

TIMELINE OF ART HISTORY

The Bauhaus, 1919–1933

The Bauhaus was founded in 1919 in the city of Weimar by German architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969). Its core objective was a radical concept: to reimagine the material world to reflect the unity of all the arts.

Alexandra Griffith Winton

August 1, 2007, revised October 1, 2016



Armchair

Marcel Breuer

1922



"Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar 1919-1923" Book

Designer Walter Gropius
Designer Herbert Bayer

1923



Tea Infuser and Strainer

Designer Marianne Brandt

ca. 1924

The Bauhaus was founded in 1919 in the city of Weimar by German architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969). Its core objective was a radical concept: to reimagine the material world to reflect the unity of all the arts. Gropius explained this vision for a union of art and design in the Proclamation of the Bauhaus (1919), which described a utopian craft guild combining architecture, sculpture, and painting into a single creative expression. Gropius developed a craft-based curriculum that would turn out artisans and designers capable of creating useful and beautiful objects appropriate to this new system of living.

The Bauhaus combined elements of both fine arts and design education. The curriculum commenced with a preliminary course that immersed the students, who came from a diverse range of social and educational backgrounds, in the study of materials, color theory, and formal relationships in preparation for more specialized studies. This preliminary course was often taught by visual artists, including [Paul Klee](#) ([📖 1987.455.16](#)), Vasily Kandinsky (1866–1944), and Josef Albers ([📖 59.160](#)), among others.

Following their immersion in Bauhaus theory, students entered specialized workshops, which included metalworking, cabinetmaking, weaving, pottery, typography, and wall painting. Although Gropius' initial aim was a unification of the arts through craft, aspects of this approach proved financially impractical. While maintaining the emphasis on craft, he repositioned the goals of the Bauhaus in 1923, stressing the importance of designing for mass production. It was at this time that the school adopted the slogan "Art into Industry."

In 1925, the Bauhaus moved from Weimar to Dessau, where Gropius designed a new building to house the school. This building contained many features that later became hallmarks of modernist architecture, including steel-frame construction, a glass curtain wall, and an asymmetrical, pinwheel plan, throughout which Gropius distributed studio, classroom, and administrative space for maximum efficiency and spatial logic.

The cabinetmaking workshop was one of the most popular at the Bauhaus. Under the direction of Marcel Breuer (☞ 1983.366) from 1924 to 1928, this studio reconceived the very essence of furniture, often seeking to dematerialize conventional forms such as chairs to their minimal existence. Breuer theorized that eventually chairs would become obsolete, replaced by supportive columns or air. Inspired by the extruded steel tubes of his bicycle, he experimented with metal furniture, ultimately creating lightweight, mass-producible metal chairs. Some of these chairs were deployed in the theater of the Dessau building.

The textile workshop, especially under the direction of designer and weaver Gunta Stölzl (1897–1983), created abstract textiles suitable for use in Bauhaus environments. Students studied color theory and design as well as the technical aspects of weaving. Stölzl encouraged experimentation with unorthodox materials, including cellophane, fiberglass, and metal. Fabrics from the weaving workshop were commercially successful, providing vital and much needed funds to the Bauhaus. The studio's textiles, along with architectural wall painting, adorned the interiors of Bauhaus buildings, providing polychromatic yet abstract visual interest to these somewhat severe spaces. While the weaving studio was primarily comprised of women, this was in part due to the fact that they were discouraged from participating in other areas. The workshop trained a number of prominent textile artists, including Anni Albers (1899–1994), who continued to create and write about modernist textiles throughout her life.

Metalworking was another popular workshop at the Bauhaus and, along with the cabinetmaking studio, was the most successful in developing design prototypes for mass production. In this studio, designers such as Marianne Brandt (☞ 2000.63a–c), Wilhelm Wagenfeld (☞ 1986.412.1–16), and Christian Dell (1893–1974) created beautiful, modern items such as lighting fixtures and tableware. Occasionally, these objects were used in the Bauhaus campus itself; light fixtures designed in the metalwork shop illuminated the Bauhaus building and some faculty housing. Brandt was the first woman to attend the metalworking studio, and replaced László Moholy-Nagy (☞ 1987.1100.158) as studio director in 1928. Many of her designs became iconic expressions of the Bauhaus aesthetic. Her sculptural and geometric silver and ebony teapot (☞ 2000.63a–c), while never mass-produced, reflects both the influence of her mentor, Moholy-Nagy, and the Bauhaus emphasis on industrial forms. It

was designed with careful attention to functionality and ease of use, from the nondrip spout to the heat-resistant ebony handle.

The typography workshop, while not initially a priority of the Bauhaus, became increasingly important under figures like Moholy-Nagy and the graphic designer Herbert Bayer (■ [2001.392](#)). At the Bauhaus, typography was conceived as both an empirical means of communication and an artistic expression, with visual clarity stressed above all. Concurrently, typography became increasingly connected to corporate identity and advertising. The promotional materials prepared for the Bauhaus at the workshop, with their use of sans serif typefaces and the incorporation of photography as a key graphic element, served as visual symbols of the avant-garde institution.

Gropius stepped down as director of the Bauhaus in 1928, succeeded by the architect Hannes Meyer (1889–1954). Meyer maintained the emphasis on mass-producible design and eliminated parts of the curriculum he felt were overly formalist in nature. Additionally, he stressed the social function of architecture and design, favoring concern for the public good rather than private luxury. Advertising and photography continued to gain prominence under his leadership.

Under pressure from an increasingly right-wing municipal government, Meyer resigned as director of the Bauhaus in 1930. He was replaced by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (■ [1980.351](#)). Mies once again reconfigured the curriculum, with an increased emphasis on architecture. Lilly Reich (1885–1947), who collaborated with Mies on a number of his private commissions, assumed control of the new interior design department. Other departments included weaving, photography, the fine arts, and building. The increasingly unstable political situation in Germany, combined with the perilous financial condition of the Bauhaus, caused Mies to relocate the school to Berlin in 1930, where it operated on a reduced scale. He ultimately shuttered the Bauhaus in 1933.

During the turbulent and often dangerous years of World War II, many of the key figures of the Bauhaus emigrated to the United States, where their work and their teaching philosophies influenced generations of young architects and designers. Breuer and Gropius taught at Harvard. Josef and Anni Albers taught at Black Mountain College, and later Josef taught at Yale. Moholy-Nagy established the New Bauhaus in Chicago in 1937. Mies van der Rohe designed the campus and taught at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

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August 2007 (originally published)
October 2016 (last revised)

Further Reading

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Citation

MLA

Griffith Winton, Alexandra. "The Bauhaus, 1919–1933." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/bauh/hd_bauh.htm (August 2007; last revised October 2016)

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