



# A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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- Welcome. This is one of over 200 talks on the history of Western Art. I have arranged the talks chronologically starting with cave art through to art produced in the last few years.

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# 49-01 BAUHAUS



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Marianne Brandt,  
*Tea Infuser*, 1924, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- This is Section 49 on the Bauhaus. It was a short-lived art school, just fourteen years, but it spread its influence across Europe and the US and became the cornerstone of modern design. More about Marianne Brandt and the tea infuser in a few minutes.

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Walter Gropius (1883-1969), Reconstructed Bauhaus Building, 1925-1926, Dessau-Roßlau, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany

Walter Gropius (1883-1969), Reconstructed *Bauhaus Building*, 1925-1926, Dessau-Roßlau, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany

- First, the Bauhaus. It was an art school that **opened in Weimar in 1919**. It was founded by Walter Gropius after the collapse of Imperial Germany by merging two former institutions: (the Grand Ducal Saxon Academy of Fine Art and the Grand Ducal Saxon School of Arts and Crafts). The school's manifesto declared: **"The ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building."** Gropius wanted to **erase the distinction between fine art and craft**.
- The name combines the German words for "building" and "house". The school **moved to Dessau in 1925** after **political pressure** from conservative forces in Weimar. This building became the school's iconic home. **Its radical design featured a steel frame, glass curtain walls, and asymmetrical composition.** The workshop wing's glass facade became one of modernism's most photographed elevations.
- **Key faculty included painters Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, designer László Moholy-Nagy, and architect Marcel Breuer** (pronounced broy-er".. Students attended a preliminary course, then specialised in workshops for metalwork, weaving, furniture, or other crafts. The curriculum balanced mystical spirituality with rational industrial production.
- The building itself demonstrated Bauhaus principles: **form following function, industrial materials, and rejection of ornament.** Different wings served distinct purposes. Workshops, student housing, and administrative spaces connected

via bridges and walkways. The flat roofs, ribbon windows, and white surfaces shocked conservative Dessau residents. **Today it's a UNESCO World Heritage site.**

- The Bauhaus school went through **three main phases, from Weimar** (central Germany) **to Dessau** (nearer Berlin) **and finally to Berlin**. It ultimately **closed in 1933** due to political pressure from the **Nazi party**:

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Bauhaus: BOW-house

Dessau: DES-ow

Weimar: VY-mar

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Josef Albers (1888-1976), *Fruit Bowl*, 1923, 5.7 cm height, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Josef Albers (1888-1976), *Fruit Bowl*, 1923, glass, silver-plated metal, wood, 5.7 cm height, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- This glass and metal fruit bowl represents the **school's early period**, when mysticism mixed with craft. Initially **Master Johannes Itten** led the preliminary course with meditation and breathing exercises. Students wore monk-like robes. **Josef Albers soon rejected this approach.** He preferred rationality and material experimentation. His glass assemblages used found bottle shards arranged in grids. "**I prefer to work with the leftovers of industrial production,**" he said.
- Albers had joined the Bauhaus in **1920** as a student after training as a primary school teacher. He was thirty-two, older than most students. His fruit bowl is a design statement that you could make beautiful things that are functional. It can be cleaned easily, you can see the fruit and the construction is "honest", that is straightforward. However, it is not very practical, the glass could crack if you dropped a piece of fruit, and the small contact point of the ball feet meant it could tip over if the fruit was loaded unevenly.
- By **1923**, the Bauhaus **shifted direction**. New director Gropius declared "**art and technology—a new unity.**" This bowl bridges both phases. Its form is functional and geometric. Albers would become a **master in 1925**, teaching the preliminary course. He **married fellow Bauhaus student Anni Fleischmann** that year. She became renowned for **her weavings**.
- The couple **emigrated to America in 1933** when the **Nazis closed the school**.

Albers taught at Black Mountain College, then Yale. His "**Homage to the Square**" **paintings** made him famous. But this modest bowl shows his early exploration of geometry and light.

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Marianne Brandt (1893-1983), *Tea Infuser*, 1924, silver and ebony, 7 cm height, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Marianne Brandt (1893-1983), *Tea Infuser*, 1924, 7 cm height, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- This small silver and ebony tea ball became **one of the Bauhaus's most elegant designs**. Brandt studied painting and sculpture in Weimar before joining the Bauhaus metal workshop in 1924. She was **one of the few women admitted**. Master László Moholy-Nagy initially hazed her, that is, **teased and bullied her** and gave her **humiliating initiation rituals** to perform. Male students resented female intrusion into "their" workshop. They gave her brutal tasks like **hammering metal sheets for hours**.
- This tea infuser may appear non-functional as the ebony handle looks slippery. But this is a tea infuser not a teapot. It is small, about 3 inches high and designed to create a very concentrated infusion of tea which is then mixed with boiling water from another pot. For this purpose the handle is perfect. The spout is non-drip and the infuser is designed to balance perfectly during pouring. However, it was intended for mass production and that aim failed. The complex geometry requires highly skilled silver smithing so it remained expensive.
- She became **workshop director in 1928**, the first woman to lead a Bauhaus workshop. Her designs included ashtrays, lamps, and teapots. The geometric forms used circles, spheres, and cylinders. "**My guiding principle was to design objects which fulfil their purpose perfectly**," she wrote. She **photographed her own work**, creating striking images that influenced

modernist photography.

- After leaving the Bauhaus in 1929, she became a successful industrial designer first at Tandem Lamps and then at Ruppelwek from 1929 to 1933. However, in 1933 the economy collapsed, she lost her job and **during Nazi rule**, her modernist work was condemned as **degenerate**. Unlike other artists she remained in Germany to look after her aging parents. She **survived by teaching** and making craft objects. Recognition came only very late in life. She is now widely recognised as one of the **great Bauhaus designers**, particularly for her contributions to metalwork and industrial design.

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Herbert Bayer (1900-1985), *Universal Typeface*, 1925, Various Sizes, Digital and Print Formats

- **Bayer designed this alphabet eliminating capital letters entirely.** Only lowercase existed. "Why should we write and print with two alphabets?" he asked. "We do not speak in capitals." The design stripped letters to geometric essentials. Circles, arcs, and straight lines. **No serifs. No decoration. Pure function.**
- He joined the Bauhaus in **1921 as a student**, aged twenty-one. Born in **Austria**, he studied under Kandinsky and Moholy-Nagy (pronounced "muh-HOE-lee Naaj" although, like Van Gogh, there are many acceptable variations). In 1925, Gropius invited him to establish a new printing and advertising workshop. At twenty-five, Bayer became the youngest master. He revolutionised Bauhaus visual identity. All school publications used his sans-serif types. Posters, letterheads, and catalogues adopted the new typography.
- The **lowercase movement** wasn't merely aesthetic. **It was political.** Capital letters represented authority and tradition—exactly what modernists rejected. Germany had recently switched from **Gothic Fraktur type to Roman letters**, though conservatives resisted. Bayer's design pushed further. "Less is more" became concrete. Text became architecture.
- (CLICK) The typeface influenced generations of designers. **Futura**, released in 1927, **borrowed heavily** from Bayer's principles. Today, **nearly every sans-serif font traces lineage to this work.** (CLICK)

- The lowercase-only ideal never succeeded completely. **People wanted capitals.** But the geometric simplicity transformed graphic design forever. **Bayer emigrated to America in 1938**, working as art director for magazines and corporations. He brought Bauhaus principles to corporate modernism.

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Marcel Breuer (1902-1981), *Wassily Chair*, 1925-1926, 78.5 × 69 × 69 cm, Multiple Collections

Marcel Breuer (1902-1981), *Wassily Chair*, 1925-1926, 78.5 × 69 × 69 cm, Multiple Collections

- Breuer (pronounced "BROY-er", in American English "BREW-er") **bent tubular steel into furniture history**. He was twenty-three, running the furniture workshop. The story goes that he **bought an Adler bicycle** with curved handlebars. The steel tubing inspired him. "**I took a length of tubular steel and bent it to create a chair**," he recalled. The material was light, strong, and cheap. It could be mass-produced.
- **The chair's name is a myth**. It **wasn't designed for Wassily Kandinsky**, though the painter owned an early version. Manufacturers **created the "Wassily" name decades later as a marketing tool**. Originally called Model B3, it stripped the chair to pure structure. No upholstery, just stretched fabric or leather. You could see through it. Weight seemed to disappear.
- **Breuer grew up in Hungary**, studying at the Bauhaus from 1920. He became a master in 1925. His tubular steel experiments shocked traditionalists. **Furniture had always used wood**. Steel belonged in factories and bridges. The chair cost about forty marks—affordable for middle-class Germans. Thonet began production in 1927, though **sales were modest**. Modernism remained niche. Today an original would cost two to three thousand dollars.
- He left the Bauhaus in 1928, opening a Berlin practice. When Hitler rose, he **fled to England, then America**. Gropius recruited him to Harvard. Together they shaped American modernism. His furniture designs—the Cesca chair, the

Isokon Long Chair—became icons. **Museums collected them.** But in 1925, he was just a hungry student with a bicycle and a brilliant idea.

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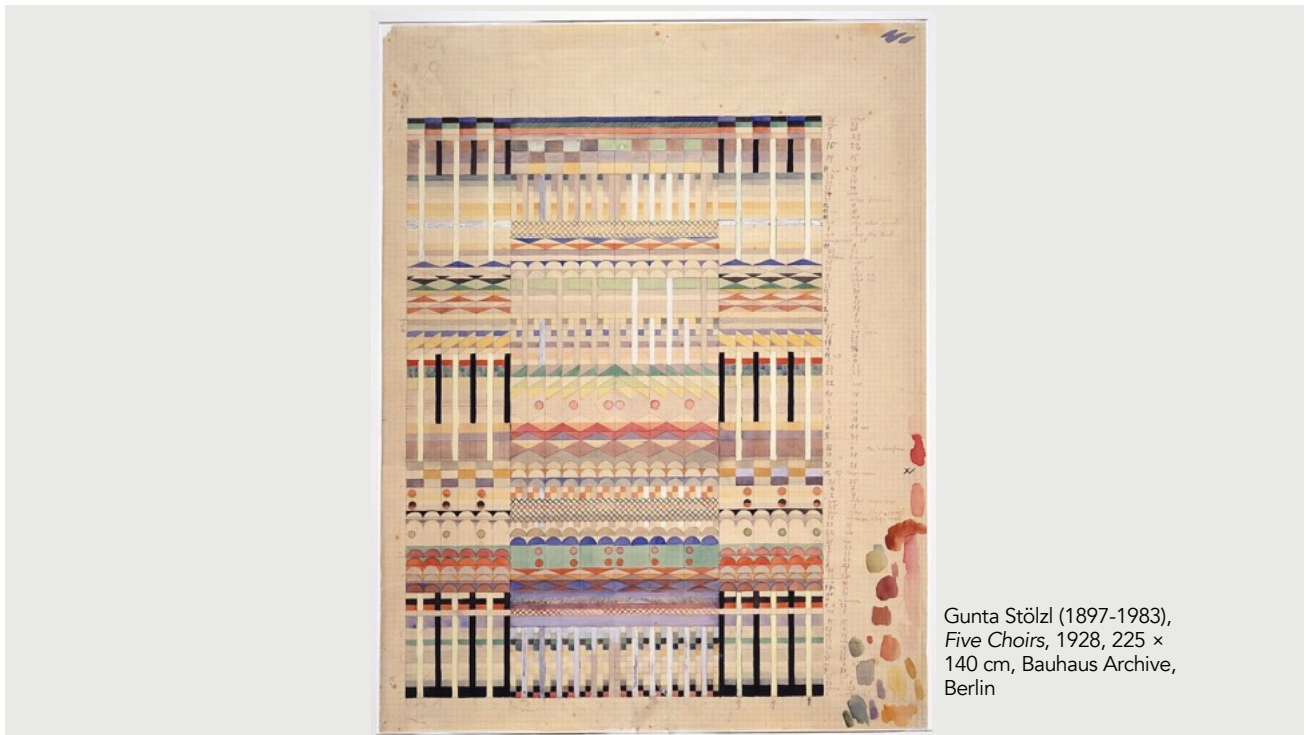
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Gunta Stölzl (1897-1983),  
*Five Choirs*, 1928, 225 ×  
 140 cm, Bauhaus Archive,  
 Berlin

Gunta Stölzl (1897-1983), *Five Choirs*, 1928, 225 × 140 cm, Bauhaus Archive, Berlin

- **This tapestry explodes with colour and geometric rhythm.** Gunta Stölzl (pronounced "GOON-tah SHTERL-tsl") wove vertical bands—yellow, orange, red, brown, black—using cotton, wool, and artificial silk. The title references **musical structure**. Five distinct sections create visual polyphony. She joined the Bauhaus in 1919 as **one of its earliest female students**. The **weaving workshop** became a "**women's ghetto**" where female students were channelled **regardless of interest**.
- Stölzl transformed this relegation into **triumph**. She studied colour theory with Klee and Kandinsky. Their lessons shaped her abstract compositions. By 1927, she became the **weaving workshop's master**—the only female master in the Bauhaus's history. Male colleagues resisted. Conservative students denounced her as a "cultural Bolshevik." She was **dating Arie Sharon**, a Jewish architecture student. This provoked **antisemitic attacks**.
- The weaving workshop became the **school's most profitable department**. Stölzl's designs **sold well**. She collaborated with architects, creating textiles for their buildings. Her innovations included combining synthetic and natural fibres. Traditional weavers used only wool or cotton. She mixed materials for new textures and durability. The results were both **beautiful and functional—pure Bauhaus**.
- In 1931, **Nazi pressure forced her resignation**. She was **unmarried and**

**pregnant.** The father was Sharon, who had already left Germany. She **moved to Switzerland**, opening a weaving studio in Zurich. There she **married**, raised her daughter, and continued designing. Her Bauhaus work **remained unknown for decades.** Only late in life did historians recognise her significance.

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Gunta Stölzl: GOON-tah SHTERL-tsl

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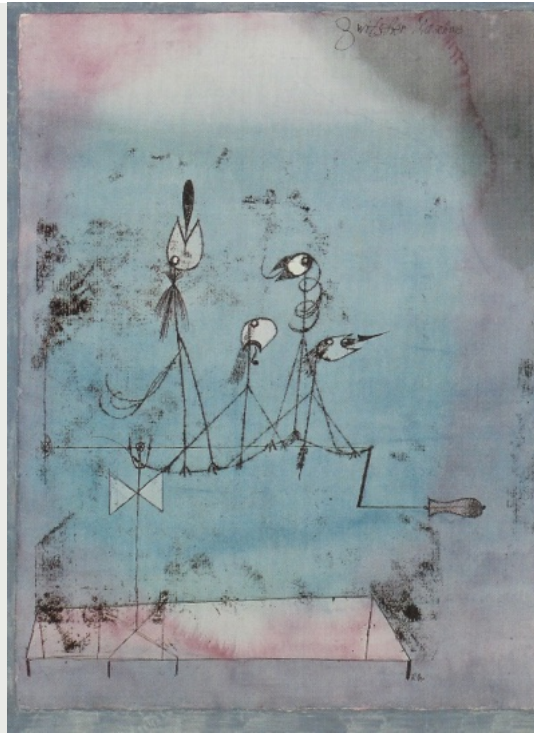
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Paul Klee (1879-1940), *The Twittering Machine*, 1922, 41 × 30 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Paul Klee (1879–1940), *The Twittering Machine*, 1922, 41 × 30 cm, watercolour and ink; oil transfer on paper with gouache and ink borders on cardboard. Group of birds shackled to a wire attached to a hand crank, Museum of Modern Art

- **Four bird-like creatures** perch on a wire attached to a **crank handle**. Turn the crank and presumably they twitter. The image suggests a **mechanical music box** or torture device. Klee drew thin lines in oil and watercolour on paper. The birds have gaping beaks. Their bodies are skeletal. **Critics debate the meaning endlessly**. Is it satire on mechanisation? A comment on art's commodification? **Klee never explained**.
- He created this three years after World War One ended. **The war had mechanised death**. Poison gas. Machine guns. Tanks. Aeroplanes. Technology promised progress but delivered slaughter. Klee served in the **German air force painting camouflage**. He witnessed the violence from relative safety. The experience haunted him. Maybe it **channels that trauma into dark whimsy**.
- He joined the **Bauhaus in 1921**. Born near Bern, he grew up bilingual in German and French. **His father taught music**. His mother sang. **He played violin expertly**. He considered becoming a **professional musician**. Art won instead. Early works were **satirical etchings mocking bourgeois society**. Marriage to pianist Lily Stumpf in 1906 provided stability. Their son Felix was born the same year.
- *The Twittering Machine* became **one of his most famous works**. It entered the Museum of Modern Art's collection in 1939.



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Die Zwitscher-Maschine: dee TSVIT-sheer mah-SHEE-nah

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Paul Klee (1879-1940), *Castle and Sun*, 1928, 60 × 50 cm, Private Collection

Paul Klee (1879-1940), *Castle and Sun*, 1928, 60 × 50 cm, Private Collection

- Klee painted this during his **most productive Bauhaus years**. Geometric forms—triangles, rectangles, circles—float in warm orange and yellow. The "castle" reads as abstracted architecture. The "sun" hovers as a perfect circle. Yet the **painting retains mystery**. Is it a real place? A memory? A dream?
- At the Bauhaus, **he taught the preliminary course and painting**. His lectures on **colour theory and form became legendary**. He filled notebooks with diagrams and theories. Students found him **brilliant but difficult**. He spoke quietly, almost inaudibly. His teaching method was cerebral and philosophical. "**Art does not reproduce the visible,**" he wrote. "**Rather, it makes visible.**"
- By 1928, he had produced over **four thousand works**. His **output was extraordinary**. Small paintings, watercolours, drawings—he **worked daily with obsessive discipline**. He **experimented constantly**. New techniques, new materials, new approaches. This painting shows his mature style: simplified forms, luminous colour, and poetic ambiguity. Critics called him a "primitive" and a "child painter." He ignored them.
- In 1931, he left for a **professorship in Düsseldorf**. Two years later, the **Nazis fired him**. They labelled his work "degenerate."
- By 1939, he was **dying in Switzerland**. **Scleroderma**—a disease hardening connective tissue—slowly paralysed him. He could barely hold a brush. Yet he kept working. His late paintings used thick black lines and simplified forms. Death came in **June 1940**. He was sixty years old.

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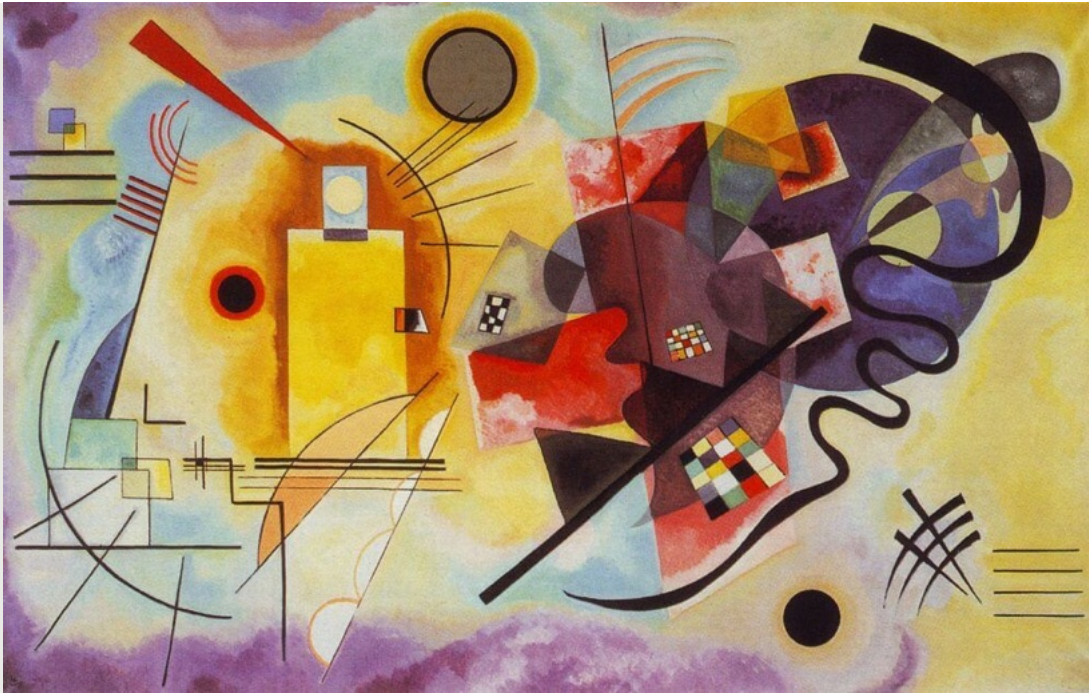
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Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Yellow-Red-Blue*, 1925, 127 × 200 cm, Centre Pompidou, Paris

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Yellow-Red-Blue*, 1925, 127 × 200 cm, Centre Pompidou, Paris

- This is *Yellow-Red-Blue* by Wassily Kandinsky, it divides into **two halves**. The **left explodes with warm colours**—yellow, orange, red. Geometric forms overlap chaotically. A yellow rectangle dominates. The **right side feels cooler and calmer**. A blue circle floats in space. Precise black lines create structure. The composition suggests conflict between opposing forces. **Emotion versus reason**. Chaos versus order. Kandinsky **spent months planning such paintings**. Preliminary sketches filled notebooks.
- He created this shortly after joining the Bauhaus. **By 1925, he had codified his colour theory into rigid principles**:
  - Yellow meant earthly energy. Blue represented spiritual transcendence. Red signified warmth and vitality. Triangles were active and aggressive. Circles were cosmic and eternal. Squares provided stability. These weren't subjective opinions. He believed them objective truths discoverable through research.
- Students found his theories **fascinating or absurd**. Some embraced his mysticism. **Others mocked it**. Josef Albers later dismissed Kandinsky's colour theories as "**nonsense**." Nevertheless, his teaching **influenced generations**. His book "**Point and Line to Plane**" became a design textbook. His diagrams appeared in art schools worldwide. Even sceptics absorbed his ideas.
- He lived **comfortably in Dessau** with his wife Nina. She was thirty years

younger—they married in 1917 after his first wife left him. Nina managed his affairs and protected his working time. **He painted every morning in strict routine.** Lunch at one o'clock precisely. Afternoon walks. Evening socialising with faculty. He spoke Russian at home, German elsewhere. He was born in Moscow and his great-grandmother was a princess. He studied law and economics but from an early age he was fascinated and stimulated by colour. In 1896, at the age of 30, he gave up a promising career teaching law and economics to enrol in the Munich Academy. He was forced to return to Russia in 1914 as an "enemy alien". He was initially accepted and helped establish museums and he oversaw education reforms but his spiritual approach to abstraction clashed with the bolsheviks and he accepted a teaching post in Germany in 1921 to escape the increasingly restrictive environment.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Jaune-Rouge-Bleu: zhohn roozh bluh

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Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Several Circles*, 1926, 140 × 140 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Several Circles*, 1926, 140 × 140 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

- **Twenty-six circles float on a black background.** They overlap, creating transparent layers. Colours range from pale yellow to deep violet. Some circles glow. Others recede into darkness. Kandinsky considered **the circle the most profound shape**. "**The circle is the synthesis of the greatest oppositions**," he wrote. "**It combines the concentric and the eccentric in a single form.**"
- He arrived at the **Bauhaus in 1922**, aged fifty-six. He was **already famous as a founder of abstract art** and taught form and colour theory. His course explored how shapes and colours create emotional responses.
- This painting **epitomises his mystical approach**. He believed art could **transform consciousness**. Colours and forms were spiritual forces. The **black background represents the cosmos**. The **circles are celestial bodies or souls**. Contemporary critics found it **pretentious**. One reviewer mocked his "colour symphonies" as "**decorative nonsense**."
- Kandinsky lived with his **much younger wife, Nina**, in a Bauhaus master house. They **hosted elaborate dinners** with faculty and students. He **dressed impeccably**—three-piece suits, polished shoes. His Russian accent never faded. Students found him distant but inspiring. He rarely discussed personal matters. His first wife and son remained in Russia. He never saw them again.
- **In 1933, the Nazis closed the Bauhaus.** They **despised Kandinsky's abstract work**. He moved to Paris, living in a small apartment. **War and poverty marked**

**his final years. He died in 1944, largely forgotten.** Recognition came posthumously.

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Wassily Kandinsky: vah-SEE-lee kan-DIN-skee

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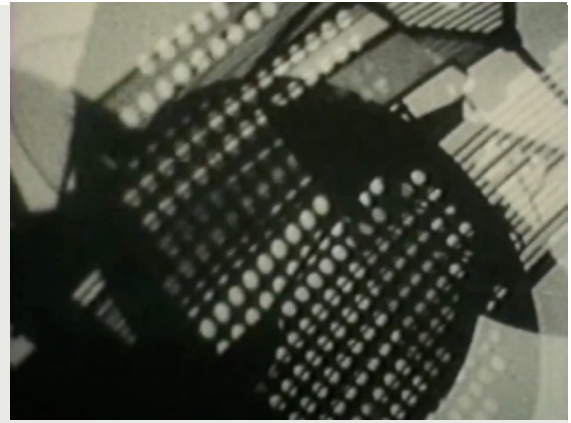
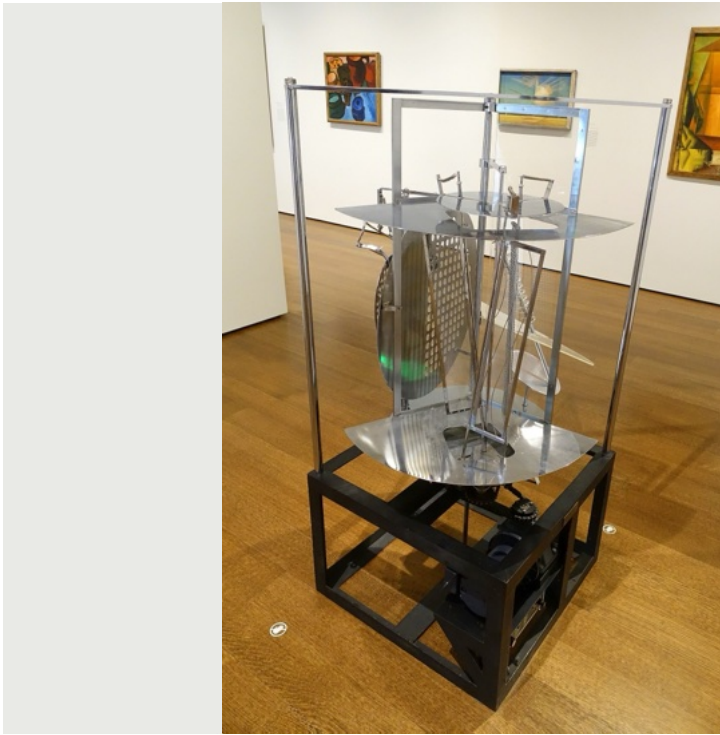
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*Lightplay: Black-White-Grey*

László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946),  
*Light Prop for an Electric Stage*, 1930,  
 151 × 70 × 70 cm, Busch-Reisinger  
 Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts

László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), *Light Prop for an Electric Stage*, 1930, 151 × 70 × 70 cm, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts

- **This kinetic sculpture by László Moholy-Nagy rotates**, creating moving shadows and light patterns. Moholy-Nagy called it the "**Light-Space Modulator**." Metal discs, perforated screens, and glass elements revolve on a motorised base. **Lights shine through, projecting shifting patterns onto surrounding walls**. The machine took over a **decade to develop**. He sketched the first designs in 1922.
- He joined the Bauhaus in 1923, **replacing Johannes Itten**. Born in Hungary, he survived World War One wounded but alive. **The war killed his illusions** about tradition. He embraced technology as salvation. At the Bauhaus, he **revolutionised the preliminary course**. **Out went meditation and mysticism**. In came **photography, film, and industrial materials**. Students built sculptures from metal and plastic, not wood and clay.
- *The Light Prop* embodied his vision: art as laboratory experiment. It had **no practical function**. It wasn't furniture or architecture. It simply explored light as material. He filmed it, creating an abstract short film called "**Lightplay: Black-White-Grey**." The film screened at experimental cinema clubs. Most viewers found it baffling.
- Building the sculpture proved difficult. **Motors broke. Parts corroded. The mechanism jammed**. He needed an electrical engineer's help. The final version premiered in 1930 at the Werkbund exhibition in Paris. Critics dismissed it as a

pointless gadget. "**A toy for grown-ups**," one wrote. Moholy-Nagy disagreed. "Light is a new medium of expression," he insisted.

- In 1937, he **moved to Chicago**, founding the New Bauhaus. Financial troubles closed it within a year. He reopened it independently as the School of Design. **Cancer killed him at fifty-one**. *The Light Prop*, reconstructed multiple times, became a modernist icon.

## **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

László Moholy-Nagy: LAHZ-loh MOH-hoy-NODGE

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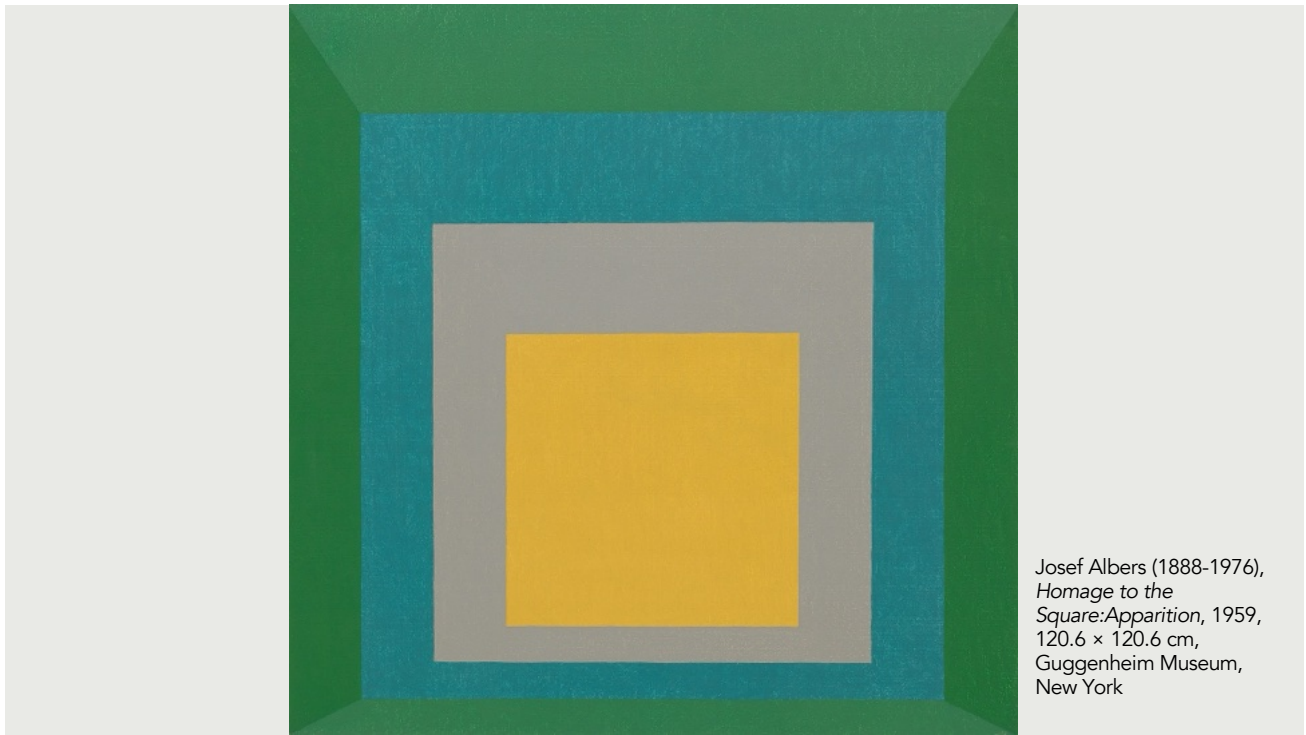
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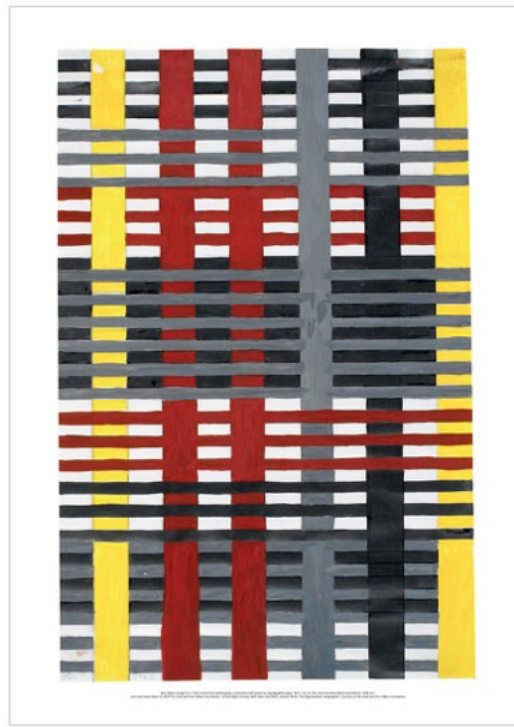
Josef Albers (1888-1976),  
*Homage to the  
Square: Apparition*, 1959,  
120.6 × 120.6 cm,  
Guggenheim Museum,  
New York

Josef Albers (1888-1976), *Homage to the Square: Apparition*, 1959, 120.6 × 120.6 cm, Guggenheim Museum, New York

- I mentioned Josef Albers near the beginning and showed you his fruit bowl. Years later he painted the series *Homage to the Square* between 1950 and his death in 1976. It consists of over **1,000 works** and illustrates his theories of art. All the works show **three or four nested squares of colour** created under carefully controlled conditions to ensure uniformity. They were all painted on hardboard starting with at least six coats of white primer. On the back of each panel all the technical details are carefully recorded.
- The optical effects Albers created—shimmering colour contrasts and the illusion of receding and advancing planes—were not meant to deceive the eye, it is not an optical illusion, it is intended to challenge us, the viewer, and refine our visual perception. He used the series to teach the mechanics of vision and show even the uninformed viewer how to see. He was always proud that many nonart students took his classes at Yale.

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Anni Albers (1899-1994), *Design for Unexecuted Wall Hanging Poster*, 1926, 41 × 40 cm, Cooper Hewitt Museum, New York

Anni Albers (1899-1994), *Design for Unexecuted Wall Hanging Poster*, 1926, 41 × 40 cm, Cooper Hewitt Museum, New York

- This gouache design shows intersecting rectangles in black, white, grey, and red. Albers created it while studying in the weaving workshop. The pattern suggests woven threads. Vertical and horizontal bands create rhythm and structure. Though titled "unexecuted," it demonstrates her mature aesthetic: geometric precision and subtle colour relationships.
- Born Annelise Fleischmann in Berlin to a **wealthy Jewish family**, she enrolled at the **Bauhaus in 1922**. She wanted to study glass or metalwork. Women were **steered to weaving instead**. She later said this **restriction became liberation**. Textiles allowed **endless experimentation**. She mastered traditional techniques, then reinvented them.
- By **1926**, she was producing innovative work. She incorporated cellophane and metallic threads. Her textiles reflected light. They functioned as room dividers and acoustic panels. Form and function merged. **That year she married Josef Albers**. They became **the Bauhaus power couple**. Both were students who became masters. Both embraced geometric abstraction.
- **The Nazis forced them to emigrate in 1933. Black Mountain College in North Carolina hired them both**. She continued weaving, creating wall hangings that blurred art and craft. **Museums ignored textiles as "women's work."** She fought this prejudice her entire career. **"A fabric is as complex as any other work of art,"** she said.

- In **1949**, the Museum of Modern Art gave her a **solo exhibition**—the first for a textile artist. Recognition grew slowly. She published books on weaving theory. She experimented with printmaking. By the time she **died at ninety-four**, she was acknowledged as a **pioneering abstract artist**.

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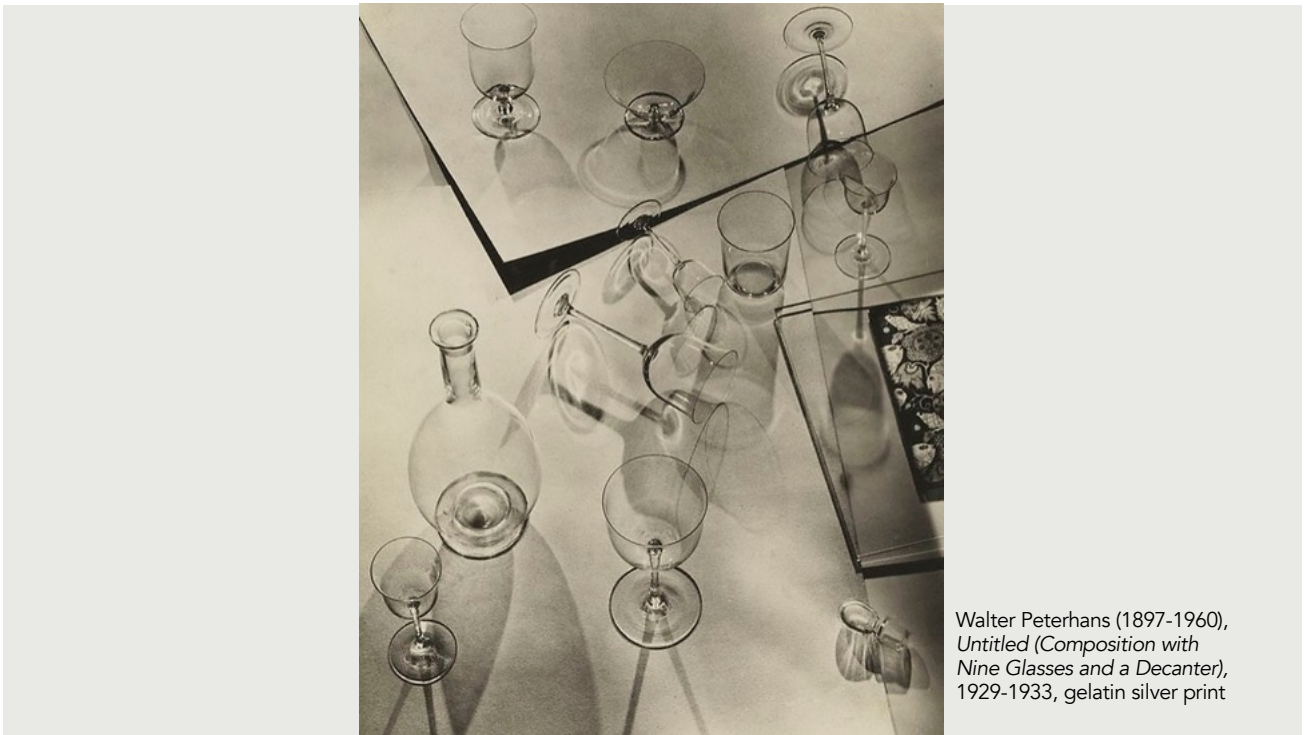
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Walter Peterhans (1897-1960),  
*Untitled (Composition with  
 Nine Glasses and a Decanter)*,  
 1929-1933, gelatin silver print

Walter Peterhans (1897-1960), *Untitled (Composition with Nine Glasses and a Decanter)*, 1929-1933, gelatin silver print

- This **black-and-white photograph** by Walter Peterhans shows glass bottles arranged on a table. Light glows through transparent glass. Shadows pool on the surface. The composition is precise. Every element occupies its exact position. Peterhans obsessed over placement. **He spent hours adjusting objects by millimetres.** Students found him **maddeningly perfectionist.**
- He joined the **Bauhaus in 1929** as photography workshop master. Trained as a **mathematician and engineer**, he approached photography scientifically. Exact exposure. Perfect focus. Careful printing. His method contrasted with Moholy-Nagy's experimental work. Moholy-Nagy created photograms and collages. Peterhans photographed objects with classical rigour.
- The still life genre connected to **Dutch Golden Age painting**. But Peterhans **eliminated narrative and symbolism**. These bottles carried **no meaning**. They existed as **pure form**. Light, volume, texture—these alone mattered. **"Photography must be as objective as possible,"** he said. **"The photographer's personality should disappear."**
- Students debated his approach. Was this art or technical exercise? Peterhans didn't care. He taught observation and precision. Look carefully. See accurately. Represent truthfully. His standards were uncompromising. Few students met them. Those who did became accomplished photographers.
- In 1933, the Nazis **closed the Bauhaus**. **Peterhans stayed in Germany initially,**



working commercially. **In 1938, he emigrated to America. Mies van der Rohe hired him** to teach at the Illinois Institute of Technology. There he continued his rigorous method. He published little. He exhibited rarely. His work influenced generations of architectural and still-life photographers. Recognition came quietly, through students who absorbed his discipline.

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Oskar Schlemmer (1888-1943), *Triadic Ballet Costumes*, 1922, Various Sizes, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Oskar Schlemmer (1888-1943), *Triadic Ballet Costumes*, 1922, Various Sizes, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

- Oskar Schlemmer created these **sculptural costumes for dancers**. They transformed **human bodies into geometric forms**. Spheres, cones, and cylinders. Dancers became living sculptures. The ballet premiered in 1922 in Stuttgart. Three dancers performed twelve sequences. The title "triadic" referenced three performers, three parts, and the unity of dance, costume, and music.
- **He joined the Bauhaus in 1921**, teaching sculpture and stagecraft. The theatre workshop became his domain. He believed dance could explore space mathematically. Bodies moved through invisible grids. Gestures traced geometric patterns. The **costumes restricted movement deliberately**. Dancers couldn't move naturally. They had to find new movements.
- The costumes used padded cloth, wire frames, and lacquered papier-mâché. One featured a giant hoop skirt with a spiral pattern. Another had a disc-shaped head and spherical body segments. Gold, silver, and bright colours made them otherworldly. Audiences found them either **fascinating or ridiculous**. One critic called them "**grotesque puppets**." Another praised their "**revolutionary vision**."
- **Schlemmer struggled financially his entire life**. The ballet toured intermittently. Performances were rare. Costumes were expensive to build and transport. He painted murals for Bauhaus buildings to earn money. His paintings

showed stylised figures in abstract spaces—theatre translated to canvas.

- In 1929, he left the Bauhaus. **He taught in Breslau, then Berlin.** The Nazis condemned his work as **degenerate**. They **destroyed his murals**. He retreated to a small town, painting quietly. He **died in 1943 from a heart attack**. The ballet was reconstructed in the 1970s. Original costumes survived, stored in a museum collection.

## **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Oskar Schlemmer: OSS-kar SHLEM-mer

Triadic: try-AD-ik

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Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), *Barcelona Chair*, 1929, 75 × 75 × 77 cm, Multiple Collections

- Ludwig Mies van der Rohe designed this chair for the **German Pavilion at the Barcelona International Exhibition**. The pavilion represented **Weimar Germany's cultural ambitions**. Elegant. Modern. Democratic. The chair embodied these ideals. Leather cushions rest on a curved steel frame. The X-shaped base suggests ancient Roman folding chairs used by magistrates. Yet the materials are thoroughly modern.
- **He became Bauhaus director in 1930**, succeeding **Hannes Meyer**. Born Ludwig Mies, he **added "van der Rohe" from his mother's surname**. No architectural degree. He **learned through apprenticeship and talent**. His buildings emphasised open space and minimal structure. "**Less is more**" became his motto. "**God is in the details**" was another.
- As director, he **depoliticised the Bauhaus**. Previous directors had leftist sympathies. **Mies avoided politics**. He wanted to focus on architecture and design. **This angered radical students** who saw art as political weapon. Protests erupted. **He expelled troublemakers**. Conservative faculty approved. Communist students called him a fascist.
- The Barcelona chair went into **limited production**. Knoll International manufactured it from 1953 onwards. It became a **status symbol**. Corporate lobbies and executive offices everywhere featured it. **Lawyers, bankers, and architects bought them**. The chair signified **good taste** and modernist

credentials. Original 1929 versions are museum pieces.

- In 1933, Mies tried moving the Bauhaus to Berlin. The Nazis shut it down permanently. He emigrated to America in 1937. He taught at the Illinois Institute of Technology and established a Chicago practice. His American skyscrapers—the Seagram Building, the Toronto-Dominion Centre—became modernist icons. He died wealthy and famous. The chair outlasted everything else. They can be bought today but prices vary widely, a good, restored example might be \$5,000 to \$8,000.

## **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: LOOD-vig MEESS van der ROH-eh

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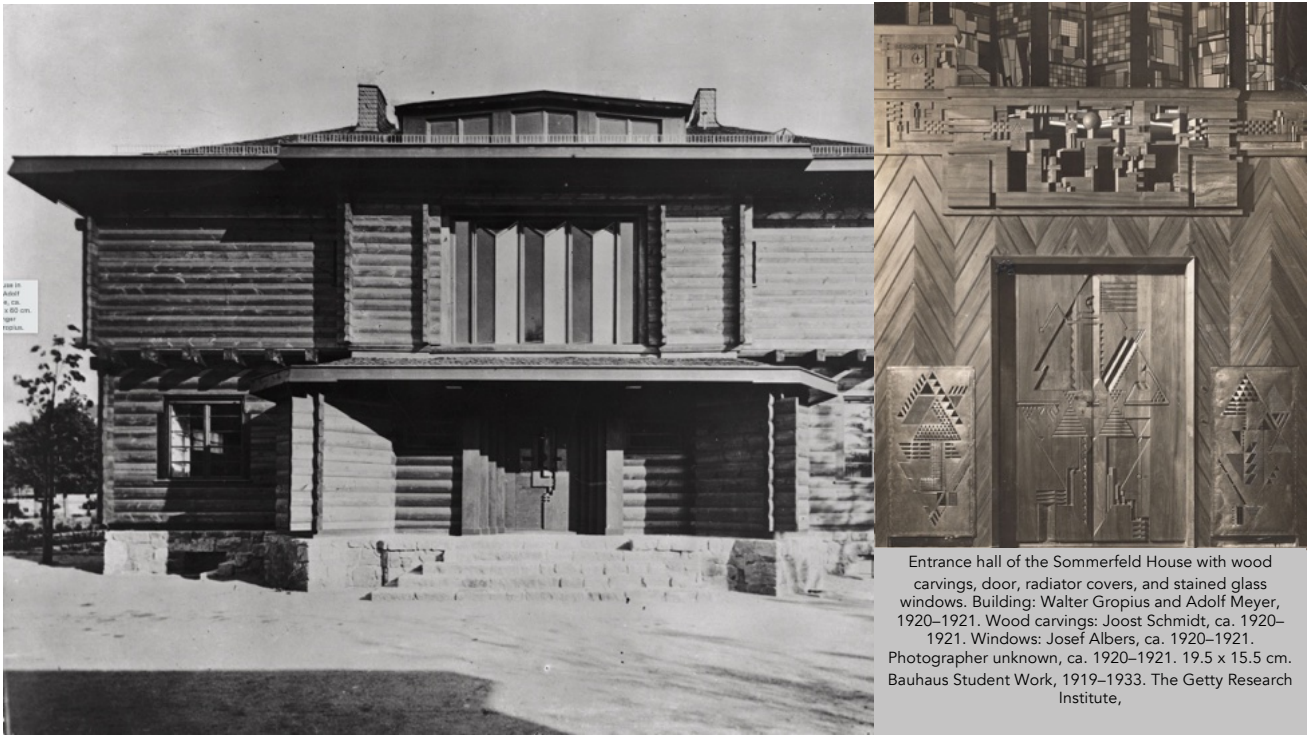
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Front Façade of the Sommerfeld House in Berlin, Building: Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, 1920–1921. Photo: Carl Rogge, ca. 1922–1923. Gelatin silver print. 41.5 x 60 cm. Harvard Art Museums / Busch-Reisinger Museum

Entrance hall of the Sommerfeld House with wood carvings, door, radiator covers, and stained glass windows. Building: Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, 1920–1921. Wood carvings: Joost Schmidt, ca. 1920–1921. Windows: Josef Albers, ca. 1920–1921. Photographer unknown, ca. 1920–1921. 19.5 x 15.5 cm. Bauhaus Student Work, 1919–1933. The Getty Research Institute,

- The Bauhaus school (1919–1933) operated under three different architect-directors during its existence across three German cities.
  - Walter Gropius (1919–1928): The founder of the Bauhaus in Weimar, Gropius directed the school through its formative years and its move to Dessau in 1925.
  - Hannes Meyer (1928–1930): Appointed at Gropius's recommendation, Meyer shifted the school's focus toward functionalism and social necessity before being dismissed for political reasons.
  - Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1930–1933): The third and final director, Mies moved the school to a private facility in Berlin in 1932 before it was closed under pressure from the Nazi regime in July 1933.
- Gropius sought to facilitate collaboration between masters and apprentices and between artists and designers in pursuit of a unity of the arts, with **“the building**

**of the future**” as the “ultimate goal.”. In early 1920 an opportunity to realise this vision presented itself. **Adolf Sommerfeld**, a lumber mill owner, building contractor, and real estate developer specialising in timber structures, commissioned the architect and his partner **Adolf Meyer** to design a house for Sommerfeld’s family in the south of Berlin. **Gropius recognised the opportunity** to bring the **various workshops together** in its design, which, in keeping with his postwar romantic vision, took inspiration from a rustic log cabin, celebrating the use of wood.

- The building’s completion in 1921 was met with **great fanfare**. A roof-raising ceremony with **several hundred guests** was held in December 1920 and featured a bonfire by Adolf Meyer, a choral recitation, and a procession, signaling the cultural and spiritual importance of this new architectural vision.





Hannes Meyer (1889-1954),  
*Bundesschule des  
 Allgemeinen Deutschen  
 Gewerkschaftsbundes*,  
 1928-1930, Various  
 Dimensions, Bernau bei  
 Berlin, Germany

Hannes Meyer (1889-1954), *Bundesschule des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes*, 1928-1930, Various Dimensions, Bernau bei Berlin, Germany

- This is by Hannes Meyer who took over from Gropius on his recommendation. This trade union school housed classrooms, dormitories, dining halls, and recreational facilities. Long horizontal blocks stretch through pine forest. Flat roofs, ribbon windows, and unadorned surfaces demonstrate functionalist principles. No decoration. No sentiment. Pure utility.
- He became director in 1928 when Gropius resigned. **Swiss-born**, he had worked in Belgium and Germany. He believed architecture should serve social needs, not aesthetic experiments. "**Building is a biological process**," he wrote. "**Building is not an aesthetic process**." This philosophy conflicted with Bauhaus traditions. Gropius and others had emphasised art alongside function.
- **Meyer brought Marxist politics**. He reorganised the curriculum around collective work and social responsibility. Students designed affordable housing and workers' furniture. Private commissions were rejected as bourgeois. Faculty divided. Some supported his approach. Others, including Kandinsky and Klee, found it philistine. Where was beauty? Where was spiritual dimension?
- **The trade union school became his masterpiece**. Workers attended courses while living communally. The architecture reflected egalitarian ideals. No hierarchy. Shared facilities. Modest materials. Yet the design showed sophistication. Careful proportions. Thoughtful siting. Natural light flooding



interiors. **The building still functions as a school today.** UNESCO designated it a World Heritage site.

- In 1930, Dessau's **conservative mayor fired Meyer.** Communist agitation by students provided the excuse. **Meyer moved to the Soviet Union,** working on urban planning. **Stalin's regime eventually disappointed him.** He **moved to Mexico, then Switzerland.** He died **obscure and bitter.** His Bauhaus tenure had lasted only two years.

## **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Hannes Meyer: HAN-ess MY-er

Bundesschule des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes: BOON-des-shoo-leh des al-geh-MY-nen DOY-chen geh-VERK-shafts-boon-des

Bernau: BAIR-now

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Lilly Reich (1885-1947), *Tugendhat House Interiors*, 1930, various dimensions, Brno, Czech Republic

- The third and final director was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. He moved the school to a **private facility in Berlin** in 1932 **before it was closed** under pressure from the Nazi regime in July 1933.
- Mies van der Rohe's designed this Villa Tugendhat and **Lilly Reich designed the interiors** for. She selected fabrics, furniture, and finishes. Ivory-coloured curtains hung from ceiling to floor. Sumptuous materials—onyx, ebony, silk—contrasted with the building's steel structure. The result balanced luxury and modernism. Critics praised the synthesis. One called it "**a house for enlightened millionaires.**"
- **She met Mies in 1926.** They became **professional partners and lovers**. She had trained as a **fashion designer**, then moved into exhibitions and interiors. Her understanding of textiles and colour complemented his architectural vision. Yet history often ignores her contributions. Books credit only Mies. Their collaboration lasted until emigration separated them.
- At the Bauhaus, she **directed the weaving workshop** briefly in 1932. She advocated for functional textiles that also possessed beauty. Her approach differed from earlier masters. Gunta Stölzl had emphasised craft tradition. Reich emphasised industrial production. Fabrics should be durable, affordable, and elegant. Art and industry need not conflict.
- **The Tugendhat family lived in the house only eight years. They were Jewish.**

**In 1938, they fled to Venezuela.** The Gestapo occupied the house. After the war, it became a dance school, then Communist offices. Rain damaged interiors. Furniture disappeared. Only in 1994 did restoration begin.

**UNESCO recognised it as a World Heritage site** in 2001.

- **Reich stayed in Germany during Nazi rule.** She had Gentile ancestry and compromised with authorities to survive. She designed exhibitions for the regime. After the war, she tried rebuilding her career. Poverty and illness overtook her. **She died alone in 1947, her contributions forgotten.**
- The **rise of the Nazi Party** in Germany viewed the **Bauhaus as a hub of leftist, modernist, and "degenerate" art.**
- Under increasing scrutiny and harassment, the school tried to continue in Berlin as a private institution, but it was **forced to shut down completely** that same year.
- Many of the **faculty and students emigrated**, carrying Bauhaus ideas **worldwide.**
- So, the end was **political rather than artistic**—it wasn't a decline in influence or quality, just external suppression.
- Mies van der Rohe became the Bauhaus head after Gropius. After the School closed **he moved to New York in 1938.**

## **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Lilly Reich: LIL-ee RIKE

Tugendhat: TOO-gend-hat

Brno: BAIR-no

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Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Philip Johnson and others, *Seagram Building*, 1958, viewed from street level, from Park Avenue

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), Seagram Building, viewed from street level, from Park Avenue.

- Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) emigrated to the U.S. in 1938 and became **head of the architecture department at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago**, not New York.
- In America, he **designed landmark modernist buildings**, emphasising **steel and glass**, open spaces, and minimal ornamentation.
- Notable examples include:
  - **Seagram Building**, New York with Philip Johnson, seen here
  - **Farnsworth House**, Illinois
  - **IIT campus buildings**, Chicago
- This is the Seagram Building, viewed from street level, from Park Avenue. The building is set off from the Avenue by the Seagram Plaza. Visible on the periphery of the image are 399 Park Avenue, to the left, and 345 Park Avenue, to the right. It was **completed in 1958**.

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## 49-01 BAUHAUS

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Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Philip Johnson and others, *Seagram Building*, 1958

- There was a lot to cover as the Bauhaus was associated with many famous artists, who **after 1933**, many Bauhaus teachers **emigrated**—**Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, László Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer**—**spreading Bauhaus in the U.S. and elsewhere**. The **legacy** of the Bauhaus was **profound**, essentially, it shaped what we now consider **modern design and architecture**. It placed an emphasis on **functionalism, simplicity, geometric shapes**, and the integration of art, craft, and technology. It created the “**International Style**” in architecture—flat roofs, open floor plans, and minimal ornamentation. The Bauhaus “workshop” approach—combining theory with hands-on experimentation—is still used in design schools worldwide.
- That brings me to the end of today’s talk. Thank you for your interest, time and attention and I look forward to recording the next talk in my overview of Western Art.





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