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### Reviews fall 2019-Special issue on Bauhaus centenary

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## REVIEW

# Reviews Fall 2019 — Special Issue on Bauhaus Centenary

Kathleen James-Chakraborty, Pep Avilés, Claudia Tittel and Jill Pearlman

James-Chakraborty, K. A review of *Bauhaus Imaginista*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 15 March to 10 June 2019.

Avilés, P. A review of Philipp Oswald, ed. *Hannes Meyer's New Bauhaus Pedagogy. From Dessau to Mexico*, Leipzig: Spector Books, 2019.

Tittel, C. A review of The New Bauhaus Museum in Weimar, designed by Heike Hanada, and the permanent exhibition *The Bauhaus Comes from Weimar*, opened 5 April 2019.

Pearlman, J. A review of *The Bauhaus and Harvard*, Special Exhibitions Gallery, Harvard Art Museums, 8 February to 28 July 2019.

### The Bauhaus Goes Global!

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*Bauhaus Imaginista*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin,  
15 March to 10 June 2019.

In 2009, the 90th anniversary of the Bauhaus was commemorated with a lavish series of exhibitions in Weimar; many of the objects in these exhibitions were subsequently repackaged in major retrospectives in the Martin Gropius

Bau (Berlin) and the Museum of Modern Art (New York), and subsequently, in part, at the Barbican Gallery (London) and the Vitra Design Museum (Weil-am-Rhein). These shows and the bevy of catalogues that accompanied them were so rich that they posed the question of how anything organized for the school's 2019 centennial could possibly top them.

The answer proved to be to move sideways, in an enormously ambitious global history project entitled *Bauhaus Imaginista* and curated by Marion von Osten and Grant Watson, which no longer focused on the school itself but on parallel developments around the world and the Bauhaus's sometimes tenuous relationship to them (**Figure 1**). The material featured in those exhibitions



**Figure 1:** Ife Campus, Nigeria. Still from Zvi Efrat's documentary, *Scenes from the Most Beautiful Campus in Africa*, created as part of *Bauhaus Imaginista*, 2019. Photo by Keren Kuenberg.

staged in the wake of the 90th anniversary all dated to before the school closed in 1933. The choice to not use material from after that date was made in part to dodge the increasing conviction of scholars that not all Bauhäusler had been opponents of the Nazis and that the Third Reich had not consistently opposed all forms of modern art, design, and architecture. In contrast, *Bauhaus Imaginista*, staged this spring at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, devoted unprecedented attention to the career trajectories of former students to demonstrate the school's eventually enormous geographic reach. *Bauhaus Imaginista's* myriad spin-offs included exhibitions and conferences on five continents, as well as a website, a catalogue, and a 128-page exhibition brochure (I gave a talk at the Delhi conference, the text of which was published on the website). Underwritten by the national government and other German sponsors, the combined result represented an unusually comprehensive soft-power cultural initiative.

Global art history is being embraced, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because treating the development of modern art in Brazil, China, India, Japan, Morocco, and Nigeria as equal to that produced at the Bauhaus in Weimar, Dessau, and Berlin is good business and good politics. A second similarly comprehensive exhibition, *Museum Global: Microhistories of an Eccentric Modernism*, held in the winter of 2018–19 at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf, suggests that although the modern art and architecture of the Global South are more widely taught in the United States than in most European universities, publicly funded European museums (if almost certainly not the Humboldt Forum, now due to open next year in Berlin) are now far ahead of most of their American counterparts in placing the Global South at the centre of the stories they tell.

The results comprise a bonanza for scholars but could be heavy going for visitors. Part of the problem was that the venue, presented in 1957 to West Berlin by the government of the United States, was designed by Hugh Stubbins to serve as a conference centre rather than a display space. The exhibition was cleverly divided into four strong themes, but it was almost impossible to develop a strong sense of flow. Another issue was that there was relatively little art on view. Within each pod, text often dominated over image. An eclectic mix of video, graphic design, and newly commissioned art works overwhelmed the few objects that were not confined to screen or paper. Finally, the episodic structure of the argument within each section was difficult to follow in the galleries, a problem repeated in the catalogue, although not to the same degree in the more clearly structured brochure or on the unusually comprehensive and scholarly website, which one hopes will remain live for years to come.

Exhibition, catalogue, brochure, and website were all structured around the same four themes: 'Corresponding With', 'Learning From', 'Moving Away', and 'Still Undead.' 'Corresponding With' introduced the issue of equality between the Bauhaus and other innovative initiatives, in this case from India and Japan. Kala Bhavan, established by Rabindranath Tagore, is also celebrating its centennial

this year. It long retained the commitment to representation and to craft that the Bauhaus quickly abandoned. Tagore located the school in Santiniketan, a village north of Kolkata where his father had already created an ashram. The contemporary relevance of the Nobel-prize-winning writer and artist was highlighted in a 90-minute video, *O Horizon*, made by the London-based Otolith Group, which took as its point of departure Tagore's approach to the environment. The short-lived Shin Kenchiku Kogai Gakuin (School of New Architecture and Design) in Tokyo was open from only 1932 to 1939, but its importation of Bauhaus principles to Japan had an enduring impact there. The grouping of the Bauhaus with the Kala Bhavan and the Shin Kenchiku Kogai Gakuin situated the innovative German school in relation to other international experiments but missed an opportunity to fully contextualize the phenomena it described. Tagore joined the Bengali physicists Satyendra Nath Bose and Meghnad Saha in an admiration for Albert Einstein that was almost certainly inflected by the fact that German expertise provided an alternative to that of the British. The same could also be said of Stella Kramrisch, whose invitation to Johannes Itten to send a small selection of Bauhaus works to Kolkata, where they were exhibited in 1922, was really just a footnote in her distinguished career as a pioneering scholar of Indian art.

Each section of *Bauhaus Imaginista* was structured around a particular object. In the case of 'Learning From', a drawing in which Paul Klee took inspiration from North African carpets provided the impetus for a consideration of the ways in which, even after the 1923 turn towards industrial design, Bauhäusler continued to make use of what they would have termed 'primitive' art. As was also the case with 'Museum Global' in Düsseldorf, women, most of them textile and ceramics artists working in the Americas, but also the teaching of Lina Bo Bardi in Brazil and Toni Mariani in Morocco, were particularly well represented here. I found this section to be the most exciting intellectually but longed for a presentation that was thicker in the objects that made the case visually.

'Moving Away' addressed the geographic range of the places where Bauhaus students and faculty found themselves. Moving well beyond the familiar story of the impact its former directors Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe had in the United States, this section instead focused on its impact in Asia. I.M. Pei's unbuilt collaboration with Gropius on a campus for Hua Tong university outside Shanghai shared space with information about links between the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, the most important German successor to the Bauhaus, and the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. Particularly refreshing here was the willingness to address the Communist commitment of many Bauhäusler, especially those close to the school's second director, Hannes Meyer. Although this came at the cost of their lives for several, other former members of Meyer's Soviet Brigade carried their political engagement with them to Chile, Hungary, Mexico, and the Netherlands as well as North Korea.

The final section, 'Still Undead' explored the use of light at the Bauhaus and afterwards. Some of the experiments

it showcased certainly had multiple origins, including the night-lighting of Weimar-era departments stores and cinemas in a way that the Dessau Bauhaus assiduously avoided. The connections to Andy Warhol and the development of the strobe light seemed tenuous, however, although the news that Kraftwerk's techno beat and Vidal Sassoon's hair colouring had Bauhaus roots gave this section of the exhibition, despite the dim conditions in which it was installed, a punkish punch. In this iteration the Bauhaus is no longer about pristine forms, protected from the contamination of commercial culture, but it is alive and well specifically because of an engagement with a pop culture that is far more interesting and edgy than the usual comparison with IKEA.

Although often frustrating for the visitor, who could not possibly absorb all of the information presented in the two hours that even the most engaged exhibit-goers typically devote to such displays, *Bauhaus Imaginista* deserves to be remembered as a pivotal moment in the historiography of the school. Addressing the art of the Global South with new respect, and insisting upon its importance to European abstraction, this exhibition also mapped out its dissemination in new detail, albeit with a focus more on biography than form, and broadened our definition of its progeny to include work from the 1960s, '70s and '80s that has never before been gathered together under the Bauhaus label. Finally, *Bauhaus Imaginista* admitted that even as we commemorate the Bauhaus, other issues, such as sustainability, urgently need to be addressed, and that even when the Bauhaus does not provide us with appropriate precedents, other often overlooked institutions from the same era, such as Kala Bhavan, certainly can.

### If Only Coffee Could Talk

Pep Avilés

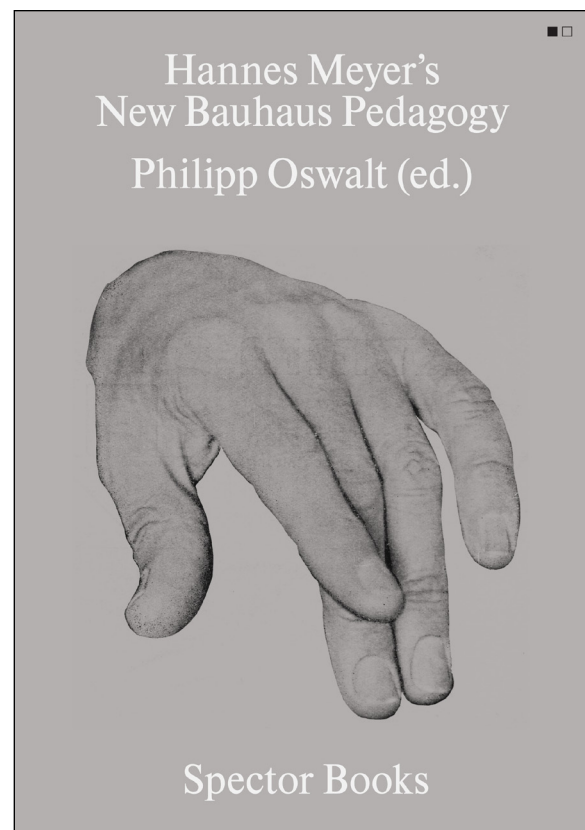
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Philipp Oswalt, ed. *Hannes Meyer's New Bauhaus Pedagogy: From Dessau to Mexico*, Leipzig: Spector Books, 2019, 502 pages, ISBN 9783959053068.

To claim attention among the myriad of publications, conferences, exhibitions, and events celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the legendary Bauhaus school in Weimar comes as a challenge these days. If anything, the new writings, visual documents, and renewed discussions taking place in academic and cultural institutions demonstrate how resilient are the parroted narratives transmitted under the lure of the 'Bauhaus Idea', a catchphrase that still enjoys an invisible halo of eloquence despite the historiographical unpacking of the diverse ideologies and conflicting personal agendas subsumed within the institution (Forgács 1995). The school's prolific generation of some foundational mantras of modern architecture act as spells, often shielding the actual events, vicissitudes, failures, and successes of some of its protagonists from a more extensive and detailed histori-

cal analyses. New publications show how under-studied many of the areas remain, particularly in relation to issues of intersubjectivity, political pedagogy, and material history, as well as the remote influences derived from the attention the school received since its foundation (Otto 2019; Saletnik and Schuldenfrei 2009). However, it still seems useful to polarize the discussion by invoking some of these slogans — 'Art and Technique — A New Unity' or 'Needs of the People, Not Luxury' — as identifiers of the most traditional and hegemonic factions that were at play in the school.

The book edited by Philipp Oswalt entitled *Hannes Meyer's New Bauhaus Pedagogy* can be dialectically evaluated in light of recent scholarship on the idea of luxury attached to some of the most paradigmatic episodes of German design, as it is in Meyer's emphatic rejection of the idea of luxury (as springboard generating an alternative model for the Bauhaus school) that this phenomenal collection of essays finds its signification and opportunity (Schuldenfrei 2018) (Figure 2). This English translation of the earlier German edition, *Hannes Meyers Neue Bauhauslehre. Von Dessau bis Mexiko* (published in Basel by Birkhäuser Verlag in 2019) offers a comprehensive counterpoint to the institution directed by Gropius, which has been lavishly studied, by perusing the political context of Meyer's directorship, the curriculum he implemented, the changes he effected, the faculty staff he hired, and finally, his legacy. Despite the continuities and frictions during Meyer's tenure, Oswalt's introduction characterizes those



**Figure 2:** Book cover of Philipp Oswalt's *Hannes Meyer's New Bauhaus Pedagogy*. Photo credit: Spector Books, Leipzig.



years as a 'New Bauhaus', a sufficiently identifiable institution — with many episodes of pain and glory — as to deserve its own, individual assessment. To that end, the editor has gathered more than forty documents, including academic essays, reprints, and oral histories, to reexamine the under-studied areas of Meyer's pedagogical project.

Oswalt describes the historical events favoring Meyer's leadership as a double crisis. On the one hand, negative political and social reactions were triggered by the construction of the Dessau-Törten housing estate. These houses, built by Gropius of prefabricated concrete elements and commissioned by the municipality in 1926, were meant to demonstrate how advantageous the adoption of Fordism and scientific planning was for the final user of modern architecture in terms of affordability, speed, and quality of construction. Oswalt qualifies the result as a 'fiasco' that triggered resentment among Social Democratic politicians and the population at large as well as a lack of belief in Gropius's leadership and the overall 'Bauhaus Idea', resulting in an institutional crisis by 1928. On the other hand, the increasing rejection by different artists and students of Gropius's rhetoric integrating art and industrial design also brought his academic authority into question. Meyer emerged as a possible future director once Gropius was no longer able to hold the different actors together and his relationships with local politicians had deteriorated. After Gropius's departure, Meyer distanced himself from the formalism of the so-called Bauhaus Style and implemented a scientifically inspired model, supported by such new faculty and staff as Hans Wittwer, Anton Brenner, Mart Stam, Ernst Kállai, Ludwig Hilberseimer, and Walter Peterhans. Architecture and photography departments were finally established and a new curriculum emphasizing grass-root functionalism, organically emanating from the collective, was implemented. The establishment of these departments anticipated methods of teaching that fostered student engagement in design-for-production. Guest lecturers contributing to the new pedagogical agenda included psychologist Karlfried Dürkheim; Rudolph Carnap and Otto Neurath, both members of the Vienna Circle; and critic Karel Teige. In addition, visits from representatives of the Vkhutemas schools, among others, helped to shift the previous academic atmosphere. The enticing, luxurious modernism exemplified in buildings constructed under Gropius's directorship were abandoned in favor of a prescriptive formula in which function, economy, and pragmatism took a leading role in generating a popular aesthetic with biological overtones.

The book has five parts and an appendix. Parts one, two, and four concentrate on Meyer's intellectual underpinnings and the subsequent curriculum implemented during his tenure. Meyer, 'a patrician orphan', appears here as a leftist whose sympathies for Marxism were present during his tenure but only cemented after he had left the Bauhaus. Nonetheless, during his years in Dessau, his firm belief in cooperativism and horizontal relations were at the basis of his study program. He brought to his role the combination of a strong character and a firm support of social mobility. He challenged the hierarchical

master-student relationships inherited from the Weimar schools of design and, to some extent, facilitated gender inclusion and development within the institution. This set of articles tempers Meyer's self-identification with functionalism as well as minimizing his ideology as the source of conflicts within the school and, more importantly, with Dessau's authorities and his political supporters. Certainly, Meyer's ideas found strong opposition in the school prior to his appointment and continued during his tenure. Josef Albers, Wassily Kandinsky, and Ludwig Grote probably were the most vociferous agents resisting change. But the heterogeneity of the school in terms of backgrounds, trades, previous knowledge, and political leanings complicated matters. The tensions that the different political groups — particularly the communist group of students and the conspiracies of the National Socialist zealots — brought to the school are at the center of Meyer's early dismissal (Oswalt 2009). The reassessment of Meyer's directorship includes a set of memories and remarks by some of the protagonists of those years — Arie Sharon, Gunta Stölz, Mart Stam, Ernst Kállai, Max Bill, and Ise Gropius, among others — that help the reader understand the difficulties of the period.

The third and fifth sections are the most interesting and novel, concentrating on the work of faculty members who came to teach at the Bauhaus under Meyer's directorship and their students. With few omissions, the third section presents scholarship on the teachings of the different workshops, lectures, and activities, as well as the important changes and new methodologies implemented in different areas, such as Otto Neurath's lectures on *Bildstatistik und Gegenwart* in the advertisement and graphic design workshop of Joost Schmidt, or the use of *Strukturstoff*, or textured fabrics, to streamline production in the weaving workshops. The fifth and last section tracks the post-Bauhaus work and the whereabouts of some of Meyer's former acolytes, such as Arie Sharon, Lotte Besse (eventually known as Stam-Besse, after marrying Mart Stam), the members of the Red Bauhaus Brigade, Tibor Weiner and Konrad Püschel in particular, as well as other students, such as Fritz Ertl, whose sympathies for National Socialism resulted in his participation in the design of concentration camps.

As could not be otherwise, there are iterations and paradoxes in the essays. Some of them correspond to the contradictions between Meyer's own intellectual positioning and the responsibilities and goals he faced as director of the Bauhaus, evidenced, for example, by the success of wallpaper production that was due to the capitalist partnership with the Emil Rasch company. The different scholars involved in the publication also introduce competing academic views, such as the gentle reevaluation of Albers' and Meyer's academic relationship, the ambivalent use of Gropius's texts (as well as Ise Gropius's diaries) as reliable historical sources, and the characterization of Ludwig Hilberseimer — whose hiring by Meyer had a great impact on Mies's postwar work — as parametricist 'avant la lettre' (175). The origins of the turbulent relationship with Moholy-Nagy, as well as with Gropius and the rest of his clique, remains unclear, even though Meyer and

Moholy-Nagy shared certain intellectual affinities prior to Meyer's arrival in Dessau. Perhaps Meyer's ideal teaching method, programmatically described as a 'functional, collective, constructive one', could not hold together the diverging ideological interests of the actors populating the school (31). Yet the reader often has the feeling that the Bauhaus is portrayed as an autonomous institution, absorbed in its internal discussions and struggles for political and economic survival and isolated from the cultural atmosphere of the turbulent final years of the Weimar Republic. Indeed, students felt compelled to take sides, given the charismatic figures and their polarized ideologies. In fact, the heat of these discussions may not have taken place in the studios or workshops, as Kurtz Kranz recalls, but in the less academic environment of the cafeteria, where the newest artistic trends and theories and the latest ideological slogans made an impact among students (120; see also Mittag-Fodor 2014; Feist 2012).

### The New Bauhaus Museum in Weimar: A Negotiation Process

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The New Bauhaus Museum in Weimar, designed by Heike Hanada, and the permanent exhibition *The Bauhaus Comes from Weimar*, opened 5 April 2019.

On its 100th anniversary, the Bauhaus, Germany's most famous school of design and architecture, was celebrated with numerous exhibitions, festivals, and events. The three most important Bauhaus locations, Weimar, Dessau, and Berlin, finally also acquired new museum structures dedicated to the school. Previously, only Berlin had an explicitly Bauhaus Museum. For Weimar, the absence of such a space was doubly conspicuous. Whereas the presence of the Bauhaus in Dessau has always been manifest in the cityscape, through the 1925 Gropius-designed school building and the master houses of the Dessau-Törten housing estate, Weimar continues to be characterized as a city of classicism. Despite the fact that 'the Bauhaus comes from Weimar', little in the city is reminiscent of the famous school. Tellingly, Weimar celebrates the birthday of Goethe every year, but has given remarkably little attention to the history of the Bauhaus. Since 1995, the famous Bauhaus collection had been relegated to a space of no more than 200 square meters, in the former Kunsthalle, opposite the National Theatre. Another important Bauhaus icon in Weimar – the Haus am Horn, the only model house realized during the Bauhaus period – was used by the Bauhaus University as an event venue and was not accessible to visitors. At an early stage, Michael Siebenbrodt, the cultural director of the City of Weimar and an expert on the Bauhaus, recognized Weimar's need to better pay homage to the Bauhaus. In guiding the development of the new Bauhaus Museum, he underscored the importance of not only making references to the Bauhaus, but also presenting an original artistic statement, an architec-

tural announcement that forms a bridge from the past to the present and the future. Weimar waited in great anticipation for the New Bauhaus Museum. But when the museum opened on 5 April 2019, it was immediately clear that the city had missed yet another chance.

The Bauhaus Museum in Weimar was the first of three new Bauhaus museums to be completed. For this reason, it received a disproportionate degree of public attention, which was compounded by a series of highly publicized, heated debates throughout the construction process. But even before this, the museum's location was the source of a fundamental controversy. In 1990, the city of Weimar and later the Klassik Stiftung began looking for an appropriate site for the museum. In 2010, the decision was finally made to place it at the Minolplatz, located between Gauforum, Neues Museum, Weimarahalle, and the green belt of the Asbach Valley. The site seemed perfectly suited to make visible the contradictions of the Bauhaus from an urban planning point of view, on the one hand, and to build a 'Quartier der Moderne' on the other. The new Bauhaus Museum, a solitary geometric monolithic cube with a light-gray concrete skin, not only stands in an area of tension between different times and their architectural ideas – the Wilhelminian neoclassicism of the 19th century and the brutal architecture of National Socialism – but was also intended to take up this historical ambivalence and at the same time to answer how modern Bauhaus architecture is conceived today, one hundred years after its foundation (**Figure 3**).

The Weimar Bauhaus Museum, a closed cube with few windows, was designed by the Berlin architect Heike Hanada. The structure does not seek communication with the city, but rather turns away from it, closing itself upon its interior. In the guest book, visitors denounce this architecture, calling the museum a bunker. Politicians, architects, and the press have turned the building into a political issue, drawing parallels with the neighboring Gauforum. But these critiques fail to appreciate the subtle commentary of the structure. While the striking monolithic and monumental concrete body is in fact turning away from the city, this might be understood as a criticism of neoclassicism and a tribute to ideologies associated with the Bauhaus. It is true that even the entrance to the museum, which is framed by aluminum panels, cannot hide the fact that the museum itself is unduly isolated from its surroundings. But the building also has a distinctly liberating quality. The light-gray, exposed concrete façade is bright, friendly, and clear in its formal language. This can be understood as a strong commitment to an abstract, strictly reduced modern language of form and material. It does not ideologically quote the Bauhaus but looks for its own architectural solutions, which are linked to the grandfather of modernism, Henry van de Velde, as well as to the great Bauhaus architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, for whom materiality was as important as pure form. Its cubature may seem monumental, but at the same time it appears noble, an impression that is reinforced by the finely chiseled joints that wind around the building. This has also led the president of the Klassik Stiftung, Ulrike Lorenz, to reject associations made between the museum

and a bunker. She rather speaks of the Bauhaus Museum as a 'jewelry box'.

During the development of the museum's design, the façade of exposed concrete was not included in the original planning. Hanada had designed a building that would be encased in glass, which would thus incorporate the idea of transparency inherent in Bauhaus architecture. Accordingly, the interior of the building, the core, the museum, was to become a large bright exhibition space with different open viewing axes. But this design had to be abandoned due to the high costs of a glass envelope, and Hanada instead proposed an exposed concrete façade with chiseling. An attempt was made to recreate the lightness of the glass façade by the addition of bands of LED light, intended to make the building appear to float at night, but this has yet to be realized. And so visitors are welcomed by a building that asserts its presence above all through its monumentality and plastic mass.

The building hides its interior like a pyramid, embodying eternity and firmness.

While the exterior of the Weimar Bauhaus Museum gives an illusion of modernity and anti-modernism in its material, inside, the technicity of its construction is celebrated. The semi-finished ceilings, with the solid T-beams or light shafts are partially exposed (**Figure 4**). The visitors enter not into a polished exhibition hall, but into a factory space, an industrial building. Hanada wanted to assume the Bauhaus idea in the interior so as to emphasize the connection between art, technology, and industrial production. The lighting – dim and diffuse – underscores the industrial character of the interior. Unfortunately, however, the idea of an open space is divided and destroyed by the stairs and by the exhibition architecture of the Swiss Architectural firm Kobler and Holzer. Although typical Bauhaus materials of metal, glass and plexiglass are used, they are installed separately, in individual departments



**Figure 3:** The new Bauhaus Museum, 2019, Weimar. © Claus Bach® Photography.



**Figure 4:** Exhibition view, new Bauhaus Museum, Weimar. © Claus Bach® Photography, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019.



through the creation of islands on which the objects are exhibited. Yes, the Bauhaus products are presented, but the idea that grounds them, that of a total work of art, is not. The exhibition of the objects on individual islands corresponds more to a traditional exhibition concept than to the spirit of the Bauhaus, yet oddly, the objects themselves are not specifically illuminated and thus staged. Again, the indecision in the design concept is evident. On the one hand, the idea of exhibiting the Bauhaus experiment and its workshops as a large laboratory is pursued; on the other hand, the departments, or workshops, are separated from each other. The new Bauhaus Museum in Dessau developed a better solution. There, too, the interior is reminiscent of a work hall, but through the skillful combination of objects that are not separated from one another on islands, but which communicate with one another, the Bauhaus cosmos is spread out in front of the visitors. The Dessau museum then works like an archive, a documentation center. The visitor strolls through the large hall and can make connections between the photo laboratory, the wood, metal, and ceramics workshops, the weaving mill, the stage, and the visual arts. In Dessau, the Bauhaus Laboratory, the Bauhaus as an ongoing experiment, becomes visible — not so in Weimar.

The curators of the Klassik Stiftung in Weimar would be well advised to make a clear decision as to the museum's curatorial idea. Is it the workshop idea of the Bauhaus that is most important, or should the products be staged? In doing so, the Klassik Stiftung could rely on tried and tested staging techniques that are very well mastered in Weimar. Perhaps it is because of such clear decisions that the exhibition in the Neues Museum also seems more authentic and successful. If the Klassik Stiftung wants the Bauhaus Museum to be a 'modern place of encounter, openness and discussion', there is still much that remains to be done. The new president has already acknowledged this fact and announced that the Klassik Stiftung will make curatorial readjustments. In the meantime, the heavy wood doors to the cascade-like stairwell have been opened. This not only brings in light, but also enables visitors to wander through the individual exhibits.

### *The Bauhaus and Harvard: A Missed Opportunity*

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*The Bauhaus and Harvard*, Special Exhibitions Gallery, Harvard Art Museums, 8 February to 28 July 2019.

*The Bauhaus and Harvard*, an exhibition held in the Harvard Art Museums from February through July 2019, displayed nearly 200 objects from its vast Bauhaus collection. It included a number of famous objects from the artists of the German design school: Lionel Feininger's woodcut for the 1919 Bauhaus Manifesto, two Breuer chairs, a William Wagenfeld lamp, Josef Hartwig's chess set, Lucia Moholy's photographs of the Dessau building, and Oskar Schlemmer's sketches for the Triadische Ballet, to name but a few. Among the lesser known works, a large photomontage by Marianne Brandt stood out, as did the weavings of Anni Albers and Gunta Stölzl, and especially Herbert Bayer's *Verdure* (1950) (**Figure 5**), an oversized vibrant green oil painting of wave-like forms.

This wonderful array of Bauhaus objects comes from Harvard's Busch-Reisinger Museum, which began to amass them in 1947. The curator, Charles Kuhn, worked with Walter Gropius to solicit objects for the museum from former Bauhausers and friends. The Bauhaus founder had been at Harvard for a decade by then, serving as chair of the Architecture Department in the Graduate School of Design (GSD). Ultimately, his and Kuhn's efforts resulted in what may well be the largest collection of Bauhaus objects in the US. Before the worldwide Bauhaus celebrations this year, it had been almost 35 years since that collection had been featured in a major exhibition. For this reason and also because of the well-publicized centenary, the Harvard exhibition attracted a large and enthusiastic audience.

Though I, too, appreciated the chance to see these Bauhaus works, I left somewhat disappointed. *The Bauhaus and Harvard* promised something it did not deliver — an



**Figure 5:** Herbert Bayer, *Verdure*, 1950. Oil on canvas. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, commissioned by the Harvard Corporation, 1950.169. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Harvard Art Museums, President and Fellows of Harvard College.



account of the unique and important relationship between these two unlikely bedfellows, the radical German design school and the nearly 300-year-old American university. Why join these two wildly different institutions together, as the exhibition did in its name, and leave that union unexplained? It had been a great twist of irony that the staid and gentlemanly Harvard, deeply rooted in New England, played the outsized role that it did in advancing the legacy of the Weimar Republic's experimental and unruly Bauhaus. Among the many Bauhaus exhibitions that took place this year, Harvard's had a unique story to tell, but it did not do so. Let's call this exhibition what it was: a display of some of the Bauhaus works contained in the Busch-Reisinger collection. Its title, *The Bauhaus and Harvard*, was a misnomer and the exhibition a missed opportunity.

Harvard's exhibition virtually ignored the fact that Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus and its greatest promoter, taught there from 1937 to 1952. From his perch at Harvard, Gropius spread his Bauhaus ethos far beyond the university's confines. Many of his own students would go on to play leading roles in the unprecedented era of building that followed World War II, and 250 of them took up teaching posts, passing on the Bauhaus gospel to the next generation. Gropius students spoke of 'the great master' with reverence: he was the 'personification of a unified life', 'the spirit that made all things seem possible' and the man who 'sees and understands relationships between things that escape most people' (Pearlman 2007: 107).

In her obituary of Gropius, Ada Louise Huxtable asserted that he (along with Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe) had 'changed the world and we make no apology for that sweeping statement'. They turned the 'solid, eclectic, brick and stone cities of the 19th century into the sky-piercing miracles of the 20th century', a feat unmatched in history (Huxtable 1960: D21). Gropius's role in this was more as a man-of-ideas than as a gifted designer. He taught that the problems of the machine age required new solutions from architects and that social responsibility was their sacred duty. Nikolaus Pevsner similarly lauded Gropius as 'as a moral force working towards aims which the century badly needed and still needs' (Pevsner 1969: 3). Gropius earned such accolades for his accomplishments both at the Bauhaus and at Harvard. For the exhibition to have neglected all this was puzzling.

The exhibition did not entirely ignore Gropius's presence at Harvard. Of the seven sections that comprised the exhibition, the final one, 'The Bauhaus in the U.S.', highlighted the Harvard Graduate Center which Gropius designed in 1948 with The Architects' Collaborative. The focus here was not on the architecture, however, but on the various artworks created for the Center by Josef Albers, Herbert Bayer, Joan Miro, Hans Arp, and Richard Lippold. These included Bayer's *Verdure*, a room-sized relief sculpture by Swiss Dadaist Hans Arp, a Miro study for a mural that hung in its dining hall, and a small model of Lippold's sculpture that sits in the Center's courtyard. Strangely missing were photographs or a model of the Graduate Center buildings. True, one could cross Harvard Yard to see the complex in person, but the artwork would have been

more meaningful if displayed in relation to the buildings and, of course, it was important to show how the Bauhaus founder's only campus project turned out.

The 'Bauhaus in the US' section also included student work from three American institutions: Black Mountain College (North Carolina), Brooklyn College (New York), and Newcomb College (New Orleans). Back when Kuhn was gathering Bauhaus-related material, these colleges sent examples from their versions of the *Vorkurs*, the preliminary course that had been the centerpiece of the Bauhaus curriculum. The small student constructions, photographs, and drawings explored color, space, volume, texture, and the nature of materials, offering a glimpse of the Bauhaus pedagogy in an American context. But this display provoked the question: why no work from Gropius's students at Harvard? Why no explanation of how the preliminary course fit in there?

The answer is simple: although photographs of Harvard's version of the course do exist, they are not part of the Busch-Reisinger collection. Telling the story of the Bauhaus and Harvard required reaching out beyond the Busch-Reisinger, at least to other branches of the university — to the GSD and to archival collections on campus that explain the important Bauhaus-Harvard ties. The Bauhaus had dedicated itself to collaboration, and Harvard under Gropius prized teamwork. Whichever word you prefer, it was sorely missing here.

For the most part, Harvard Museums offered a conventional Bauhaus retrospective: in addition to the American section, one area was devoted to the preliminary course, another to weaving, one to photography, one more to the modern dwelling, and yet another to the Dessau building. The one surprise was 'The Bauhaus in Paris', focused on the German contribution to the 1930 Society of Decorative Artists exhibition that Gropius had organized. This section highlighted Bayer's bold drawing of communal rooms designed by Gropius and Marcus Breuer, and Laszlo Moholy Nagy's large motorized kinetic sculpture, *Light Prop for an Electric Stage*, both of which had appeared in the Paris show. All are wonderful pieces that had to be included, but to devote a whole section of the exhibition to Paris 1930 as a seminal Bauhaus moment while neglecting the Bauhaus founder's fifteen years at Harvard, seemed odd.

Given my surprise at how *The Bauhaus and Harvard* unfolded, with little illumination of the ties between the two institutions, I went back to look again at the introductory wall text. Indeed, it explained that the exhibition drew from Harvard's Busch-Reisinger and it made the claim that the museum's collection 'has long played a key role in the legacy and reception of the Bauhaus in the US'. As rich as that collection may be, it did little to advance the Bauhaus legacy in the US, and the exhibition made no attempt to show how it might have done so. This same wall text also asserted that Harvard 'became a center for the Bauhaus in America when ... Gropius joined the GSD Architecture Department in 1937'. If even part of the exhibition had been devoted to upholding this claim, *The Bauhaus and Harvard* would have been far more interesting, true true to its title, and it would have stood apart from the many other Bauhaus exhibitions that took place this centenary year.

## Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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