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BAUHAUS: REFLECTING ON 100 YEARS OF INFLUENCE

A glimpse into the legacy of this historic school demonstrates its effort and success in unifying the arts

WRITTEN BY Laurel Delp

It was a small German art school that lasted a mere 14 years from 1919 to 1933, suffered squabbles regarding its core philosophy and teaching methods, was forced to move from Weimar to Dessau to Berlin, and had three radically different directors. It certainly didn't invent Modernism, and many of the ideas it espoused were already in the air, but 100 years after its founding, the Staatliches Bauhaus remains one of the most profound influences on modern architecture and design.

So what was the Bauhaus? Its name translates to "building house" or "construction house," but it began as an avant-garde school that sought to erase the elitist line between craftsmanship and art via workshops. But



even that idea existed. What made the Bauhaus historic was its gathering of gifted faculty striving toward breakthroughs in style, including Paul Klee, Oskar Schlemmer, Wassily Kandinsky, László Moholy-Nagy, and former-students-turned-instructors, Josef Albers and Marcel Breuer. Coupled with gifted students, the school's driving energy was to create free of influences from the past, in an atmosphere in which art and technology were no longer opposing forces.

The founding director, Walter Gropius, worked as a young architect for Peter Behrens from 1908 to 1910. Behrens was considered Germany's most innovative architect, a founder of the Deutscher Werkbund, an organiza-



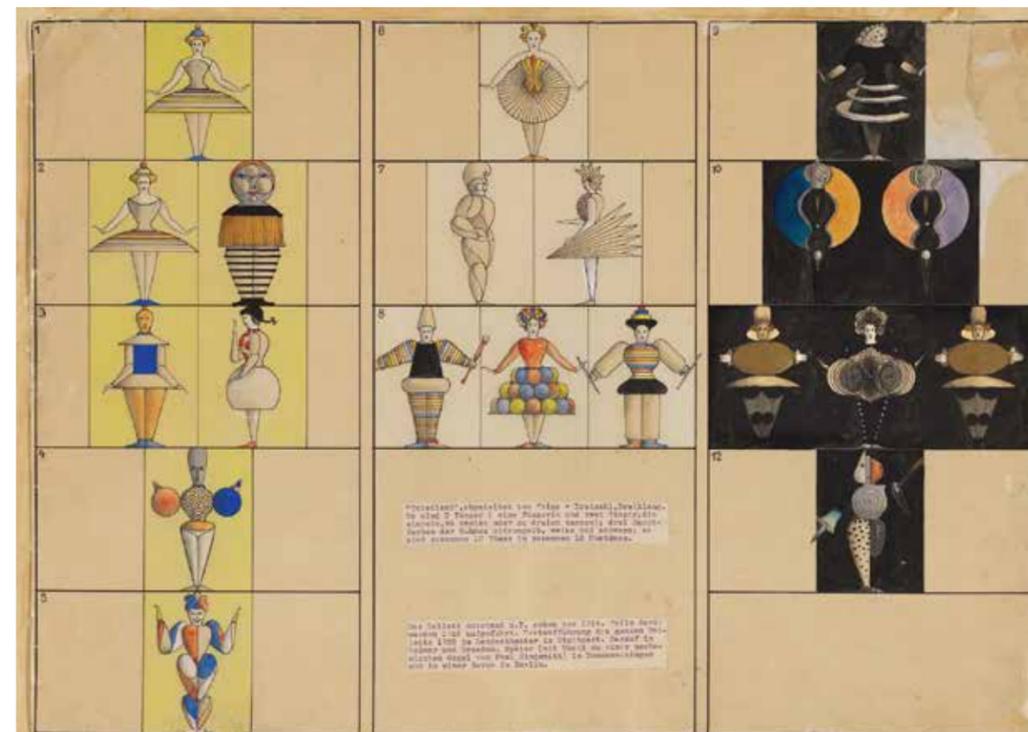
"Thirty years since founding our design-build practice, the Bauhaus continues to be one of our greatest influences. Our multidisciplinary firm of architects, builders, interior designers, landscape designers, fabricators, and furniture makers work side by side to merge architecture, craft, and art to construct our visions in its entirety."

— Ron Radziner, Marmol Radziner in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City

Clockwise from top: Haus am Horn in Weimar, Germany, designed by Georg Muche. | Courtesy of Freundeskreis der Bauhaus-Universität Weimar e. V., Photograph ©Cameron Blaylock | A photo by Lucia Moholy of the Masters Housing at Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany. This was Moholy and László Moholy-Nagy's living room (1927–28). | Gelatin Silver Print with Opaque Watercolor Retouching | Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, BRGA.21.55.A. ©Lucia Moholy Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Harvard Art Museums. | Design for a Rug by Anni Albers (1927) | Black Ink and Watercolor over Graphite with Cut and Drawn Paper Additions on Off-White Woven Paper | Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, BR48.49. ©The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Harvard Art Museums. | Costume designs for "Triadic Ballet" by Oskar Schlemmer (1926). | Black Ink, Opaque Watercolor, Metallic Powder, Graphite, and Typewritten Collage Elements on Cream Wove Paper Mounted to Cream Card | Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, BR50.428. Photo: Harvard Art Museums.



This page, from top: A 1926 photograph taken by Lucia Moholy depicts the Bauhaus building, designed by Walter Gropius in Dessau, Germany. | Gelatin Silver Print | Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, BRGA.20.24. ©Lucia Moholy Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Harvard Art Museums; ©President and Fellows of Harvard College. | Bauhausgebäude Dessau, designed by Walter Gropius from 1925 to 1926. | Südseite, Tadashi Okochi ©Pen Magazine, 2010, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau



tion which advocated for the idea that industrialization and mass production, rather than the enemy of art, could be wed to creativity. In the age of IKEA, this idea might seem ho-hum, but in the early 20th century, it was revolutionary.

During his tenure with Behrens, Gropius worked alongside Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and, for some months, Le Corbusier. It's tempting to imagine the ideas they might have shared.

After Gropius left Behrens' office in 1910, he partnered with architect Adolf Meyer to design two landmark Modernist factory buildings. One of these, the Fagus Factory, was marked by an absence of ornamentation and a steel frame that replaced support walls and allowed for large expanses of glass. This first commission allowed Gropius to



Clockwise from above: *Tapestry* by Gunta Stölzl (1922–23) | Cotton, Wool, and Linen Fibers | Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, BR49.669. ©Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Harvard Art Museums. | *Untitled (with Anna May Wong)* by Marianne Brandt (1929) | Collage of Cut and Printed Papers, Cellulose Acetate, Glass, Metal Rivets, and Flocked Paper on Paper Board | Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, 2006.25. ©Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Harvard Art Museums. | *Verdure* by Herbert Bayer (1950) | Oil on Canvas | Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, 1950.169. ©Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Harvard Art Museums.



apply his revolutionary ideas in three dimensions.

It's been said that in later years Gropius hijacked the mythology of the Bauhaus and made it his own, despite the many disparate voices and approaches that were a strong part of the school's evolution. But he was the longest director, and its most dedicated cheerleader.

In the beginning, students were required to finish a six-month introductory program, after which the brightest took part in apprentice-style workshops (rather than academic classes) teaching design, form, and color. Each was co-taught by a craftsman and an artist known as Masters of Craft and Masters of Form. Metalworking, carpentry, stained glass, photography, and typography, among others, were offered in workshops.

Pieces created by students and lecturers that continue to inspire awe in their inventiveness and beauty include the Wassily chair by Breuer, the tea set by Marianne Brandt, and the table lamp by Carl Jacob Jucker and Wilhelm Wagenfeld.



The idea was to create mass-producible products of simple beauty that could be personalized with small changes.

The German state of Thuringia, which financed the school, had quickly gone from a liberal government to conservative and disapproving; in 1925, the school was closed. It reopened in Dessau, where the city government was more welcoming.

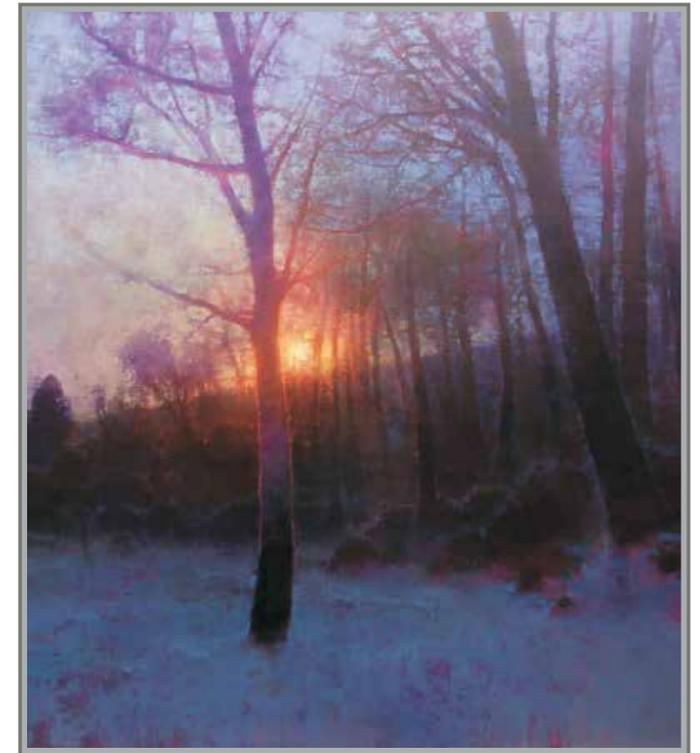
"I was directly influenced by De Stijl and the Bauhaus in the utilization of artistic spirit in the deployment of common, mass-produced materials, such as concrete, steel, and glass; and in the utilization of simplified directional forms based on the function of receiving heat from the sun and comfort in cold climates."

— Greg Faulkner, Faulkner Architects in Truckee and Berkeley, CA

Gropius designed the school's three-pronged new building, which garnered much attention. Designs for the new masters' houses employed classically Modernist flat roofs over basic cube elements. Ideally, the cubes could be added onto or rearranged to create individuality among the economical, uniform elements.

Until 1927, there was no official architecture department at the school. But all along, students, and in fact,

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"I was influenced by the Bauhaus in terms of the craft tradition and modern technology, clear thinking, and directness."

— Rick Joy, Studio Rick Joy in Tucson, AZ

This page, clockwise from top left: A Bauhaus-inspired building designed by Yehuda Megidovitz. Courtesy of Bauhaus Center Tel Aviv. | A view of the backside of the Fagus factory. Courtesy of UNESCO-welterbe Fagus-werk | Architect Yehuda Megidovitz designed this structure in 1939. Courtesy of Bauhaus Center Tel Aviv | A building designed by Shimon Hamadi Levy. Courtesy of Bauhaus Center Tel Aviv



most of the workshops, had worked on private commissions taken on by Gropius and Meyer. So technically there are few actual Bauhaus buildings — they're more accurately described as Bauhaus style. The ideal was for all of the crafts to come together and create a complete work.

Life at the Bauhaus wasn't all seriousness. There were frequent costume balls where the students outdid one another with elaborately constructed, playful clothing designs. Look at photographs of the students and the energy and enthusiasm is evident. But at the same time, the Nazis were rising to power and judged the Bauhaus as "degenerate art." Hannes Meyer, the director from 1928 to 1930 (chosen by Gropius) was fired by the Dessau mayor for his Communist leanings, but in fact, Meyer repudiated much of the Bauhaus philosophy and had



From left: *Coffee and Tea Service* by Wilhelm Wagenfeld (1924–25). | Brass with Mercury Silvered Interiors and Ebony Fixtures (replacement handle on sugar bowl) | Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, BR52.22–26. ©Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Harvard Art Museums. | *Table Lamp* by Wilhelm Wagenfeld and Carl Jacob Jucker (1924). | Transparent Glass, Opaline Glass, Mercury-Silvered German Silver, and Mercury-Silvered Brass | Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of Walter Gropius, BR49.248.A–B. ©Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Harvard Art Museums; ©President and Fellows of Harvard College.

already forced out many masters. The final director, Mies, oversaw the school until Nazis took over the Dessau city government and cut off funding in 1932. Mies briefly secured private funding and reopened the Bauhaus in Berlin, but it was closed by the Nazis in 1933.

What the Nazis couldn't have anticipated was that fleeing students and professors would spread the school's influence across the world. A number went to Palestine, where

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Bauhaus Centennial Celebrations

Interested in observing this groundbreaking school of artistic thought founded in April 1919? Events are planned worldwide. In Germany alone there will be hundreds of exhibitions and celebrations. Here are a few highlights...

United States

The Bauhaus and Harvard: Taking place February 1 – July 28 in Harvard’s Special Exhibitions Gallery, this exhibit includes 200 works by 74 Bauhaus artists from Harvard’s Busch-Reisinger Museum, which hosts the largest collection of Bauhaus works outside of Germany; harvardartmuseums.org.

Bauhaus 100: Focusing on the Bauhaus’ historic and continued influence in the Roaring Fork Valley of Colorado, organizations plan celebrations through August 8. A few examples: the Wheeler Opera House will host a Bauhaus-esque costume party on June 6. And the Aspen Historical Society presents an exhibit of works by Bauhaus student and teacher Herbert Bayer, who pioneered historic preservation in the area, designed the Aspen Institute, influenced local architecture, and built innovative earthworks; bauhaus100aspen.org.

The Whole World a Bauhaus: Taking place February 16 – April 20, this international traveling exhibition (appearing in the U.S. only at the Elmhurst Art Museum in Illinois) includes original art and design by instructors and students, and other works that convey the Bauhaus spirit. On April 27, Soirée 2019 will feature dinner, cocktails, and auctions of artworks by established and emerging artists; elmhurstmuseum.org.

Bauhaus.photo: Featuring 100 key photo reproductions from the collection of more than 70,000 key works held by the Bauhaus-Archiv/Museum für Gestaltung in Berlin, this exhibition presents images by Lucia Moholy, László Moholy-Nagy, T. Lux Feininger, and others from June 6 - July 14 at Peter Miller Architecture and Design Books in Seattle, Washington; goethe.de.

Germany

The Bauhaus Vision: View the world’s oldest Bauhaus collection in its new home opening on April 6. The Bauhaus Museum Weimar’s new building, located in the founding place of the Weimar State Bauhaus, was designed by Heike Hanada; bauhausmuseumweimar.de/en

Bauhaus Centenary Program Dessau: The new Bauhaus Dessau Museum (designed by Barcelona-based addenda architects) opens on September 8, and houses the second-largest collection of Bauhaus works in the world. The museum will host celebrations throughout 2019; bauhaus-dessau.de/en

Bauhaus Buildings Dessau – Originals Retold: Opening on April 18, with no closing date, the Bauhaus Dessau museum will offer tours of the numerous Bauhaus buildings in the famed school’s second home, including the landmark campus designed by Gropius; bauhaus-dessau.de/en

Tel Aviv

Josef Rings and Erich Mendelsohn – New Building in Germany and Mandatory Palestine: Located at the Bauhaus Center in Tel Aviv, an exhibition closing March 30, examines the work of two Bauhaus architects; one who worked in Germany and the other in Palestine. In 1924, Mendelsohn, together with Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, created the Modernist architectural group, Der Ring. Mendelsohn fled the Nazis in 1934, spending seven years designing structures in Palestine. The Bauhaus Center in Tel Aviv also has year-round rotating exhibitions of art and architecture, plus tours of Tel Aviv’s White City; bauhaus-center.com

“Growing up in Tel Aviv, I was surrounded by Bauhaus design and architecture. Having experienced it first-hand has had a major influence on my design ethos and outlook, which is evident in our work. The flowing shapes and contextual relationships are becoming increasingly appreciated, plus there are great ways to modernize Bauhaus fundamentals with environmentally conscious design.”

— Dan Brunn, Dan Brunn Architecture
in Los Angeles, CA

they created the White City, some 4,000 Bauhaus-influenced buildings in Tel Aviv, Israel, now a UNESCO world heritage site. Many key figures (which reads like a “who’s who” of early Modern art and architecture) moved to the United States. Gropius was the chair of Harvard’s Department of Architecture from 1938 until he retired in 1952. Mies left Germany in 1937 and became head of the architecture department at what would become the Illinois Institute of Technology, where he also designed much of the campus. Breuer followed Gropius to Harvard and left to form his own New York architectural practice in 1941. Moholy-Nagy ran the New Bauhaus in Chicago, Illinois, which lasted only a year. He then founded the Institute of Design, which was absorbed into the Illinois Institute of Technology. Albers became an art professor at the fabled Black Mountain, then joined the design department at Yale. These Bauhaus veterans had a profound effect on American architecture, art, and design. The influence of the Bauhaus reaches far beyond a school of thought, shaping concepts of art and design around the globe today. ■

Laurel Delp is a Los Angeles, California-based freelance writer and editor. She’s a frequent contributor to *Western Art & Architecture* and other magazines and websites, including *Town & Country*, *Departures*, *Sunset*, and *A Rare World*.