

## **CHRONOLOGY**

### ***Taken By Design: Photographs from the Institute of Design, 1937-1971***

#### **Photography and the Founding Generation, 1937-1946**

In 1937 László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), a Hungarian Jew fleeing Nazi Germany, was brought to Chicago by the city's industrial leaders to establish a school of industrial design to be modeled after the original Bauhaus in Germany, the pioneering school of art, design and architecture where Moholy had taught previously. Although the New Bauhaus lasted only one year (1937-1938), it was quickly reorganized as the School of Design (1939-1944) and eventually became the Institute of Design (1944-present).

The photographs produced in the ID's early years were controlled studio experiments, more concerned with form and materials than with imitating works by photography's masters or documenting the world. Moholy's photograms, for example, are elegant light studies that reveal the complete scale of gray between black and white and illustrate photography's abstract potential. Along similar lines, faculty member György Kepes (1906-2001) produced an extensive series of photographs of his wife in which he explored solarization and negative exposure and even painting on the picture's surface. Nathan Lerner (1913-1997), a student and later teacher at the ID, worked with refractive lenses and photomontage and used his light box to test the pictorial effects of pure light. Another student, Milton Halberstadt (1919-2000), produced a triple-exposed portrait to showcase photography's capacity for simultaneous vision. At a moment when American photography was largely confined to more conventional portraiture, landscape or documentary reportage, these experimental and abstract pictures revealed the enormous creative potential of the medium.

#### **Callahan, Siskind and the Rise of a Program, 1946-1961**

As the school grew, Moholy hired Arthur Siegel (1913-1978) and Harry Callahan (1912-1999) to lead a new, four-year program in photography. After Siegel resigned, Callahan hired Aaron Siskind (1903-1991), and the two formed a superbly effective teaching team that is now legendary. Under their leadership, the program's emphasis shifted from experimentation toward the development of individual vision and subjective expression. Callahan invented problem-related exercises such as documenting the alphabet in the

environment to encourage students to work in series, and Siskind developed an exercise to discover forms in plants. Students worked in groups to create documentary projects and individually to create sustained photographic series for their theses.

Callahan made some of his most enduring images during his years in Chicago, including studies of plant forms seen against snow and an intimate series of his wife, Eleanor, and their daughter, Barbara. Siskind's photographs concentrated on local architecture and the abstract forms of walls covered with paint and graffiti. Many of the ID students also hit their photographic stride in their thesis projects, including Joseph Jachna (born 1931), who studied the changing forms of water; Yasuhiro Ishimoto (born 1921), who made pristine recordings of Chicago's streets; and Ray K. Metzker (born 1931), who turned his camera on pedestrians and shadows in Chicago's Loop. Eight works by Metzker, who has made his home in Philadelphia since 1962, are presented in the exhibition, including the local images *Composites: Philadelphia* (1966), and *Atlantic City* (1966).

### **Photography on Its Own, 1961-1971**

During the 1960s, the ID felt the effects of the country's changing attitudes toward sex, politics, drugs and the environment. Photographs made during this period reflect these changes, with a new emphasis on the body (especially the nude) and an overriding concern with the mechanisms and language of photography itself. Concurrently, photography education programs proliferated across the country, making the ID uniquely positioned to supply teachers.

Metzker, Barbara Blondeau (1938-1974), and William Larson (born 1942) are among the photographers who brought these radical teaching methods to Philadelphia, instructing students who continue the ID tradition. Metzker, whose landscapes were the focus of a major Museum retrospective in 2000-2001, taught at the Philadelphia College of Art from 1962-80. Blondeau was an instructor at Moore College of Art and the Philadelphia College of Art from 1970 until her death from cancer in 1974. While at the ID she pushed the picture beyond the single frame into long strip pictures, made by winding a roll of film past an open shutter. Larson, director of graduate studies at Maryland Institute College of Arts in Baltimore, has taught at the Tyler School of Art while working as a freelance photographer in Philadelphia. Thomas Porett (born 1942), whose 1966 master's thesis involved slides, black-and-white prints and film, currently teaches photography and electronic media at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.