

# Typography and screen printing

## SCHOOL, WORKSHOP

Age 12–18, 3 Hours, 3-4 Lessons

*Fabric, screen printing*

*Printing and advertising workshop, typography, graphic design, Herbert Beyer*

### YOU WILL NEED

grid paper, pencils, marker pens, scissors, fabric bags, fabrics, screen printing frames (A3, 1 per group), squeegees (1 per group), fabric ink for screen printing, spatulas, sponge, adhesive foil, paper tape, cardboard as base

### INSTRUCTIONS

This module provides an introduction to the development of typography at the Bauhaus in Weimar (under László Moholy-Nagy and Wassily Kandinsky) and Dessau (under Hans Beyer and others). At the same time, participants learn one of the most important basic printing techniques: screen printing. First of all, examples of various designs are examined in books and websites including the graphic devices and basic geometrical forms used in the work of Herbert Beyer and Josef Albers. Subsequently, participants prepare their own designs and print them onto fabric bags or items of clothing (which they have brought with them) using a simplified screen-printing method.

Step 1: With the examples from Herbert Bayer and Josef Albers in mind, the participants work in small groups of 4 or 5 to design letters and graphic elements based on basic geometrical forms (square, circle and triangle).

Step 2: The participants share their designs and agree on a letter, word or collage to work on together.

Step 3: The designs on paper are transferred to the adhesive foil, then the templates are carefully cut using craft knives and scissors. If two or more colours are to be used, the printing must be done in several stages (this variation is best suited for more experienced or older participants).

Step 4: The adhesive foil templates are attached to the screen. This works best if two participants press the frame onto the base (cardboard) so that it does not move while two others smooth the foil onto the screen (evenly and without bubbles or creases). The outside edges are taped off using paper tape.

Step 5: The material to be printed is placed on the base and smoothed out. Then the screen is positioned with the template at the required position. Two or three participants hold the screen down from different sides and press it gently onto the fabric. Two other participants apply ink to one of the longer sides of the screen using a spatula.

Step 6: Now printing can begin. One participant holds the squeegee at a slight angle and draws it to the other side of the screen, causing the ink to be pressed evenly through the screen. A little pressure must be applied. Then the squeegee is lifted and the ink pushed back again (angle the squeegee as before).

Step 7: Now the screen is carefully lifted (without shifting it on the fabric). The motif should now be printed evenly on the fabric.

Step 8: The procedure can now be repeated for another piece of fabric. Ink will need to be added as

necessary. After the last print any surplus ink is returned to the container.

Step 9: Wash the screen using warm water before the ink dries. The screen should be allowed to dry properly before further printing. If a second colour is required, the procedure is repeated with a second template. Ideally the fabric should be allowed to dry first, so the second colour is best applied the next day (or at least after some time).

## BACKGROUND

From the outset the Bauhaus propagated a reduced, unornamented style of design based on basic geometric forms. While each teacher pursued their own concept, priority was always given to function, production, suitability, and visibility of construction. These aspects apply at all scales, from large architectural ensembles to individual buildings, to functional furniture, user-friendly utensils and unremarkable everyday objects. When he founded the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius sought to bring together the arts and crafts. The goal was to train a new type of artist in the field of design and architecture to create products suitable for industrial mass production. Leading figures from different artistic currents and walks of life taught and studied at the Bauhaus: architects, visual artists, craftsmen and -women, scientists, educators and dancers.

Typography initially played a marginal role at the Weimar Bauhaus, even if the lettering design course was already experimenting with geometrically constructed fonts. The status of typography at the Bauhaus changed in 1923 when László Moholy-Nagy was appointed to succeed Johannes Itten as head of the preliminary course. In connection with the Bauhaus exhibition of 1923, an advertising workshop was established under Wassily Kandinsky. This sparked an intense exploration of typography, which later became an important part of the curriculum.

In *Offset*, no. 7, 1926, László Moholy-Nagy wrote:

*“A standard typeface is needed, for example, without minuscules and capitals; just standard letters – not in terms of size, but of form. Of course, one could also raise ideational demands that go a great deal further than modernizing the kind of lettering we use today. Leaving aside the handful of phonetically derived characters, our alphabet is based on ancient conventions; their origins are lost in the mists of time. They are very often stylistic (or practical) modifications of traditional forms that have lost their meaning. We will only be able to speak of a true reorganization of (printed) writing if it is conducted on the basis of objective scientific knowledge. Perhaps on the basis of opto-phonetic experiments, sound figures, seismographic projection or similar. The use of basic forms such as circle, square and triangle in typeface redesign today certainly produces interesting formal – and indeed practically necessary – outcomes; yet from a perspective that would appear utopian today they cannot be regarded as a proper definition of the problem.”*

When the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, the new building included a composing room and a print shop. Herbert Bayer headed the printing and advertising workshop from 1925 to 1928. The advertising typography he developed for the Bauhaus characterized the visual identity of the Dessau phase. Red and

black dominated the designs, with Scheltersche Grotesk as the preferred typeface, and later occasionally Futura. Herbert Bayer worked on the idea of a universal typeface (“Weltschrift”). He dedicated himself to developing new fonts, their practical application, and the technical, economic and psychological principles of modern advertising in general. His typefaces were based on the simplest geometrical elements. His objective was to standardize communication processes and develop a uniform typographic style for the Bauhaus.

Early products from the printing and advertising workshop include the Catalogue of Designs, which was used to promote selected Bauhaus products. Through the printing and advertising workshop, a linguistic reform was initiated at the Bauhaus in Dessau, whose most noticeable aspect was the absence of capital letters (which are normally used for all nouns in German). Bayer thought that all letters should be based on the basic forms of circle and square, with the lines having the same width throughout.

In Offset, no. 10, 1926, he wrote:

*“Unfortunately, we are confused and overwhelmed today by the number of so-called character and art typefaces, all of which are created in principle to express individuality and originality. Their ornamental, decorative style appears archaic, frivolous and over-complicated. In order to satisfy present and future requirements, a formally objective result needs to be obtained.”*

*„There is no big and little alphabet. There is no need for a sound to have both a large and a small letter. The simultaneous use of two alphabets of completely different character is illogical and unharmonious. (...) Typefaces that are national in character, such as Fraktur, Gothic, Russian and so on, are precluded under item 1 (international understanding) on account of their limitations.”*

At the end of 1925, the Bauhaus decided to write without capital letters and to produce all its printed materials according to the DIN norms. Its letterhead now stated:

*“we write everything lower case as it saves us time. anyway, why two alphabets when one achieves the same? why write large if we cannot speak large.”*

Josef Albers also worked on lettering concepts based on basic geometrical forms. His experiments with a “combination typeface” created a complete alphabet from three basic forms: square, quadrant and circle.

#### FURTHER READINGS AND MATERIALS

*Bauhaus 1919–1933*, author: Droste, Magdalena, Bauhaus-Archiv, ISBN: 3822876011, publisher: Taschen, 256 pages, year of publication: 1998  
On Amazon.ca: <https://amzn.to/2kajYfA>

*50 Bauhaus Icons You Should Know*, author: Straßer, Josef, ISBN: 9783791341972, publisher: Prestel, 157 pages, year of publication: 2009

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On Amazon.ca: <https://amzn.to/2kEUQOd>

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<https://www.bauhaus100.de/das-bauhaus/werke/druck-und-reklame/>

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