

Black Mountain College

Black Mountain College	
	
Active	1933–1957
Type	Liberal arts college
Director	John Andrew Rice
Admin. staff	about 30
Students	about 1,200 total
Location	Asheville and Black Mountain, North Carolina, United States
Website	blackmountaincollege.org ^[1]

Black Mountain College, a school founded in 1933 in Black Mountain, North Carolina, was a new kind of college in the United States in which the study of art was seen to be central to a liberal arts education, and in which John Dewey's principles of education played a major role. Many of the school's students and faculty were influential in the arts or other fields, or went on to become influential. Although notable even during its short life, the school closed in 1957 after only 24 years.^[2]

History

Founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice, Theodore Dreier, and other former faculty members of Rollins College, Black Mountain was experimental by nature and committed to an interdisciplinary approach, attracting a faculty that included many of America's leading visual artists, composers, poets, and designers, like Buckminster Fuller, who popularized and named the geodesic dome.

Operating in a relatively isolated rural location with little budget, Black Mountain College inculcated an informal and collaborative spirit and over its lifetime attracted a venerable roster of instructors.



From 1933 to 1941, Black Mountain College was located at the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly.

Some of the innovations, relationships, and unexpected connections formed at Black Mountain would prove to have a lasting influence on the postwar American art scene, high culture, and eventually pop culture. Buckminster Fuller met student Kenneth Snelson at Black Mountain, and the result was the first geodesic dome (improvised out of slats in the school's back yard); Merce Cunningham formed his dance company; and John Cage staged his first happening (the term itself is traceable to Cage's student Allan Kaprow, who applied it later to such events).



Its Lake Eden campus, used from 1941 to 1957, is now part of Camp Rockmont, a summer camp for boys.

Not a haphazardly conceived venture, Black Mountain College was a consciously directed liberal arts school that grew out of the progressive education movement. In its day it was a unique educational experiment for the artists and writers who conducted it, and as such an important incubator for the American avant garde. Black Mountain proved to be an important precursor to and prototype for many of the alternative colleges of today ranging from Naropa University, the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Marlboro College to Evergreen State College, Bennington College, Shimer College, Prescott College, Goddard College, and New College of Florida, among others, including Warren Wilson College located just minutes down the road from where Black Mountain College was located.

For the first eight years, the college rented the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly ^[3] buildings south of Black Mountain town. In 1941, it moved across the valley to its own campus at Lake Eden where it remained until its closing in 1956. The property was later purchased and converted to an ecumenical Christian boys' residential summer camp (Camp Rockmont), which later became a long-time location of the Black Mountain Festival and the Lake Eden Arts Festival. A number of the original structures are still in use as lodgings or administrative facilities.

Faculty and alumni

Among those who taught there in the 1940s and 1950s were:

Josef and Anni Albers, Eric Bentley, Ilya Bolotowsky, Josef Breitenbach, John Cage, Harry Callahan, Mary Callery, Robert Creeley, Merce Cunningham, Max Dehn, Willem de Kooning, Robert Duncan, Buckminster Fuller, Walter Gropius, Lou Harrison, Alfred Kazin, Franz Kline, Jacob Lawrence, Richard Lippold, Charles Olson, M. C. Richards, Albert William Levi, Xanti Schawinsky, Ben Shahn, Arthur Siegel, Aaron Siskind, Theodoros Stamos, Jack Tworckov, Robert Motherwell, Emerson Woelffer, and William R. Wunsch.

Guest lecturers included Albert Einstein, Clement Greenberg, Bernard Rudofsky, Richard Lippold and William Carlos Williams.

Ceramic artists Peter Voukos and Robert C. Turner taught there as well.

Notable alumni

- Ruth Asawa - (faculty as well)
- Harrison Begay, painter
- Lyle Bongé
- Nicholas Cernovich
- John Chamberlain - (faculty as well)
- Robert Creeley
- Fielding Dawson
- Elaine de Kooning,
- Ed Dorn
- Jorge Fick
- Joseph Fiore
- James Leo Herlihy
- Ray Johnson
- Karen Karnes
- Basil King
- Gwendolyn Knight
- Hazel Larson
- Jane Mayhall (1918–2009), poet.^[4]
- Peter Nemenyi
- Robert De Niro, Sr.
- Kenneth Noland
- H. Peter Oberlander
- Joel Oppenheimer
- Pat Passlof
- Arthur Penn
- Charles Perrow
- Robert Rauschenberg
- Dorothea Rockburne
- Michael Rumaker
- Oli Sihvonen
- Kenneth Snelson
- Claude Stoller
- Cy Twombly
- John Urbain
- Elaine Schmitt Urbain
- Stan VanDerBeek
- David Jacques Way
- Susan Weil
- John Wieners
- Jonathan Williams
- Vera B. Williams

The college ran summer institutes from 1944 till its closing in 1956.

Black Mountain poets

Various avant-garde poets (subsequently known as the Black Mountain poets) were drawn to the school through the years, most notably Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Jonathan Williams, Ed Dorn, and Robert Creeley. Creeley was hired to teach and to edit the *Black Mountain Review* in 1955, and when he left two years later for San Francisco, he became the link between the Black Mountain poets and the poets of the San Francisco Renaissance. Through Allen Ginsberg, a link with the Beat generation writers of Greenwich Village was initiated.

Further reading

- Harris, Mary Emma (2002). *The Arts at Black Mountain College*. The MIT Press. ISBN 978-0-262-58212-4.
- Katz, Vincent (ed.) (2003). *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art*. The MIT Press. ISBN 978-0-262-60071-2.
- Lane, Marvin (ed.) (c1990). *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds: an Anthology of Personal Accounts*. University of Tennessee Press. ISBN 978-0-870-49663-9.
- Duberman, Martin (c1993). *Black Mountain An Exploration in Community*. W.W. Norton. ISBN 0393309533.
- Rumaker, Michael (c2003). *Black Mountain Days*. Black Mountain Press. ISBN 0964902087.

References

- [1] <http://blackmountaincollege.org/>
- [2] <http://blackmountaincollege.org/content/view/12/52/>
- [3] <http://www.blueridgeassembly.org>
- [4] Fox, Margalit. "Jane Mayhall, Poet Who Gained Prominence Late in Life, Is Dead at 90" (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/20/books/20mayhall.html>), *The New York Times*, March 19, 2009. Accessed March 19, 2009.

External links

- Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center (<http://www.blackmountaincollege.org>)
- <http://www.blackmountainstudiesjournal.org>
- The Black Mountain College Project (<http://www.bmcproject.org/index.htm>)
- Black Mountain College: Collections in the North Carolina State Archives (http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/archives/bmc_web_page/bmc.htm)
- Fully Awake: Black Mountain College Documentary (<http://www.bmcfullyawake.org>) the only documentary solely on Black Mountain College. The story of BMC is woven through interviews with students, professors and modern scholars with archival footage and photographs.
- *Honoring the Mind's Eye* (http://www.journalnow.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=WSJ/MGArticle/WSJ_RelishArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1149189298208) article on Hazel Larsen Archer, a photographer who documented her years at the college in the 1940s and early '50s
- Bauhaus in America (<http://www.mindspring.com/~cliofilm>) a documentary about the influence of the Bauhaus on America, including a segment on Black Mountain College with Anni Albers, Ted and Bobbi Dreier, *et alia*. produced and directed by Judith Pearlman, Cliofilm.
- Black Mountain College Celebration (<http://blackmountaincollegecelebration.com/>) 75th Anniversary of Black Mountain College
- Asheville Art Museum (<http://www.ashevilleart.org/>)
- Finding Aid for the Black Mountain College Collection (<http://library.uncg.edu/depts/archives/mss/html/Mss118.htm>) at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- Finding Aid for Black Mountain College Publications (<http://library.uncg.edu/depts/archives/mss/html/Mss110.htm>) at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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- Asheville, North Carolina, a National Park Service *Discover Our Shared Heritage* Travel Itinerary (<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/asheville/>)
 - University of Connecticut special collections related to Black Mountain writers (<http://doddcenter.uconn.edu/dodda2z/subjectarea.cfm?Area=10>)
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