

The Bauhaus

<http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/special-collections/the-bauhaus>

Reviewed by Margot Note, Consultant

2019 will mark the centennial of the founding of the Bauhaus, the influential German school of art and design. Founded by architect Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus encouraged collaborations across creative disciplines and sought to bridge the divide between high and low culture, using design to improve the quality of life by making its objects practical and affordable.

Harvard University's Busch-Reisinger Museum boasts one of the first and largest collections of Bauhaus materials. The Bauhaus Study Collection was established in 1947 to document the school's history and its influence in America, especially at Harvard.¹ A new, online resource makes it easier to navigate these holdings. Over 32,000 digitized objects including paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture, photography, textiles, and other media are searchable or browsable by keyword, title, artist, medium, date, discipline, theme, culture, and donor.

The website serves as a digital proxy of the collection to explore by itself and can also help to prepare one to visit for in-person viewing of most objects. It was designed for users with all levels of knowledge of the art movement. The site displays on mobile and desktop platforms, and multiple options exist for navigating through the site. By clicking on "Continue Reading" on the landing page, you can navigate through the sections via arrows on the right or left of the page of each section or by a menu bar at the top of each page. One can also explore the Bauhaus collection through four different sections: "Chronology: Introducing the Bauhaus," "Holdings: What Makes Up the Collection," "Essay: The Bauhaus and Harvard," and "Resources: At the Museums and Beyond."

The "Chronology" is a visual timeline that traces the legacy of the movement from its founding in 1919 to its dissolution in 1933, and concludes in 1969 when Gropius dies. The "Holdings" section provides an overview of the collection; each item has a catalog listing with descriptions, provenance, and exhibition and publication histories, and with an email address to contact for revisions, which capitalizes on crowdsourcing to correct and improve the archival record. Many items are described as "Bauhaus-related," because the objects were not created during the Bauhaus movement but were made by teachers and students afterward. The

¹ Harvard Art Museums, "1947," *The Bauhaus*, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/tour/the-bauhaus/slide/6338>.

collection holds original works of art and documentary and archival materials. The items offer both historic and artistic appeal, as they act as museum objects and archival documents. They raise questions about aesthetics and practicality, art and design, and originals and copies.

The “Resources” section includes links to Bauhaus past exhibitions, a bibliography, and descriptive records for series and records groups at Harvard to explore the holdings through a collection-level lens; it provides context to the multitude of finding aids available online.

The “Essay” provides a history of the Bauhaus at Harvard. Harvard hosted the first American exhibition of the Bauhaus in 1930 and Gropius introduced Bauhaus pedagogy and practitioners to the school when he emigrated there in 1937. As the Bauhaus was Americanized, it lost its utopian values and began to signify modernism in general.² The United States was far from Weimar Germany, so too were Harvard’s graduate students from the Bauhaus group of radicals. Gropius’s classical education was something against which he and his Bauhaus sought to rebel.³ His influence could have been explored deeper as the educational ideologies of the Bauhaus and Harvard surely would have diverged, at least initially.

A Google map in “Resources” highlights institutions, archives, buildings, and projects affiliated with the school around Boston. The website could have been improved by enabling users to explore how people, places, and schools were linked through a data map or tool. For example, how could the connections between the Bauhaus, Harvard, Black Mountain College, and the New Bauhaus in Chicago have been displayed visually?

The archives are an object of historical study that elucidates Bauhaus’s legacy in the contemporary world. The site, ready for new research, aspires to make these collections more easily and widely accessible to deliver a study collection to students and scholars around the world. The site’s strength is its thoughtful commentary and context about the collections which are richly illustrated by cataloged items from the archives. As the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus approaches, the website will be utilized as a resource for deeper analysis of the movement and its enduring inspiration.

² Robert Wiesenberger, “The Bauhaus and Harvard,” *The Bauhaus*, Accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/tour/the-bauhaus/slide/6339>.

³ Ibid.