

Press release:

The Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung in Berlin presents ‘Vassily Kandinsky – Teaching at the Bauhaus’

Original teaching materials used by the famous Bauhaus master and his students provide information about the teaching methods of the pioneer of abstract art.

Berlin, 25 June 2014. The teaching work of Vassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) at the Bauhaus is the focus of an exhibition that can be seen at the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung from 25 June to 8 September 2014. Kandinsky, the pioneer of abstract painting, taught at the famous art school for 11 years, up to its closure in 1933. Teaching manuscripts and materials by the Bauhaus teacher, on loan from the archives of the Centre Pompidou (Paris) and the Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles), are being presented together for the first time, along with a selection of practical exercises and notes made by his students from the holdings of the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin and the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau. The combination of these materials at the ‘Vassily Kandinsky – Teaching at the Bauhaus’ exhibition reveals the content and methods that Kandinsky used for teaching in the Mural Painting Workshop, in the Basic and Main Courses, and in the Free Painting Class at the Bauhaus, and the exhibition also illustrates the ways in which the students used and reflected on them.

‘None of the other Bauhaus masters worked at the Bauhaus for as long as Vassily Kandinsky did. His teaching work and his charismatic personality had an enormous influence on the students,’ explains Dr. Annemarie Jaeggi, Director of the Bauhaus-Archiv.

During his time at the Bauhaus, Vassily Kandinsky developed his ideas on the theory of art further, teaching them and putting them into practice. His publications and eleven of his prints and watercolours from this period of his creative work are also on show. In addition, works dedicated to him by of his Bauhaus colleagues – one each by László Moholy-Nagy, Georg Muche, Lyonel Feininger and Paul Klee – are also being exhibited.

The exhibition ‘Vassily Kandinsky – Teaching at the Bauhaus’ is based on a research project carried out by the Société Kandinsky and is curated by art historian Dr. Angelika Weißbach. It is accompanied by a 195-page catalogue with some 200 illustrations, edited by Bauhaus researcher Prof. Magdalena Droste on behalf of the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung. A varied programme of events provides further information about details from the exhibition.

Exhibits

Twenty pages of text and notes by Vassily Kandinsky from his course preparation work, as well as 30 items of pictorial material and seven publications that he presented as teaching materials; 60 exercises, works and notes made by students (including Eugen Batz, Erich Comeriner, Lothar Lang, Hans Thiemann and Monica Ulmann-Broner), five publications and 11 works (watercolours, prints) by Vassily Kandinsky and one art work each by László Moholy-Nagy, Georg Muche, Lyonel Feininger and Paul Klee.

Exhibition catalogue

Vassily Kandinsky – Teaching at the Bauhaus, ed. by Magdalena Droste for the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin. 2014, museum catalogue (self-published), 195 pages with a total of approx. 200 illustrations, available in German and English at the Bauhaus-Archiv for € 29 or by mail order from the Bauhaus shop for € 33 (www.bauhaus-shop.de).

Programme of events

Sun. 29 June, 3 p.m.: 'bauhaus_barrier-free', a guided tour for the visually impaired (in German). Registration: visit@bauhaus.de

Wed. 2 July, 7 p.m.: 'Vassily Kandinsky – Teaching at the Bauhaus', lecture by Prof. Magdalena Droste, art historian (in German). Admission: € 6, concessions € 3, students free

Sun. 10 August / 7 September, 11 a.m.: 'bauhaus_brunch': brunch, admission and guided tour (in German): € 19. Registration: visit@bauhaus.de

Vassily Kandinsky's teaching work at the Bauhaus

Russian painter and cosmopolitan Vassily Kandinsky taught at the Bauhaus from 1922 to 1933, having risen to fame as a theorist and practitioner of abstract art through his book *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* [*Concerning the Spiritual in Art*] (1912) and the 'Blue Rider' almanac (1912), as well as several exhibitions. Even before working at the Bauhaus, he had lived in Germany and taught at the private Phalanx Art School in Munich between 1901 and 1902, before returning to Russia in 1914. In Moscow, he taught at SWOMAS (the Free State Art Studio), INChUK (the Institute for Artistic Culture) and the VChUTEMAS art school. Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius offered him the post at the Bauhaus, and he also continued to work there under the later directors Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Despite the Bauhaus's moves from Weimar to Dessau (1925) and from there to Berlin (1932), Kandinsky continued to teach at the renowned college of art and design until it was finally closed.

During his period at the Bauhaus, Kandinsky offered various courses, published his book *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche* [*Point and Line to Plane*] in the Bauhaus book series – a continuation of his theory of art – and produced some 350 oil paintings and a total of 584 watercolours, gouaches and tempera paintings. Geometrical basic shapes and colours played an important role in Kandinsky's teaching work, as well as in his own watercolours from this period. As Form Master in the Mural Painting Workshop, which he headed from 1922 to 1925, Kandinsky used a questionnaire that had to be completed by the students to test his hypotheses on the connections between the basic colours of yellow, red and blue and the basic shapes of triangle, square and circle.

His teaching in the Preliminary Course – later also known as the Basic Course – was compulsory for new students from 1922 to 1930. This course, initially for one semester and extended to two semesters starting in 1925, was characterized by the dual provision of analytical drawing instruction and design theory. Together, the courses were intended to enable the students to perceive and interpret colour and shape and to undertake abstraction as the basis for independent synthetic design; and to convey an understanding of abstract art as an evolutionary step in the history of art and humanity. In 14 lecture units, Kandinsky initially discussed art history, then the colours yellow and blue, red, white and black, green and yellow, and orange and violet, and finally addressed the topics of point, line and surface and their connections with colour. The lectures were supplemented with exercise courses for the students and discussion groups on their results and homework. Kandinsky taught that there are laws in art, the grammar of which can be learned – although he also repeatedly emphasized that art is not possible without intuition. His analytical

drawing instruction – in which the students connected self-arranged still lifes graphically using mesh lines, for example, and carried out abstractions based on the basic shapes of circle, square, triangle and rhombus – formed part of the Bauhaus's design-oriented teaching work.

With the increasingly functionally oriented approach at the Bauhaus under Hannes Meyer, Kandinsky in 1928 gave an in-depth seminar course on 'Construction and Design' for students in the Main Course. In 14 lectures, he contrasted technology and art, spoke about form and content, and explicitly discussed architecture. He used a wide range of pictorial materials from the fields of art, architecture, technology, everyday life in various cultures, and from the animal and plant worlds.

In addition, Kandinsky offered a painting course starting in 1927, which was called the 'Free Painting Class' from 1928 onwards. The course did not involve only painting; instead, students' works were discussed in relation to colour, rhythm, tension and composition. Under Hannes Meyer, Kandinsky's teaching work was expanded with additional courses for the students, but Ludwig Mies van der Rohe continually restricted Kandinsky's work and made his courses optional. In Berlin, Kandinsky's teaching work was limited to only the Free Painting Class, although it continued to be well attended up to the closure of the Bauhaus in 1933.

After leaving the Bauhaus, Kandinsky moved to Paris in 1933, where he died in 1944.

Das Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung

The Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung in Berlin is committed to the research and presentation of the history and influence of the Bauhaus (1919-1933), the twentieth century's most important school of architecture, design and art. Its exhibitions feature the world's most comprehensive collection of objects related to the school's history and all aspects of its work. Serving as a laboratory and platform for debate, the Bauhaus-Archiv engages in current issues of contemporary architecture, design and art.