

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE MUSEUM + ARTS CENTER

PERMANENT COLLECTION OVERVIEW

BMCM+AC holds the largest museum collection specifically dedicated to the history and impact of Black Mountain College (1933-1957), a legendary experiment in progressive interdisciplinary education that had a tremendous impact on modern and contemporary art, dance, theater, music, performance, and literature.

Since the museum's inception in 1993, it has been a collecting institution, acquiring a wide-ranging collection largely from donations by alumni, their family members, and friends. The total collection comprises approximately 4,000 items, in addition to about 15 linear feet of archival collections, not including institutional archives/records.



Black Mountain College has attracted global attention, often focusing on the individuals associated with Black Mountain College who have become household names, such as Josef and Anni Albers, Ruth Asawa, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jacob Lawrence, Buckminster Fuller, Kenneth Noland, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley.

The collection represents the college's history and legacy holistically, including works by such well-known individuals alongside lesser-known histories. There are about 4,000 objects dating from the 1930s through the present, works by alumni and faculty demonstrating the progression of their careers at and following Black Mountain College. This includes paintings; works on paper (including prints, drawings, and mixed media); photographic materials; ceramics; textiles; plans/blueprints; sculptures; microfilm; furniture; and assorted other artifacts such as sketchbooks, class notebooks, scrapbooks, jewelry, music scores, and LP records.

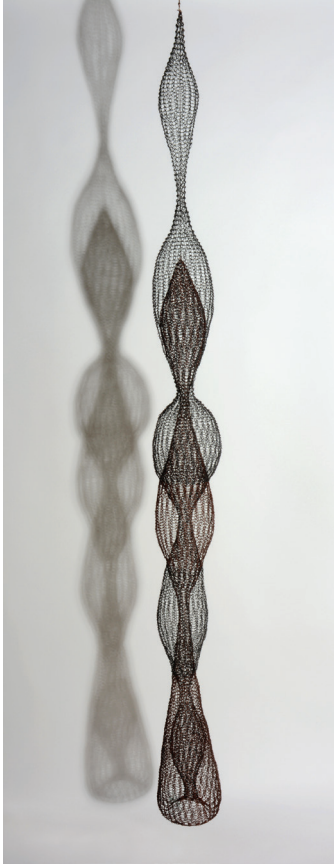


Oral histories are a particular strength of the collection, with 60+ created by BMCM+AC since it began recording oral histories in 1999, and several dozen more donated. The museum also holds custody and responsibility for the **Hazel Larsen Archer Estate**, which includes some of the most iconic photographs from BMC, as well as the only extant moving image films created there by Archer and her students.

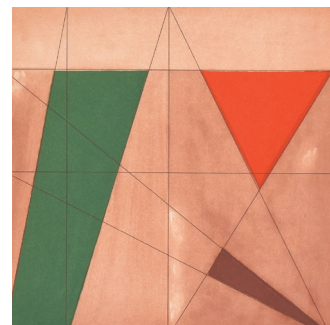
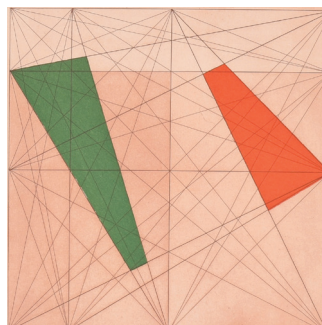
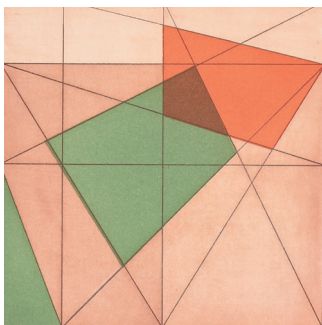
Peter Voulkos, *Narrow Necked Vessel*, 1953. Glazed stoneware. Gift of Joseph Fiore.

Kenneth Noland, *Coach tote with target*, 1977/2002 (Coach, Inc.) Silkscreen on canvas. Gift of Sandy Ratcliffe.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE COLLECTION

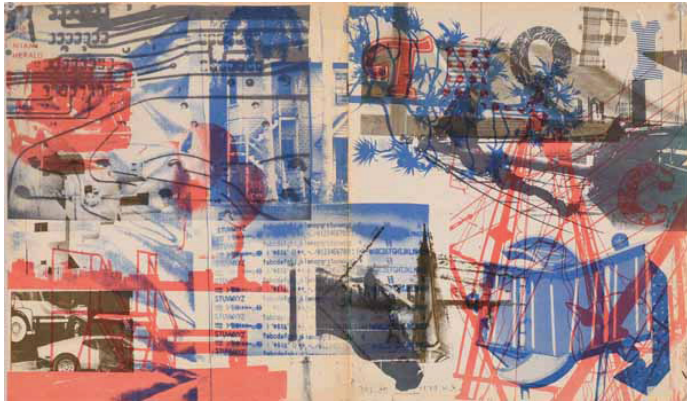


- Wire sculptures by **Ruth Asawa**
- A palette table used by **Franz Kline**
- Ceramic works by potters **M.C. Richards**, **Peter Voulkos**, and **Karen Karnes**, created at BMC
- A shuttle-craft loom from the Weaving Workshop at BMC that provides a direct connection to **Anni Albers'** teaching and artistic practice at Black Mountain College
- Bent plywood furniture designed and built at BMC by **A. Lawrence Kocher**, the American modernist architect who also designed the signature Studies Building at the college's second home at Lake Eden
- A collection of family letters written by **Alma Stone Williams**, the first African American student to attend Black Mountain College in 1944 (ten years before the Supreme Court ruling on Brown v. Board of Education), which shed light on an important milestone in the history of integration in the Jim Crow South
- Benches that were built in the early 1940s by BMC faculty member **Molly Gregory** for the Quiet House
- Nearly seventy paintings, assemblages, and other works by **Jo Sandman** dating to the early and mid-1950s, during and following Sandman's time studying under Robert Motherwell at BMC, donated by the Jo Sandman Legacy Project
- Paintings by **Pat Passlof**, who studied at BMC under **Willem de Kooning**, and eventually developed a style that balanced abstraction and representation, distinguishing her own work from that of her mentor
- A rare desk designed by **Josef Albers** for BMC students, created to be modular so that the college community could easily manage the seasonal task of packing up all of their belongings every summer and putting them in storage at their rented Blue Ridge Assembly campus, during the first eight years before they moved to the Lake Eden campus
- Textiles, furniture, paintings, photographs, and broadsides made at the college, all of which help us to tangibly understand the materials, ideas, and collaborations that were in flux



Ruth Asawa, *Untitled S. 373*, 1954. Enameled and oxidized copper wire. Gift of Lorna Blaine Halper.
 A. Lawrence Kocher, *Conversation Chair*, 1942. Bent plywood and solid wood. Gift of Sandra Kocher.
 Jack Tworkov, *L-SF-ES #1/#2/#3*, 1979. Etching with aquatint. Gift of Brian Butler.

HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION



BMCM+AC has been a collecting institution since it was founded in 1993. While some items were acquired earlier, initially the collection was largely formed from donations received from alumni in connection with the BMC Reunion and exhibition Remembering Black Mountain College held on October 27 - 29, 1995, thirty-eight years after the college itself dissolved. This event catalyzed plans to develop a growing permanent collection of work by former students and faculty throughout their lives, as well as historical documents and photographs.



The museum's founder, Mary Holden Thompson, was committed to an active roster of exhibitions, publications, and public programs even though there was no dedicated public space for the museum until 2003. This led to many collaborative programs during the first ten years of existence and gradual growth of the collection. Later additions to the collection came primarily in connection with subsequent exhibitions and publications, many from BMC alumni and family members and through the museum's growing network of relationships with collectors and friends of alumni.



A foundational principle of BMCM+AC's collecting policy is not to freeze BMC alumni or faculty in time as who they were during their time at BMC, but to provide a full view of their contributions over the years and of the lasting influence of BMC as a community. In 2017, BMCM+AC's collecting scope officially expanded to include contemporary responses to the BMC legacy, as the museum launched the Active Archive Residency Program, an initiative inviting contemporary artists and creative thinkers to develop new work building upon BMC's experimental foundation.

PRESERVATION + CONSERVATION

Since BMCM+AC's mission statement includes a conservation mandate, preservation and conservation activities have been carried out in some form since the museum's beginnings as a grassroots, nomadic organization. **In September 2018, following a successful multi-year capital campaign, BMCM+AC moved into its current 6,000 square foot location at 120 College Street.** Collections storage in this new location is centralized in the same building as exhibitions, and allows for much easier control over temperature, humidity, and light levels. All but three very large collection items are now permanently housed in the new location. This move also carries with it a path to ownership which will solidify BMCM+AC's place as an international arts center in the heart of downtown Asheville for generations to come.

The most critical needs have been met for the materials in BMCM+AC's care. **In the exhibition galleries and primary storage space at 120 College Street, temperature, relative humidity, air quality, and light levels are maintained at acceptable levels, which are monitored and recorded regularly; and a fire suppression system is in place.** An emergency preparedness plan is in place and staff are trained in measures to protect collections from harm caused by emergency situations. BMCM+AC maintains relationships with area conservators trained in the care of the materials comprising the collection.



BMCM+AC at 120 College Street. *Between Form and Content: Perspectives on Jacob Lawrence and Black Mountain College*. Photo by Michael Oppenheim.

USE OF THE COLLECTION

The Permanent Collection is made available to the public primarily through exhibitions, presented across two floors of gallery space in the museum's location at 120 College Street in downtown Asheville. **BMCM+AC typically presents three exhibition seasons**, with new temporary exhibitions running from January-May, May-September, and September-January, taking place across two floors of gallery space. Exhibitions typically include borrowed work as well as Permanent Collection objects; the amount of Collection pieces included varies between exhibitions.

Recent exhibitions demonstrate the museum's commitment to rediscovering artists who have not previously been the focus of scholarship, presenting narratives and connections that bring new dynamism and relevance to the Black Mountain College story, and highlighting the ongoing connection to current contemporary practice, for instance:



- The inaugural exhibition in BMCM+AC's new location after the museum's move to 120 College Street was ***Between Form and Content: Perspectives on Jacob Lawrence and Black Mountain College***, curated by Julie Levin Caro and Jeff Arnal. This was the very first exhibition to focus on the impact of Lawrence's experience as an educator during the summer of 1946, when Josef Albers invited Lawrence to teach painting at Black Mountain College.
- ***Materials, Sounds + Black Mountain College***, curated by Caleb Kelly and originally exhibited at MAMA Albury, Australia, brought together contemporary artists who each created an experience that is focused on the making of sound through materials. Newly commissioned works were exhibited alongside archival ephemera and works from the BMCM+AC collection demonstrating experimental and materials-based processes.
- ***VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek***, curated by Sara VanDerBeek and Chelsea Spengemann, Director of the Stan VanDerBeek Archive, presented artwork by contemporary artist Sara VanDerBeek alongside work by her father, Stan VanDerBeek, a Black Mountain College alum. The show included a selection of Stan VanDerBeek's restored films, featuring immersive layers of dance, color, and sound.
- ***Question Everything! The Women of Black Mountain College***, curated by Kate Averett and Alice Sebrell, celebrated the work and impact of the women associated with Black Mountain College, featuring borrowed works alongside pieces from the BMCM+AC collection by a wide-ranging group of artists including Anni Albers, Suzi Gablik, Ruth Asawa, Pat Passlof, Jo Sandman, M.C. Richards, and Hazel Larsen Archer.

USE OF THE COLLECTION CONTINUED



Forthcoming exhibition themes include the pioneering resin sculpture of Japanese American sculptor Leo Amino; the many connections between Mexico and BMC in its time and beyond; and the first exhibition devoted to textile practices at BMC.

Each exhibition is accompanied by public programs and digital or print publications to enhance public awareness, access, and longevity. Programs include lunchtime PERSPECTIVES tours led by artists, curators, critics, or researchers; evening lectures or panel discussions; staff-led gallery tours for students or adults; and artist-led workshops. These formats enrich public understanding of the museum's collections and highlight connections to visitors' personal interests or larger issues in culture. In March 2020, BMCM+AC shifted focus to online programs, which cumulatively attracted more than 9,000 participants between March and December. **The museum has also published more than 30 print exhibition catalogues, several digital catalogues for select exhibitions, and 13 volumes of the peer-reviewed open-access digital journal, The Journal of Black Mountain College Studies,** which often includes oral histories and makes use of collection objects to illustrate contributors' research.



Works from the BMCM+AC Permanent Collection are also regularly loaned to museums around the world. Works have been included in the exhibitions and accompanying catalogues for *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957* at ICA Boston, the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and The Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, OH; *Black Mountain: An Interdisciplinary Experiment* at the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum; *Merce Cunningham: Common Time* at the Walker Art Center; *Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends* at the Museum of Modern Art; *Ruth Asawa: Life's Work* at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation; and *Anni Albers* at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen and Tate Modern.

