



# The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College

*Eva Díaz*

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In the years immediately following World War II, Black Mountain College, an unaccredited school in rural Appalachia, became a vital hub of cultural innovation. Practically every major artistic figure of the mid-twentieth century spent some time there: Merce Cunningham, Ray Johnson, Franz Kline, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg, Dorothea Rockburne, Aaron Siskind, Cy Twombly—the list goes on and on. Yet scholars have tended to view these artists' time at the College as little more than prologue, a step on their way to greatness. With *The Experimenters*, Eva Díaz reveals the importance of Black Mountain College—and especially of three key teachers, Josef Albers, John Cage, and R. Buckminster Fuller—to be much greater than that.

Díaz's focus is on experimentation. Albers, Cage, and Fuller, she shows, taught new models of art making that favored testing procedures rather than personal expression. These methodologies represented incipient directions for postwar art practice, elements of which would be sampled, and often wholly adopted, by Black Mountain students and subsequent practitioners. The resulting works, which interrelate art and life in a way that imbues these projects with crucial relevance, not only reconfigured the relationships among chance, order, and design—they helped redefine what artistic practice was, and could be, for future generations.

Offering a bold, compelling new angle on some of the most widely studied creative figures of modern times, *The Experimenters* does nothing less than rewrite the story of art in the mid-twentieth century.



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