

May 1948

**Experiment in education by Jimmie Tite**

"We do not pretend to have *the answers* in matters of education; we are still learning and experimenting, and it is my hope that we shall always be thought of as an experimental college," Bill Levi said at a recent community meeting.

These sentiments are finding practical expression in a rather unique educational experiment this semester, which from all reports, seems to be working out pretty well. For the first time courses are being offered by three student-teachers: Art Penn, Harry Holl, and myself. Though by no means considering ourselves last-word authorities in our respective fields (drama, sculpture, printing), we three young men are drawing upon our own experience in these arts. Calling on Penn the other day, I found him absorbed in his well-worn handbook, *An Actor Prepares*, by Constantin Stanislavski. "Each time I read this," he told me, "— and I think I've been through it a couple of dozen times—I get new inspiration." The idea I learned is to make acting a creative rather than an interpretive art form. "We try to deal within the personal experience for the sources of creative acting instead of using cliché images as is the case with the usual representational kind of acting."

Art studied at the Neighborhood Playhouse in Philadelphia in 1939-41 and had several seasons in summer stock. During the war he directed soldier shows in Germany, liked it so well he remained in Europe a year following his discharge, before enrolling at Black Mountain in the spring of 1947.

Students who take these informal courses do not receive transfer credits, but are interested for a variety of other reasons.

Harry Holl in his pastoral studio up by the shop, adjacent to the forge, was patiently hacking away at a granite block inscribed with the single word, "Ben." "A friendly tombstone carver in the next valley gave us a lot of material from his quarry," he explained. "The students begin by trying to work out any ideas they have—no tombstones, though—and before long everybody has some sort of trouble, and their troubles are usually similar. We look for the cause, and in most cases we discover these three basic problems: 1. Hard for them to see three-dimensionally; 2. Not able to handle the tools;

3. Not being able to find forms that suit the material. Of course there are other problems, but I think, in the beginning, it is better to concentrate less on finished design and more on the nature of material and the proper handling of tools." Harry is quite tool-conscious, having learned to handle, to make, and to respect them from early experience in his family's boatyard. He worked for some time with Jose De Creeft before coming to Black Mountain, and has been an active carver for many years. "I've got a lot to learn myself, but what I try to do is to set up situations by which students can gain experience in the use of tools and materials. By situations I mean posing problems which demand solutions. This sounds simple, but many students don't see their obstacles as problems, and so no attempt to search for more creative possibilities take place. Anyway, we enjoy working together, and I think we're all learning something."

The resurrection of the print shop, its recent expansion, and its new press are probably old news to most of you, but its original goals have not been forgotten. The people in the course are learning the printing processes so that they will be able to help with the college work as well as to see some of their own creative writing in print. The interest in such a course was so great at the beginning of the term, that we had to divide the class into two sections. Frank Rice meets with four people twice a week, and I have the Tuesday and Friday group. My own knowledge and interest in printing developed while here on the campus. In the beginning there were only a few of us, and we started from scratch; we made a lot of mistakes, not serious ones, fortunately, but with patience and study we learned to avoid those mistakes, and I hope that we can help others avoid the same mistakes. Each new job, whether it's a concert program, letterhead, or bulletin, presents a different problem, and we go to work trying to solve it. It's pretty exciting to see the first sheet come off the press. It also teaches a person a lot about coordination and manual dexterity. I hope that eventually the shop will possess a Linotype machine. — J. T.

### **The Harriet Engelhardt Memorial Collection of Textiles**

The first use which has been made of a new room for art classes in the "Eye" (one of the government barracks), was appropriately for the purpose of a textile exhibition. The textiles shown constitute the first part of a collection made in memory of Harriet Engelhardt, a former student of Black Mountain College who was especially interested in weaving.

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Most of the pieces shown were collected by Anni Albers during her visit in Mexico last year and originate therefore to a large extent from that country. Included in the collection are also pieces from Italy, Peru, Bolivia, tapa cloth from the South Seas and three pieces of Egyptian mummy cloth, which are of interest because of the fineness of threads and the closeness of weave.

It is a collection most varied in character. What all of these pieces have in common is their close relationship between material, construction and design, all organically related to each other. This factor determined the choice of the fabrics selected for this collection; it is one toward which we are also striving.

Among the Mexican textiles are some small pieces, such as belts, scarfs, and a charming head-piece, woven by the Chamula Indians. These materials are more somber in color and coarser than most other pieces from Mexico because of the more severe climate in which these people live.

There is a little cross-stitched bag and some woven belts and purses by the Huichol Indians which show remarkable skill and sense of design. An antique silk serape, from a more northern region, is more striking because of its strong figure-background design in black and white.

A small embroidery in black on a white background from Toluca is an example of the insertion of threads in such a manner as to make them an intricate part of the weave itself. There are a number of sashes with interesting fringes, several belts woven in different techniques of double weave, some ribbons to be braided into the hair of the Mexican women, all of these in bright colors which catch the eye immediately.

An antique rebozo is especially fine in weave; the ends are finished to give a lace-like appearance. In the entrance to the exhibition room is a rain coat made out of long pointed palm leaves which overlap on the outside to shed water and are knotted intricately on the inside. White tortilla cloths show raised loops and fine lay-in work.

From Peru are three pre-Columbian pieces as well as several knitted caps with gay figures, a white wool blanket of silk-like quality with stripes in multi-color.

A blanket very similar in its appearance is from Bolivia.

Two pieces in black and white are from Sardinia, Italy. Boldness of design brings them close to the Mexican textiles, even though they are more sophisticated.

The exhibition has been arranged by Willie Joseph and Nancy Dunn. The quietness which has been achieved in the placement of these textiles brought out each piece, despite the great variety.

We admire these textiles for their craftsmanship and artistic value, but what is even more important is the stimulation they will give to some, opening new ways in the use of materials and tools.

The collection will be available to students who specialize in the study of textiles. We hope that this exhibition marks the beginning of a collection which will continue to grow.

### Campus news

Black Mountain College bought its present property in 1937 from the estate of E. W. Grove, a former Asheville business man who had developed it as a family summer resort, "Lake Eden Inn." The purchase price was \$36,240.48. Approximately half this sum was paid in cash through gifts from friends of the college; the remaining portion, \$17,500, was borrowed from the Grove Estate itself, and the total property of the college was mortgaged as security for the loan. During the ten years since then, again through the help of friends and well-wishers, annual payments of one to two-and-a-half thousand dollars have steadily sliced this debt away. Last month, April 20 to be exact, came the day when it was possible to send the last check to the offices of the Grove Estate and to receive in exchange the final note marked "Paid in full" and the mortgaged deed to the property also marked "Fully paid and satisfied."

It is true that there remains an external indebtedness (for improvements to the property) of \$10,000, previously held under second mortgage, now advanced to first mortgage position, and payable at \$1,000 a year for 10 years. But this scarcely dims the satisfaction of having at least the original debt against the purchase of the property now fully paid and erased.

Josef Albers was juror for the awards at the Society of Washington Artists, Washington, D. C., in April. He has been elected a member of the committee on architecture, painting and sculpture of the University Council, Yale University. At its first meeting, held April 24 and 25, at Yale, the committee discussed plans for the reorganization of the Fine Arts Department at the University.

Natasha Goldowski, teacher of physics and chemistry at BMC, attended the meeting of the eastern division of the National Physics Society at Oak Ridge, early in April, and later in the month, that of the American Physics Society in Washington, D. C.

Dr. Nathan Rosen, formerly of the faculty of Black Mountain College, now professor of physics at the University of North Carolina, visited BMC for a weekend in April. He talked to the community on the subject of Nuclear Disintegration.