

The “Bauhaus Idea” in Robert Rauschenberg’s Blueprints

Abstract

In the Fall of 1948, when Robert Rauschenberg enrolled at Black Mountain College, Josef Albers, who had taught at the institution since 1933, would only spend one more year teaching there before leaving for Yale University. Despite this short overlap in time, Albers’s influence upon the young artist is well acknowledged, perhaps most adamantly by Rauschenberg himself, who referred to Albers as his “most important teacher.” While many accounts of the relationship between the two highlight its significance on the development of Rauschenberg’s practice, little has been said of Albers’s impact on the production of Rauschenberg’s blueprints, which he began making in 1949. This essay explores this relationship further by showing that elements of Albers’s instruction and the “Bauhaus idea” he brought with him to Black Mountain College are evident in Rauschenberg’s blueprints, life-size blue and white photograms, which provided a fundamental basis for Rauschenberg’s oeuvre, leading him to his famed *Combines* and later silkscreen works.

The “Bauhaus idea” broadly encompasses many principles shared by its émigrés, including László Moholy-Nagy’s *New Vision*. Developed at the Bauhaus, this revolutionary theory proposes how photography, and specifically the photogram, could create new ways of seeing. It was integrated into the *Vorkurs*, the preliminary course that promoted material experimentation and visual training, which Moholy-Nagy and Albers taught together from 1923 to 1928, and which later formed the basis of Albers’s *Werklehre* course at Black Mountain College. This essay argues that there is a discernable influence of the New Vision, among other Bauhaus concepts, on Rauschenberg’s blueprints and later works as transmitted to the American artist through Albers’s pedagogical practice.

Keywords

Robert Rauschenberg, Bauhaus, Blueprints, Josef Albers, László Moholy-Nagy