

MODULE 2

Light & shadow sculpture garden

SCHOOL, WORKSHOP

Age 12–18, 2 Hours, 3 Lessons

Making, designing, presenting

*Preliminary course, community, material, Josef Albers, light, shade
can be combined with Module 4*

YOU WILL NEED

Aluminum wire, coloured foil, scissors, adhesive foil, wire cutter, selection of craft materials, projector, screen

INSTRUCTIONS

This module takes its inspiration from the studies on materials, light and shadow in the Bauhaus preliminary course, and from Josef Albers's glass paintings and window art. Coloured sculptures are made using aluminum wire and foil. Their characteristics are examined and they are arranged together in a setting of light and shadow. The point is not to make a perfect sculpture, but to examine the effects of light and shadow and explore how the individual objects can be presented collectively.

Step 1: Students use aluminum wire to create a stable sculptural form.

Step 2: This structure serves as the basis for imaginative coloured objects. The effects of projected light on the objects are investigated at intervals as they are created.

Step 3: Once all participants are ready, the objects are arranged together and lit by the projector to create a collective image. Colours and contours vary according to the location of the light source.

Step 4: Optional: The projected sculptures can be used to make a simple animated film (i.e. using a Smartphone app such as Stop Motion Studio, Lapse It, iMotion).

BACKGROUND

When he founded the Bauhaus in 1919, the architect 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. The school set out to shape society as a whole by influencing the way people lived. Creating collective "comprehensive artworks" (Gesamtkunstwerke) was one important aspect. Interdisciplinary studies and experimentation were also crucial to the educational concept.

Training at the Bauhaus began with a single-semester preliminary course, using new and experimental educational methods to impart knowledge of materials and basic design principles. The students developed spatial structures, concentrating on materials, construction, function and production. The aim was to optimize production and minimize use of materials, energy and time.

The Swiss painter and art educator Johannes Itten designed the preliminary course at the Bauhaus in Weimar. Itten saw individual sensibility, subjective cognition and objective comprehension as the basis of creative design. His lessons as head of the preliminary course (1919–23) concentrated on studies of nature and materials, along with colour and form theory; analyses of the Old Masters and life drawing were also included. When Itten left the Bauhaus in 1923, László Moholy-Nagy took over the preliminary

course, which he ran together with Josef Albers. Moholy-Nagy shifted the focus from artistic to technical questions, but retained Itten's teaching methods encouraging students to conduct their own material studies. Rather than promoting pure individuality, he sought to systematically introduce his students – in a synthesis of the senses – to basic technical principles such as statics, dynamics and equilibrium. In 1928, Josef Albers became the official head of the preliminary course. He encouraged students to investigate the properties of materials like metal, wood and paper by using simple tools and also placed special weight on the effect and representation of light, shadow and perspective.

JOSEPH ALBERS

Josef Albers came to the Bauhaus in Weimar as a student in 1920 from the Royal Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. He took the preliminary course under Johannes Itten and attended the glass painting workshop. In 1923, he was appointed by Walter Gropius to the College of the Bauhaus. He received a teaching role in the preliminary course and (although still a journeyman) also a foreman in the glass painting workshop. In 1925, he was made a trainee. From 1925 to 1927–28, he headed the preliminary course at the Bauhaus in Dessau together with László Moholy-Nagy. After Moholy-Nagy departed in 1928, Albers became the sole head of the preliminary course and until 1929 also headed the joinery workshop. From 1932, Albers led the preliminary course at the Bauhaus in Berlin and taught drawing and lettering. After the Bauhaus closed in 1933, Josef and Anni Albers immigrated to the United States where they were employed by the Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina, at the recommendation of the Museum of Modern Art. Albers taught art there until 1949. His teaching attracted young artists to Asheville, including Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell and Robert Rauschenberg.

FURTHER READING AND MATERIALS

Links to works by Josef Albers on the website of the Josef & Anni Albers Foundation:

<https://albersfoundation.org/art/josef-albers/glass/index/>

<https://albersfoundation.org/art/josef-albers/paintings/homages-to-the-square/index/>