

MODULE 9

# Postcards and posters

## SCHOOL, WORKSHOP

Age 12–18, 2 Hours, 3 Lessons

*Painting, graphic art, collage, poster art*

*Graphic print shop, theory of form, typography, illustration,*

*Bauhaus Exhibition*

*Weimar 1923*

### YOU WILL NEED

Blank postcards, A3 paper, coloured paper, coloured pencils, ruler, scissors, glue sticks, magazines to cut up, Optional: stamps

### INSTRUCTIONS

The first Bauhaus exhibition was held in Weimar in 1923. It aimed to show the results of the first four years of teaching at the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus students designed posters and postcards to advertise the exhibition and the school's ideas. This module uses the posters and postcards from 1923 to convey insights into poster art, advertising and typography at the Bauhaus. The participants design their own postcards and posters for their own school or a particular school event.

Step 1: The module begins with a brief introduction to the exhibition in Weimar. Participants view the posters and postcards designed by the various Bauhaus students and masters and compare typography, technique and composition. The poster by Joost Schmidt is especially striking. Which colours and forms did he use and combine? What makes his design so powerful?

Step 2: In the next step the participants design their own postcards and/or posters. How would they represent their school? Is there a special school event they would like to draw attention to? Perhaps a commemoration, a play, a concert or a sports day?

Step 3: All the required information is gathered (date, place, type of event, etc.) and one or more techniques are selected (collage, drawing). Which colours, forms and motifs convey a good impression of the event? Which colours are best suited to convey the desired feelings and emotions? How should the words and images be arranged to make the information easy to understand?

Step 4: The finished posters and postcards are displayed and viewed by the group. Are there similarities? Which designs do the participants like best? Could they actually be reproduced and used for the event?

### BACKGROUND

When he founded the Bauhaus in 1919, the architect Walter Gropius was seeking 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. Interdisciplinarity and experimentation were also central to the educational concept.

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 also became an important part of the curriculum.

In June 1922 the state government of Thuringia urged the Bauhaus to exhibit its work to date. Although the Bauhaus itself felt this was premature, Walter Gropius poured the school's energy into the project: the workshops worked longer hours and no new students were admitted for the summer semester in 1923. The masters decided to present a fully furnished house in time for the exhibition. Georg Muche won the competition with his design for the *Haus am Horn*, which was built by Gropius's architecture firm and furnished collectively by all the Bauhaus workshops. The *Haus am Horn* was the first example of "New Building" to be built in Germany.

The exhibition ran from 15 August to 30 September 1923. It began with a week of events, the Bauhaus-woche, which was enthusiastically received by public and press. Gropius opened the exhibition with a lecture on "art and technology – a new unity". Lectures followed by Kandinsky on "synthetic art" and the Dutch architect Oud on the development of modern architecture in the Netherlands. Paul Hindemith's song cycle *Life of Mary* was premiered, and concerts given with music by Busoni, Krenek and Stravinsky. Bauhaus students performed Kurt Schmidt's *Mechanical Ballet* and Hirschfeld-Mack's *Reflecting Plays of Colours*; the high point was a performance of Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet*. Works by masters and students were exhibited in the state museum and in the school buildings, and Gropius's newly furnished director's office could be viewed.

The catalogue *State Bauhaus in Weimar 1919–1923* was published to coincide with the exhibition, with an edition of 2,000 in German, 300 in English and 300 in Russian. The cover was designed by Herbert Bayer.

In connection with the Bauhaus exhibition Gropius also put together an International Architecture Exhibition to present his line of functional/dynamic architecture. This was the first presentation of modern architecture in the 1920s.

The exhibition and associated events were very well received by the public and the press. But the days of Bauhaus in Weimar were numbered. During the Weimar Republic the teachers, students and admirers of the Bauhaus were regarded as "left-leaning" and "internationalist". The political right rejected the Bauhaus from the outset. The state elections in Thuringia in February 1924 saw a swing to the right and the new government halved the Bauhaus budget. In response to these political and financial pressures the masters decided to move the School to Dessau in 1925.

## IMAGES, REFERENCES, BOOKS, LINKS

*Bauhaus: 1919–1933*, author: Droste, Magdalena; Bauhaus-Archiv, ISBN: 3822876011, publisher: Taschen, 256 pages, year of publication: 1998 (poster by Joost Schmidt on page 107)  
On Amazon.ca: <https://amzn.to/2kajYfA>

## MODULE 9

# BAUHAUS S19

Images of postcards:

<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/bauhaus-postcards-moma-slideshow>

Information on Joost Schmidt's design:

<https://www.bauhaus100.com/the-bauhaus/works/graphic-printshop/poster-for-the-1923-bauhaus-exhibition-in-weimar/>