Press release
Berlin, March 21, 2018

Start of bauhaus imaginista’s international program in Morocco and China

The bauhaus imaginista series of exhibitions and events highlights the impact and reception of the Bauhaus across major geopolitical transformations of the 20th century. The Bauhaus was in contact with like-minded individuals and institutions throughout the world, where it encountered similar movements that had arisen independently of it, and that lent the Bauhaus itself strong stimuli. Realized by the Bauhaus Cooperation Berlin Dessau Weimar, the Goethe-Institut, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (HKW), with partner institutions in eight countries, bauhaus imaginista explores these interconnections. Four separately developed exhibitions will be shown at art and design museums, and institutions in China, Japan, Russia and Brazil. The exhibitions are organized together with the local Goethe-Instituts and complemented by discursive events such as workshops and symposia in India, the United States, Morocco, and Nigeria. In 2019, the exhibition bauhaus imaginista will be on view at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (HKW), as part of the Bauhaus centenary.

On March 23 bauhaus imaginista starts with a program of encounters and research in Rabat (Morocco), on April 8 bauhaus imaginista’s first exhibition will be opened at the new China Design Museum in Hangzhou (China).

The curators and artistic directors of bauhaus imaginista, Marion von Osten (Berlin) and Grant Watson (London), are developing the project in cooperation with a team of international researchers, artists and designers. bauhaus imaginista focuses on reciprocal dialogue and exchange between the Bauhaus, its students and teachers with non-European Modernisms. The Bauhaus pedagogy and design practice spread worldwide throughout a network, integrated and developed into diverse social and cultural contexts. It corresponded with local art and design movements as well as with processes of decolonization. For the first time on this scale, bauhaus imaginista explores the global history of the Bauhaus, the effects of which continue to this day.

Online, bauhaus-imaginista.org will provide information and updates about the project’s events and exhibitions in the following years and will regularly publish new material on research processes and results.

Further information at:
www.bauhaus-imaginista.org
www.bauhaus100.de

Press images see:
www.goethe.de/pressemappen, www.goethe.de/bilderservice
In 1910 the exhibition ‘Masterpieces of Mohammedan Art’ in Munich presented carpets displayed on walls like paintings, a presentation that made many Europeans visit the Maghreb to study its local crafts traditions. In 1927 – 13 years after his voyage to Tunis – Bauhaus teacher Paul Klee created a drawing based on monochrome Kilims made by Tunisian Berbers. While studying its structure and patterns Klee developed a relation between craft object, decorative arts and a specific language of abstraction.

As one of four focal objects of bauhaus imaginista Klee’s drawing Teppich (carpet), one of many attempts by Bauhaus artists to learn from pre-modern design practices triggers a debate around transcultural readings of vernacular objects. Klee’s drawing invites the question from a contemporary perspective, how and through which framings craft objects are transformed into an art work or a design innovation. What is gained and what is concealed in such readings?

According to French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, non-Western museum objects like Berber rugs have been detached from their original meaning by removing them from their initial context. Through a process of abstraction, they have been cleansed from the physical and social body to which they must be connected if they are to function and be complete. To fully understand an object’s identity, Attia argues, we have to reconnect it to the body. In the context of bauhaus imaginista Kader Attia will produce a new film, based on studies on Berber jewelry that in addition to traditional metals and gems also used coins imported by colonial powers. Through the appropriation of European money, its currency became detached from its original value. The photographs of Berber jewelry from Attia’s new film project unfold a complicit relation between tradition and modernity and point out how intercultural encounters always unleash a never-ending process of exchange and re-appropriation.

It is this open-ended process of transcultural readings that was also foundational for the post-independence art movement in Morocco of the 1960s. Artists and designers in Casablanca revisited the Bauhaus curriculum by turning to a study of local crafts. To them, Berber crafts offered an alternative to the existing Beaux-Arts art education, implemented under the French colonial rule. Asserting the need to decolonialize culture and the art school curriculum, artists and intellectuals such as Farid Belkahia, Mohamed Chabaa, Bernt Flint, Toni Maraini and Mohamed Melehi revisited popular art forms to create a new post-colonial language that aimed to synthesize the arts. This productive friction between different knowledge structures beyond the usual hierarchy of the manual vs the cognitive, the popular vs elite culture is still a challenge for today’s art institutions.

How can the reading of cultures be decolonialized? With the start of bauhaus imaginista’s year program in Morocco in Rabat 23rd/24th of March 2018, this question is reflected through the study of vernacular objects as well as through parallel projects in the 20th century that wanted to go beyond the western paradigms of knowledge production and transfer.

The work by Kader Attia will be on show at Le Cube – independent art room until April 20, 2018.
The Bauhaus was not the only institution considered to be a place of reflection on design theories and new practices in the twentieth century; the China Academy of Arts (CAA), one of the China’s oldest art school, represented another design school that was connected with the Bauhaus. bauhaus imaginista presents the exhibition Moving Away at the opening of the China Design Museum. 

A range of objects, prototypes, archival material, as well as plans and studies of urban projects will be shown alongside original works from the academy’s collection of Chinese modern design. In China, bauhaus imaginista focuses on how universal design principles were developed, adapted, expanded or renewed by designers and architects in different social and political contexts. The exhibition will shed light on the ways in which Bauhaus principles have been discussed, translated and adapted over the course of the twentieth century to the present day including in the former USSR, India, North Korea and China.

The way in which a Bauhaus’s design ethos spread internationally, its institutional role and its evolution from within diverse cultures, forms the basis of the bauhaus imaginista exhibition Moving Away. The title indicates both the migration of Bauhaus ideas, as well as the distance produced by time and geography. Marcel Breuer’s filmstrip ein bauhaus-film. fünf jahre lang (a bauhaus film. five years long, 1926) visualizes the development of chair design from crafted object to industrial prototype towards a future where designed objects become obsolete. Breuer wrote about the need for design to evolve in response to changing needs, something to consider when reflecting on the international reception of Bauhaus ideas. The collage appeared in the Bauhaus magazine, no. 1 (1926) as an advertisement, reflecting the attempt to sell and promote Bauhaus products designed by students and teachers in a more creative and ironic way.

While Breuer’s collage addresses the chair – the magazine’s contents introduce the reader to the basic principle of Bauhaus design, which was to go beyond the individual object in order to think about the building as a whole. This meant the development of new designs for cups, chairs, textiles, wall colours and flooring, through to campus architecture, single houses and housing estates. In its later period this extended from environmental and urban studies to city planning on a grand scale. Bauhaus ideas, including the potential for modern design to transform the human environment, has spread throughout the world to, for example, the United States, the Soviet Union, China, India, Mexico, Chile, Iran and North-Korea. Never as pure dissemination, but always accepted and rejected in relation to local conditions.

Two decades after the Bauhaus closed its doors the HfG Ulm (founded in 1953) continued but also contested Bauhaus ideas. It regularly hired Bauhaus masters and students to teach a version of the preliminary course, based on a visual and tactile training in colour and form, considered a basic qualification for new students. When HfG Ulm developed links with the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad (founded in 1961) and the Industrial Design Centre (IDC) in Mumbai (founded in 1969), aspects of the preliminary course were incorporated into the Indian curriculum, along with workshop based teaching. From the perspective of post war Germany and post-Independence India, design was understood by these schools as a catalyst for economic reconstruction, and in India it was also seen as a development tool that could utilise centuries old Indian crafts traditions, as well as artisan and vernacular skills, through field work and projects undertaken by students.

Bauhaus ideas entered China through architects such as Richard Paulick, who was Walter Gropius’ assistant and Wang Dahong (a student of Gropius). Both were hired to teach at the Architecture Department of St. John’s University established in 1942,
which had a curriculum that directly referenced the Bauhaus model. After 1945, these two architects played an important role in the development of a Greater Shanghai Plan, a modern urban project based on rationalist principles. In the same period, the renowned Chinese architect Liang Sicheng began a new approach to teaching architecture at the Tsinghua University (Beijing) which was strongly influenced by Gropius. Subsequently, during the cultural revolution Bauhaus ideas were attacked as bourgeois, but in recent decades have they been rehabilitated in China.

The way in which a Bauhaus’s design ethos spread internationally, its institutional role and its evolution from within diverse cultures, forms the basis of the bauhaus imaginista exhibition Moving Away. The title indicates both the migration of Bauhaus ideas, as well as the distance produced by time and geography. The exhibition will be presented as part of the opening of the China Design Museum (located on the China Academy of Arts campus Hangzhou). It will feature a range of objects and prototypes for commercial production as well as plans and studies of architectural and urban projects, which will be shown alongside original works from the academy’s collection of Western modernist design. To accompany the exhibition, an international symposium (April 9–10, 2018) will address a rich history of Bauhaus’s relationship with design and architecture in Asia.

**bauhaus imaginista** is a collaboration between the Bauhaus Cooperation Berlin Dessau Weimar, the Goethe-Institut and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (HKW). The research project with its different exhibition stations is taking place for the centenary of the founding of the Bauhaus. It will be enhanced with international perspectives of the Goethe-Instituts and tied together as part of the long-term project 100 Years of Now in 2019 at Haus der Kulturen der Welt. bauhaus imaginista is made possible by funds from the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. The German Federal Cultural Foundation is supporting the exhibition in Berlin and the German Foreign Office the stations abroad. Mediapartners are 3sat and Deutschlandfunk Kultur. Partners abroad are the Goethe-Instituts in China, New Delhi, Lagos, Moscow, New York, Rabat, São Paulo, and Tokyo as well as Le Cube – independent art room (Rabat) and other institutions. bauhaus imaginista is realized in collaboration with the China Design Museum / China Academy of Art (Hangzhou), the Independent Administrative Institution of National Museum of Art / The National Museum of Modern Art Kyoto, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art (Moscow) and SESC São Paulo.

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