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The Bauhaus: Understanding its History and Relevance to Art Education Today.

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The Bauhaus
Understanding its History and Relevance to Art Education Today

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors

By Miette Bretschneider

The Honors College

Fine and Performing Arts Scholars Program

East Tennessee State University

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Introduction

In a sentence, the Bauhaus was the most famous art college of the 20th century (Arnason). But of course, it was and still is much more than that. During its time, the school revolutionized the way that art was taught. Our models for teaching and instructing art students through experimentation and creativity were based on the classes taught at the Bauhaus. It brought under one roof some of the most famous architects, painters, sculptors, artists and craftsmen of the time. The Bauhaus embodied the designs and ideas of modernism, both in theory (see Gropius's "Manifesto") and in practice (see samples of Bauhaus artwork). Still today the Bauhaus is thought of as a remarkable example of modernism, which holds up style and good design. It united art, craft and technology into one recognizably German style. Its name became simultaneously associated with a place, an idea, and a style. This Bauhaus movement left such an impact that the advancements made at that time are still impacting areas of life 100 years later.

In my thesis I will discuss how the Bauhaus has influenced me personally. The famous preliminary course of the Bauhaus played an important part in my own art education experience. Just like at the Bauhaus, I first attended introductory art classes before moving on to more focused studies. The lessons I learned in the first year I now consider instrumental to my creative process. In part, I will compare the preliminary classes I took at East Tennessee State University with those courses taught at the Bauhaus, such as 2D Design, Drawing, 3D Design and Color Theory. The classes I later attended like weaving, metalwork, ceramics, and bookbinding all built upon these initial classes. By looking at some of the art I produced, I will demonstrate how similar my art education was to that of the Bauhaus. I believe that by first

understanding the life and times of this German Art College, I will gain a greater appreciation for the education I received at East Tennessee State University.



Gelatin Silver Print by Edmund Colleyn - Image of Bauhaus Students (Figure 1)

Chapter I: Brief History of Bauhaus

The Bauhaus was a school established by Walter Gropius (1883-1969) in 1919, in Weimar, Germany. Two existing schools, Weimar Academy of Fine Art and the School of Arts and Crafts, were fused together to create the new Bauhaus. The name Bauhaus refers to a place, a “house for building, growing, nurturing” (130 Dempsey). The German word Bau means to build or building. The name also comes from the Medieval term “ ‘Bauhütten’, [which] were the guilds of masons, builders and decorators, out of which the free masons sprang”(Whitford 29). Thus in the name the intent for this new art school was presented. The idea behind this institution, according to Gropius, was to equip artists to understand not only the creation of art and craft in a creative sense, but also to give them an understanding of the theory of art. The Bauhaus functioned as an art school, where students researched form and function in art. It was an environment which encouraged experimentation with materials and techniques. Students learned how to combine the designs of art with the skills of craft. They were taught to be socially responsible artists who were present in the community, not secluded from it.

As director, Gropius selected well-known artists to teach who each brought a fresh perspective to the classroom. People like Johannes Itten (1888-1967), Paul Klee (1879-1940), Gerhard Marcks (1889-1981), Georg Muche (1895-1987), Oskar Schlemmer (1888-1943), Lothar Schreyer (1886-1966), Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Josef Albers (1888-1976), László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) and Gunta Stölzl (1897-1983) revolutionized the way art was taught. Central to the curriculum was the famous Preliminary Course developed by Itten. This class was a study of “materials, tools, and colour theory, analysis of pictorial structure of Old Masters, mediation and breathing exercises” (Dempsey 131), as well as a challenge toward the “pre-conceived classical notions of art training” (Dempsey 131). Other famous courses, taught

and developed by Kandinsky and Klee, were based on theories of color and form. Regardless of the classes, an emphasis was placed on exploration of materials and driving creativity to its edge, while simultaneously encouraging students to pay attention to good craftsmanship and function. All students were required to take the preliminary course before they progressed to various art classes. Referred to as workshops, each class was co-taught by one artist and one craftsman. Classes included “cabinetmaking, wood and stone carving, mural painting, glass painting, bookbinding, metalworking, ceramics, weaving, printing and theatre” (Dempsey 132). It is interesting to note that although today the Bauhaus is famous for its innovative architectural style and design ideas, architecture as a course was not added until 1927, after the Bauhaus moved to Dessau. Later photography was also added.

In the early 1920s, heavy criticism from outside the Bauhaus started creating tension. Major issues like the increasing industrialization, the German defeat in World War One, drastic inflation, and the rise of the National Socialist Party could no longer be ignored. One complaint was that the Bauhaus was essentially divorced from the rest of society; it had excluded itself from the outside world and was inwardly focused: “art had been fused with craft, but not with industry” (Dempsey 132). One problem was that many faculty members were more interested in the creation of art as a personal and spiritual activity than with making art and craft accepted in the society. In addition, the opinions between faculty, German Society and Post WWI German culture about how the school was being operated showed the growing unrest. All this tension meant that rejecting the world outside of the Bauhaus would result in consequences. The Bauhaus would either have to change, or face possible closure. Some individuals were unwilling to change their ideology, though. As result of this pressure, radical thinker Johannes Itten left the Bauhaus. With his resignation in 1923, he was replaced with a less radical László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946). Moholy-Nagy, along with Josef Albers, changed the focus of the

Preliminary Course to a “practical approach” exploring “new techniques and new media” (Whitford 128). Itten’s old spiritual aspect of creating art was done away with, replaced with a more rational approach. Moholy-Nagy also placed emphasis on production of art objects as “practical design of prototypes for industry” (Dempsey 132) and mass production, in place of singular craft pieces. As the director, Gropius, too, understood that only through cooperation with the changes made in industry could the Bauhaus survive. In fact, Gropius made this new unity of “Art and Technology” an integral part of the Bauhaus policies (Dempsey 132). Thus, the “school’s emphasis changed from integrating arts and crafts to humanizing industrial design... logical [simple] forms that should lend themselves to mass production” (Smock 60). As the industrial realm was advancing in Germany, the Bauhaus jumped on board. Not eagerly at first, though. Some professors were still wary of incorporating technological advances into art. Later it became evident, however, that without this cooperation between the Bauhaus and the outside world, the Bauhaus would not last much longer (Droste).

Unfortunately, in 1925 the city of Weimar allied itself with the ideals of the political right. Since the Bauhaus was very strongly associated with the socialist party, the school’s funds were removed by the government and forced the Bauhaus to close (Droste). Subsequently the school moved north to Dessau. Dessau was a manufacturing town and offered the Bauhaus considerable funds to move to their town. Here, the Bauhaus was happily received and constructed buildings specifically geared toward the needs of the students and staff. After the relocation, Gropius hired six new teachers who were former students: “Marcel Breuer (1902-1981); Herbert Bayer (1900-85); Gunta Stölzl (1897-1983); Hinnerk Schlegel (1897-1957); Joost Schmidt (1893-1948) and Albers” (Dempsey 133). In the classrooms of these new professors, the style of the Bauhaus changed. The designs known today to be of the Bauhaus emerged,

“characterized by simplicity, refinement of line and shape, geometric abstraction, primary colours and the use of new materials and technologies” (Dempsey 133).

In 1928, Walter Gropius resigned. He appointed Swiss architecture teacher Hannes Meyer (1889-1954) to be the school’s new director. Under his leadership, the Bauhaus became a commercial success. Many of the metal, furniture, weaving and advertising workshops received commissions and brought revenue back to the Bauhaus (Whitford 189). Guest speakers were invited to lecture on a broad range of topics, and other new courses were added (Fiedler). However, due to Meyer’s rigidly left-wing ideologies, several professors, including Moholy-Nagy, Breuer and Bayer, resigned in 1928 (Whitford 185). They felt that the school had replaced its sense of community with personal gain. Meyer’s political Marxist views were perhaps so extreme, that he encountered conflict from the local Dessau Government, and in 1930 was forced to resign (Droste).

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) became the new and final director until the end of the Bauhaus in 1933 (Blaser). During this time, the Dessau Government had also allied itself with the National Socialist Party and in 1932 the funding for the school was shut off. The authorities accused the Bauhaus of participating in “what it called ‘decadent’ and ‘Bolshevistic’ art” (Whitford 9) and “was accused of being too cosmopolitan and not sufficiently ‘German’” (Dempsey 133). Of course, several members of the teaching staff were from Russian and other Eastern European countries. The open-minded ideas of the school no longer matched the countries current political agenda. No longer welcome in Dessau, the Bauhaus moved to Berlin as a private institution in a final and unsuccessful attempt to save it. However, the German Government permanently closed it in April of 1933 after Hitler took power as Chancellor. “The Nazis...condemned the Bauhaus’s failure to mirror Germany’s ‘national character’” (Smock 18). Thus “the Nazis unwittingly ensured the fame of the school” (Dempsey 133). As a result of the

Bauhaus' closure, many of the staff fled to America. Gropius and Breuer left Germany, ending up as professors at Harvard University. In Chicago, Moholy-Nagy became head of a New Bauhaus school while "Mies van der Rohe became Dean of Architecture at the Armour Institute" (Dempsey 133). Joseph Albers and his wife Anni (1899 –1994) moved to North Carolina to teach at the New Black Mountain College. Then in 1950 he became the Director of the Department of Design at Yale University. It was, then, precisely because the Bauhaus scattered in 1933 that its famous ideas and methods spread all over the world.



Photo by Brandt, Marianne and Hans Przyrembei of Bauhaus Weaving Students

(Figure 2)

Chapter II: Important History Preceding Bauhaus

Before schools like the Bauhaus, artists studied under a master or learned a trade (craft) to make a living. Successful and talented young individuals were permitted into art academies where they were classically trained through replication of permissible subject matter, not individuality and expression. Painting and sculpture were the primary media with which artists could depict “ancient classical art, the European tradition, and historical subjects” (Rosenfeld). Experimentation across disciplines, like ceramics, printmaking, theatre, photography or textiles to create art was not conceived before the Bauhaus. This would in fact have been frowned upon. Classical teaching styles and adherence to strict formats allowed no room for “free thought” in art. These art schools were approved and supported by their local governments and “from the late eighteenth century... such institutions had a virtual monopoly on public taste and official patronage” (Rosenfeld). Craftspeople, on the other hand, were not considered true artists. Their goods were sold as useful everyday items, but despite the skills of these artisans, they were not acknowledged as professional artists. Crafts like furniture-making and weaving, which had before been viewed as a trade, would soon enjoy the title of “art”. Everyday products were now being designed to serve a function, and also to be beautiful. Thus the Bauhaus was critical in leveling the field between these two groups and raising the status of fields not previously considered high art.

It is also important to understand that the ideas for which the Bauhaus is famous today, were already developing in the previous century. Long before the Bauhaus, other artists, architects and groups were forming and exchanging ideas on which Walter Gropius would lay the foundations of the Bauhaus. Two important movements to precede the Bauhaus were the Arts and Crafts Movement and *Jugendstil* (Dempsey). The Arts and Crafts movement would

bring the idea of fusing Craft with Art to create a new generation of artists who produced works that were both functional and well crafted. The *Jugendstil*, born from the Arts and Crafts movement, provided a style that eventually would merge into that of the Bauhaus style.

With the expansion of industrialization in Britain in the second half of the 19th century, ideas about arts and crafts began to evolve (Lucie-Smith). Prior to the industrialization, artisans and craftsmen were the common suppliers of goods to the people. However, because of the Industrialization, machines and factories began mass-producing goods more cost-efficiently than human hands. After these new advances in technology and machinery, demand for hand-crafted objects diminished. In response to this, there was a push-back against the rapidly growing mass production in which artists and craftsmen sought to “break down the hierarchy of arts, revive and restore dignity of traditional handicrafts, and make art that could be affordable for all” (Dempsey 19). The Industrial Revolution, in the British minds, threatened the quality of products enjoyed by the masses. As Industrialization spread onto the European continent, the Arts and Crafts principles took root in Germany. However, unlike in England, the German artisans were not threatened by the rapid rise of machine production: instead they embraced it. Artists, architects, and craftspeople in Germany “allied [themselves] to machine production and used it as an expression of National Identity” (Dempsey 22). They were successful in adopting the designs and production styles of the machine industry into a form that then became the identity of 20th century German artwork.

The Art Nouveau scene was another major facet of these ideas. The international Art Nouveau (new art) lasted “from the late 1800s until World War I” (Dempsey 35). This style emphasized the line, bold and simplistic. One aim of Art Nouveau was to unite the fine and applied arts. This style was so widespread that different countries developed their own names for it. In Germany it was called *Jugendstil* and lasted from about 1895 until around 1910. This

German version of Art Nouveau sprang out of the Arts and Crafts ideas and manifested itself into two different styles. The two were a “floral representational style derived from English Arts and Crafts designs, and a more abstract one which developed after 1900, under the influence of Belgian architect Henry Van de Velde (1863-1957)” (Dempsey 57). “Van de Velde was [a] major figure in European Art Nouveau,... [who] preached the social benefits of a closer relationship between art and industry and passionately believed in the principle of a total work of art” (Dempsey 35). He was a figurehead of both the Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts Movement, and interestingly directed the Arts and Crafts School in Weimar right before it became the Bauhaus. The *Jugendstil* designs permeated not only the graphic arts, but also the applied arts as well as architecture. “*Jugendstil* coincided with a growing interest in industrial design and applied arts and a desire to improve German products in order to compete in the international market. The example of the British Arts and Crafts movement was particularly important for its high standard of design and its concept of ‘fitness for purpose’ and ‘honest construction’ ” (Dempsey 57). With its roots in the Arts and Crafts movement, *Jugendstil* desired to “erase the distinction between the fine and decorative arts” (Dempsey 35). Creating pieces that were not only beautiful but also functional, these artists tried out their contemporary and experimental designs in the forms of metalwork, floor mosaics and architecture: “The most important legacy of the *Jugendstil* in Germany was the atmosphere of experimentation it fostered and the desire for a synthesis of fine and applied arts, which...led to the formation of the Bauhaus” (Dempsey 58).

As a result of the ongoing changes in culture, politics and industry around the turn of the century, numerous social reform groups emerged in Germany. The climate was one that welcomed change. Groups like the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, *Deutscher Werkbund*, and the *Novembergruppe* advocated change in the way the art world operated, as well as its function

within larger society. These groups were important to the formation of the Bauhaus for their radical ideals and execution of these principles. Also, many of the members of these groups became teachers and students at the Bauhaus.

The first group to come about was the *Deutscher Werkbund* (German Work Federation). Formed in 1907 by architect Muthesius (1861-1927), Naumann (1860-1919), and Schmidt (1873-1954), “its goal was ‘the improvement of professional work through the cooperation of art, industry and the crafts, through education, propaganda, and united attitudes to pertinent questions’ ” (Dempsey 80). The group embodied the idea of a close relationship between industry and art. “Its aim was the reconciliation of art, craft, industry and trade, and a subsequent improvement in the quality of German products” (Whitford 20). A member since 1912, Gropius embraced these ideals. He incorporated many of these themes into the formation of the Bauhaus. Many of the Bauhaus themes can thus be traced back to the *Deutscher Werkbund*, which sought to create “high-quality machine –made products” (Dempsey 81). In the Bauhaus Manifesto, Gropius spelled out these integrations between the disciplines of fine arts, applied arts and industry very clearly.

Another important movement was the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*. This Workers’ Council for Art was founded in 1918 by architect Bruno Taut (1880-1938). The Manifesto states that “Art and the people must form an entity. Art shall no longer be a luxury of the few, but should be enjoyed and experienced by the broad masses” (Dempsey 128). Unlike the *Deutscher Werkbund*, the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* was more politically oriented, and its aim was to exert “political pressure on the new government of Germany” (Dempsey 126). This group was important to the Bauhaus in that its goal was to free art from the strict ideas concerning the validity and structure of art in the past.

Lastly came the *Novembergruppe* (November Group), named after the November revolution of 1918 in Germany. This was a diverse group of artists whose aim was the reorganization of and unity within the arts. Their styles embraced modernist designs, through which they hoped “art and architecture could create a better world” (Dempsey 129). The *Novembergruppe* organized exhibitions, lectures, and concerts to publicize their values. Notable names of these artists included Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Bruno Taut, Lyonel Feininger, Otto Müller, László Moholy-Nagy, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Hans Richter. Many of these held Bauhaus affiliations. In addition to the numerous Bauhaus faculty involved in these public and social groups, the Bauhaus students were always encouraged to join such political and social activist groups and gain recognition outside the art world. Gropius hoped that all those associated with the Bauhaus would be seen as useful members of society seeking changes for the advancement of their society.

The Bauhaus owes great recognition to one Belgian architect and his vision. In 1902 at the request of the Weimar government, Henry Van de Velde (1863-1957) moved to Germany to head the Grand-Ducal School of Arts and Crafts in Weimar. Though at the time this school was just a small private workshop for local artisans to get feedback on their designs, it would eventually merge into the renowned Bauhaus. (Whitford 23-25) Van de Velde used his time there to develop his ideas. These ideas laid the foundation for the Bauhaus in that Van de Velde sought to combine Arts and Craft with industrialization. He saw “the dream of ‘cooperation between the artist, craftsman, and industrialist...twenty years before [the foundation] of the Bauhaus’ ” (Whitford 25). After their defeat in the first World War, the German people were ready to see change in social, political, and economic areas. Germany after the war was facing huge debts and inflation, disease, unemployment, and restrictions on imports and foreign policy. There was general pessimism about the future. When Van de Velde resigned in 1915, he

suggested architect Walter Gropius for the position of director of the Arts and Crafts School. After hearing Gropius' vision for reforming the school (to better society by teaching artists and craftsmen to create quality works and to embrace industry), the Weimar government approved the merger of the city's two art schools. This produced the Bauhaus, which was officially titled "Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar" (Droste). "Important to Gropius' conception of the Bauhaus was the idea that the fine arts and the crafts were not fundamentally different activities but two varieties of the same thing" (Whitford 47). The aims of this new school were clearly stated in the 1919 Manifesto.

Gropius's Manifesto:

The ultimate goal of all art is the building! The ornamentation of the building was once the main purpose of the visual arts, and they were considered indispensable parts of the great building. Today, they exist in complacent isolation, from which they can only be salvaged by the purposeful and cooperative endeavors of all artisans. Architects, painters and sculptors must learn a new way of seeing and understanding the composite character of the building, both as a totality and in terms of its parts. Their work will then reimburse itself with the spirit of architecture, which it lost in salon art.

The art schools of old were incapable of producing this unity – and how could they, for art may not be taught. They must return to the workshop. This world of mere drawing and painting of draughtsman and applied artists must at long last become a world that builds. When a young person who senses within himself a love for creative endeavor begins his career, as in the past, by learning a trade, the unproductive "artist" will no longer be condemned to the imperfect practice of art because his skill is now preserved in craftsmanship, where he may achieve excellence.

Architects, sculptors, painters – we all must return to craftsmanship! For there is no such thing as “art by profession”. There is no essential difference between the artist and the artisan. The artist is an exalted artisan. Merciful heaven, in rare moments of illumination beyond man’s will, may allow art to blossom from the work of his hand, but the foundations of proficiency are indispensable to every artist. This is the original source of creative design.

So let us therefore create a new guild of craftsmen, free of the divisive class pretensions that endeavored to raise a prideful barrier between craftsmen and artists! Let us strive for, conceive and create the new building of the future that will unite every discipline, architecture and sculpture and painting, and which will one day rise heavenwards from the million hands of craftsmen as a clear symbol of a new belief to come." (Gropius)

Through his manifesto, Gropius highlighted the ideas of all the groups and movements out of which the Bauhaus grew. The belief that craft and art are not separate but two avenues of the same creative process are clearly stated. Also, that the unity of an idea, most complete in the building of an object was for Gropius, all important. Again, the Deutscher Werkbund’s desire for “reconciliation of art, craft, industry and trade, and a subsequent improvement in the quality of German products” (Whitford 20) was written into the Manifesto. So, too were the Novembergruppe’s ideas about unity in the arts and the Arbeitsrat für Kunst’s political ideologies that art should be freed from the restricting tastes of the wealthy.

Chapter III: Education and Vorkurs

After the opening of the Bauhaus in 1919, Walter Gropius needed to find himself a teaching staff. Many of the people that Gropius invited to join the faculty he was already acquainted with. The first three prominent men that Gropius hired to be Masters of Art were Gerhard Marcks (1889-1981) in Pottery, Lyonel Feiniger (1871-1956), and perhaps most importantly Swiss painter Johannes Itten (1888-1967) (Brewster), who headed the Preliminary Course: “Paul Klee and Oskar Schlemmer accepted calls in 1921, Kandinsky in 1922, and Moholy-Nagy in 1923” (Neumann 174). Itten himself was a strange man who strictly followed a religion called Mazdaznan, which heavily influenced his teaching style. At Itten’s proposal, Gropius agreed that it was mandatory for all art students to attend six months of the preliminary course (called the Vorkurs), prior to moving on to other subjects. Before long the Vorkurs became a central part of the Bauhaus curriculum. Also, Itten’s teaching method was considered the “backbone of Bauhaus Education” (Droste 25). His instructions were adopted by other Bauhaus staff and those who inherited his preliminary course after he left in 1923, such as Klee and Kandinsky.

Johannes Itten developed the Vorkurs in order to break down “students pre-conceived classical notions of art training” (Dempsey 131) and rebuild independent, free-thinking and adventurous art students. His methods directly opposed the teaching styles of the Art Academies. As Johannes Itten wrote “The aim of my instruction in the Vorkurs (basic design course) was education to form the creative individual” (Neumann 174). In his Vorkurs, Itten focused on three main areas: “studies of natural objects and materials, analysis of Old Masters and life drawing” (Droste 25). This foundation course was also taught as an introduction to the art and design principles and to various forms of media and techniques, as well as craftsmanship.

“Itten...taught his students the fundamentals of colour and form theory, composition and design” (Droste 30). He was an extraordinarily gifted teacher who “sought... not only to increase the overall power of individual expression, but even to emphasize the feeling of an individual word (by writing “anger” in a heavier, less rounded hand than the word “sweetness”)” (Itten 12). In his class, every mark, every letter was a tool one could use to develop a creative design. Every work of art, even the small studies, were significant in forming the creative mind.

Before any instruction could begin, however, Itten felt it was crucial for students to be physically ready to start the creative process. He asked, “How can a hand express a characteristic emotion through a line when hand and arm are cramped? The fingers, the hand, the arm, the whole body can be awakened through relaxing, strengthening, and sensitizing exercises” (Itten 11). Therefore, he thought it necessary to administer breathing and stretching exercises. Students followed him in meditation rituals in order to develop open-mindedness and a relaxed creative atmosphere. These physical activities helped students focus the mind and ready the body for the work that needed to be done.

For the material studies, he had his students bring in various found objects and instructed them in making “assemblages” of sorts. Itten helped students develop an understanding of contrasts by having them “[arrange] in unison contrasting marks, tones, colours and materials” (Whitford 55). One student, Mirkin’s example (Figure 3), shows the juxtaposition between rough and smooth, straight lines and wavy ones. By placing the metal pieces on the wood, each material is emphasized through contrast. The metal is smooth yet sharp at the edges; the wood is rougher visually and physically. One is man-made and malleable; the other is found in nature and is rigid. In color, too, they are different. The metal is cool gray, and the wood is a warm yellow-orange. These subjective studies were to create a feel for the materials and supplies. Another purpose was to prepare students for the workshop classes by exposing them to as many

materials as possible. Artistically Itten emphasized exploring “various textures, forms, colors, and tones in both two and three dimensions” (Whitford 55). The students created art with “rhythmic lines which were meant to capture the spirit, the expressive content of the original” (Whitford 55). There were no right or wrong ways to make these studies. The point was to understand the basic structures of the materials. Through a total interaction, by having his students touch, observe, sketch, and combine certain objects, they would later be able to become more successful artists in the workshop classes.



Figure 3 Mirkin, M., Study in Contrasting Materials, 1920

In the Old Masters section, students were shown a projection of a famous painting. They then were told to reconstruct what they saw using lines, shapes, movement and color. This was to connect the art student to important works of the past and “to experience works of art in their profoundness” (Droste 30). They were not asked to copy the works, as other art schools taught, but to represent them more subjectively as each student’s interpretation. Through this exercise his students developed an eye for the formal qualities applied to these famous works. Each work of art was essentially deconstructed, then recreated through lines, shapes, and colors. By breaking down the forms and area within a piece, students learned to recognize the formal qualities that made each painting such a success. A good example of such an exercise was Itten’s interpretation of Meister Francke’s *Adoration of the Magi* (Fiedler 249) (Figure 4). In this study, the rational analysis of the painting emphasizes the centrality of the figures of Mary and the Christ Child with the use of circle- the halo. Jesus is at the very center, where one of the kings bows to bestow his gift. The woman in the bottom left corner, though unimportant, draws the viewer’s eyes to the child through her gaze. The use of lines to break up the picture plane shows how the eye reads the painting. The immediate focus begins on the Virgin Mother’s face, moves down to Baby Jesus and the bowing lord, then up to the two standing men, and finally back to Mary. The triangle, too, situates the important persons within the form, with all the others directing the focus to the holy family. In this study, Itten demonstrates how the fragmentation of such a work into geometric shapes and forms allows the student to understand the great achievement of this painting. Though Itten did not want his students to copy works of art, he certainly wanted to install an appreciation for famous historical pieces. “Analyses of the works of the old masters also provide the opportunity for studies of feeling. When heart and hand are one during the designing of a form, this form becomes the bearer of intellectual-spiritual content. When we can relive this content from the form, we discover the effect of a

work of art” (Itten 148). He wanted students to interact with a piece through subjectively reconstruction, yet also simply by understanding and sympathizing with it.

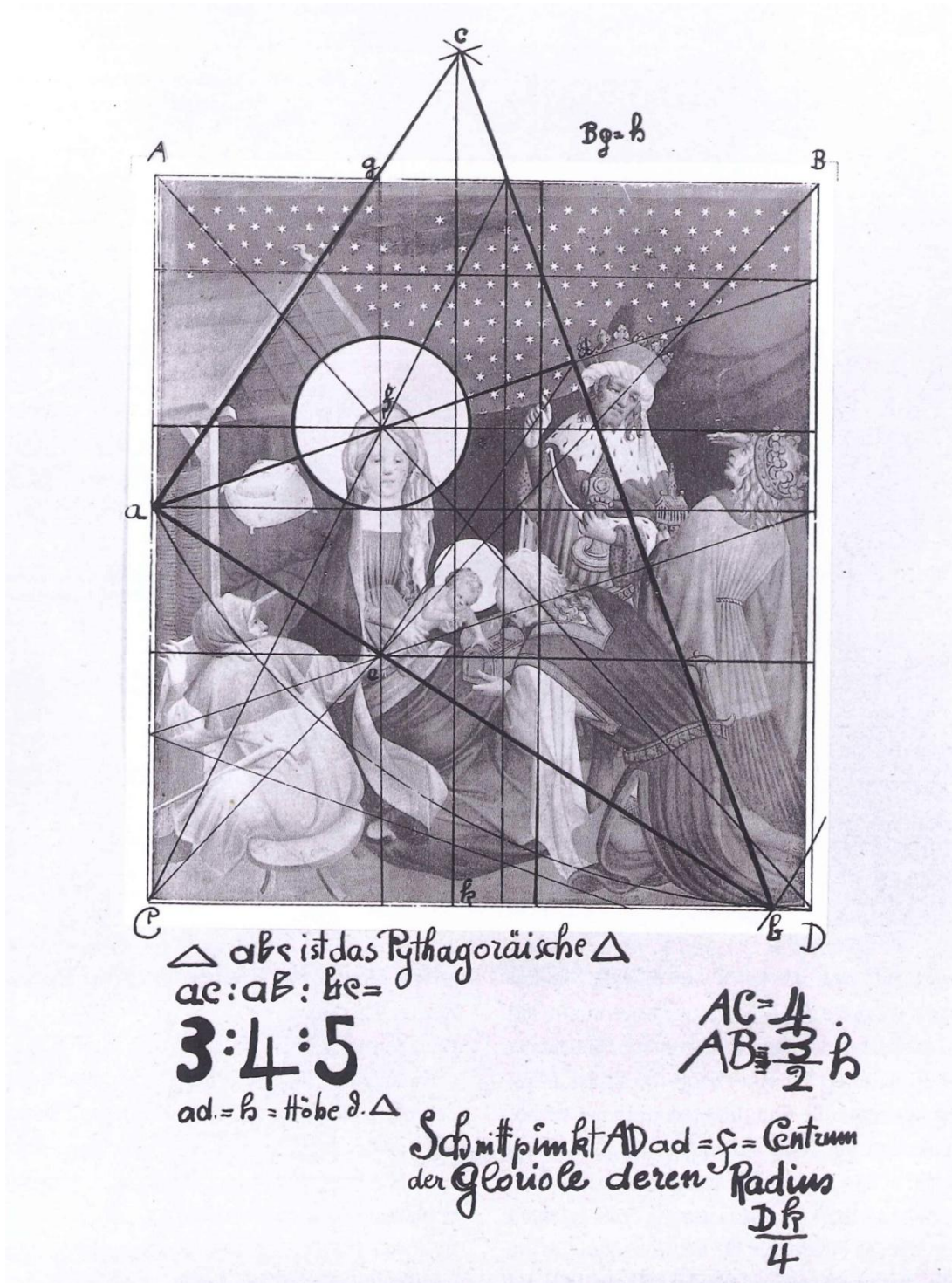


Figure 4 Itten’s Old Master Study - Meister Francke. Adoration of the Magi

The third aspect of the Preliminary Course was the life drawing. Students drew not only objects from nature, like flowers, leaves, rocks and such, but also the traditional human figure. However, like the other two components of the Vorkurs, these were not necessarily required to be true to life. As usual, Itten stressed the fundamental, form, color, and texture (Brewster): “for me the sensual capturing of the characteristic properties of things is of the utmost importance.” (Bauhaus Archiv Wall) in the two drawings shown here (Figure 5 and Figure 6), each student represented his or her expression of a certain object. In Hirschlaff’s fern study (Figure 3), he captures the flowing softness of the plant. By utilizing a smooth curving brush the texture of the fern is achieved. The brush dipped in dark ink applied in one stroke shows the gradations of light and dark in this composition. In the leaves and branches study (Figure 4), the student was not capturing each detail of the plant. Instead, the wispy quality that constitutes a leaf is represented. The forms and shapes of each section of a leaf are placed on the paper with a flat brush. The line quality also signifies a sense of motion and rhythm. Itten stressed that the essence of an object should be captured. To project onto a piece of flat paper one’s personal experience of a leaf was what counted. Exact representation was uncreative and not as interesting as one’s own relationship to a subject. He believed all these activities were to prepare the student to think creatively for himself.

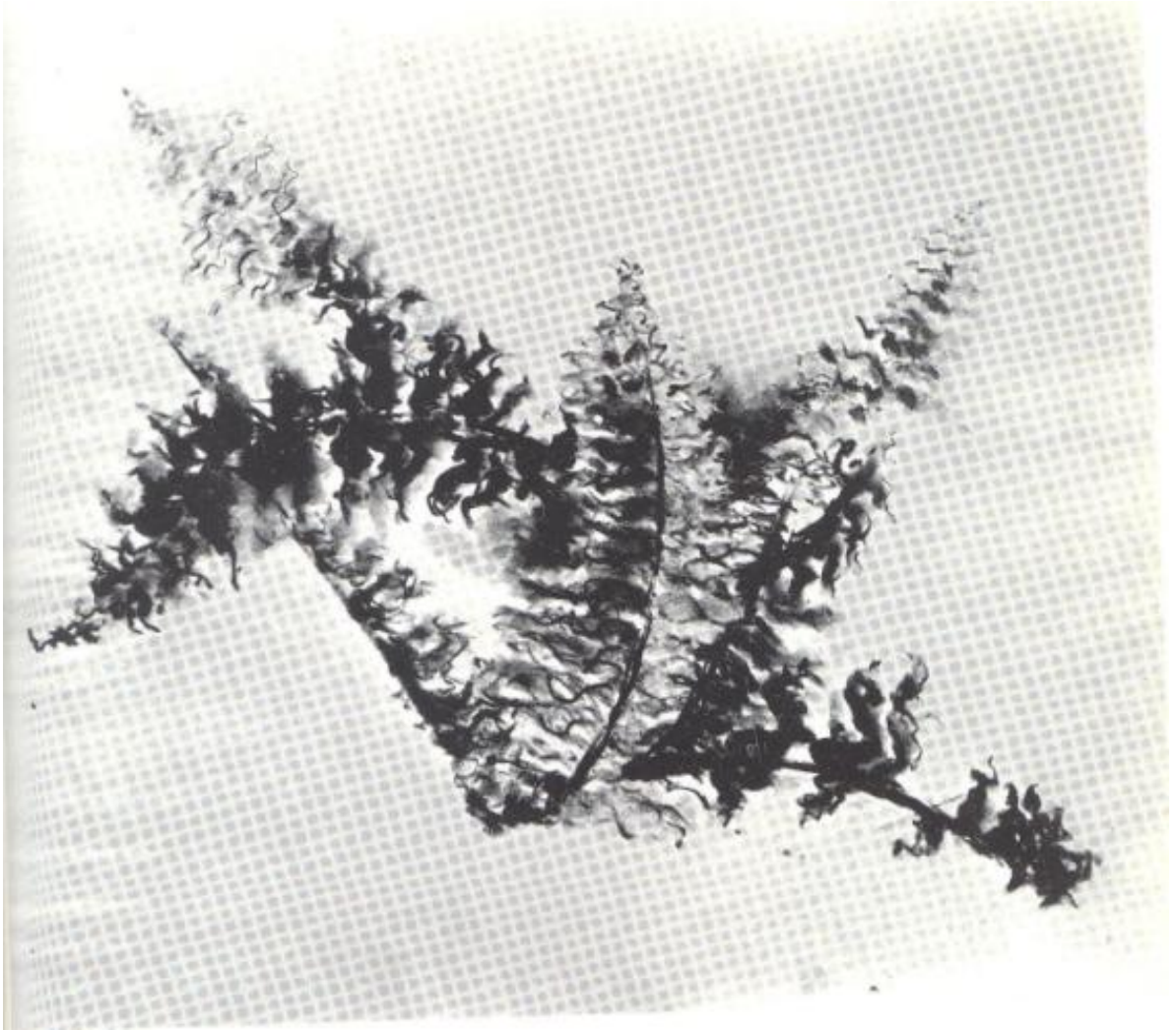


Figure 5 Hirschlaff. (1930) Fern study



Figure 6 Brush Drawing of Branch (1958) Textile Trade School, Zurich

Johannes Itten is accredited for designing and first teaching the Preliminary course (Smock). It is important to remember, however, that several other people taught this class over the fourteen years the Bauhaus was in operation. Each teacher made his own important contributions and changes to this class, adapting it as he saw fit. Itten, Klee, Kandinsky, Albers and Moholy-Nagy all taught the Vorkurs at some point. A wall sign at the Berlin Bauhaus Archiv reads:

Bauhaus Pedagogy: Bauhaus did not only develop its own type of design, it was also characterized by a new form of design instruction. Without visiting the so called Vorkurs (preparatory course) you could not start studying at the Bauhaus. It was a sequence of exercises, designed to familiarize the student with materials, their mechanical properties, contrasts, and surfaces. Inaugurated by Johannes Itten, further developed by Joseph Albers, it became the model for many courses worldwide. In the afternoon, students had to visit classes by Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, who familiarized them with colour theory and principles of composition. László Moholy-Nagy was specially interested in the problems of equilibrium. The students not only drew in these classes but also produced many and diverse three dimensional studies in various materials.

This Preliminary course was indeed important. Students learned lessons in materials and composition. They were taught to really look at and interact with a subject. This class was so complex, that each student's experience and growth must be unique. In addition, each professor contributed a different focus to the class, which no doubt made it one of the most important for developing well-rounded students. As mentioned, the other men who taught the Vorkurs were Joseph Albers, László Moholy-Nagy, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee.

Before coming to the Bauhaus, both Kandinsky and Klee were members of the Blaue Reiter Expressionist group. In 1922 Kandinsky came to the school to teach classes in the painting workshop as well as a course on color. With his co-teacher Klee, Kandinsky employed a systematic approach to color. He offered a course called 'primary artistic design' in which the students explored the edges of a picture, the functions of the center, the lines objects and colors within it (Bauhaus Archiv audio guide). Kandinsky famously coupled the primary colors with basic shapes: yellow with a triangle, red with a square, and blue with a circle. Kandinsky favored basic shapes in his own artwork. The idea of a total work of art, or "Gesamtkunstwerk" in German, was communicated by Kandinsky. Ursula Schuh, a former student of Kandinsky recalled: "To "arrange" a picture was despised. If a picture was arranged it meant: A square was capably filled by more or less agreeable shapes, but lacking genuine experience. It was not composed, i.e., inner experience and formal knowledge did not form a unity" (Neumann 162). Kandinsky's students considered the whole composition, even when painting studies. In his classes he taught about color interaction and form interaction.

Joseph Albers, who had been a student in Itten's Preliminary course, taught the Vorkurs in 1923. Albers gave lessons the first semester, while Moholy-Nagy taught the second semester. Albers took his students to visit factories and craftsmen in order to gain understanding of industrial techniques. Although each teacher had a unique style, both encouraged students to develop a "feeling for materials" (Droste). Albers once stated: "Im Anfang steht allein das Material." Or "In the beginning there is the material only "(Berlin Bauhuas Museum). Albers was always engaging his students in really looking at materials. He stressed that lack of certain tools or supplies should not prevent the creative process. In his classes, it was often a simple sheet of paper cut or folded in a way that made the most dramatic statement. Here (Figure 7) his

student made a few cuts in the paper and folded sections up or down. His created a visually appealing composition, with good use of shadows and negative space.

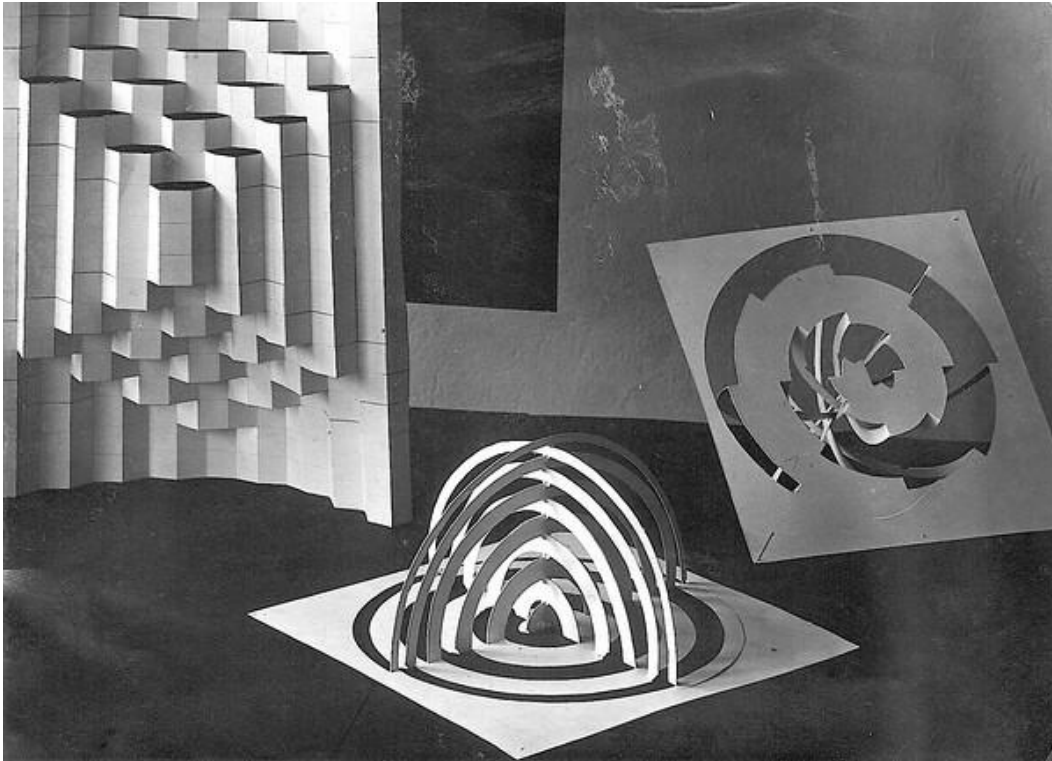


Figure 7 Arieh Sharon, paper constructions in Joseph Albers's *Vorkurs*

Chapter IV : My Education Experience

Many of these ideas like color interaction and “Gesamtkunstwerk” were part of my own art education experience. The teaching styles I encountered at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) were modeled after the Bauhaus. Even if this goes unnoticed, it is not difficult to grasp that the Bauhaus has influenced our system of education. Looking back at some of the courses and lectures I attended, I can make the claim that I essentially had a Bauhaus learning experience.

First, like all Bauhaus students, I too had to complete certain Vorkurse before moving on to specialized art classes. These included 2D Design, Drawing Fundamentals, 3D Design, and Color Theory. Together, these took a little over half a year to complete. The lessons I learned in my first year I built upon and developed in later classes. The next three years were spent in upper-level classes, exploring other materials and techniques. Some of these courses, like Ceramics, Weaving, Book Arts, Metalsmithing and Printmaking gave me a feel for material and an eye for design. I feel I grew into a well-rounded artist, capable in many areas with a greater appreciation for skilled artists and craftsmen. Thanks to the Bauhaus, I consider craft as high a form as fine art, and yet I still revere the Old Masters. Creativity, too, is as valuable as the skill needed to produce any work of art.

In my preliminary classes we learned the visual language of art. These building blocks of design were the elements of art, – point, line, shape, space, form, color value, texture – and the principles of design, – rhythm, harmony, unity, emphasis, variety, balance, contrast, symmetry, movement and pattern. Learning these terms, not only could I become a better designer, but I could more clearly speak about my own art. In all my classes, we did what was called “critique.” These were our tests, but not in the objective sense of the word test. We brought our works in

and discussed them with the professor and with the other students. We got feedback about what worked in a composition and what did not work. We learned from one another as well as from the teacher. Of course we received a grade, but we learned through the whole process.

Constructive criticism filed away the unrefined areas to reveal pure, clean and more advanced art work. Just like at the Bauhaus, by discussing the work in artistic language, we could gain a better eye for design.

I also learned the idea of a total work of art, or “Gesamtkunstwerk” as taught at the Bauhaus. We were trained to develop an eye for good design. We were asked questions to challenge our thinking such as “why did you choose a certain mark or color over another?” and “what could you take away or add to enhance the piece?” The unity of a piece was of the utmost importance in my classes. All the elements within a work had to be unified otherwise it could compromise the concept.

Below are two of my first artworks completed in my 2D Design class. For this project we cut out gradations of construction paper ranging from black to grays to white. These two drawings depicted the interaction of line, geometric shapes, and value. These two pieces are meant to be seen next to each other creating a visual unit. In the left hand image (Figure 8), the emphasis is placed on the small black square in the bottom right, surrounded by the various circles. By designing the square to be small in scale compared to the other elements, it is not overwhelmed within the composition. Similarly, in the image on the right (Figure 9), the intensity of the stark white small circle is diffused by the gray lines and boxes. Without the use of the element of line, the white circle would create an almost overwhelming focal point. This closure within the pictorial space brings unity. Together the two images create a sense of balance. This study is in many ways similar to a composition from Itten’s course (See Figure 10) by student Stauch. This piece uses the some basic geometric shape of the circle but in

varying sizes to create a balanced composition. The lines add interest to the image. The gradations in black and white repeat and emphasize the circular shapes. This student's work, like my own, was an exploration in successfully arranging elements on a 2-dimensional surface. Though seemingly simple, these exercises were good introductions to the elements of art.



Figure 8

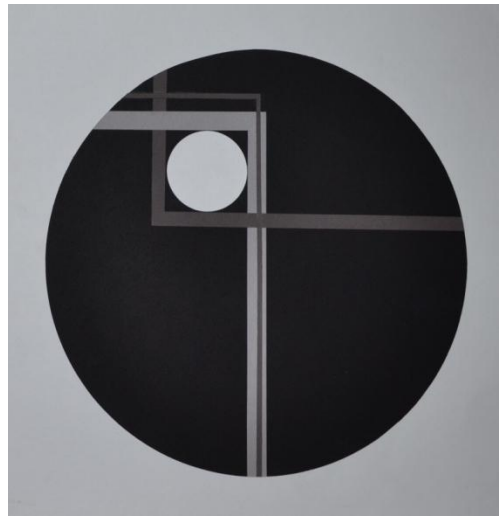


Figure 9

(2D Design- Line, Shape, Value, 2008)

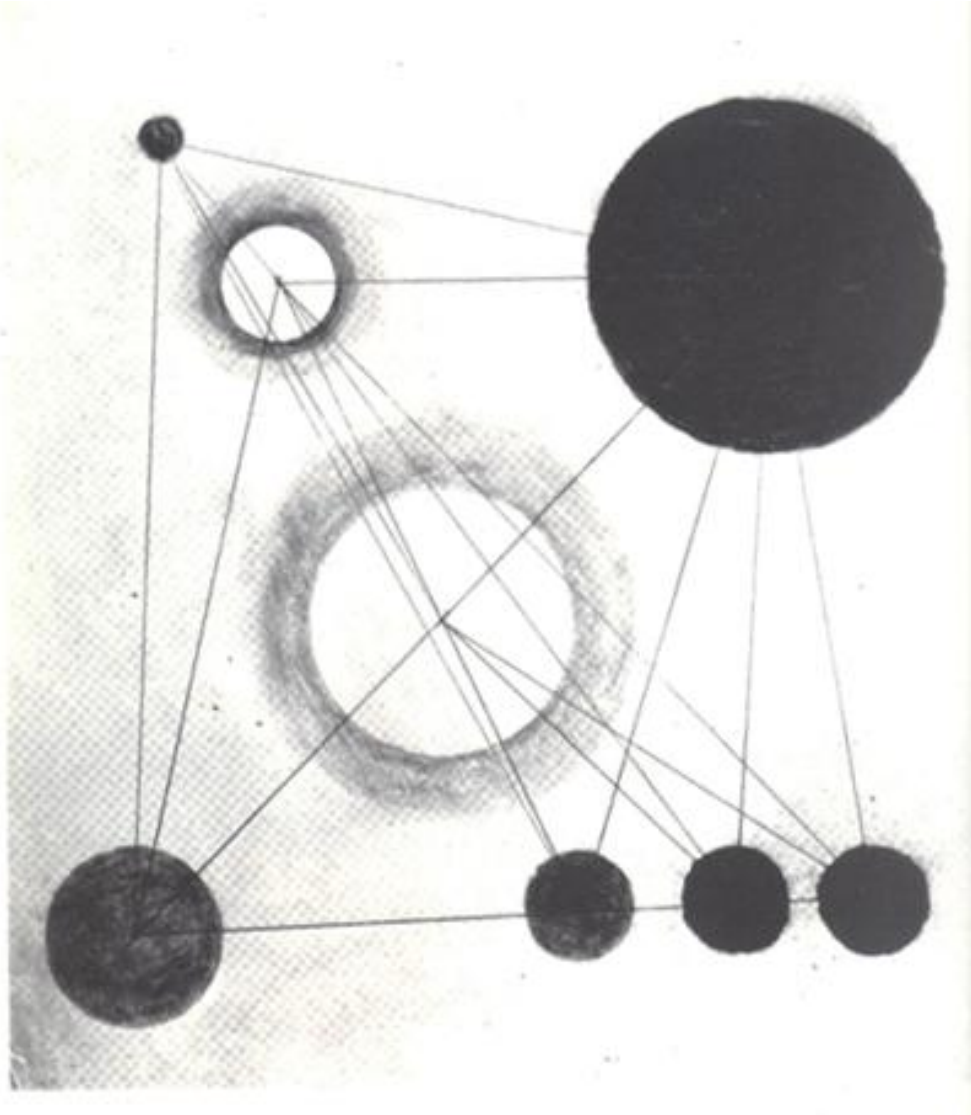


Figure 10 H. Stauch, Drawn Composition (1928) Berlin.

In Drawing Fundamentals, we did life drawings of models, still lifes, and buildings around campus. These were mostly true-to-life to improve our observation skills and draftsmanship. Accuracy for these types of drawings was stressed. Yet we also engaged in expressive exercises such as blind contour drawings, timed drawings, and ‘emotional abstract sketches’ similar to those directed by Johannes Itten (See Figure 11). The blind contour drawings were not expected to be precise. Through them I learned to “read” the outlines and shapes of

objects. I gained greater control of my hand-eye coordination and my sketching improved as a result of these exercises. The timed drawings also improved my drawing skills, by forcing me to focus on basic structure of objects to capture the gesture instead of focusing on unimportant details. Often there was only time to pick out the basic circle, rectangle, or triangular forms of these objects. The “emotional abstract sketches” were not necessarily to improve our drawing, but to get us thinking in a more creative way. If the professor said a word, like anger or love, we had to come up with creative, non-representational means of depicting these feelings. This was where our visual vocabulary of point, line, shape form, value and such came in to play. We rearranged these elements on a page in order to best describe these abstract feelings visually. For example, if anger was the word, most of the students used highly emphasized and almost violently harsh lines, perhaps diagonal or darkly crosshatched. Love on the other hand, was usually softer in value, using light brushstrokes and curvilinear marks or shapes. Once again, all these drawings taught me to look at the whole work of art and to consider the space within the page. The “Gesamtkunstwerk” was never out of mind.



Figure 11 Portrait Study (1928), Berlin from Itten's class

Another preliminary course at ETSU was 3D Design. In this class the study of materials was an important aspect to our learning. So was craftsmanship. Our first assignment in this class was to use two basic everyday materials – cardboard and masking tape- to construct a three-dimensional breakfast. I chose to create a cup of tea, a half-peeled banana, and a slice of toast. (Figures 12 and 13) Though these objects did not need to be true to scale, they did need to be well crafted. In my example, I retained the texture of the cardboard I found to create visual and physical texture in my cup. Using sand paper, I roughed up the white cardboard to create a ‘fluffy’ texture for the banana. The peel of the banana I covered with masking tape to make it slicker and smoother. This study really forced the students to think outside the box by having us use unconventional yet common materials. This I found was similar to the newspaper exercises Josef Albers gave to his students: “Albers’s choice of materials that were cheap, plentiful, and easy to handle permitted students to move immediately into creative work with no technical training and fewer financial worries. The use of non-traditional materials kept students from shopworn paths and clichéd forms, and impressed upon them the idea - - that you could be creative with whatever was at hand.... Students at various times worked with paper, corrugated cardboard, confetti, paper streamers, wire, wire screen, glass, plastic, sheet metal, tinfoil, razorblades, matchboxes, straw, dowels, and wood” (103 Horowitz). In order to construct the cup of tea, the banana and the piece of toast well, I closely observed these three items. For several days I ate a banana and a slice of toast with a cup of tea for breakfast to familiarize myself with the various stages in consuming this meal. Once I decided when these appear most interesting, I picked out the cardboard best suited to each item. For the banana peel, I used thin board from a cereal box. The cup was made from nicely corrugated cardboard, and the toast from a thicker industrial cardboard. Really paying attention to the textures of the foods and cup allowed me to match the best materials for each. Though not representational, the studies made

in Albers' class (See Figure 5) also utilized the materials available to the best of each student's ability. When paper was the only supply accessible, the problem to be solved was still how to make the most interesting composition by folding or cutting. Of course, if other materials were to be had, either in my class or in the Bauhaus, we were encouraged to experiment. In both the Bauhaus classes and in my classes, the use of a variety of materials was favorably looked upon. For another art project we created the skeletal outlines of objects using metal wire. For example, I created a bird that I broke down into geometric shapes. This taught us about the importance of the negative space within a piece, as well as the positive. We again learned about line quality, form, and the interaction of a 3-dimensional object within space. Emphasis was placed on formal structure through the elements, though the non-traditional materials kept a playful and creative atmosphere. As always, technical skill was exceptionally important.



Figure 12 and Figure 13 (3D Design – Cardboard Breakfast, 2009)

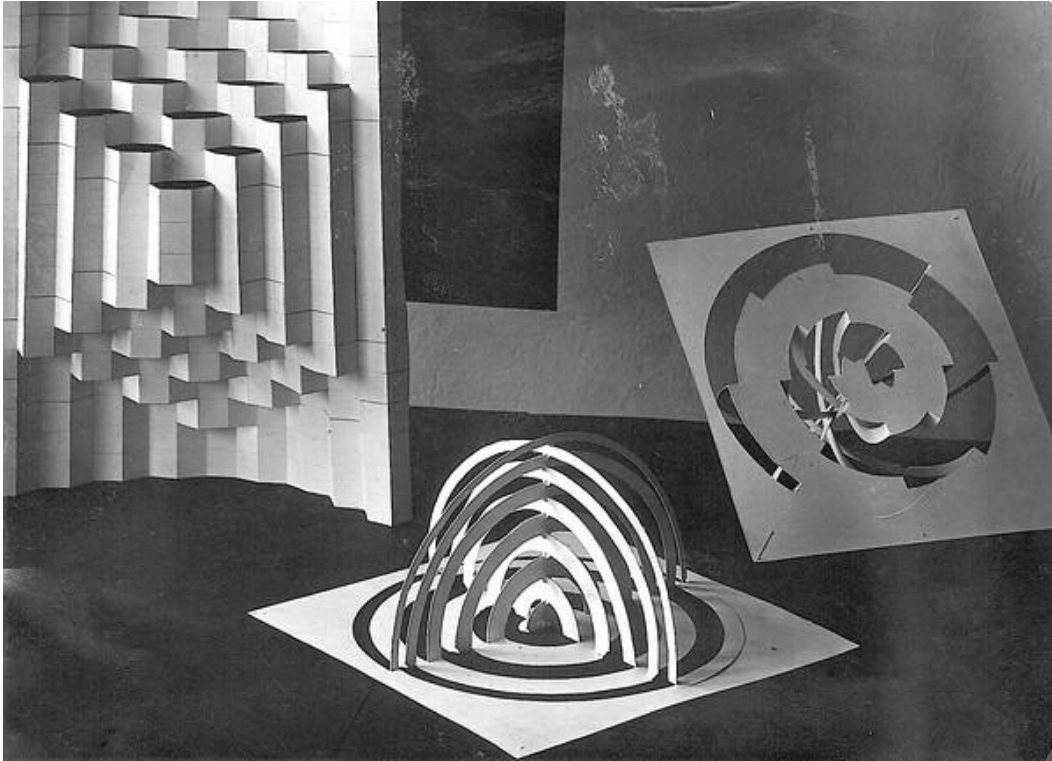


Figure 7 Arie Sharon, paper constructions in Joseph Albers's *Vorkurs*

One of the most complex classes I took was Color Theory. In this course, we learned about the interactions of colors, the interaction of light with color, and the impact of color on human emotion. In class we painted a color scale to demonstrate the relationship of primary, secondary and tertiary colors to one another. In addition, we kept a sketchbook in which we painted color gradations and various values of each hue. We looked at Joseph Albers's color square studies (Figures 18 and 19) to see how colors placed next to certain other colors interact. The way that light affects and determines colors was also discussed. Our professor lectured on the teachings of Itten and Albers and the advancements they made in the field of color theory. We learned other terms like intensity, value, tone and shade to better talk about colors. The assignment of our final project was to choose two master pieces, reproduce them precisely, then swap their color palettes. To quote our assignment sheet, by becoming "familiar with the colors in each work... [I'll] see how color choice can alter an image-how it can change the

psychological tone of the piece” (Wilt). In the examples below, I chose Franz Marc’s *Tiger* of 1912 (Figure 14) and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s *Winter Landscape in Moonlight* of 1919 (Figure 17). In this exercise, I first painted as well as I could the two original works onto a canvas nearly a foot or so in length and height. Then, using the color palettes of the two original works, I had to switch the colors of each painting. Each student could employ his subjective preference for color placement but had to retain the color palettes. In my example (Figure 15), I chose to paint the tiger pink and the background blue and yellow. Pink, I felt, drew the eye due to the warm intensity of the hue, causing the focus to fall on the Tiger. When interpreting Kirchner’s *Winter Landscape*, I took a more naturalistic approach and rendered the sky blue, the trees green, and the mountain yellow (Figure 16). Each student could choose where to use a certain color from the original to best emphasize certain parts of the image. This color study was in some ways similar to Itten’s study of Old Masters. (See Figure 4) We could choose a famous artist and reinvent their works along certain parameters. Though the forms were not open for our interpretation, the colors were. This study taught us how powerful colors can be in conveying an idea within an artwork, especially an emotional concept.



Figure 14 (Copy of Original)



Figure 15

Franz Marc's *Tiger* of 1912



Figure 16



Figure 17 (Copy of Original)

Kirchner's *Winter Landscape in Moonlight* of 1919

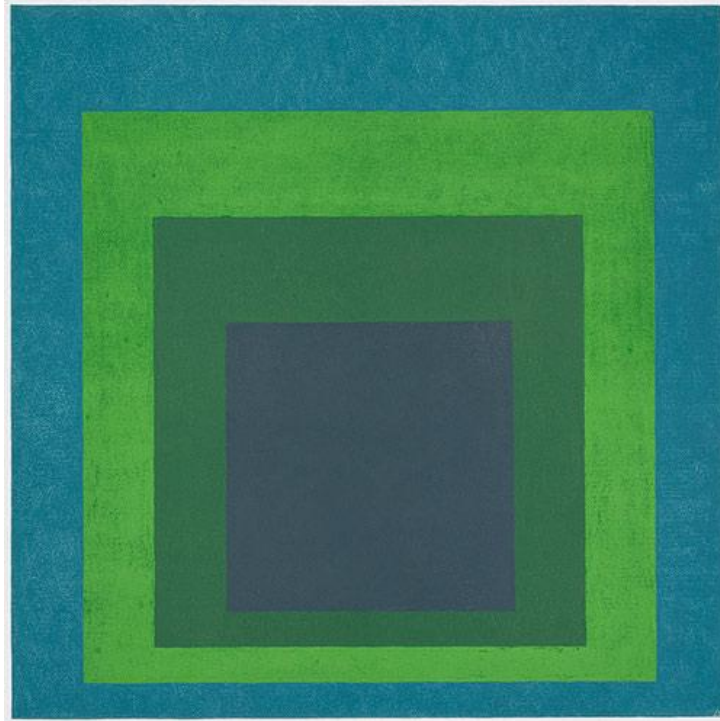


Figure 18 Josef Albers: *Homage to the Square: Soft Spoken*

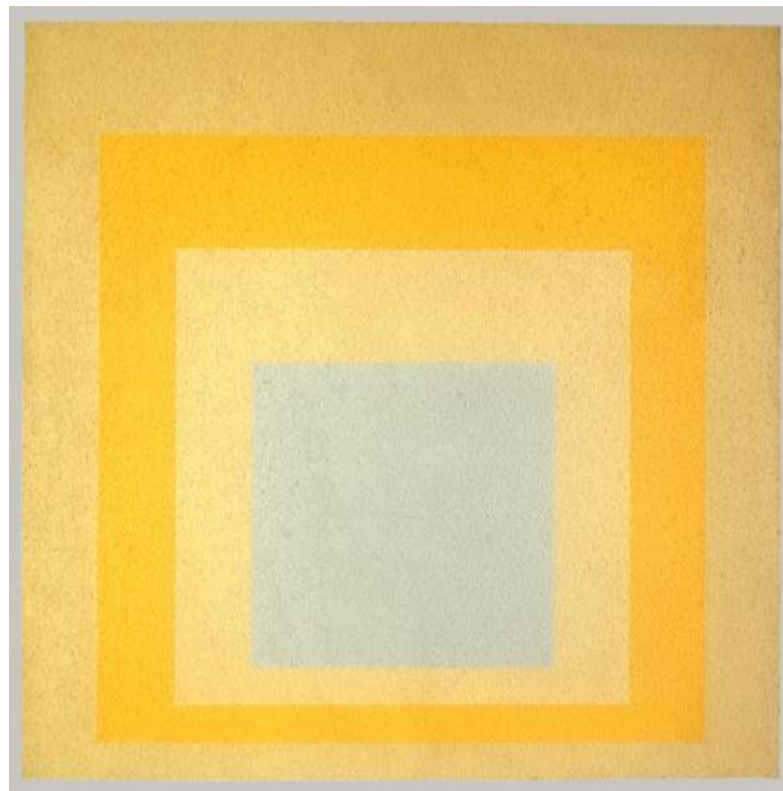


Figure 19 "Josef Albers: *Homage to the Square: With Rays*

Once I finished these four precursors of the art program, I then signed up for the more advanced classes. In classes like Weaving, Metalsmithing, Ceramics and Book arts, I built upon the foundations I had learned. In the studios, craftsmanship became a primary focus. Next was good design and form coupled with concept. It was expected that I had developed a sense of a total work of art or “Gesamtkunstwerk” and could now apply the principles and elements to my art. These next pieces were expected to be meticulous and beautiful. Also, after the Vorkurses I was free to choose either a more abstract form of expression, or stay with a naturalistic representation. In two of my pieces, my metal sea urchin (Figure 20) and my wooden toy boxes (Figure 21), I explored both avenues. My metal piece is representative of nature, taking on a realistic feel. The wooden boxes, on the other hand, imitate real wood, but are only made of paper and book board. They are suggestive of Albers’s color squares, but mine are a 3-dimensional representation. Though the cube forms are simplistic, they convey a powerful idea. Even in these advanced courses, we often looked closely at materials the way that Itten instructed. In many of my fiber classes, our professor asked us to bring into class numerous found objects and interesting materials. Some brought in wood, sticks, rocks, metal rust, fabrics and glass. For an hour or so we placed certain objects near one another to compare and contrast colors, textures, lines and shapes. We then discussed what we noticed to sharpen our observation skills. For example, by placing a pinecone next to a brown paper bag, the lines and forms within the two objects become evident, while the colors are seen as secondary. By juxtaposing similar colors, the shapes or lines of an object could be brought out. Though we never made assemblages, like Itten’s student’s image (Figure 3), I believe we gained the same knowledge of tools and materials. Simply understanding how objects interact with one another was important.

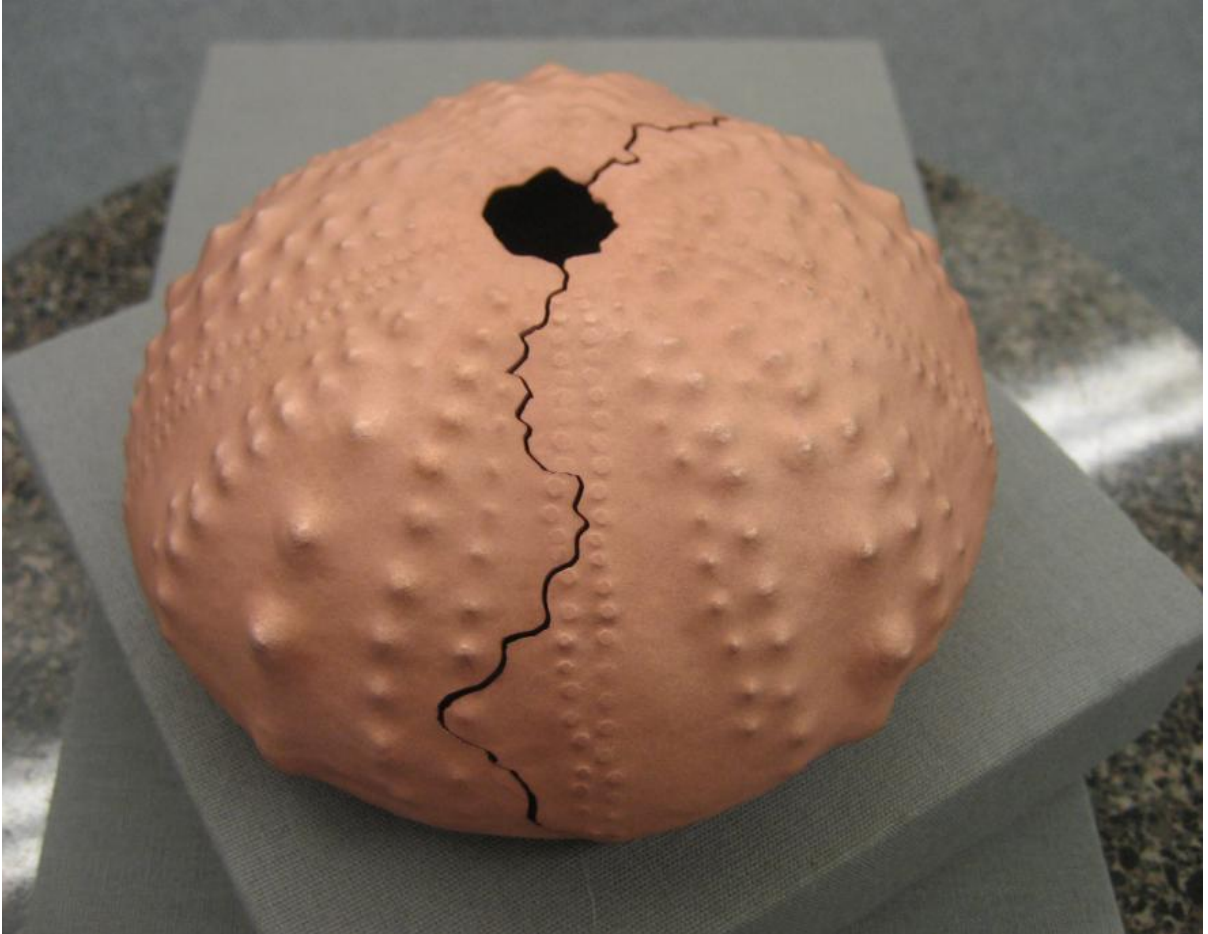


Figure 20 Metal Sea Urchin from Metalsmithing Class 2010

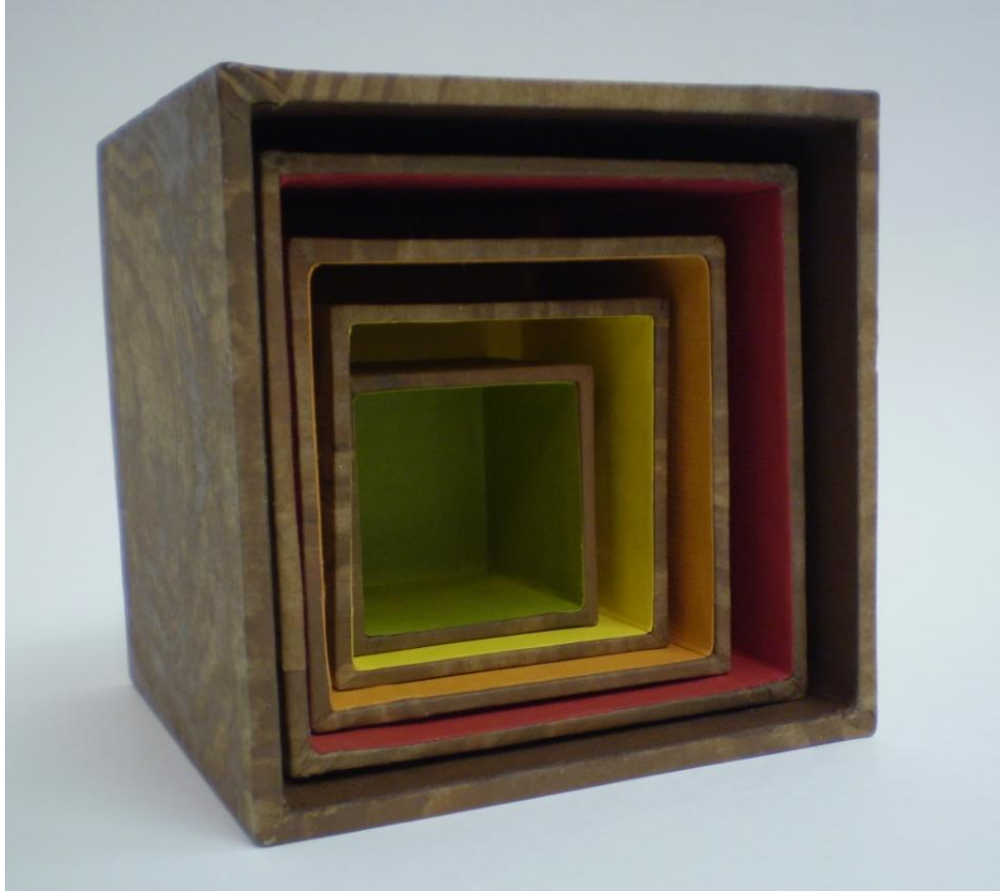


Figure 21 Constructed boxes as a 3-dimensional study of Albers's studies of Color Interaction within a Square, 2012

The advanced classes were quite similar to the preliminary classes in that they fostered an atmosphere of experimentation and pushed creativity. They were simply a more focused subject, and craftsmanship was highly emphasized. An excerpt taken from the syllabus in my Throwing course states: “attaining the basic skills, acquiring the necessary techniques and gaining an understanding of the concepts that serve as the foundation for working on the potter’s wheel.... This is very much a “hands on” class and you will be involved in every aspect of the process from mixing the clay to firing your finished pieces” (Davis). Practicing the techniques and being involved in the process of working in clay helped us learn. As we spent more time with the

material, molding the clay, and even making mistakes, our skill on the potter's wheel improved. Our professor, in this class, like in every other class, demonstrated a technique during the class period. Having watched, each student would then attempt to practice this technique for himself. Developing our own style was supported. The more we practiced the more proficient we became with a material. In my fiber classes, too, I developed the feel for materials only through practice. After speaking with my fibers professor, Pat Mink, I was informed that she, herself has been influenced by the Bauhaus, both in her art work and in her Teaching. She studied under a student of Josef Albers, where she learned "the idea of direct observation" (Mink). In her Color Theory classes, she uses the exercises developed by Josef Albers, as well as the methods of Anni Albers in her weaving classes. I learned the reason the students at ETSU receive a Bauhaus style education is that some of the teachers were themselves influenced by this school.

After four years of taking these experimental and "hands-on" classes, I feel I have developed into a more adept and well-rounded artist. Though I am by no means finished learning, in my creative skills I have improved dramatically since I started out in 2008. I will continue to refine my arts and push myself creatively.

Conclusion

After a thorough investigation of the history, courses and style of the Bauhaus, I have gained a greater appreciation for this revolutionary German Art School. Although I have only known of this famous art institution for little over a year, it has been making an impact at ETSU for far longer than that. After nearly a century, the styles and ideas developed at the Bauhaus have become an integral part of our American system of art education. Looking back over my own education in the discipline of art, I feel that the Bauhaus has indeed played a major role in my artistic progression. In fact, my old artwork from my preliminary and studio classes paralleled those works produced back in Germany in the early part of the 20th century. Also, after reading about the times in which the Bauhaus operated, it appears that their world was not so far removed from our own world. In their time after the First World War, their staggering inflation, and uncertain political climate, the Bauhaus may have been a place of escape for these artists. It would seem that my own four years of art studies in many ways mirrored the experiences of the Bauhaus students in the 1920s. Now I am left to wonder if my art classes at ETSU have prepared me for life outside of college. Like the students at the Bauhaus, I may have enjoyed a few years of escape from the realities that lie just beyond school. But I am sure I will face whatever comes next in my life with the same creativity and resilience that those members of the Bauhaus demonstrated over 100 years ago.

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