

To Herbert Bayer, New York
from Bauhaus masters

May 24, 1945

Dear Herbert:

Thanks for your very nice letter. Hattula would be very proud if she knew you thought her to be charming. For the time being compliments are still withheld for pedagogical reasons. She was deeply impressed by you and Joella, and so - by the way - was I. It was so nice to get together after so much second-hand information.

May I use this opportunity, Herbert, to mention a point which has been on my mind very long but which I never could express because Moholy wouldn't want me to - and he does not know that I'm doing it now. But I simply have once to get this off my chest. In your last letter, in S.G.'s letters at least since January, and in several of Pius' letter the main contents is always the wellmeaning advice: get the Institute of Design attached to some large established institution and your troubles will be over. And then, with a warningly raised index finger, you all add: Paepcke is soon to tire of his benevolence and will abandon the school if you don't do as advised by us, your devoted friends.

Now, really, Herbert, I don't mean to be nasty about this; I have learned to swallow a lot during emigration, but how do you or the other well-meaning friends imagine such a fusion with a university could be managed? It is so easy to give such an advice and when results are not forthcoming, to throw up one's hands and say: well, I told him but he won't listen! Moholy has tried all large institutions within the reach of his connection. He has done so for years, but has failed. The reasons why he has failed are manifold. The deepest and most persistent reason is that institutions of higher learning in the United States are ultra-conservative while we are an experimental and unorthodox school. The trend toward reactionary educational methods has become increasingly strong during war years and will continue to grow for a while while the psychological phenomenon called "Siegerlaune" manifests itself in super-patriotism and a rush for the status quo as it has done all over the world at all times.

The second reason - much harder to see and nearly impossible to admit by our well-meaning advisors - is that not a single friend of the European Bauhaus group who either came directly from there or was closely related to its ideas, has found it worth his while to give up the flesh-pots of commercial New York for the hard work and the financial risks of an experimental school. Moholy is much too proud and much too loyal to his old co-fighters to have ever mentioned this to me, but I know from his weariness and

his deep sense of isolation that he feels rather bitter about ^{the} ~~the~~. You see, Herbert, one cannot aspire to bring a completely different concept of art and art-integration to this country, then leave the teaching of these new principles to native talent or rather native good-will. I do doubt very much that if Moholy had known at the outset how aloof his closest friends of the European past would keep themselves from his work, he would even have started his venture. Now it is a question of proving the soundness of one's concept not only to America, but also to those whose appreciation was so utterly platonic.

You can't sell a school to a university or similar institution if you haven't a faculty that is beyond doubt as far as talent and enthusiasm are concerned. The old hoary objection to the Institute of Design that it is Moholy's "One-man-school" is rather a bitter joke if one considers the attempts spread over seven full years to get anyone of the old guards to teach here. Black Mountain College might be a more pleasant playground for the summer, and Harvard or Yale, or the hell knows what, a much safer time investment -

but from a long historical view I feel that you all made a great mistake, and that this mistake should not be topped by this benevolent advice: Why in God's name don't you get off our consciences by ~~vanishing~~ disappearing into the academic anonymity of a university.

As I said before - Moholy has been more than willing to do ^{so} not because he had any illusions about the inevitable adulteration of his goals by the shallowness of the usual American campus, or because he would have enjoyed a regular salary, a pension, and a respectable letterhead - but simply because at nearly fifty he feels that it is almost too much for his strength to carry the responsibility and the fight for goals you all considered in your youth worth fighting for, too heavy.

It might be a blessing - and not a misfortune - that all these attempts failed. If the Institute survives it will be a great victory for singleness of purpose in one man. But just now this is still very uncertain and it would be gratifying if you and S.G. and Pius and the whole group of European friends would not give so much good advice that seems under the circumstances a little ridiculous, when what we desperately need is practical collaboration, i.e. teachers and money, and teachers and money. I trust you understand, Herbert, that this is my letter and my very private and personal opinion, and that it has nothing to do with the fact - or rather that it's bitterness is caused by the fact that I have so much admiration and a deep feeling of affinity for you and the other friends.

Always, yours -

Sm - n