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Forms, Ideals, and Methods. Bauhaus Transfers to Mandatory Palestine

Abstract

Globally known as the “Bauhaus Capital of the World,” the *White City* of Tel Aviv is allegedly home to the world’s largest ensemble of Bauhaus-style buildings (over 4,000). In the year of the Bauhaus centenary, the Mediterranean metropolis is particularly suited to demonstrating the global radiance of the Bauhaus school after its forced closure in 1933. The discussion of the ostensible “Bauhaus style” in Tel Aviv indicates the complex and contradictory nature of the Bauhaus, which, on the one hand, encouraged its students to experiment and promoted pluralism and heterogeneity in design without wanting to coin a coherent style, and, on the other hand, contributed to the establishment of a clichéd “Bauhaus style” through a streamlined public image. Against this backdrop, this essay aims at a critical and comparative examination of “Bauhaus transfer” to the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine in the 1930s. In view of its historical transformation, can central ideas, methods, and concepts be identified that refer exclusively to the Bauhaus and can they be distinguished from other currents of European architectural modernism? In particular in Tel Aviv, it is hardly possible to name projects in which conceptual references can be made to the agendas of Gropius, Meyer, or Mies van der Rohe, for example. Nonetheless, in cooperation with various clients and communities in Mandatory Palestine, former Bauhaus students were given the opportunity to introduce selected architectural forms, ideals, and methods into local construction work and the accompanying discourse. It can be demonstrated that the spectrum of “Bauhaus transfers” clearly depends on the political, social, and ideological background of the client, ranging from merely formal references to thorough implementation of social considerations and to planning methodologies.

Keywords

White City, Kibbutz, Labor Movement, Modernism, Zionism