When Juan Manuel Bonet, the Director of the Reina Sofia, asked me if I would like to curate an exhibition on Black Mountain College, I said yes right away. I was well aware of the significance of the Black Mountain poets, and at least of two of them, Robert Creeley and John Wieners, major figures in post-war American literature, were among my personal favorites. I saw it as an opportunity to delve further into writers such as Robert Duncan and Charles Olson, whose work I knew but, due to their vast productivity, wanted to know better. I also knew that Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline (again, towering figures and personal predilections) had taught at Black Mountain. Then there were the early paintings of Rauschenberg and Twombly. Both, amazingly, painted some of their best work while still students at Black Mountain.

What I learned is that there is a single thread that connects all the disparate strands of Black Mountain experience, that that thread was woven by the college’s founders, who determined the faculty and students, not a governing board, would have the final say.
Black Mountain College: Una Aventura Americana

make all decisions regarding teaching at the college, in particular that learning should be a communal experience, shared by student and teacher, not a product delivered from teacher to student.

It is always particularly gratifying to me to work with living artists, as I believe that art criticism and curating should be done in service of artists, and that service can best be appreciated by the artists themselves. I am proud to say that the work of 23 vitally active artists is included in the exhibition, along with that of 42 others. There are over 300 pieces, including painting, sculpture, drawing, prints, weavings, jewelry, photographs, video, books, manuscripts, posters, flyers, and letters. There are many breathtaking moments in the exhibition. Perhaps one can serve for all: Nicholas Cernovitch’s rare color footage, shot at Black Mountain, of Katherine Litz dancing. We were not sure if that footage could be located, let alone arrive in time for the exhibition, but as with so many institutions and private lenders, not to mention the artists, Cernovitch was generous with this material, which is personal as well as historical. Every exhibition is a collaboration, and this one was embodied by a vast phalanx of those passionate about the subject.

The opening was exciting, especially for the presence of Gus Falk, Elizabeth Jennerjahn, Pete Jennerjahn, Basil King, Martha King, Lu Lubroth, Gregory Masurovsky, and Marnie Preger-Simon. Lu lives in Madrid and Greg in Paris. The others came from the U.S.A.! The book accompanying the exhibition will be out in January from MIT Press. It contains essays by Martin Brody, Robert Creeley, Kevin Power, and myself. I hope you will get a chance to read it.

I would like to thank the Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center for their support of the exhibition. The loans they made were very special and provided key elements to the Black Mountain story, as it was told in Madrid. I am sure it will be told many times again.

In Memorium

Within the past couple of years some of Black Mountain College’s most stalwart alumni have passed away. We salute them and their memory.

Hazel Larsen Archer
Miriam Batchelor
Margaret Cantieni
Francis M. Curley
Fielding Dawson
Ed Dorn
Margaret Dwight
Maude Dabbs Haas
Eva Schlein Jungermann
Jacob Lawrence
Richard Lippold
Bert Morgan
Helen Livingston
Nickerson
John O’Neill
Morris Simon
Peter Stander
Peter Voulkos
John Wieners
Norman Weston

Davidson College Honors BMC Alumnus Joe Fiore with an Exhibition

To underscore the regional importance of the Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center, Davidson’s Van Every/Smith Galleries will mount the exhibition Joe Fiore: Works from the Collection of the Black Mountain College Museum, on view from January 24 - February 21, 2003. The Galleries are part of Davidson's Katherine and Tom Belk Visual Arts Center. http://www2.davidson.edu/news/cevnts/facil_vac.asp

For more information, please contact Gallery Director Brad Thomas, at 704.894.2519 or brthomas@davidson.edu.
In 1952, John Cage first staged Theatric Piece #1 at Black Mountain College featuring work by David Tudor, Merce Cunningham, M.C. Richards, Robert Rauschenberg, and Cage himself - putting in motion ideas that led to the development of Happenings beginning in the late 50s. From September 19-22, all of Asheville, NC, and much of the surrounding area became the site of a 50th anniversary celebration of this historic event. Over the 4 days of Under the Influence, Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center organized multiple performances of music, art, film, and poetry, all of the work tracing its roots back to the innovations of Black Mountain College.

Much of the focus of the festival was on music, and especially on Cage's legacy. The two main performances, both equally marvelous, were by Tony Conrad and Pauline Oliveros on consecutive evenings at UNCA. Conrad, using a violin, played one note working behind a screen, and Oliveros improvised on an amplified accordion. On Thursday night in a downtown Asheville gallery, Vincent Wrenn used a machine he invented to play the music of the spheres using a computer-driven sound generating matrix keyed to planetary positions and interacting with the body of dancer Yoko Myoi. On Saturday, singer Elisa Faires performed Cage's Aria for Voice in Vincent's Ear bar. It was a stunning performance in which the operatically trained vocalist sang, played a coffee grinder, a laptop, and tap danced on a piece of sheet metal. Other performances included the Western Carolina University Gamelan Ensemble playing Cage and Lou Harrison pieces, Chris Hamilton performing Radio Music, and a piece by David Dawson.

There were also a number of tributes to New York Correspondence School founder Ray Johnson, including a display of mail art from the BMCMAC archives and the premier screening of How to Draw a Bunny, a controversial documentary exploring the enigmatic death and life of the BMC graduate. On Friday, Negativland presented a number of culture-jamming videos. And on Saturday and Sunday poets Patrick Herron, John Landry, Lee Ann Brown, and Beth Brown Al-Rawi, Lisa Jarnot, and Michael Boughn variously read poetry, did string tricks, and sang camp songs and rhymes at a bookstore in Asheville and in the dining hall at Black Mountain College where the Cage piece was originally performed. Many ghosts attended. Numerous other installations, performances, and exhibits contributed to make the festival a remarkable event which invoked over the four days some of the same wildly eclectic and synergistic energies Cage and the other Black Mountainites unleashed on a needy world. (The full schedule for Under the Influence can still be found at www.blackmountain-college.org/festival/.)
Under the Influence: Yoko Ono

by Patricia Bailey, BMCMAC board member and associate professor of art

For the Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center’s September Festival, Under the Influence: Celebrating the Legacy of Black Mountain College, contemporary artist Yoko Ono dedicated a special version of an earlier work entitled Mending Peace for the World for Black Mountain College in the Spirit of the 50th Anniversary John Cage Happening event. This work was installed throughout the month of September at the Asheville Area Arts Council’s Front Gallery on Biltmore Avenue in downtown Asheville.

In response to September 11 and the subsequent war in Afghanistan, Yoko Ono made a new version of an earlier 1966 work called Mend Piece. In addition to Western North Carolina, throughout 2001-02, Mend Piece for the World has been, or will be, performed in Barcelona, Berlin, Boston (at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard), Brazil, Canada, China, Copenhagen, France, Helsinki, Ireland, Israel, London, and Scotland.

A “Memorial Mending” took place simultaneously in Asheville at the Arts Council and under the Clock Tower in front of the University Center at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee between 8:46 and 10:28 a.m. on the morning of September 11, 2002. The public in Asheville and the campus community at the University were invited to participate by mending broken pottery from around the world which was placed on tables with mending supplies.

Under the Influence: Thanks!!!

BMCMAC thanks the following organizations and individuals who have given financial and in-kind support to our recent programs: American Institute of Architects (Asheville Chapter), Anonymous Donor, Asheville Area Arts Council, Asheville Art Museum, Asheville Contemporary Dance Theater, Eric Baden, Bonesteel Films, The Big Idea, Black Box Studio, Black Mountain Artspace Charter School, Black Mountain Center for the Arts, Buncombe Community School East, Camp Rockmont, Brenda Coates, Daniels Graphics, European Graduate School, The Friends of Mountain History, Hart Distributing, Jon Jicha Design, Malaprops Bookstore, Mountain Xpress, NC Arts Council, NC Dept. of Cultural Resources, The Reader’s Corner, Semi Public: A Space for Contemporary Art, Susan Rhew Design, Table of the Elements, Lynne Santy Tanner, UNC Cultural and Special Events Committee, UNCA Mass Communication and Music Depts., Vincent’s Ear, Warren Wilson College, Western Carolina University Art, English, Music and Philosophy Depts., Western Carolina University Women’s Center, and Gretchen Westphal. We also thank the MANY volunteers who have helped in countless ways, particularly in overcoming the enormous challenges associated with Under the Influence our multi-media, multi-location festival in September. And finally, a big thank you to the poets, musicians, artists, dancers, filmmakers, and educators who have fallen under the influence of Black Mountain College and shared their bounty with us.

Lake Eden from Dining Hall, David McConville (festival organizer and BMCMAC board member) and Marie Tavroges Stilkind (BMCMAC alumna) with a Ray Johnson-inspired pancake bunny head.
Soon To Appear: “Black Mountain Days” by Michael Rumaker

by Mary Holden Thompson, BMC MAC founder and board member

Black Mountain Press, an imprint of the BMC Museum and Arts Center will soon publish a major new book, Black Mountain Days, a memoir by former student Michael Rumaker. This 544 page-turner takes you from Rumaker’s working-class origins through his student days during the College’s final four tumultuous years. Those days comprised for Rumaker a period of intense creative and personal discovery.

Rumaker’s delightful account of his misadventures offers a unique insider’s glimpse of BMC from 1952-56 and sketches personalities like Robert Creeley, John Chamberlain, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Jonathan Williams, Wes H uss, and looming above all others his mentor and avowed father-figure, Charles Olson. Devotedly portrayed by Rumaker, the gargantuan Olson is invoked as a great teacher and a marvelous monster of modernist originality. Rumaker’s essential memoir is as enlightening as it is engrossing.

Available September 2003 through your local bookstore and through the BMC Museum and Arts Center. Price $25.

Pre-Publication Comments

“This book is terrific. The reader feels that he/she is there, living through Black Mountain’s endless difficulties (and equally endless epiphanies) in the most intimate way. (It’s like one of those exhaustive, amazing dreams you get if you take melatonin to help you sleep.) I love the sentence: ‘Even the commonplace at Black Mountain was not without risk.’ Rumaker has compiled a wonderful chronicle, the book to put next to Martin Duberman’s Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community.” — Jonathan Williams

“Michael Rumaker’s finely detailed, evocative memoir puts personal flesh on BMC’s historical bones. He brings to life the daily texture of what it meant to live in that remarkable community.” — Martin Duberman

“Michael Rumaker’s Black Mountain Days joins with the late Fielding Dawson’s The Black Mountain Book to provide an increasingly articulate record of ‘those happy few’ who were its persons in the closing years of the college. The poet and rector Charles Olson makes an ample and defining pivot for the meld of stories here told — of persons in displacing crisis, of elders confounded with responsibility and poverty, of the all too indifferent world surrounding this fragile company in perhaps the most decisive experiment ever to be attempted in the history of American educational enterprise.” — Robert Creeley
During the past two years Black Mountain College alumni have made some extraordinary donations to our permanent collection ranging from photographs, correspondence, and memorabilia to paintings and sculpture. One of the most prized additions is a painted directional sign associated with the Lake Eden BMC campus. One of the looms from the BMC Weaving Studio was donated by Elma Johnson, and three benches from the Quiet House are on loan from Camp Rockmont. Our dream is to someday have a facility where these things can be seen and appreciated on a regular basis.

Several alumni have donated packets of letters they sent home from Black Mountain College and also letters to and from fellow Black Mountaineers after college. Ati Gropius Johansen donated letters (in German!) to and from her parents as did Alma Stone Williams who was Black Mountain College’s first African-American student (summer 1944). Jesse Green donated some wonderful correspondence with M.C. Richards, and Leo Krikorian sent letters and photographs taken before, during and after BMC. Jane Mayhall sent excerpts from Betty Brett’s journal dating back to 1940 and 1941. We are pleased that all of this material is being safely stored now and that it will be available to researchers in the future.

We have been given some amazing artwork recently including: one of Ruth Asawa’s woven wire sculptures, a steel sculpture by Neil Noland, paintings by Basil King and Leo Krikorian, prints by Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, Jacob Lawrence and Xanti Schawinsky, ceramics by M.C. Richards and Peter Voulkos, copies of Ray Johnson’s mailart, some Albers memorabilia and negatives of drawings that Ati Gropius Johansen made in Josef Albers’ drawing class. Nick Cernovitch donated two copies of “The Song of the Border-Guard,” a broadside of Robert Duncan’s poem designed by Cy Twombly and printed by Nick at BMC. We’ve also received new publications from Basil and Martha King, Michael Rumaker, and Hannelore Hahn.

If anyone you know has any Black Mountain College material that needs to be protected, or if you are interested in donating artwork to the BMC MAC Collection please call 828.299.9306 or e-mail bmcmac@bellsouth.net. We are a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization; there can be positive tax benefits for donations of value.

FROM TOP CLOCKWISE: 
Jacob Lawrence, Windows, 79/100, 1977, lithograph, 17.75 x 22 inches. Gift of Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence in memory of the Artist.
Ruth Asawa, Untitled, 1954, black and brown iron wire, 81 x 8 x 8 inches. Gift of Lorna Halper.
Black Mountain College sign. Gift of Lorna Halper.
All works are gifts to the BMC MAC Collection.

Congratulations

... to Mary Holden Thompson, Founding Director of BMC MAC and Dr. James Thompson III on the birth of their son Adam.

... to BMC alumni, poet, publisher, and photographer Jonathan Williams on the recent publication of his book A Palpable Elysium: Portraits of Genius and Solitude. An exquisite mix of photographic portraits and accompanying text creates highly memorable and entertaining reminiscences of remarkable people he has known. 176 page book published by David R. Godine.
We Need You!

The spirit, legacy, and ongoing influence of Black Mountain College have been celebrated this year locally, regionally, and internationally from Lake Eden to Madrid. Our collection has been significantly enriched by recent gifts, and we will publish another major book about Black Mountain in the coming year. We have expanded our historical focus by celebrating those still finding contemporary inspiration from the Black Mountain ideals. We need the financial assistance of everyone who believes in the importance of Black Mountain College for this organization to grow. The many visitors who make a pilgrimage to Western North Carolina to find the mythic Black Mountain College need an actual destination where they can learn more about the amazing college and its remarkable alumni. Just imagine what we could do with a space of our own for exhibitions, performances, educational programs, and a library of books and films for research.

Membership in BMCMAC is the first level of support to continue to make this community of ideas and events an ongoing reality. Join us today in this worthy enterprise; we cannot do it alone. Consider a gift of membership to someone who is interested in Black Mountain or a tribute gift in memory of a like-minded friend or relative.

BMCMAC is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, so your donation is tax-deductible. Now is the time to make a donation or bequest to BMCMAC and help to celebrate the legacy! Please clip out the form below and send it with your check to:

BMCMAC
P.O. Box 18912
Asheville, NC  28814

Black Mountain College
MUSEUM + ARTS CENTER

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- $500 DONOR • A II of the above plus a free t-shirt.
- $1000 PATRON • A II of the above plus recognition on the inside cover of the next Dossier.

Mail to:
Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center
P.O. Box 18912, Asheville, NC  28814

FROM TOP: Micah Pulley (BMCMAC board member), Claude Stoller + Hope Greer Eisenman (BMC alumni) on a return visit to Lee Hall and BMC’s first campus, Blue Ridge Assembly.
BMC Alumni Return to North Carolina

by Connie Bostic, BMCMAC board chair

Six Black Mountain College alumni traveled from various parts of the U.S. and Canada in April, 2002 to participate in The Black Mountain College Experience: Points of View IV. The participating alumni were: theater lighting designer Nick Cernovitch, painter Dorothea Rockburne, editor Marie Tavroges Stilkind, actress and art researcher Leslie Paul Symington, artist Susan Weil, and humanities professor Alma Stone Williams.

The weekend provided an opportunity for BMCMAC to record six new oral history interviews, reflecting points of view based on very different experiences of the school. The weekend also featured a tour of the Lake Eden Campus graciously led by BMC alum Nick Cernovitch and Jon Brooks, one of the current owners of the property. There was a screening of Monty Diamond's film Black Mountain College: A Thumbnail Sketch and a lively panel discussion with the alumni held in the Lake Eden Dining Hall.

The large audience for the panel discussion included North Carolina Secretary of Cultural Resources Libba Evans and several representatives from the Western Office of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History. Sponsors of the Black Mountain College Oral History Project include the North Carolina Dept. of Cultural Resources, North Carolina Arts Council, Asheville Area Arts Council, The Friends of Mountain History, Lynne Santy Tanner, and Camp Rockmont for Boys.