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Technology Review, November 1961

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[IMAGE] A
[IMAGE] B

Education in Art at M.I.T.

[IMAGE] C
[IMAGE] D

BY ROBERT O. PREUSSER
Assistant Professor of Visual Design

PARTICIPATION in the visual arts is giving a new dimension to education at M.I.T. Contrary to the myth that Art and Science do not mix, students are freely electing studio courses and performing creatively. This recent development is the Institute's response to the urgent need of overcoming visual "illiteracy" in an age increasingly dependent upon perceptual awareness.

The visual arts program, a tenth field in the humanities and social studies electives from which each student selects an area of concentration in his junior and senior years, is attracting students from more than half the departments in the Institute. By combining history and criticism with drawing and painting, the program affords an opportunity for students to gain an understanding of art and develop confidence in visual expression.

As an innovation in general education for scientists and engineers, the study of art with its capacity to transform concept into immediate experience, and make possible instantaneous total projection of thought and feeling, transcends education in the conventional sense. The artist's method of working intuitively and empirically to achieve qualitative values is a unique experience for students oriented toward quantitative concepts arrived at by formula. M.I.T. students' successful studio performance evokes no less surprise than that such an opportunity exists in a scientific and technological school. There is impressive evidence that visual sensitivity and ability to create visual form can no longer be considered the exclusive domain of the liberal arts colleges.

The role of the visual arts in modern education has been of increasing concern to colleges and universities in recent years. No exception to this trend, M.I.T. was among the first to give it serious consideration. An investigation, resulting in recommendations for the existing program, began in 1952 when the School of Humanities (supported by the Carnegie Corporation) appointed a committee for the study of the Visual Arts at M.I.T. Initiated by John E. Burchard, '23, Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Science, this committee consisted of John Coolidge, Director of the Fogg Museum at Harvard University; Robert Iglehart, Chairman of the Department of Art at the University of Michigan; Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr., Director of the Addison Gallery of American Art at the Phillips Academy, Andover; Charles H. Sawyer, Professor of Art

The photos above are of (A) surface variation with lines, by Edward Agro, Course VIII; (B) paper relief sculpture, by Robert Fisher, XXI-A; (C) mobile relief with magnetized triangles, by John Karl, VIII; and (D)

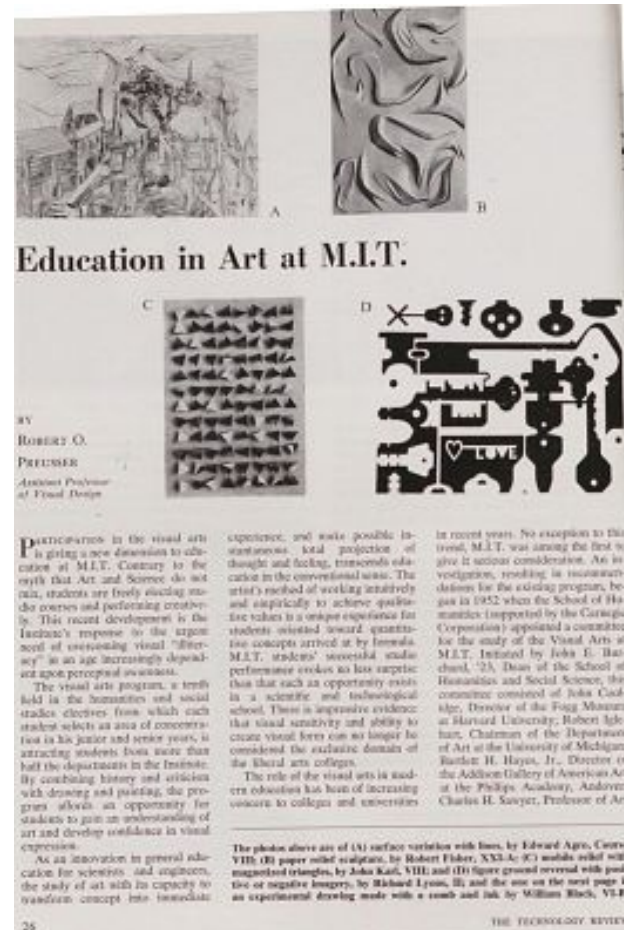


figure ground reversal with positive or negative imagery, by Richard Lyons, H; and the one on the next page is an experimental drawing made with a comb and ink by William Black, VI-B.

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