

# THE MAKING OF CHICAGO'S MOHOLY-NAGY

BY DAWN REISS



PHOTOGRAPH (SELF-PORTRAIT WITH HAND), 1925/29, PRINTED 1940/49. GALERIE BERINSON, BERLIN. © 2016 HATTULA MOHOLY-NAGY/VG BILD-KUNST, BONN/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK.

Fineberg said his life was forever changed from that moment on and owes his life's work as a designer and artist to Moholy-Nagy. "He made you do things you didn't think you could do," said Fineberg, who has continued to make and exhibit artwork in a variety of media since he received his degree in 1948. "He was a quiet, thoughtful man and such an inspiration."

What made the school unique, Fineberg said, was how it was built around collaboration of thoughts, ideas and creativity among architects, artists, photographers and other visionaries, including R. Buckminster Fuller, who came to the school and helped students build a geodesic dome in the basement. "Moholy was always bringing all sorts of people to talk and lecture," Fineberg said. "He was like a student and helped you

Sumner M. Fineberg, a 94-year-old World War II veteran, remembers the first time he arrived in Chicago at what was then called the Institute of Design, after just having finished serving in the U.S. Army infantry in October 1945. After spending months writing the school asking them to delay his acceptance, it was László Moholy-Nagy who greeted him at the school's front door.

think through things and stayed away if you didn't need it."

After seven years in the works, the Art Institute of Chicago will now celebrate that philosophy via its *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present* exhibition that opens in October. Although Chicago is home to other recognized artists and architects, said Richard and Ellen Sandor Chair and Curator Matthew Witkovsky for the Art Institute's department of photography, "Moholy is the most internationally recognized visual artist who ever lived in Chicago."

During his 51 years of life, Moholy, who fled Germany before World War II and later died of leukemia, faced many obstacles. His daughter, Hattula Moholy-Nagy, noted the Hungarian-born painter, sculptor, photographer, filmmaker, designer, writer and teacher was a proponent of a "beautiful things

make the world a better, more insightful place" philosophy. However, he was not widely heralded for his accomplishments until after his death, albeit a few noteworthy exceptions. "The exhibition catalogue makes clear that Moholy had a relatively

difficult time getting exhibitions and finding collectors in the United States, outside of Hilla Rebay and her patron, Solomon Guggenheim, in New York," Witkovsky said. "Geometric abstraction had its adherents in this country but was not widely popular."

The show will feature a variety of works including the multimedia instillation, "Room of the Present," which Moholy showcased as a prototype in Paris in 1930 before fleeing Germany. The piece includes a linoleum floor and a glass curtain wall that divides the entrance from the exit, making visitors travel via circuit through the room. In the center is Moholy's motorized metal-glass-wood-and-plastic sculpture, "Light Prop for an Electric Stage," which rotates and reflects colored electric lights.

Radical and forward-thinking for its time, setting one's living environment in motion was part of a larger conversation of creating a dialogue among architects, designers, fine artists, advertisers, graphic and product designers. "He brought in people from different walks of life. That wasn't common then," Witkovsky said.

That ideology was born out Walter Gropius's genesis of the Bauhaus School, where a post-World War I Germany tried to rebuild. "So they devised various types of architecture to house



RUTSCHBAHN (SLIDE), 1923. THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK, GIFT OF MRS. SIBYL MOHOLY-NAGY, 19.1965. © 2016 HATTULA MOHOLY-NAGY/VG BILD-KUNST, BONN/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK.

people," Fineberg said. "It was a necessity ... It was an awakening of the architecture and art that people called avant-garde and all kinds of things, but it has radically changed the world."

As Germany was taken over by Hitler, the Bauhaus refused to produce materials for the war, Fineberg said, so artists fled and rebuilt the school in Chicago. At Gropius' request, Moholy-Nagy opened the New Bauhaus in 1937, before it became the Institute of Design and was eventually rolled into the Illinois Institute of Technology after Moholy-Nagy's death in 1946.



RAUM DER GEGENWART (ROOM OF THE PRESENT), CONSTRUCTED 2009 FROM PLANS AND OTHER DOCUMENTATION DATED 1930. VAN ABBE MUSEUM, EINDHOVEN, 2953. © 2016 HATTULA MOHOLY-NAGY/VG BILD-KUNST, BONN/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK.

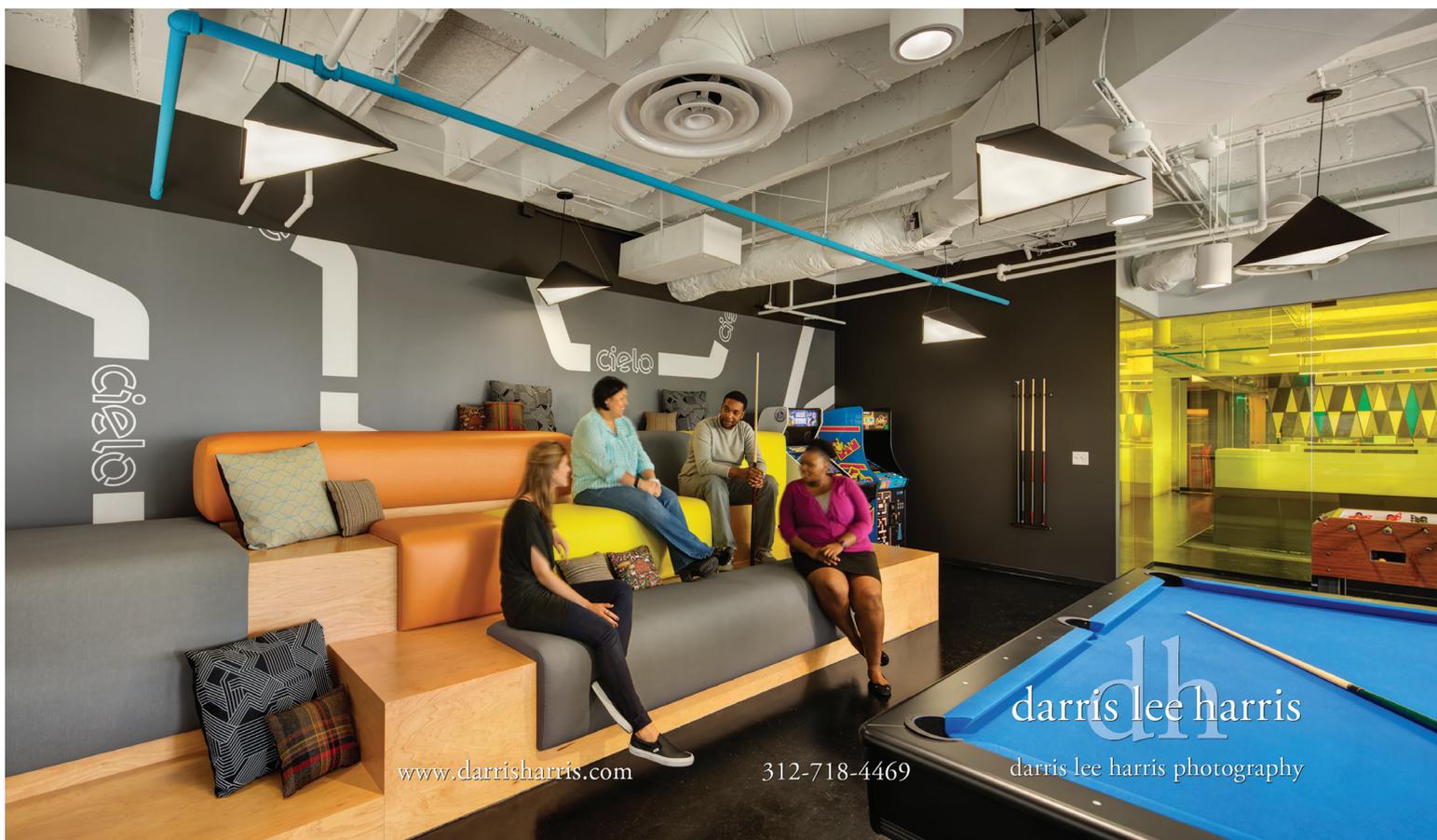
"We are now celebrating the one man who kept the school going, who is finally getting his due for everything he did," said Fineberg, who, many years ago, purchased a crayon, pen-and-ink abstract sketch to help Moholy-

Nagy's wife pay for his beloved teacher's funeral costs. CA

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The Chicago chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians and AIA Chicago will host "Totality vs.

Perfection: Moholy, Mies, and the Function of Cities," a lecture by author Thomas Dyja, The Third Coast, on Wednesday, October 19, at The Cliff Dwellers, 200 South Michigan Avenue. The 6 p.m. lecture and preceding reception are free; dinner is available with advance reservation. For details, visit [aiachicago.org](http://aiachicago.org).

Moholy-Nagy: Future Present is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, and is open from October 2, 2016, through January 3, 2017.



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