

Bauhaus Architecture 1919-1933

Hans Engels







Walter Gropius

DESSAU BAUHAUS BUILDING

Dessau, 1925–26

The fact that the image of the Dessau Bauhaus Building has endured in the collective memory as one of white purist modernism is thanks to the Bauhaus itself. The availability of manageable, reasonably priced 35mm cameras led to a great enthusiasm for photography – which at that time was black and white – and this enthusiasm found its way into the Dessau Bauhaus. It is above all Lucia Moholy's photos of the Bauhaus Building, the Masters' houses and the Bauhaus product portfolio that have defined the image of the art school up to the present day: Lucia Moholy is synonymous with Bauhaus photography.

In reality, however, "white modernism" is much more colourful. This begins with the bright red entrance doors of the Bauhaus Building in Dessau, continues inside with a sharp orange on the balustrade, and is also apparent on the ceilings and walls, painted blue in some places and pastel yellow in others. The Masters' houses are even more euphoric with colour. Here, pale pink meets midnight blue and dark red, yellow ochre meets bright pink, bottle green meets honey yellow, along with the colour composition blue-yellow-red. How could it be otherwise, with so many painters among the instructors? Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Oskar Schlemmer, Lyonel Feininger. Afterwards, the senses may well yearn for the white calm of the Bauhaus.

The composition of the Bauhaus Building is based on three L-shaped wings which intersect one another in the style of a windmill. The first wing was for the technical classes; in the studio building, the Prellerhaus, there were originally twenty-eight residential apartments for students and young Masters; and the third wing housed the workshops. The festival area – a single-storey intermediate building – connected the workshop wing with the studio building. The festival area housed the auditorium, the Bauhaus stage and the canteen. A two-storey bridge – which also accommodated the administrative rooms and, until 1928, Walter Gropius's architecture office – connected the workshops with the wing for the training school classrooms.

Apart from the functional division of the space by individual structures connected to form one organism – which was novel at the time – a particularly striking feature of the architecture is the facade wall of the workshops completely dissolved into glass. This generated much

excitement at the time. The building's supports are all set back from the glass facade, so the glass curtain extends over all three storeys and runs the whole length of the building without interruption. This new transparency, lightness and planarity exceeded all previous notions of aesthetics.

The Italian art historian Giulio Carlo Argan offers an astute description of the Bauhaus Building in his book *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus* (1951): "The anti-monumental function of a building that is both factory and school, and that seeks to give form to the idea of work as education, overlaps with the function of urban development. The Bauhaus Building, completed in 1926, aims, above all, to be evaluated as part of urban development planning. It integrates with and emphasizes urban planning by forming a bridge across one street, facing another, and incorporating a sports ground into two of its wings. In short, it avoids interrupting the hustle and bustle of urban life by integrating into this with its own rhythm and extending its own glass facades far outwards, not primarily in order to capture more light but to satisfy the craftsman's instinctive need to look up from his work from time to time, so that he can sharpen his gaze – clouded by continuous, uninterrupted work – once again. In comparison with the spatial arrangement briefly discussed earlier, that of the Bauhaus is characterized by a compact structure, ensuring that if we were to turn around within it, it would offer us from every angle a continuous view of the whole. There is no perspective from which the building does not present itself in full, and none from which it admits particular effects or perspectival deceptions. Within the total space there is only one perspective: a 'being in the middle of things', a participation in the generative rhythm."

The five-storey studio building in the east, the Prellerhaus, finishes off the wings of the Bauhaus. On its eastern side, the balconies protrude from the tower building like springboards, covering the painted white facade with a play of light and shade. The steep view from under the balconies is a favourite motif often used to represent the Bauhaus, such as by László Moholy-Nagy, Lucia Moholy, Irene Bayer and Marianne Brandt. The famous photograph by Irene Bayer, moreover, cuts into the building and uses the contours of the white external walls as a kind of background for the succinct shadows cast by the balconies.















Walter Gropius; Bruno Fioretti Marquez Architekten

MASTERS' HOUSES

Dessau, 1925–26, 2010–14

The Masters' houses are located in a pine forest not far from the Bauhaus itself. They consist of a single-family house – the Bauhaus director's residence – and three semi-detached houses for the Bauhaus Masters. The single-family house has an L-shaped ground plan, whereas the semi-detached houses have S-shaped ground plans; these have been produced by placing together two L-flanks which have been turned 180 degrees.

The spatial proportions and the exactness of the construction are the result of a three-dimensional cubic projection, based on an axonometric drawing, which demarcates and measures the space. The interior rooms follow the same logical design; the objects form a unity with the space without this compromising their function.

The detached house belonging to the Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius – occupied first by himself and then by the later Bauhaus directors Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe – and the neighbouring semi-detached houses, built by the Bauhaus Master László Moholy-Nagy, were destroyed by a British air attack at night on 7 March 1945; 80 per cent of the town of Dessau was destroyed in this attack. After several unsuccessful attempts to rebuild the ensemble, another competition was advertised in 2010; this was won by the Berlin architecture firm Bruno Fioretti Marquez with a design which consciously went against a reconstruction faithful to the original.

The architects decided to approach the original buildings from a distance and artistically defamiliarize them. In their external dimensions, the arrangement of structural parts and the position of the ground plan, the two new houses correspond exactly to the earlier houses. The structures that had been destroyed were reproduced within the old perimeters on the basis of their fundamental significance for the ensemble and their place in the collective memory of modernism.

However, the external walls of the houses are now made of lightweight concrete, and in place of the windows laminated glass panes have been set into the facade, allowing only a muted light into the rooms. Inside, the subdivided spatial structure is broken up; parts of the original ceilings and walls have been left out. Large rooms have been created, extending over several storeys, with galleries and a balcony-style exit. It is an intellectual approach the architects describe as "architectural vagueness". The houses do not seem like houses; they seem more like an illusion. Everything is there – the walls, the refreshment kiosk, the director's house, the Moholy-Nagy house – but it seems strange and mysterious, as if Gropius were enshrined in a shrine. The two other Masters' houses had already been restored in the mid-1990s and are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



