

Boris Friedewald

The Bauhaus and India: A Look Back to the Future

“Building! Design! Gothic—India!”

In the beginning was longing—the longing to overcome the materialism and horrors of the “Great War” and at the same time to create something new and modern—even a new human being. What guise this newness should take was, however, something that most of the young people drawn to the Bauhaus in Weimar, founded in 1919, were less sure about. Inquiry and experimentation were therefore very much in the air. That some things nevertheless soon took shape goes down to the founder of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius, who had something that was invaluable at the time: a sense of optimism. While he did not have a blueprint at hand, he did have ideas and other, even more valuable, things: utopias! Thus, the title page of the Bauhaus manifesto shows a cathedral, which reaches to the stars, and the first sentence of the program announces: “The ultimate aim of all artistic activity is the building!”

Gropius dreamed of a small, lodge-like community in which artists and skilled craftsmen of various disciplines would, hand in hand and on equal footing, create a new architecture: architecture as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and communal project that would serve a new, future society. Like many other Expressionist architects, he thereby looked to the Gothic cathedral, which he believed was informed by the mysterious Masonic knowledge of the artists and artisans of the cathedral workshop.¹ For Gropius, this made architecture the “mother of all arts.” Nonetheless, a number of years passed before an architecture class was introduced at the Bauhaus in Dessau.

In May 1919 Gropius delivered his inaugural speech in front of one hundred and fifty Bauhauslers. As the concept for this speech reveals, he once again adopted collective design work on the building and Gothic architecture as a guiding principle but added to this a further dimension: “Building! Design! Gothic—India!”² Gothic and India—these were everything but opposites for Gropius, who must have thereby been thinking of the temples of India, which had also been built by collectives of craftsmen and artists. And when he opened the first exhibition of students’ work at the Bauhaus, he again testified to the fact that “all great artworks of the past, the Indian, the Gothic wonders, were born of the mastery of craftsmanship.”³ It comes

as no surprise that at the time, Gropius gave his close colleague, architect Adolf Meyer, the gift of a book about Indian architecture. For critic and author Paul Westheim, the huge enthusiasm for Indian architecture that Gropius shared with some of the avant-garde architects of the day was clearly rooted in the cultural pessimism of the age. In the introduction to this book, he stated: "It is natural that the embattled people of Europe, who have every reason to doubt the superiority of their civilization and, on a higher plane, are worried by something like the 'decline of the Western world,' turn toward the East. That, which is first revealed in the art of East Asia and most palpably in the art of India is the creative power of spiritual driving forces, without which, as can be seen, art is condemned to decline."⁴ The young architect Fred Forbát, who in 1920 became an assistant in Gropius's architecture office, surmised that the enthusiasm for India certainly also had an impact on the designs of Gropius and Meyer at that time: "The design vocabulary confounded me, for until then I knew of Gropius and Meyer only buildings of clear-cut cubes and glass . . . That it was not exclusively informed by the special timber structure, but also had to accommodate Gropius' attitude of mind at the time, was something I first noticed later when he gave me a book about Indian sculpture for Christmas, inscribed with the dedication: 'an aspiration!'"⁵

- [1] See Annemarie Jaeggi, "Ein geheimnisvolles Mysterium: Bauhütten-Romantik und Freimaurerei am frühen Bauhaus," in *Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*, ed. Christoph Wagner (Bielefeld and Leipzig, 2005), pp. 37–45.
- [2] Concept by Walter Gropius for the inaugural speech at the Bauhaus on May 6, 1919, Bauhaus Archive Berlin, Archive Walter Gropius, GS 3, File 12.
- [3] Speech by Walter Gropius for the first exhibition of students' work at the Staatliche Bauhaus on June 25, 1919, in *Das Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar: Dokumente zur Geschichte des Instituts 1919–1929*, vol. 15: *Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission für Thüringen, Große Reihe*, ed. Volker Wahl (Cologne et al., 2009), p. 243.
- [4] Paul Westheim, ed., *Indische Baukunst* (Berlin, ca. 1919), p. 14. Originally published by Orbis Pictus / Weltkunst-Bücherei.
- [5] Fred Forbát, "Erinnerungen eines Architekten aus vier Ländern," pp. 46–47, typescript, Bauhaus Archive Berlin.
- [6] Letter from Hermann Graf Keyserling to Franz Singer, March 13, 1920, Bauhaus Archive Berlin, File Gropius / Letters to personages GS 19/346.
- [7] Hermann Graf Keyserling, *Das Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen*, vol. 1 (Darmstadt, 1922), p. 402.
- [8] Letter from Paul Klee to Lily Klee, October 27, 1917, in *Paul Klee: Briefe an die Familie 1893–1940*, vol. 2: *1907–1940*, ed. Felix Klee (Cologne, 1979), p. 885.

Caption

- 1 Lyonel Feininger, *Cathedral*, 1919, woodcut, 32 × 19.7 cm, title page, manifesto, and program of the Staatliche Bauhaus Weimar, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau

The Guest from a Higher Spiritual Dimension

The communal life of the Bauhausers was not over at the end of the school day—Gropius had even set this out in the Bauhaus program. Masters and students therefore went on walks together, celebrated vibrant parties, and engaged in discussions—for example, in the Indian tea room in Weimar’s Marienstraße, where they were served by ladies clothed in batik robes. The Bauhausers attended “Bauhaus evenings” to hear lectures or performances by poets or musicians. The Bauhausler Franz Singer had evidently invited the Baltic aristocrat Hermann Graf Keyserling to deliver a lecture, for in a letter to Singer, Keyserling expressed a wish to speak about “spiritual reincarnation.”⁶ His *Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen* (Travel Journal of a Philosopher), in which he described at length his world tour before the First World War, had been published the year before, promptly making him famous. On this adventurous journey to Asia and elsewhere he had seen “tropical kings” and “intellectual giants”; in Calcutta he had also encountered a man who, to him, seemed otherworldly—the musician, poet, philosopher, and founder of a progressive school, Rabindranath Tagore: “Rabindranath, the poet, seemed like a visitor from a higher spiritual dimension. Perhaps never before have I seen such robust spiritual substance in one man.”⁷ At the time that Keyserling described this encounter, Tagore knew almost no one in Europe, but when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his collection of poems *Gitanjali*, he became famous overnight. But Tagore was not yet loved by the German masses. And in a letter to his wife Lily in 1917, Paul Klee, whose father had previously composed a German version of Tagore’s *The Gardener*, described a work by Tagore as follows: “The Indian book is not all that powerful, weakly erotic, a bit stiff. For that, we don’t need an Indian.”⁸

It is not known whether Keyserling actually held his lecture at the Bauhaus. After all, he had great plans: in autumn 1920 in Darmstadt he founded the “Schule der Weisheit” (School of Wisdom), with which he created a meeting place for spiritual figures where practical counter models were to be found for a world increasingly characterized by rationalism and technology. For Keyserling this was inextricably linked with the endeavor to build a bridge between the Eastern and Western spiritual worlds. Keyserling shared this unorthodox philosophy with Rabindranath Tagore, who, after being awarded the Nobel Prize, increasingly also saw himself as an ambassador between the East and the West and was convinced that India and the East could bring peace to the world. On May 12, 1921, Tagore took a three-day trip to Germany—and also visited Keyserling in Darmstadt. A few days later, Keyserling announced in the press: “The Indian and I have reached such agreement on our mutual objectives that Shantiniketan, Tagore’s Bengali university, and the School of Wisdom will henceforth work together in

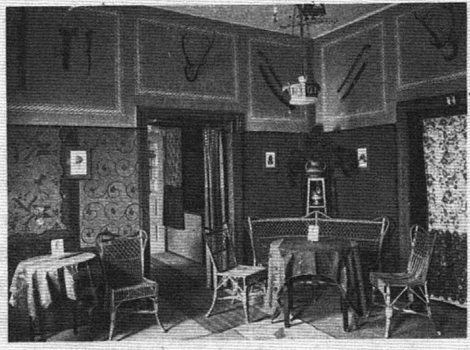
order to create a brotherhood between East and West.”⁹ Tagore was now the talk of the town, first and foremost among the bourgeoisie who felt dispossessed and sought spiritual orientation. This enthusiasm will have been the reason why the German National Theater in Weimar dedicated one of their Sunday matinees on May 29 to Tagore, although the program announced that this was “To celebrate his 60th birthday,” when he had in fact celebrated it on May 3. Weeks before the matinee, the Bauhaus master Johannes Itten had already noted in his diary: “Rabindranath Tagore to appear on his 60th birthday with a program . . . in the German National Theater.”¹⁰ Evidently, Itten had misread the announcement, for the matinee began with a welcome speech by Carl Stanz, the theater’s dramaturge. This was followed by a recitation of some of Tagore’s works at the public premiere of composer Carl Schadwitz’s *Zyklus nach Gedichten Rabindranath Tagores* (Cycle after the Poems of Rabindranath Tagore). One thing is, however, clear: Tagore was not present at the celebration in Weimar—he had traveled via Hamburg to Sweden, where he belatedly accepted the Nobel Prize in person. Finally, also in May of that year, Itten had completed a small drawing, which he called *Tagore*. This, however, does not show a man with flowing hair and a long beard, but a music-making tabla player entirely free of such sumptuous locks. While Germany’s fascination with Tagore at the time also focused heavily on his outer appearance, which was often associated with the figure of prophet and savior, for Itten it was obviously more about the emotion associated with Tagore’s nature—which he perceived as equally ascetic and artistic. From Northern Europe, Tagore returned to Germany and visited Berlin, Munich, and finally Darmstadt once more, where, from June 9 to 14, Keyserling had organized a so-called “Tagore Week” with great pomp and ceremony.

[9] Hermann Graf Keyserling, “Rabindranath Tagore und Deutschland,” *Der Tag* 21, no. 117 (May 22, 1921).

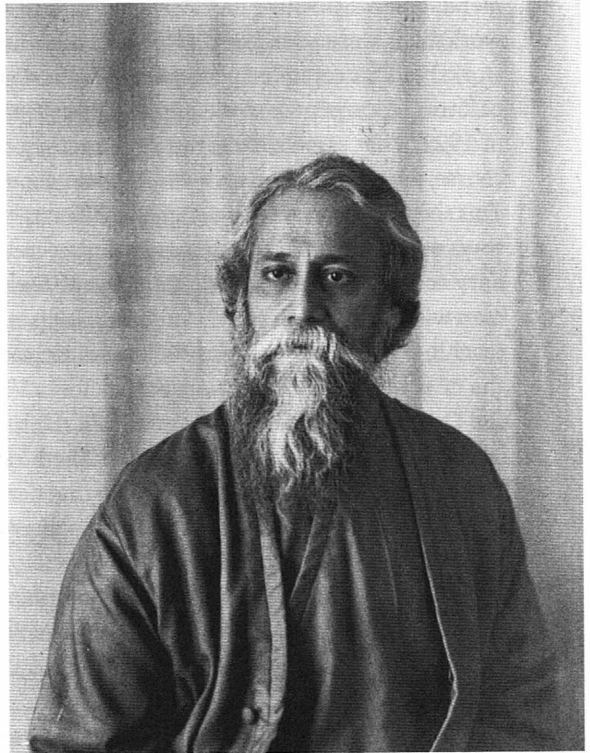
[10] Quoted from Patha Mitter, “Bauhaus in Kalkutta,” in *bauhaus global*, vol. 3: *neue Bauhausbücher, neue Zählung*, ed. Bauhaus Archive Berlin (Berlin, 2009), p. 157, footnote 9.

Captions

- 2 Louis Held, Indian tea room in Weimar, Marienstr. 4, postcard, ca. 1919–23, photogravure on off-white card
- 3 Auguste Léon, Rabindranath Tagore, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 1913, 1920, photograph
- 4 Deutsche Nationaltheater, invitation to the tenth morning ceremony in celebration of Rabindranath Tagore’s sixtieth birthday, Deutsche Nationaltheater, Weimar, May 29, 1921



Schilder:
Landschaft
Wälder
Museum



Deutsches Nationaltheater ²⁷⁹

Sonntag, den 29. Mai 1921
Vormittags 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr

Zehnte Morgenfeier Rabindranath Tagore

(zur Feier seines 60. Geburtstages)

Vortragsfolge:

I. Einleitender Vortrag: Rabindranath Tagore

Carl Haupt

II. Rabindranath Tagore:

- a) Ich lieb dich (aus „Der Gärtner“)
- b) Der Nijanga
- c) Der böse Döbbo (aus „Der juchende Mond“)
- d) Es war einmal ein König (aus „Erzählungen“)

Max Rabel

III. Carl Schadewitz: „Der Gärtner.“ Ein Zyklus nach Gedichten

Rabindranath Tagores für Sopran und Bariton, Oboe, Flöte, Klarinette (op. 17)

Paul Krumpholtz, Hans Wegmann,

Das erste Mal

Kiefer 2462, Leo Stroz, Julius Hamer

Kostenlos: Vorklein, aus dem Chörigen Hoffmann Hermann Henning (Zub. Karl Hoflin), Weimar, Marktstraße 24
Die Werke von Rabindranath Tagore sind im Verlag Kurt Wolff, München, erhältlich.

Preise der Plätze 5.—, 3.—, 2.—, 1.— M.

Kasseneröffnung 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ Uhr Ende gegen 1 Uhr

Wochen-Spielplan

Montag, den 30. In ermäßigten Preisen: Die Wädhme, Opern in vier Akten von G. Bizet und E. Lalo. Dorothea von E. Gutzmann. Welt von G. Büchner. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Dienstag, den 31. Juni Das Nijanga, Opern in zwei Akten von Rabindranath Tagore. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Mittwoch, den 1. Die Wädhme, erster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Donnerstag, den 2. Die Wädhme, zweiter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Freitag, den 3. Die Wädhme, dritter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Samstag, den 4. Die Wädhme, vierter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Sonntag, den 5. Die Wädhme, fünfter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Montag, den 6. Die Wädhme, sechster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Dienstag, den 7. Die Wädhme, siebter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Mittwoch, den 8. Die Wädhme, achter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Donnerstag, den 9. Die Wädhme, neunter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Freitag, den 10. Die Wädhme, zehnter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Samstag, den 11. Die Wädhme, elfter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Sonntag, den 12. Die Wädhme, zwölfter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Montag, den 13. Die Wädhme, dreizehnter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Dienstag, den 14. Die Wädhme, vierzehnter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Mittwoch, den 15. Die Wädhme, fünfzehnter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Donnerstag, den 16. Die Wädhme, sechzehnter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Freitag, den 17. Die Wädhme, siebzehnter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Samstag, den 18. Die Wädhme, achtzehnter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Sonntag, den 19. Die Wädhme, neunzehnter Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Montag, den 20. Die Wädhme, zwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Dienstag, den 21. Die Wädhme, einundzwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Mittwoch, den 22. Die Wädhme, zweiundzwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Donnerstag, den 23. Die Wädhme, dreiundzwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Freitag, den 24. Die Wädhme, vierundzwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Samstag, den 25. Die Wädhme, fünfundzwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Sonntag, den 26. Die Wädhme, sechsundzwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Montag, den 27. Die Wädhme, siebenundzwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Dienstag, den 28. Die Wädhme, achtundzwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Mittwoch, den 29. Die Wädhme, neunundzwanzigster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.
Donnerstag, den 30. Die Wädhme, hundertster Tag des Nijanga. Montag 7, Ende 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ Uhr.

Während der Vorträge bleiben die Türen geschlossen

Ein- und Abfahrt nur an den Seitentüren

Verlag - G. Hoffmann

The Preliminary Course and Johannes Itten

For all its enthusiasm for experimentation, the Bauhaus had meanwhile rejected many a controversial path and also parted with some teachers—moves that were frequently accompanied by intense discussions among the Bauhaus masters and Weimar's conservative citizens and artists. At the same time, in the public and ongoing search for the contemporary, some things had taken firm shape at the school. In addition to the original departments—the metal, graphic printing, bookbinding, and weaving workshops—further workshops were added in 1920, which the students could choose between: workshops for ceramics, glass painting, wood carving, stone carving, and wall painting. A carpentry workshop and a stage workshop were then set up in 1921. That same spring, the introductory course became the preliminary course, which from then on was obligatory for every new Bauhaus student. This six-month course was designed to liberate the students from any traditional ways of thinking and stimulate their inherent artistic potential. The preliminary course was developed and led by the Swiss artist Johannes Itten, a man with an abiding interest in the mysticism, esotericism, and spiritual teachings of diverse cultures. Before he arrived at the Bauhaus, he had been the director of his own private art school in Vienna. Here, in this city on the Danube, Itten had also met Alma Mahler, whose interest in theosophy he soon came to share. Shortly before the First World War, Mahler had become so fascinated by the theosophy that permeated the spiritual doctrines of India that she enrolled on a Sanskrit course in Benares, India, with Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society.¹¹ However, the outbreak of the First World War put a stop to these plans. At the time, Mahler's circle of friends included art historian Josef Strzygowski, who in 1912 had

- [11] See Alma Mahler, *Mein Leben* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), p. 67.
- [12] Manuscript of the lecture in Eva Badura-Triska, *Johannes Itten: Tagebücher. Stuttgart 1913–1916; Wien 1916–1919* (Vienna, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 225ff.
- [13] See "Zwischen Lebensreform und Esoterik: Johannes Ittens Weg ans Bauhaus," in Wagner 2005 (see note 1), pp. 67–68.
- [14] See Manfred Metzner, ed., *Ré Soupault: Bauhaus; Die heroischen Jahre von Weimar* (Heidelberg, 2009), pp. 38–39 and 46.
- [15] During his trip to Germany in 1921, he was usually introduced as Murshid Inayat Khan. However, his worshippers called him Pir-o-Murshid, a title of respect for Sufi leaders. After his death, he was given an honorary title to precede his name, according to the Sufi tradition for high-ranking Sufis. Today he is therefore generally known as Hazrat Inayat Khan.
- [16] *Jenaische Zeitung* 248, no. 236 (October 8, 1921).
- [17] See minutes of the masters' council meeting on October 12, 1921. Document in the Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar, ThHStA Weimar, Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar 12, sheet 105–106.
- [18] The transcript of the unpublished lecture is now in the archive of the Nebakht Foundation, Suresnes, France. While the Bauhaus had announced Khan's lecture for October 22, 1922 (see ThHStA, Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar, no. 14, sheet 144 r), the transcript mistakenly gives October 24 as the lecture date.

established an East Asia department at Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Institut. In May 1917, Itten presented a lecture here on composition theory,¹² in which he made reference to many aspects that he was to take up shortly afterward in his preliminary course at the Bauhaus. It is likely that Itten had met Strzygowski through Alma Mahler, who had married Walter Gropius in 1915 and recommended Itten to him as a suitable man for the Bauhaus.¹³

Once in Weimar, Itten became increasingly involved with the Mazdaznan movement, a "life school" founded in nineteenth-century America that aimed to draw on the secret doctrines of the Persians, Greeks, and Egyptians. As a result of his involvement with this movement, Itten began to do breathing exercises with his students and introduced a purely vegetarian diet to the Bauhaus canteen. But his interest in everything Indian did not end there, as illustrated by his journal on temple mansions, among other things. Here he notes the canons of the Tattva that symbolize the "basic principles" of the cosmos, expressed in different base colors and forms. The journal also includes notes on the fate of Brahma, the god of creation, who on committing his first sin wept tears so hot that they formed the first sapphires. He also cultivated an interest in Pali, the literary language of the original Buddhist texts. Itten's devotion to India also stimulated some of his students: the Bauhaus student Erna Niemeyer, for instance, began to simultaneously study Sanskrit in Jena and subsequently wove many of the Sanskrit symbols that she learned there into a carpet she was making in the Bauhaus workshop.¹⁴

The Bauhaus Visit of the Indian Poet-Philosopher

Just a few months after Rabindranath Tagore's first visit to Germany, another Indian gentleman traveled through Germany in autumn 1921. This was Murshid Inayat Khan, musician, poet, philosopher, and founder of the International Sufi Movement.¹⁵ He visited Munich, Hagen, Berlin, Frankfurt, and Darmstadt, where he also met Keyserling. On October 21, Khan arrived in Jena, where he held a lecture at the home of a publisher and admirer of Eastern philosophy, Eugen Diederichs. The local press had already announced his arrival some weeks earlier and connected his visit with Tagore's: "Khan's visit to Germany . . . is, like Tagore's, a sign of the convergence of Indian spiritual life and German thought."¹⁶

After his visit to Jena, Khan went on to Weimar. There, he was invited by Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche to give a lecture at the Nietzsche Archive on October 23. He was also invited to visit the Bauhaus: Eugen Diederichs had recommended the Sufi master to Gropius for the Bauhaus—a suggestion that was unanimously welcomed by all the Bauhaus masters.¹⁷ Khan finally arrived at the Bauhaus on October 22, where, in the Oberlichtsaal, he sang, played the vina, and spoke freely on "The Nature of Art."¹⁸ Khan spoke on the beauty of god and life and described the two best-known Eastern

paths of enlightenment: the path of the Yogi and the path of the Sufi, which, unlike the former, found great pleasure in art. The Sufi recognized the divine in art, which therefore could become something religious for him. Finally, Khan declared: "The call of the Sufi to the Western world and to the whole world today is to harmonize and combine in the beauty of God . . . For during this age materialism and commercialism increased to the greatest disaster the world ever has seen."¹⁹ This evening made an impact at the Bauhaus. Many years later, Bauhausler Heinrich Konrad was to recall: "One day an Indian poet-philosopher appeared to give a lecture; everything about this man emanated the metaphysical, which we were hungry for." Konrad wrote further about his fellow student Kurt Schwerdtfeger: "Schwerdtfeger modeled this manifestation in one day, also by the dark of night, and later realized this imposing study in granite."²⁰

The very next week, Itten penned an ardent letter to Diederichs: "You were so kind to send us the Indian musician last Saturday. Because of illness I was unfortunately unable to attend the lecture, but a friend told me about it. Since the way of thinking that this man expressed is in essence precisely in line with what I have intuitively known and taught for 5 years, you can imagine how happy I am to know of a second man, or indeed a whole order, that has for a long time thought and felt the same way . . . would you be so kind as to let me know where the Sufi . . . will be in the next 3–5 days, so that I can seek him out."²¹ But Itten's interest in spiritual matters of all kinds, which was also transferred to the students, was soon to lead to conflicts at

[19] Murshi Inayat Khan, "The Nature of Art," transcript of the English-language lecture of October 22, 1922, Nekbakht Foundation Archive, Suresnes, p. 6.

[20] Letter from Heinrich Konrad to the Bauhaus Archive, February 11, 1956, p. 3. The letter regarding the Heinrich Konrad questionnaire is located at the Bauhaus Archive Berlin.

[21] Letter from Johannes Itten to Eugen Diederichs, n.p., n.d. Available as a copy in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, Handschriften, Medien-Nr. HS000626289.

Captions

- 5 Johannes Itten, *Rabindranath Tagore* (?), May 1921, pencil on paper, 17.5 × 22.0 cm, Itten-Archiv Zurich
- 6 Alfred Bischoff, Hazrat Inayat Khan (Pir-o-Murshid) in Jena, 1921, photograph
- 7 Announcement of the event *Umlauf* (Circulation): "Tonight at 8 p.m. in the Oberlichtsaal, lecture, songs and lute music by the North Indian musician Murschid Inayat Khan, Weimar, October 22, 1921"



Umlauf.

000144

Heute Abend 8 Uhr im Oberlichtsaal Vortrag, Gesang und
Lautenspiel des nordischen Musikers ^{aus} Marschid Inayad Khan.

Weimar, den 22. Oktober 1921.

1.
R. Krieger

Vorzulegen:

- Meister Lionel Feininger, *Feininger*
- * Johannes Itten,
- * Paul Klee, *Klee*
- * Gerard Marcys telephonisch erledigt
- * Georg Muche, *Muche*
- * Oskar Schlemmer *Schlemmer*
- * Lothar Schreyer *Schreyer*
- * Adolph Meyer verretzt
- * Josef Hartwig *Hartwig*
- * Josef Zachmann *Zachmann*
- * Max Krehan telephonisch erledigt
- * Carl Schlemmer z.Zt. Berlin
- * Helene Börner *Börner*
- * Carl Zaubitzer *Zaubitzer*
- * Otto Dorner *Dorner*

the Bauhaus, the reasons for which are implied as early as December 1921 in a letter written by the Bauhaus master Oskar Schlemmer to his artist friend Otto Meyer-Amden: "But Gropius says that that we may not place ourselves outside life and reality, whereby the risk (if it is one) of Itten's method is that, for example, the workshop students find meditation and rites more important than work." Schlemmer continues: "This duality appears to be fundamental to present-day Germany. On the one hand, the advent of Eastern culture, the India-cult, also the return to nature of the wayfarer and others, settlement, vegetarianism, Tolstoyism, reaction to the War—and on the other, Americanism, progress, the marvels of technology and invention, the metropolis. Gropius and Itten are the quasi-typical advocates and I must say, I find myself once more happily-unhappily in the middle. I approve of both, or indeed wish that one were informed by the other."²²

[22] Oskar Schlemmer in a letter to Otto Meyer-Amden, Weimar, December 7, 1921, in *Oskar Schlemmer: Idealist der Form; Briefe, Tagebücher, Schriften, 1912–1943*, ed. Andreas Hüneke (Leipzig, 1990), pp. 81–82.

Captions

- 8 First page of handwritten notes for the lecture "The Nature of Art" by Hazrat Inayat Khan (Pir-o-Murshid) at the Staatliche Bauhaus Weimar, 1921, manuscript
- 9 Joost Schmidt, *Die sieben Chakras* (The Seven Chakras), 1931, pencil and colored pencil drawings and typewritten notes on transparent paper, from *Natur- und Menschenwerk: Die Sinne als Steuerungswerkzeuge; Studien zum Thema "Mensch und Raum," Elemente einer Gestaltungslehre, Aufzeichnungen für den eigenen Unterricht*

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 The Nature of Art
 1932

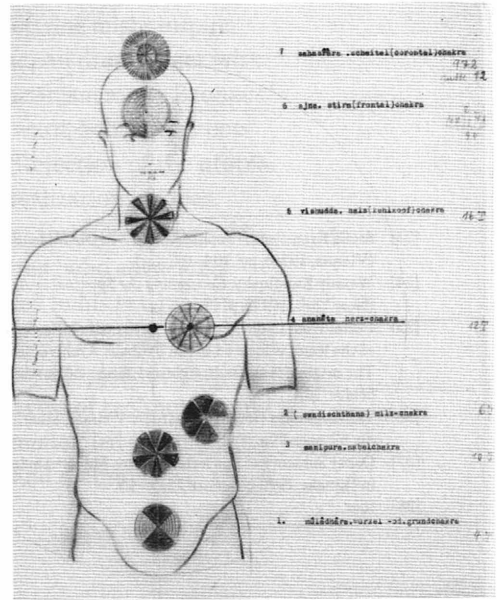


The Sufi thinks that art is divine for the very reason that the source of art is divine. The source of art is divine, art depends more on intuition than on study. In the language of the mystic there is the great attribute of the Creator and the participate state.

There are two things, nature and art. Nature is the art of the creator and in its perfection, one sees the perfection of the creator's art. Variety of colours and forms. One can notice in the nature of a flower one that God is the perfect artist. If there is anything that has given the proof of God it is nature and the beauty of nature.

No, could there are two kinds of individuals, the major and the minor. And this dependence goes that is, an individual who lives in the beauty of nature, he is just contented. He does not feel, he only lives in his grave. But there is another who is open to feel the beauty of colour and form in nature and to him nature is a paradise. And when that person goes a step forward, he asks, what appears to him, is it the colour, the form? And he asks, how is it that nature which is already there? And it is this tendency to create again in which is the origin of art. This tendency comes in two forms: one may come with

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A Letter from Calcutta

In May 1922 a letter from Calcutta arrived at the Bauhaus. This was from Stella Kramrisch, who had been working at the International University in Shantiniketan, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, since 1921. She had studied under Josef Strzygowski in Vienna, where, in 1919, she drafted her dissertation on the early Buddhist art of India. Kramrisch was fascinated by theosophy and anthroposophy. In 1920, she wrote an article about the painter Sophie Korner, who had studied under Itten in Vienna and who, as a student, had moved with him to the Bauhaus.²³ Kramrisch's letter included an invitation to the Bauhaus masters and students to participate in a commercial exhibition with works by contemporary Indian artists, organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art—it was addressed not to Gropius but to Itten. This suggests that Kramrisch already knew Itten from Vienna.

Among the works by the Bauhauslers that were eventually sent to Calcutta in August were several copies of the art book *Utopia: Dokumente der Wirklichkeit* (Utopia: Documents of Reality). Compiled by Itten in 1921, this contained philosophical and religious texts from different cultures, as well as his own painting studies. Itten followed the introduction with the beginning of the creation myth from the Rigveda, the oldest part of the Hindu Vedas. This was followed by a text that refers, among other things, to the book *Chitralakshana*, one of the earliest books on the history of Indian art. This text was accompanied by an illustration that shows the interior of an Indian temple in Ahmedabad.

The packages sent to India also included three works by Wassily Kandinsky, who in 1922 had just joined the group of Bauhaus masters. As early as 1911 in his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, with which the

- [23] Stella Kramrisch, "Sophie Korner," in *Die Bildenden Künste: 1920*, vol. 3 (Vienna, 1920), pp. 104–07.
- [24] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M.T.H. Sadler (New York, 1977), p. 13.
- [25] Letter from Lyonel Feininger to his wife Julia, September 6, 1922. A copy of the letter is located in the Bauhaus Archive Berlin, inv. no. 11830/1-4. The original is at the Houghton Library of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- [26] Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar, Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar, no. 57, page 79a.
- [27] Oskar Schlemmer in a letter to Otto Meyer-Amden, Weimar, June 1922, in Hüneke 1990 (see note 22), p. 93.
- [28] *Ibid.*

Bauhausers were most familiar, he had written critically about “materialistic science” and praised those contemporaries who looked to other peoples with different, nonscientific methods of exploring the phenomena of existence and the world: “However, these very methods are still alive and in use among nations whom we, from the height of our knowledge, have been accustomed to regard with pity and scorn. To such nations belong the Indians, who from time to time confront those learned in our civilization with problems which we have either passed by unnoticed or brushed aside with superficial words and explanations.”²⁴

What might the Bauhausers have felt when their pictures for the first joint exhibition abroad went to the much-revered India, of all places? Perhaps a healthy mix of trepidation about the distance their works were to travel, and great delight. In a letter from Lyonel Feininger to his wife Julia in September 1922, there are echoes of both: “I have been advised by Fraulein Heckmann that the 35 watercolours, woodcuts, etc. are happily on the way to Calcutta . . . Oh, girlie—.”²⁵ And Paul Klee, who even prior to his Bauhaus days had often engaged with matters Indian, and whose bookshelves contained titles on Indian sagas, Indian sculpture, and Indian miniatures of the Islamic era, at that time painted a picture that he christened Indian Flower Garden. In spring 1923 there was a long wait for the works to arrive back from India. Then, in April, the secretary of the Bauhaus, Lotte Hirschfeld, noted in a small handwritten memo: “Works arrived on 23.4.”²⁶ There was just one work that failed to make its way back to Weimar: a watercolor by the student Sophie Korner, which was the only one to find a buyer—Rabindranath Tagore.

“Art and Technology—A New Unity”

In summer 1922, there were already indications that Itten might soon leave the Bauhaus. He now imagined that the Mazdaznan doctrine might inspire the Bauhaus more strongly than ever. Itten’s Mazdaznan dream “met with resistance, especially from Gropius, who feared sectarianism at the Bauhaus,” as Oskar Schlemmer noted in a letter.²⁷ Shortly afterward, Schlemmer outlined what the Bauhaus was now moving toward: “Rejection of the utopia. We can and may aspire only to the most real, to the realization of ideas. The *Wohnmaschine*, as opposed to the cathedral. Rejection, therefore, of the medieval and the medieval concept of craftsmanship.”²⁸ Itten, who advocated craftsmanship and the handmade object, finally handed in his resignation and left the Bauhaus in spring 1923. With this, the Bauhaus’s initially very open search for the new had departed from many of its early utopian ideals, and the fascination for “Americanism, progress, the marvels of technology and invention, the metropolis,” once referred to by Schlemmer, led to a change of direction that was articulated in the slogan “Art and technology—a new unity.”

Spirituality and Technology—A New Unity?

With the Bauhaus's new orientation, the collective reconnaissance of the East, of India, was quickly consigned to the past, with mysticism and esotericism becoming the private preserve of individual Bauhauslers. Some of it nevertheless continued to reach the Bauhaus crowd through the spiritual world view of the masters Klee, Schlemmer, and Kandisky. But in 1931—Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was by now director of the Bauhaus, and Schlemmer and Klee had left—something unexpected happened: Joost Schmidt, who had initially studied under Itten and other masters at the Bauhaus in Weimar, and who was now junior master of the advertising department and head of the sculpture workshop, introduced a special course for students, in which he aimed to convey the “quintessence of his learning.”²⁹

While Schmidt in his workshops was involved with practical typography, advertising photomontages, the exploration of elementary spatial figures, and exhibition design, this course was to be about the comprehensive analysis of the human being—his relation not only to nature, but also to the cosmos. From this course, or from its preparation, stems a work by Schmidt that shows the seven chakras of the body—materially intangible energy centers through which human energy flows. The chakra teachings were first referred to in the Upanishads, where each of these energy centers had its own name. Schmidt, too, gave the Sankrit name to each of these. For all the zeal that Schmidt applied to the technique, he also saw the risks associated with it. As early as 1928 in the journal *Bauhaus*, he had warned: “A look at the social discrepancies of the technological machine age should suffice to make all its splendor seem highly questionable!”³⁰ And he was convinced that the end of the nineteen-twenties would herald a new age that would have the physical-psychological wholeness of the human being at its core. For Schmidt, the knowledge of the chakras evidently belonged to this amplified, new image of humanity—an image that the early Bauhaus had already longed for.

[29] See Lutz Schöbe, “Joost Schmidt: Die Sieben Chakras,” in Wagner 2005 (see note 1), p. 109.

[30] Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 110.

[31] Walter Gropius, opening of the new building at the Ulm School of Design (HfG), September 1955, typescript, Bauhaus Archive Berlin, GS 20/File 161, p. 4.

Four years later, with the Bauhaus long since closed, the Ulm School of Design (HfG), which initially saw itself as an extension of the Bauhaus, was founded. Walter Gropius held the inaugural speech for the opening of the new school building in 1955, in which former Bauhausers such as Josef Albers, Walter Peterhans, and Johannes Itten taught. Now, Gropius—as if he could hear the words of Joost Schmidt in his ear—spoke about how the technological advances of past decades had convulsed humanity, had dissolved the people's sense of community, and emphasized the importance of a new cultural orientation. Gropius's vision looked back to the early days of the Bauhaus and, at the same time, presented a utopia for the present: "On a world tour last year I became familiar with the oriental mode of thinking in Japan, Siam and in India, which reveals itself so differently, more internalized and magical than that of the logical-practical Western man. Will the future with its greater generosity on earth bring the gradual merging of these two modes of thinking and henceforth lead to a more mature democracy of balance between the spiritually divine and intellectually logical? The artistic being with his predisposition for human completeness is predestined to nurture this interpenetration and to achieve for himself an aim that is truly worthy of enthusiasm."⁵¹