

Building Bauhaus

September 30, 2019 – February 29, 2020



Bauhaus Building, Dessau, 1925-1926: Workshop wing from the southwest, Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of Ise Gropius, © President and Fellows of Harvard College

United Arab Emirates, DUBAI – “The ultimate aim of all art is the building!”¹ declared Walter Gropius in his Bauhaus manifesto of 1919. Foregrounding architecture -- the word Bauhaus comes from *bauen*, which means ‘to build’ and *haus* (‘house’) – architect Gropius, called on artists and artisans to work collaboratively to create a total work of art, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. To construct not only buildings but complete environments. To offer affordable, practical and beautiful objects and buildings equipped to the smallest details to improve the living conditions of individuals. “Art and the people must form an entity,” he proclaimed. “Art shall no longer be a luxury of the few but should be enjoyed and experienced by the broad masses. The aim is an alliance of the arts under the wing of great architecture.”²

The Jean-Paul Najjar Foundation (JPNF) in partnership with Alserkal Avenue presents *Building Bauhaus*, an exhibition that marks the 100th anniversary of its founding by Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany. One of the most important schools of the twentieth-century, the Bauhaus drew from different philosophies and artistic styles; from the medieval guild system and Gothic architecture to William Morris’ Arts & Crafts movement, which emphasized handmade objects and the absence of ornamentation. The Bauhaus was also influenced by avant-garde movements such as Russian Constructivism and the Dutch movement, de Stijl - Theo van Doesburg taught at the Weimar Bauhaus in 1922. All this enabled the Bauhaus to become a place of innovation, creation and experimentation that would ultimately rethink the basic conditions of life and change the way we lived, worked and even played.

Through student exercises, iconic design objects, photography, textiles, and archival material, this multipart exhibition opens with an examination of the Bauhaus School’s significant contributions: its revolutionary teaching model known as the preliminary course or *Vorkurs* and the specialized workshops that followed, all largely shaped by

¹ Walter Gropius, Bauhaus Manifesto, April 1, 1919.

² ‘Work Council for Art: Under the wing of a great architecture’ in Ulrich Contrads (ed.), Programmes and manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture, p. 44.

Swiss painter and art theoretician, Johannes Itten, the most important personality during the first phase of the Bauhaus. But the Bauhausers' attitude to life was just as progressive and in keeping with the new modern way of life outside of the classroom. Recreational and sporting activities, dances, festivals, and parties such as the 'Metal Party' of 1929 held to the jazz sounds of the Bauhaus Band were an essential part of the students' ongoing artistic development. Finally, this part of the exhibition looks at the women artists who taught, studied and made groundbreaking work at the Bauhaus School but who often faced gender bias and found themselves overlooked and excluded by the structural system that was then in place.

The second section of *Building Bauhaus* looks at important design objects and architecture- the raison d'être of the Bauhaus and the modernist ideals and philosophies that it championed and which would later be subsumed within the International Style. On exhibit are examples of prototypical objects designed by young masters of the now Dessau school - all distinguished by their simple, practical and functional construction and designed for mass production - a new direction for the school. Significant architectural works are introduced with focus on Marcel Breuer, one of the most notable figures to come out of the Bauhaus and his collaborations first with Walter Gropius as part of the Dessau school and well after its closure in 1933 when both architects moved to the United States. Breuer founded his own architectural practice in 1941 and designed iconic modernist structures with Mario Jossa who joined the team in 1964. Architectural projects on exhibit include Black Mountain College (1929), UNESCO headquarters (1955) and Sayer House (1972). Jossa designed the Jean-Paul Najjar Foundation (JPNF) in 2015, also highlighted in the exhibition through archival material and hand-drawn architectural plans that feature its modernist characteristics.

Bringing the exhibition home, the final section, which opens in November offers insight into the modernist movement's influence and relationship with the Middle East. In the mid-twentieth-century, newly established nation-states, carved out of former colonial territories were eager to construct a new national identity for themselves. A new optimism and a desire for social change, prompted a surge in architectural production that was deeply rooted in a modernist ideology that was often problematic and fragmented.³ The Middle East became a prime site for the influx of architects from the Americas, Europe and sometimes Asia for the implementation of these 'new' modernist ideals. Renowned international architects were commissioned major projects, sometimes in collaboration with young local architects who were returning from their studies abroad and would later become power houses in their own right. Iraqi architect Hisham Munir for example worked with Walter Gropius and his architectural firm, The Architects Collaborative (TAC) on the University of Baghdad when Gropius was awarded the project in 1957 - is one such example on exhibit. Also, on exhibit include canonic projects found in Abu Dhabi, Cairo, Sharjah and Tel Aviv in Mandate Palestine, which holds the largest concentration of Bauhaus buildings built between the 1920s and 40s that are representative of the modernist boom in our region.

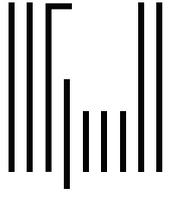
About JPNF

The Jean-Paul Najjar Foundation for Contemporary Art is a non-profit ICOM registered private museum, gathering abstract European and American art from the 1960s through today. The JPNF is also home to a remarkable archive tracing forty years of artist-collector exchanges. Education is central to the museum's mission. Committed to presenting an educational program that promotes a spirit of discovery and inquiry that engages our diverse communities, the JPNF is designed by Mario Jossa, of Marcel Breuer and Associates.

www.jpnnajarfoundation.com | @JPNFMUSEUM
JPNF is open Sunday - Saturday, 11AM - 6PM

³ "From the Nation-State to the Failed State," Ziad Jama'eddine, *The Arab City: Architecture and Representation*, Edited by Amale Andraos, Nora Akawi with Caitlin Blanchfield. pp.94-100.

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