

MODULE 4

Bauhaus things – material exercises

SCHOOL, WORKSHOP

Age 12–15, 2 Hours, 3 Lessons

Making, feeling, experimenting, exhibiting

Preliminary course, material, theory of form

can be combined with Modules 1 and 2

YOU WILL NEED

For the folding and form exercises: **paper and foil in different thicknesses and colours, scissors, rulers, bone folders, hole punch, string**

For the experiments with materials: **paper in different thicknesses and textures, leaves, grasses, pieces of wood, wool, fabric, sponges etc., scissors, glue sticks, tape**

INSTRUCTIONS

In this module participants learn about different materials – rather like in the Bauhaus preliminary course. Folding exercises using coloured paper of different thicknesses allow participants to explore the properties of paper, possible forms, and the stability created by folding. Further experiments follow with a range of different materials such as paper, wood, fabric, wool, metal, plastic, leaves and grasses. Can the materials be identified by touch? How can they be combined to create new objects?

Students in the preliminary course at the Bauhaus developed spatial structures focusing on the relationships between material, construction, function and production. They were seeking to optimize production and minimize use of materials, energy and time. This module takes up the approach of those exercises, allowing participants to learn about the materials at a very basic level and to create their own little objects and works of art.

Step 1: Each participant chooses a piece of paper and begins by investigating its properties: What does the texture feel like? How stable is it? Can it be placed upright without falling over?

Step 2: Now the paper is folded according to the folding instructions (see PDF below). Participants may refer to the examples. Depending on age and ability, the resulting forms and structures may be simple or more complex. Note that this is a free exercise so the point is not to replicate a given form. Imagination knows no limits!

Step 3: Now the paper is examined again. The flat sheet has been turned into a structure or three-dimensional object. How stable is it now? How do light and shadow affect the form? How do other types of paper or foil behave when folded? How could the object be expanded?

Step 4: Moving on to the other materials, participants are asked to close their eyes and feel small samples. How does the wool feel to the touch? And fabric? A piece of metal? What is soft, what feels cold? Which respond to pressure, and which do not?

Step 5: Now participants can use the different materials to make their own objects or collages. They should pay special attention to how the different materials and surfaces can be combined.

Step 6: When the objects are finished they are arranged in a display situation (plinth, table or shelf) and

presented in the workshop space (for example in the library). This creates a little collection of “Bauhaus things” that can be expanded in further workshops.

Optional: The forms from Module 1 and the sculptures from Module 2 could also be included in the collection of “Bauhaus things”.

BACKGROUND

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.

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 teacher Johannes Itten designed the preliminary course at the Bauhaus in Weimar. Itten saw individual sensibility, subjective recognition and objective comprehension as the basis of creative design. His teaching 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 exercises. 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, shade and perspective.

FURTHER READING AND MATERIALS

Folder 1: Folding instructions

Folder 2: Photos of examples

For further information on the preliminary course and its teachers:

<https://www.bauhaus100.com/the-bauhaus/training/preliminary-course/>