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Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack (1893–1965) and the Bauhaus in Australia

Abstract

Ultimately, the Bauhaus was an educational institution. Pedagogically, the “new man” stood at its centre as the nucleus for a society to be built on new aesthetic and social-ethical foundations. This premise combined the most diverse approaches to artistic elementary teaching, which in retrospect were summarized under the term “Bauhaus pedagogy”. A large number of Bauhaus students worked as teachers after leaving this school—often in involuntary exile due to National Socialism in Germany. Therefore, this essay advocates the thesis that a sustainable transfer of the Bauhaus to the whole world took place primarily through its pedagogy and less through the products in the field of architecture and design that emerged from the spirit of this school. This thesis is exemplarily presented in the work of Ludwig-Hirschfeld-Mack, who belonged to the Weimar Bauhaus from fall 1919 as a student and from 1922 as a so-called Bauhaus journeyman until its closure in April 1925. In addition to his artistic works, above all his famous colour-light plays, he earned his living as a teacher for design in Germany and, since 1936, in England. After his deportation from England to Australia in 1940, he found employment as “Art Master” at Geelong Grammar, a leading private boarding school in the state of Victoria. Its headmaster, who was already familiar with the Bauhaus, saw in Hirschfeld-Mack an ally for his plans to realign the school in the sense of a comprehensive human education. The most important instrument for this were, above all, the liberal and applied arts, for which the school had just completed its own workshop buildings. At the centre of Hirschfeld-Mack's teaching was an artistic propaedeutics that encompassed all workshops and was based on the preliminary and formal teachings of the Bauhaus, but in particular on Josef Albers's preliminary course lessons. Under the term “Study of Materials” Albers's experimental approach to practical research of materials, which was oriented towards technical and economic aspects, was extended by Hirschfeld-Mack towards purpose-free play in order to promote not only the

technical-constructive imagination, but also general creativity in the individual. Thus, he merged the traditional propaedeutics of design in the utilitarian tradition of the schools of arts and crafts with a central concern of the art education movement, namely human education through artistic self-expression. In the 1960s, this approach found broad acceptance in teacher training in the state of Victoria, where it exerted a lasting influence on future generations of art educators. Despite the well-known diverse criticism of Bauhaus pedagogy, it continues to appear topical from the central aspect of human education against the background of the potential conflicts of the present.

Keywords

Hirschfeld-Mack, Australia, Bauhaus Pedagogy, Study of Materials