

Art Since 1945

28 February 2022

### Black Mountain College Field Trip Reflection

Headed into Saturday's field trip, I had a set of expectations about what I would see and experience. Sitting in our classroom in Spartanburg, I saw the history of Black Mountain College through a series of black and white photos, clippings from newspapers, and photos of art pieces made by the students. Although the discussions and lectures were informative and interesting, nothing really solidifies one's understanding of the history of a location than physically being there. This trip was interesting and immersive, and altered my perception of the place in which this college existed.

To me, Black Mountain College seemed like a quiet place frozen in time, nestled far out in the forest, still radiating with the presence of the great minds that once inhabited it. The altering of my perception began when we pulled into the entrance to Camp Rockmont. In the back of my mind, I knew that the college had become a summer camp after it closed. However, due to my anticipation of seeing the former college as it appeared in my mind, I had pushed that notion away. What surprised me the most while touring the site was that it did not resemble an educational institution at all. In fact, it looked like it had always been a summer camp.

The exception, of course, was the studies building, with its relatively modern architecture and frescoes hidden behind tarps. If one enters the former college as a camper, I imagine there is a good chance one would never know its past. It was surreal to peek my head in the same rooms

where students studied and slept, walk the hallways they walk, stand on the porch where countless activities had happened before, and plant my feet on the same patch of floor where students ate, danced, and gazed upon the famous Happenings and theatrical performances. However, I find it insane to think of the countless young campers who spent a summer in this space, completely oblivious to the fact that it used to be a home for some of the greatest artistic minds of the century. Walking through these spaces myself, I found it difficult to imagine that it was a home for this small community of brilliant minds.

I would have loved to have spent more time in the museum looking at the works made by the former students of the college, and really digesting everything that was there. I admire how diverse their works were, from sculpture to prints to paintings and beyond. I also enjoyed looking at the rare film displayed on the lower floor and various relics of the college, such as the diagram assigning each student to a study room. My favorite piece was one of the captivating sculptures of Ruth Asawa that I observed right as I walked in. Photos I had seen previously of these sculptures had piqued my interest, but it felt special to see one in person, to not only walk around it and really process its unique forms and the way light moves through it, but also to feel its texture through a sample provided by an attendant at the museum! How neat!

When given the opportunity, I would be delighted to return to the museum to get another look at the art, and perhaps some other galleries around beautiful downtown Asheville (especially when it gets warmer). Despite my realization of just how hidden the presence of Black Mountain College is in the presence of Camp Rockmont, I am not disappointed with my experience. In fact, it was exciting to stand in the places the amazing minds of the college once stood, even if hints of their presence are few. If anything, it reminded me of an important lesson:

History is not always laid out before our eyes, perfectly preserved, but that doesn't mean it's not there. It is a privilege for me to have been introduced to and shown around such an important and beautiful place. It may be something as simple as a few paint splatters on the floor that open our eyes to the wonders of what happened before.