the projection mechanism. The Noack manufacturing firm, established in 1897, has weathered the political and cultural development of Berlin. The title (the legal name of the business) carries the complexities of that history as well as current economic realities and, as the subject of the film and collaborator in the fabrication of the piece, references the artist's own production process. A type of portrait of the firm's history, this piece relates to Starling's preoccupation with icons of the modern, and outmoded, arcane forms of technology.

Both the film's apparatus and footage of *Wilhelm Noack oHG* emphasize the craftsmanship of metalwork, drawing out the dynamics between the unique and mass produced. The clanging sounds of anvils and the panning camera suggest the presence of human labour and the pace of such industry. A decidedly analogue sense of time heightens a palpable experience of real space and material presence, quite unlike the illusory spectacle of cinematic projection. In mounting the camera on one of Noack's dollies, the film seems to have a machine vision. Typical of one of Starling's constructions, the projector apparatus is a functional sculpture, its meaning integrally tied to purpose and the conditions of its making. Reminiscent of a spiral staircase, the helix form pumps the film strip as if veins in an infinite loop. This installation expresses what one critic has aptly described as Starling's ability to express the phenomenology of making.

Helga Pakasaar, Curator

Lectures

Simon Starling Saturday March 24, 2 pm at Vancity Theatre

Oliver Botar Sunday March 25, 2 pm at PHG
'The biological ... taken as the guide': László Moholy-Nagy and Biocentrism

Starling lecture in partnership with the Contemporary Art Society, Vancouver and Emily Carr Institute Speaker Series. This exhibition is financially supported by the British Council.

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ARTISTS

Born in Borsad in Southern Hungary in 1895, **LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY** was an influential Bauhaus figure in Weimar Germany, who lived throughout Europe until emigrating to the U.S. to become director of the Design School in Chicago in 1937 where he continued to produce innovative projects until his death in 1946. Considered one of the most inventive artists of the early twentieth century, he worked in various mediums including painting, sculpture, film and photography. He was also a graphic and stage designer, and an influential writer and teacher who published extensively. Moholy's prescient theories about perception, technology and modernity have become increasingly relevant. Exhibitions and publications on his artwork abound, most recently *Colour in Transparency* at the Bauhaus- Archiv, Berlin, the internationally touring exhibition *Albers and Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World* and *Technical Detours: the Early Moholy-Nagy Reconsidered* curated by Oliver Botar.

SIMON STARLING was born in 1967 in Epsom England and is a graduate of the Glasgow School of Art, he was the recipient of the coveted Turner Prize in 2005 and was shortlisted for the Hugo Boss Prize in 2004. He currently lives in Berlin and Copenhagen and is Professor of Fine Arts at the Staedelschule, in Frankfurt Germany. He has exhibited widely including the Bienal de Sao Paulo in 2004 and he represented Scotland at the Venice Biennale in 2003. Forthcoming solo exhibitions include Stadlischen Kunstmuseum Zum Museum Folkwang in Essen, Germany (2007) MIT and Mass MOCA (2008) as well as Villa Arson, France, MACRO, Rome, Italy, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, Scotland, and Museum of Modern Art in Australia.

WORKS IN EXHIBITION

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY

Ein lichtspiel Schwarz weiss grau
5 min 30 sec, silent
16 mm black and white film transferred to DVD

Courtesy of George Eastman House and the Estate of Moholy-Nagy

Untitled, 1936-46
Fujicolor print

Untitled, 1939-46
Fujicolor print

Untitled, 1936-46
Fujicolor print

Untitled, 1937
C-print

Untitled, 1937-46
Fujicolor print

Untitled, 1936-46
Fujicolor print

Untitled, 1936-46
Fujicolor print

Courtesy of the Estate of Moholy-Nagy and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

Photogram, 1922
Inkjet print

Photogram, 1924
Inkjet print

Rinnstein, 1925
Gelatin silver print

Light Space Modulator, ca. 1925
Gelatin silver print
* image left

Laboratory, 1938
gelatin silver print
Courtesy of George Eastman House

Fishheads, ca. 1928-30
Gelatin silver print

Lucia, ca. 1926-28
Gelatin silver print

Untitled (Sketch for Space Modulator "Prehistoric Construction"), 1941
Ink and grease crayon on paper
Private collection

Ship's Deck, c. 1930
Gelatin silver print

Material Construction, ca. 1922
Gelatin silver print
Collection of Harry and Ann Malcolmson

SIMON STARLING

Wilhelm Noack oHG, 2006
Stainless steel, 35 mm film projector,
4-minute looped 35 mm film projection,
plastic, sound, light
Courtesy the artist and
neugerriemschneider, Berlin
* image right

