



# in detail

**Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack** Untitled (Abstract composition with blue, yellow and orange angular forms)

**Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack** born Germany 1893, died Australia 1965  
 Untitled (*Abstract composition with blue, yellow and orange angular forms*) c.1950  
 watercolour on spackle on tempera on board, 20.5 x 31.0 cm (sight)  
 The University of Melbourne Art Collection  
 Gift of Mrs Olive Hirschfeld 1982  
 1982.0112

## 'The artist is an exalted craftsman.'

In 1920 Ludwig Hirschfeld studied at the Bauhaus school of art and design established the previous year, at Weimar in Germany, by architect Walter Gropius. The school's philosophy and teaching methods were revolutionary and exerted a global influence on art and culture, which is still seen today. Hirschfeld explained the school's derivation: 'The name 'Bauhaus' derives from 'bauen' meaning to build, including the idea of creating in a spiritual sense, and 'haus' meaning the house or building.'<sup>2</sup>

A later Bauhaus director, Mies van der Rohe, wrote: 'The Bauhaus was an idea, and I believe that the reason for the tremendous influence which the Bauhaus had on ... the world lies in the fact that it was an idea. One cannot achieve such resonance with organization nor with propaganda. Only an idea has the power to spread as far as that.'<sup>3</sup>

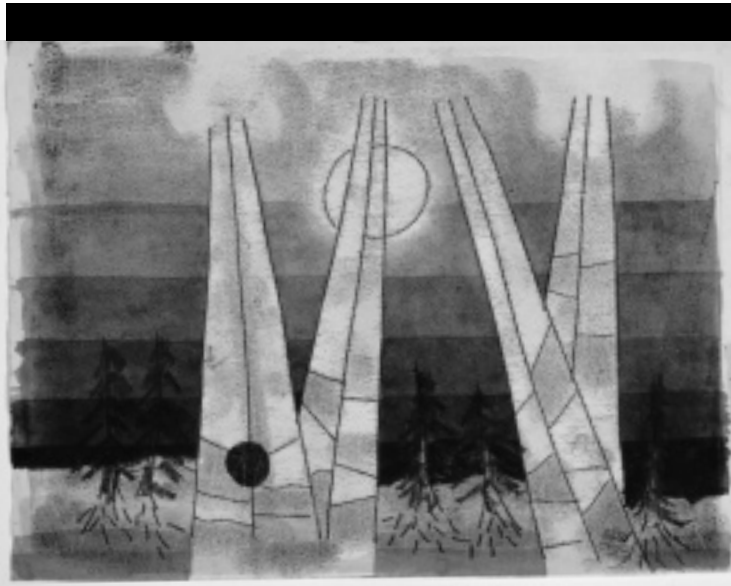
Both as a student and teacher during the Bauhaus' Weimar period (1919-1925), Hirschfeld was a colleague of leading European artists and intellectuals including Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Johannes Itten, Lyonel Feininger, Oskar Schlemmer, László Maholy-Nagy, Josef Albers and Marcel Breuer. At the Bauhaus he adopted his mother's surname Mack to sign paintings, a common practice at that time.<sup>4</sup> In 1921 he worked closely with Klee, conducting experiments with drawing techniques best described as a 'pioneer' of the monotype. Paul Klee wrote of their joint endeavours: 'a sheet of paper is painted with black oil colouring and is used as a carbon. The reverse of the drawing is then worked with a needle.'<sup>5</sup>

The University of Melbourne's painting, *Abstract composition with blue, yellow and orange angular forms*, can be better understood by studying Ludwig Hirschfeld's Bauhaus colour theories and early light art experiments. He developed the Bauhaus colour top (Farbenkriesel), a spinning top made of coloured disks, which was used to analyse colours, their qualities and interactions. Under the leadership of Kandinsky and Klee, he was involved in researching the psychological relationship between form and colour and later wrote: '... we sent out about

a thousand postcards to a cross section of the community asking them to fill in three elementary shapes, the triangle, square, and circle with three primary colours red, yellow and blue, using one colour only for each shape. The result was an overwhelming majority for yellow in the triangle, red in the square and blue in the circle'.<sup>6</sup>

He also described his Reflected Light Compositions (c.1922-1923), which sought to combine colour, form and music: 'Yellow, red, and blue in glowing intensity, blended with light silvery grey colours, moving about in varying tempi on the dark background of a transparent screen. They appeared at one moment as angular forms, triangles, squares, polygons; then as curved shapes, circles, arcs, and wavelike patterns; they joined and created overlappings and colour blendings as a result'.<sup>7</sup> Hirschfeld showed the Light Compositions at the 1923 Vienna Music Festival, accompanying Fernand Léger's experimental films.

During the Weimar period of the Bauhaus, Hirschfeld worked with one of his teachers, Oskar Schlemmer, and a fellow student, Kurt Schwerdtfeger, developing slightly varying versions referred to as Colour Light Plays.<sup>8</sup> In later years his contribution to the field of 'light objects' and the development of Kinetic art has been equated with Jean Tinguely and Yaacov Agam.<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Hirschfeld's light and colour research during the 1920s has also supported Man Ray, Maholy-Nagy and Raoul Hausmann's work in the field.<sup>10</sup> His pioneering studies, combining music and directing beams of coloured light, evolved a new artistic genre which has been followed by artists as diverse as John Cage, Otto Piene, Philip Glass and Robert Wilson.<sup>11</sup>



**Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack** born Germany  
1893, died Australia 1965  
*Roads to eternity* 1960  
Durchdruckzeichnung and watercolour,  
21.7 x 29.8 cm  
The University of Melbourne Art Collection  
Gift of Mrs Olive Hirschfeld 1971  
1971.0028

Ludwig Hirschfeld left the Bauhaus in 1925, when it moved to Dessau, and taught at the Free School Community at Wichensdorf in Thuringa. In 1933 the National Socialists (Nazis) closed the Bauhaus. Art and culture in Germany came under strict government control. Hirschfeld, along with many other artists, teachers and intellectuals, eventually felt compelled to leave the country. He moved to England in 1936, where for the first couple of years he taught unemployed Welsh miners. Returning to London, he worked on 'screen art devices' adopting the principles of his Colour Light Compositions to serve stage lighting.<sup>12</sup> In 1938, Hirschfeld was invited to participate in *The Bauhaus, 1919-1928*, an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

After the fall of France in 1940 all Germans living in England were interned. Ludwig Hirschfeld was among internees then deported to Australia aboard the ship *Dunera*. In Australia, he was confined at internment camps near Hay, Orange and Tatura. Fortunately, Dr. James Darling, the principal of Geelong Grammar intervened and had him released and appointed Art Master at the school (1942-1957). He held his first Australian solo exhibition, featuring largely abstract works, at the University of Melbourne's Rowden White Library

**Selected works by Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack from the University of Melbourne Art Collection:**

- Untitled (*Abstract composition with circular and patchwork forms*), c. 1950, watercolour on spackle on tempera on cardboard
- Untitled (*Floral forms – pink, blue and white*), c. 1950, watercolour on spackle on tempera on board
- Untitled (*Abstract composition*), c. 1950s, watercolour, pastel and spackle on composition board
- Untitled (*Abstract composition in blue, yellow and pink*), 1961, watercolour on spackle on tempera on cardboard

**Additional information available at [www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au)**

**Stephen Mead** The Ian Potter Museum of Art, 2003

- 1 Gropius, Walter. Cited in Hirschfeld-Mack, Ludwig, *The Bauhaus: An Introductory Survey*, Longmans, Croydon, Vic., 1963, p. 4.
- 2 Hirschfeld-Mack, p.1.
- 3 Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig. Cited in Hirschfeld-Mack, pp. 8-9.
- 4 Draffin, Nicholas, *Two Masters of the Weimar Bauhaus: Lyonel Feininger, Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1974, p. 39.
- 5 Klee, Paul. Cited in Draffin, p. 42.
- 6 Hirschfeld-Mack, p. 6.
- 7 Hirschfeld-Mack, *ibid*.
- 8 Piene, Nan R., 'Light art', *Art in America*, vol. 55:26, May 1967, p. 26.
- 9 Popper, Frank, 'The luminous trend in kinetic art', *Studio International*, February 1967, pp. 72 & 74.
- 10 Blok, C., 'The art of artificial light', *Art International*, December 1966, p. 41.
- 11 'The new graphic languages', *Design Quarterly*, no. 142, pp. 15-16.
- 12 Draffin, p. 43.
- 13 'Exhibition of abstract and other art', & 'Dr. L. Hirschfeld-Mack', *Farrago*, March 21 1946, p. 2.
- 14 Turnbull, Clive, 'Geelong art master's unusual show', *The Herald*, March 25 1946, p. 3.

in 1946.<sup>13</sup> He explained the intricacy of these compositions to modernist critic Clive Turnbull: '...upon the inter-weaving of the lines of two-dimensional shapes, and of silhouettes which are so composed in their values that they create third-dimensional illusions'.<sup>14</sup> Thus providing a further insight to the University's work - *Abstract composition with blue, yellow and orange angular forms*.

Involvement with the Contemporary Art Society of Australia followed in the same year, and solo exhibitions held at Melbourne's Peter Bray Gallery in 1954 and Gallery A in 1960. During the later part of his career in Australia, Ludwig Hirschfeld also devoted a great deal of his energy to teaching children, educating art teachers and lecturing Fine Arts students at the University of Melbourne. He visited Europe in 1964 at the invitation of the Bauhaus Archive, at Damstadt, to reconstruct his colour light apparatus and demonstrate his Colour Light Plays. Hirschfeld died in Sydney on 7 January 1965.

Recognition followed with exhibitions such as *Two Masters of the Weimar Bauhaus: Lyonel Feininger, Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack* held in 1974 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and *Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack Monotypes* at the University of Melbourne Gallery in 1976. A retrospective was shown at the Queensland University Art Museum in 1977 and a collaborative exhibition, *Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack: Works from the Collections of Melbourne and Monash Universities*, staged in 1981. In 2000 the Ian Potter Museum of Art loaned works from the University's collection to support a major European retrospective and subsequent re-evaluation of his work, *Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack: Bauhäusler und Visionär*, which was shown at the Museum of Modern Art at Bolzano, Italy, and the Jewish Museums in Vienna and Frankfurt (2000-2001).