

# LYONEL FEININGER PHOTOGRAPHS, 1928–1939

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## GETTY MUSEUM DISPLAYS FIRST COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY LYONEL FEININGER

*A Selection of Bauhaus Photographs from the  
Getty Museum's Permanent Collection Complements the Exhibition*



*Bauhaus*, March 22, 1929. Lyonel Feininger (American, 1871–1956). Gelatin silver print. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lyonel Feininger.  
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*[Bauhaus Band performing]*, about 1928–1929. T. Lux Feininger (American, b. Germany, 1910–2011). Gelatin silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.  
© T. Lux Feininger

### *Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939*

At the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center  
October 25, 2011 – March 11, 2012

LOS ANGELES—Widely recognized as a painter, printmaker, and draftsman who taught at the Bauhaus, Lyonel Feininger (American, 1871–1956) turned to photography later in his career as a tool for visual exploration. Drawn mostly from the collections at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, *Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939* at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center, October 25, 2011–March 11, 2012, presents for the first time Feininger's unknown body of photographic work. The exhibition is accompanied by a selection of photographs by other Bauhaus masters and students from the Getty Museum's permanent collection. The Getty is the first U.S. venue to present the exhibition, which will have been on view at the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin from February 26–May 15, 2011 and the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich from June 2–July 17, 2011. Following the Getty installation, the exhibition will be shown at the Harvard Art Museums from March 30–June 2, 2012. At the Getty, the exhibition will run concurrently with *Narrative Interventions in Photography*.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust  
Communications Department

1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 403  
Los Angeles, CA 90049-1681

Tel 310 440 7360  
Fax 310 440 7722

www.getty.edu

"We are delighted to be the first U.S. venue to present this important exhibition organized by the Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum," says Virginia Heckert, curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum and curator of the Getty's installation. "The presentation at the Getty provides a unique opportunity to consider Lyonel Feininger's achievement in photography, juxtaposed with experimental works in photography at the Bauhaus from our collection."

### **Lyonel Feininger Photographs**

When Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956) took up the camera in 1928, the American painter was among the most prominent artists in Germany and had been on the faculty of the Bauhaus school of art, architecture, and design since it was established by Walter Gropius in 1919. For the next decade, he used the camera to explore transparency, reflection, night imagery, and the effects of light and shadow. Despite his early skepticism about this "mechanical" medium, Feininger was inspired by the enthusiasm of his sons Andreas and Theodore (nicknamed Lux), who had installed a darkroom in the basement of their house, as well as by the innovative work of fellow Bauhaus master, László Moholy-Nagy.

Although Lyonel Feininger would eventually explore many of the experimental techniques promoted by Moholy-Nagy and practiced by others at the school, he remained isolated and out of step with the rest of the Bauhaus. Working alone and often at night, he created expressive, introspective, otherworldly images that have little in common with the playful student photography more typically associated with the school. Using a Voigtländer Bergheil camera (on display in the exhibition), frequently with a tripod, he photographed the neighborhood around the Bauhaus campus and masters' houses, and the Dessau railway station, occasionally reversing the tonalities to create negative images.

***Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939*** also includes the artist's photographs from his travels in 1929–31 to Halle, Paris, and Brittany, where he investigated architectural form and urban decay in photographs and works in other media. In Halle, while working on a painting commission for the city, Feininger recorded architectural sites in works such as *Halle Market with the Church of St. Mary and the Red Tower* (1929–30), and experimented with multiple exposures in photographs such as *Untitled (Street Scene, Double Exposure, Halle)* (1929–30), a hallucinatory image that merges two views of pedestrians and moving vehicles.

Since 1892 Feininger had spent parts of the summer on the Baltic coast, where the sea and dunes, along with the harbors, rustic farmhouses, and medieval towns, became some of his most

powerful sources of inspiration. During the summers Feininger also took time off from painting, focusing instead on producing sketches outdoors or making charcoal drawings and watercolors on the veranda of the house he rented. Included in the exhibition are photographs Feininger created in Deep an der Rega (in present-day Poland) between 1929 and 1935 which record the unique character of the locale, the people, and the artistic and leisure activities he pursued.

In the months after the Nazis closed the Bauhaus, and prior to Feininger's departure from Dessau in March 1933, he made a series of unsettling photographs featuring mannequins in shop windows such as *Drunk with Beauty* (1932). Feininger's images emphasize not only the eerily lifelike and strangely seductive quality of the mannequins, but also the disorienting, dreamlike effect created by reflections on the glass.

In 1937 Feininger permanently settled in New York City after a nearly 50-year absence, and photography served as an important means of reacquainting himself with the city in which he had lived until the age of sixteen. The off-kilter bird's eye view he made from his eleventh-floor apartment of the Second Avenue elevated train tracks, *Untitled (Second Avenue El from Window of 235 East 22nd Street, New York)* (1939), is a dizzying photograph of an American subject in the style of European avant-garde photography, and mirrors the artist's own precarious and disorienting position between two worlds, and between past and present.

### **The Bauhaus**

Walter Gropius, director of the Bauhaus from 1919 to 1928, changed the face of art education with his philosophy of integrating art, craft, and technology with everyday life at the Bauhaus. When Gropius's newly designed building in Dessau was completed in December 1926, its innovative structure did more than house the various components of the school; it became an integral aspect of life at the Bauhaus and a stage for its myriad activities, from studies and leisurely pursuits to theatrical performances. From the beginning, the camera recorded the architecture as the most convincing statement of Gropius' philosophy as well as the fervor with which the students embraced it. The photographs in this complementary section of the exhibition also examine the various ways photography played a role at the Bauhaus, even before it became part of the curriculum.

In addition to the collaborative environment encouraged in workshops, students found opportunities to bond during their leisure time, whether in a band that played improvisational music or on excursions to nearby beaches, parks, and country fairs. One of the most active

recorders of life at the Bauhaus was Lyonel Feininger's youngest son, T. Lux, who was also a member of the jazz band.

Masters and students alike at the Bauhaus took up the camera as a tool with which to record not only the architecture and daily life of the Bauhaus, but also one another. Although photography was not part of the original curriculum, it found active advocates in the figures of László Moholy-Nagy and his wife Lucia Moholy. With his innovative approach and her technical expertise, the Moholy-Nagys provided inspiration for others to use the camera as a means of both documentation and creative expression. The resulting photographs, which included techniques such as camera-less photographs (photograms), multiple exposures, photomontage and collages ("photo-plastics"), and the combination of text and image ("typo-photo"), contributed to Neues Sehen, or the "new vision," that characterized photography in Germany between the two world wars.

It was not until 1929 that photography was added to the Bauhaus curriculum by Hannes Meyer, the new director following Gropius's departure. A part of the advertising department, the newly established workshop was led by Walter Peterhans, who included technical exercises as well as assignments in the genres of portraiture, still life, advertisement, and photojournalism in the three-year course of study.

***Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939*** was organized by the Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts in cooperation with the J. Paul Getty Museum. The exhibition was curated by Laura Muir, assistant curator at the Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, with Virginia Heckert, curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum, who is responsible for the presentation at the Getty Museum and the selection of complementary Bauhaus photographs. The original exhibition, tour, and catalogue (authored by Laura Muir) were funded through the generosity of the German Friends of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, the Terra Foundation for American Art, the Dedalus Foundation, Inc., and the Emily Rauh Pulitzer and Joseph Pulitzer Jr. Fund for Modern and Contemporary Art, Harvard Art Museums.

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**MEDIA CONTACT:** Alexandria Sivak  
Getty Communications  
(310) 440-6473  
[asivak@getty.edu](mailto:asivak@getty.edu)

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