



Photo: Catrin Schmitt

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22 years as director of the Bauhaus-Archiv – A look back with Dr Annemarie Jaeggi

As custodian to the world's largest collection of all things Bauhaus, the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung is the most prestigious institution devoted to the study and presentation of the history of the world-famous school of art and design. This is due in no small part to its long-time director, Dr Annemarie Jaeggi. Since assuming her post, she has produced numerous

highly acclaimed exhibitions in Germany and abroad which have significantly expanded and shed light on the Bauhaus collection. She has tirelessly and passionately worked to advance the construction of its new museum. Today we look back with Annemarie Jaeggi at her 22 eventful and exciting years at the Bauhaus-Archiv.

Annemarie Jaeggi, you joined the Bauhaus-Archiv in 2003, and from the start, you advocated building a new museum. How have you experienced this process, what were the most important steps, what were the greatest challenges?

I was urged by the then Senator for Cultural Affairs Thomas Flierl to look into constructing a new museum. So it wasn't originally my idea, but I was given a very clear mandate. My advantage was that I had been working at the Department of Architecture at the University of Karlsruhe for many years and was able to bring my expertise to the table: which architects were raising eyebrows, what was the scene talking about at that moment?

Because financing was so tight, the annex was originally supposed to be built as a public-private partnership. This 'PPP model' was quite in vogue in 2003, but since then, we've moved away from that. The idea was to find an investor who would purchase the property, build part of the annex, and co-finance the public construction. To lay the groundwork for this, we organised a competition with the support of our then chairman of the board Edzard Reuter. We invited six agencies to participate, and the winner was SANAA, the Japanese architectural collective. It was still relatively unknown at the time, but then became very, very renowned and the winner of the Pritzker Prize. So we had a pretty good nose. Even though the concept was never realised, this first competition was something new to me, very special and very instructive. What we learned was that involving private enterprises, sponsors and investors in the project wouldn't produce the results we hoped for.

In 2013, as Berlin's financial situation improved, and Germany's overall, we were able to secure funding from state and federal authorities and

organise another competition in 2015. The design submitted by Staab Architekten was by far the best. And I was delighted beyond belief that the jurors felt the same way. That was naturally a very, very special moment for me. Indeed, I've been occupied by this project from the day I started as director of the Bauhaus-Archiv and will continue until my last day on the job.

As a museum director, you oversee numerous tasks. What general or specific tasks have surprised you the most? What did you never imagine having to do when you transferred from the university to the museum sector almost 23 years ago?

There are definitely two things. The first has to do with the many legal issues I have to think about – copyrights, licensing deals, contract law and much more. Since I have no legal training, this was a real challenge in the beginning. The other thing was actually the Bauhaus families and how close our relationships, our friendships, with some families became. Of course, that doesn't include all the families of the 1,200 or so former Bauhaus members, but we have cultivated close contact with many of them since the Bauhaus-Archiv was established. Hans Maria Wingler, our founding director, laid the foundation, and Peter Hahn, his successor, continued to foster these relationships. When I arrived, everyone was very curious about me. My most vivid memory was my first encounter with Ati Gropius, Walter Gropius's daughter. She explicitly asked to meet me not at the Bauhaus-Archiv but on neutral ground at a restaurant in Berlin. She came with a whole battery of questions to ask me. Apparently, I passed her test and was welcomed warmly into the Gropius family. And over time, I can say I've become almost a member of the family.

You've really done an outstanding job expanding the holdings in a very targeted manner in the past 22 years. Is that something that you might say surprised you – that that was also a director's job?

I was able to build on the close and trusting relationships that my predecessors had cultivated with many Bauhaus families. The families are grateful for the time and effort we devote to them, and in return entrust their objects, documents and artworks to the museum, knowing that we will take good care of them. I've also learned to regularly and attentively follow the art trade and auctions. I absolutely love bidding at auctions. I would never have thought we'd still find so much. Even back in 2003, the Bauhaus-Archiv collection was already quite extensive. People often assume that everything's been grazed over, but there's always something new to see and discover – also an aspect that makes museum work so marvellous and exciting. I've tried as much as possible to secure items for us that were either of interest or worth being exhibited. Today we have a collection for the coming years and decades and enough material to present new aspects of the Bauhaus and continue staging interesting and relevant exhibitions and events.

The Bauhaus was part of an international network. How important were these connections to you all these years?

Networks and connections play an enormous role in the cultural sector – institutions thrive on them. For us, it begins with the Bauhaus families, then the sponsors and foundations who support us financially, and the local contacts with the neighbourhood and the urban community and the strong alliances that emerge from them in politically or socially challenging times. For me personally, networking with other museum professionals has been indispensable. For example, here in Berlin, I quickly forged contacts with colleagues through the Berliner Museumsverband e.V. (Berlin Museum Association) – formerly the State Association of Berlin Museums – and was also a long-time member of the board of this important stakeholder in Berlin's cultural sector. The same obviously applies to museums outside

Berlin. There are numerous institutions who have networked with us from Germany, Europe and abroad whose collections focus on the avant-garde of the interwar years or the art and culture of the 20th century. I've also benefited from my work with non-profit organisations, through which I could draw attention to the topic of the Bauhaus and the concerns of our institution. I'm also on the presiding committee of the German Design Council, I co-founded the Gesellschaft für Designgeschichte (Association for the History of Design) and am a member of the University Council of the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, which is very important to me.

The most closeknit network is without a doubt the Bauhaus Kooperation, a partnership between Weimar, Dessau and Berlin. When I began, there was still a strong sense of competition between us. Luckily, that's over now. All three institutions recognise the necessity to cooperate closely and at the same time, play to our individual strengths and contribute to the partnership. What really brought us closer were the large projects that the three of us coordinated together – the 2009 exhibition "Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity", marking the 90th anniversary of the Bauhaus that featured at the MoMA in New York, also the major Bauhaus exhibition presented at the London Barbican Centre on the occasion of the 2012 Olympics. And of course, in 2019, the exhibition "100 Years of Bauhaus".

What does the Bauhaus-Archiv mean to you, what does it stand for?

The Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung is a very special institution. There is hardly any place comparable to it, because as the name says, it's both an archive and a museum. Historically, the archive was always the main focus, but

now it's more the opposite. This is also due in part to the move to Berlin from Darmstadt, where the archive was originally founded. The aim was to highlight its role as a museum, so following the construction of its new premises on the Landwehrkanal, it received the additional name "Museum für Gestaltung". Today, the public certainly views us as a museum. Nonetheless, the archive is our foundation and will remain the source of our identity as an institution. Our founding director Hans Maria Wingler regarded the Bauhaus-Archiv first and foremost as a non-university research organisation open to scholars and interested laypeople. Basically, the core collection of works was only meant to serve as evidence of the history of the Bauhaus and its impact. That's why from the start, we've been committed not only to collecting works, but also documenting their development and their provenance history. That's how Bauhaus works are integrated into the various processes within the history of the Bauhaus. I find that to be an incredibly smart idea.

The archive-museum connection is also rather unique to our institution. To some extent, it's comparable – and this is interesting – to the recently opened Archiv der Avantgarden in Dresden based on the Marzona Collection. I'm delighted by this because it shows that the concept we've been promoting as its sole representative in the museum sector for the past 65 years is so interesting and compelling that others are now adopting it.

Since you took office, the museum sector has undergone rapid transformation – as has the rest of the world. Looking back, what are the major through-lines and changes that have impacted your term?

Museums have completely transformed over the past 25 years. And the Bauhaus-Archiv is about to radically change, as well. When I began at the Bauhaus-Archiv in 2003, we were just 15 staff members, a very small team in a relatively small museum which was 'analogue' in every respect. Of course, we all had computers on our desks, but I still dictated letters to my secretary, and at the end of the day, I was handed a file with correspondence that I had to sign. Those years quickly

passed, and soon digitalisation transformed our museum operations with incredible speed. This meant that we needed staff who possessed this expertise. It's not something you learn when you study art history and become a curator.

In addition, my ambition and a challenge was to open the museum to other visitor groups, expand the scope of its educational activities and anchor them firmly in our operations. The Bauhaus was a school, and if we make the history and the works of a school our primary focus, it seems obvious that we ourselves should be pedagogically active. By offering events and establishing an education department, which basically didn't yet exist, I've tried to increase visitor frequency and get people excited about our institution and the Bauhaus with many wonderful projects.

Another thing I've found is that museums have become increasingly politicised, and that for the plain and simple reason that it was unavoidable. I can't imagine any museums considered what they were doing as political until they found themselves in a situation where they had to take a stand. Of course, museums have always been social and political venues but oftentimes might not have realised it. In the 2010s they were forced to align their activities much more closely with societal expectations and the public sphere. And the trend continues today as the polarisation of society increases, which naturally runs the risk of fuelling polarisation even further. In this situation, inviting people to participate in various discussions and dialogue formats is the right course for museums as culturally and socio-politically impactful actors.

As a museum director, is there anything you're especially proud of? Do you have any advice you'd like to pass on to your younger colleagues?

I'm not one to pass on advice. I think my colleagues here at the museum pay close attention to what is going on in society – and that's what I find so wonderful about the Bauhaus-Archiv. Whether it's from the Young Bauhaus, our community service volunteers or other employees – the staff come up with so many ideas and projects on their own. I get the impression that many things seem to happen by themselves, which keeps the museum vibrant and socially relevant. My successor will wisely manage this institution and its incredibly committed team – of that I'm absolutely convinced.



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Short CV Dr Annemarie Jaeggi

Annemarie Jaeggi served as director of the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung in Berlin from 2003 until the end of 2025. After studying in Zurich and Freiburg and subsequently obtaining her doctorate, she worked as an assistant at the Institute of Art History at the Technical University of Karlsruhe. Her postdoctoral qualification was followed by various temporary professorships and the interim management of the Southwest German Archive for Architecture and Engineering (saai) at the Technical University of Karlsruhe (now the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, KIT). In 2019, she received an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Architecture at KIT. In 2020, she was honoured with the Julius Posener Prize. Until 2021, she taught as a private lecturer at the Technische Universität Berlin and the Accademia di Architettura in Mendrisio, Switzerland. Jaeggi is the author of numerous publications on modern architecture.

During her tenure at the Bauhaus-Archiv, Annemarie Jaeggi was responsible for nearly 100 exhibitions. These spanned all genres and were dedicated to a large number of previously unknown Bauhaus artists, contemporary design as well as important architects such as Egon Eiermann and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Her time as director coincided with the 90th and 100th anniversaries of the Bauhaus, which were celebrated with numerous national and international partners. After the museum closed for expansion in 2018, Annemarie Jaeggi continued the institution's lively exhibition activity in the project space The Temporary Bauhaus-Archiv. As a Gropius specialist, she also initiated and led a multi-year research and cooperation project on the correspondence between Alma Mahler and Walter Gropius in collaboration with the University of Tübingen. During her nearly 23 years in office, Annemarie Jaeggi has significantly expanded the Bauhaus-Archiv's holdings through targeted acquisitions and donations: almost 9.000 inventory numbers have been newly assigned since 2003, representing more than 21.500 objects, around 14.000 of which were donated to the museum.