

NOV|DEC 2009

FiberARTS

NOV|DEC 2009

CONTEMPORARY
TEXTILE ART
AND CRAFT

Making it BIG

**Monumental
Outdoor Fiber Art**

**5th Annual
Student Showcase**

The Bauhaus Weaving Legacy

Nick Cave's Soundsuits



fiberarts.com

\$7.99



Fiberarts

fiberarts.com

FiberARTS

Features

NOV|DEC 2009 VOLUME 36 NUMBER 3

34 | BIG AS ALL OUTDOORS

by Kathleen Vanesian

Janet Echelman expands the sky with colossal fiber sculptures that respond to natural elements and reshape urban environments.

38 | 2009 STUDENT SHOWCASE

Our fifth annual student showcase features work being produced in colleges and universities both in the United States and internationally.

44 | LACE IN TRANSLATION

by Jacqueline Ruyak

A rarely seen lace collection in Philadelphia has inspired a handful of acclaimed artists and designers to create exciting new large-scale work.

48 | BAUHAUS TEXILES: A LEGACY OF FEMALE HANDS

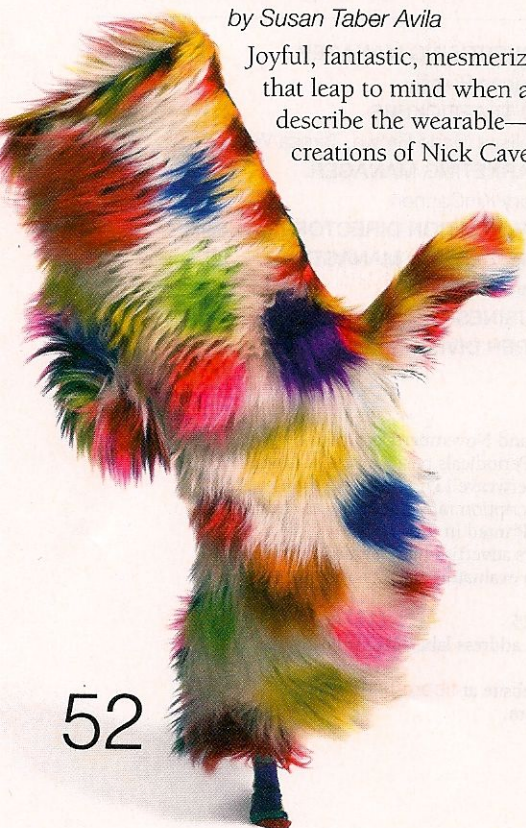
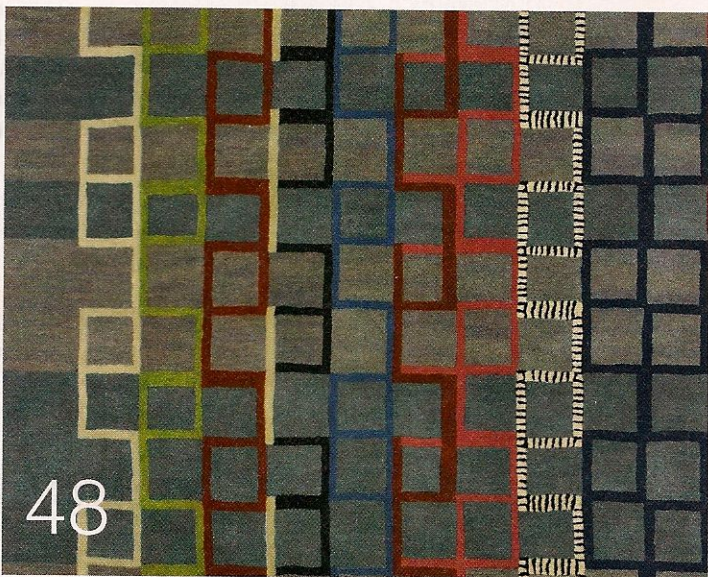
by Cynthia Elyce Rubin

Nearly a century after its inception, the Bauhaus school's Weaving Workshop continues to influence contemporary textile appreciation, production, and design.

52 | IMAGINATION ACTIVIST

by Susan Taber Avila

Joyful, fantastic, mesmerizing: all words that leap to mind when attempting to describe the wearable—and audible—creations of Nick Cave.



ON THE COVER: Janet Echelman, *Her secret is patience*, 2009; painted galvanized steel, changing sets of recyclable high-tenacity polyester braided twine netting, and color lighting; 145' x 353' x 289'. Civic Space Park, downtown Phoenix, Arizona. Echelman's large-scale public installations are the subject of the feature on page 34. Photo: Craig Smith. PAGE 38: Jodi Stevens, *Resting Place*, 2009; yarn; dimensions variable. MFA Artisanry/Fibers, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Photo by the artist. PAGE 48: Produced by Christopher Farr Rugs, *Gunta Stözl Plate 160 Rug*, original design from the 1920s (no date specified); handspun wool, cotton backing with latex adhesive; hand-tufted; 11' x 8'. Commissioned by Design Within Reach. Image courtesy of Design Within Reach. PAGE 52: Nick Cave, *SOUNDSUIT*, 2009; human hair, fabric, metal armature; 8' x 36" x 18". Image courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. Photo: James Prinz.

BAUHAUS TEXTILES

A Legacy of Female Hands

by Cynthia Elyce Rubin

Nearly a century after its inception, the Bauhaus school's Weaving Workshop continues to inspire contemporary textile appreciation, production, and design.



This year marks the Bauhaus jubilee in Germany, ninety years after the founding of the short-lived but profoundly influential art school. The Bauhaus existed from 1919 to 1925 in Weimar, from 1925 to 1932 in Dessau, and from 1932 to 1933 in Berlin, until Nazi pressure finally shuttered its doors, resulting in the dispersal of teachers and students worldwide. Holding a unique place in the history of twentieth-century art, design, and architecture, the school, with international and avant-garde dimensions, challenged design and architecture principles around the world, and spearheaded the irrepressible global aesthetic force called Modernism. What is less known is the contribution of its Weaving Workshop to modern textile design.

When architect Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus, he assembled multitalented teachers who sought to reverse the split between art and production by returning to crafts as the foundation of all artistic activities and were intent on developing designs for objects and spaces that would advance a more humane society. As a former employee of architect Peter Behrens, who helped found the Deutscher Werkbund (German Work Federation) in 1907, which was an organization that sought a new visual idiom appropriate for a modern indus-

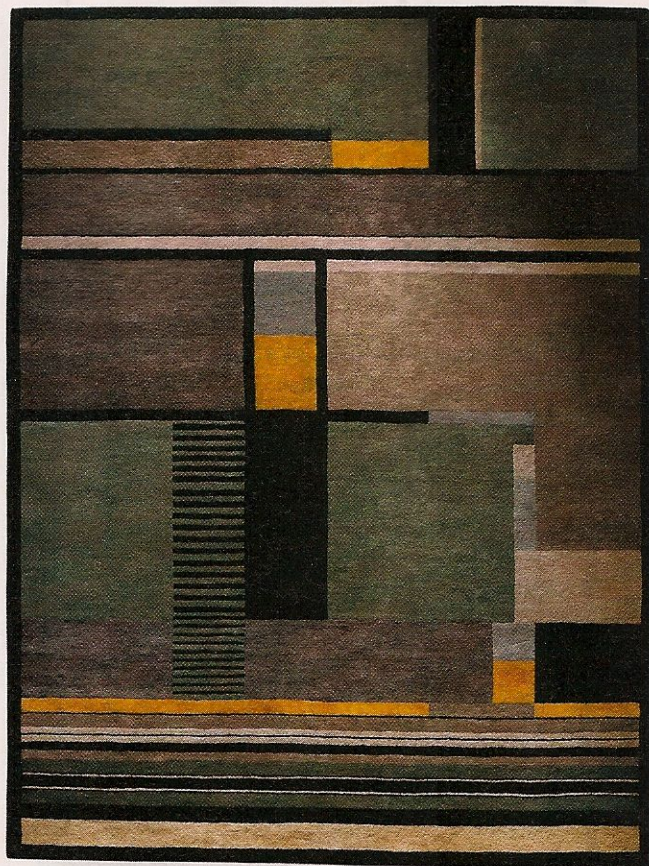
LEFT: Anni Albers, wall hanging, 1926; silk; three-ply weave; 70 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 46 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Harvard Art Museum, Busch-Reisinger Museum Association Fund. © 2009 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Image courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Katya Kallsen © President and Fellows of Harvard College. ABOVE: Poster for the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition. Image courtesy of Bauhaus 2009.

trial nation, Gropius eschewed historicism, believing a building's purpose—its functional form—should reflect “unity in diversity”: a close affinity between design and environment in a synthesis of art and technology. Gropius's *Bauhaus Manifesto* (1919) extolled a variety of ideas on art teaching reform, which above all called for interdisciplinary collaboration between artists and craftsmen toward a sense of social responsibility. Aspects of this philosophy to bring art and design into the public sphere included inexpensive, “healthy” housing and functional, affordable wares.

Students began their Bauhaus studies with the compulsory backbone of the educational program, the *Vorkurs*, tapping into their own creativity by practicing analytical exercises in color, form, texture, light, and line. Because craftwork was considered an ideal unity of creative design and material production, training to become a master craftsman in the artisan apprentice tradition played an essential role. “The school,” the manifesto proclaimed, “is the servant of the workshop.” After completion of the *Vorkurs*, students began practical hands-on training in a specific workshop. Each was taught by a master of form, an artist responsible for the aesthetic aspect of the work, and a master of crafts, who oversaw technical skills. Gropius believed that this controversial dual approach promoted teamwork and allowed method and technique to develop hand-in-hand with intuition and creativity. Gropius further challenged the status quo by choosing masters of form that were not trained academics but well-known practicing artists, such as Swiss painter Johannes Itten, German-American painter and cartoonist Lyonel Feininger, Swiss painter and graphic artist Paul Klee, and Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky, who authored the pioneering text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911).

Despite egalitarian claims, Gropius practiced a conventional attitude toward women, steering the large number of female would-be artist and architect applicants into the Weaving, Pottery, and Bookbinding Workshops. “I would most have liked to become an architect, but an uncle who was a practicing architect . . . advised me against it, explaining that it was an unsuitable profession for women,” reminisced Bauhaus weaver Kitty Fischer. The Pottery Workshop, however, shut out women, and by 1922 the Bookbinding Workshop closed. Consequently, all women entered the Weaving Workshop, except those very few who fought hard to go elsewhere.

RIGHT, TOP: Gunta Stölzl, tapestry, 1922–1923; cotton, wool, linen. 8' 4³/₁₆" x 6' 2". Harvard Art Museum, Busch-Reisinger Museum Association Fund. © 2009 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Image courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Michael A. Nedzweski © President and Fellows of Harvard College. *RIGHT, BOTTOM:* Produced by Christopher Farr Rugs, Stölzl Plate 106 Rug, original Gunta Stölzl design from the 1920s (no date specified); handspun wool, cotton backing with latex adhesive; hand-tufted; 12' x 9'. Commissioned by Design Within Reach. Image courtesy of Design Within Reach.



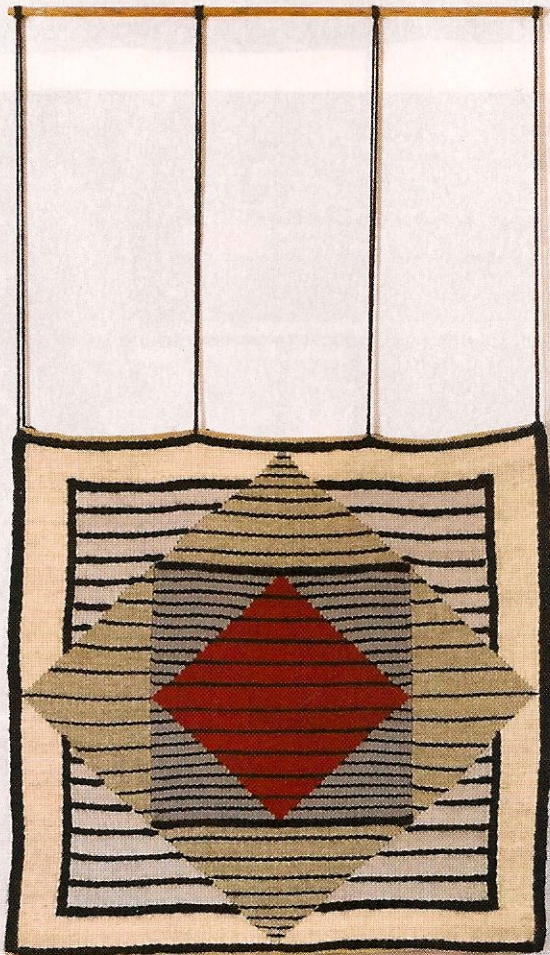


In its first year, the Bauhaus contracted with Helene Börner, a private textile educator who owned looms, and offered classes in weaving and textile techniques like knotting, embroidery, and macramé. During her tenure, students received little solid technical education but learned by free experimentation and trial and error. Gunta Stölzl, who enrolled in 1919, was a prime example of Bauhaus talent and ambition. Early on, she traveled with Benita Otte-Koche to Krefeld, the German textile center, to study dyeing techniques and advanced fiber technology, and she brought back these technical capabilities to the classroom.

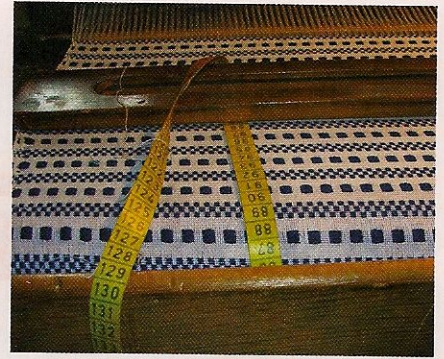
Unfortunately, money, conservative politics, and internal squabbling exerted continuing pressure on Gropius, who found himself dealing with personality issues that ultimately changed the school's direction away from crafts toward industrial methods of production and affordable design. When the school moved to Dessau, students learned to develop functional products and furnishings by combining geometric shapes in primary colors and by contrasting textures, proportions, and innovative materials such as chrome-plated steel tubing, plastics, and glass.

When Bauhaus Ltd. was created in 1925 to sell items designed and produced at the school, guidelines stipulated that each object consist of as few simple parts as possible so that its design could be easily adapted to industrial production. Soon Gropius complained that the Weaving Workshop's output of individual handloomed pieces was incompatible with machine creation. When Stölzl became master of the workshop in 1927, the only female to reach that pinnacle, she continued to value handwoven elements, such as unusual materials and surface textures, in designs for commercial furnishings and upholstery fabrics. "Formal as well as theoretical designs had to be coupled with inspiration and motivation," wrote student Monica Bella-Broner. "The intellectual aspect of artistic creation, of such elemental importance to the Bauhaus painters, was also Stölzl's point of departure and remained as such throughout her life." Under Stölzl's leadership, Bauhaus weaving thrived, and evolved from narrative pictorial tapestries to abstract, geometric designs for machine production.

By 1930, a contract with the Berlin textile firm Polytexstil yielded lucrative licensing fees for Bauhaus designs and gave students the unique opportunity to be involved in every phase of textile production from creation to finances. Finally the work of the Weaving Workshop was on equal footing with other workshops that produced elegantly designed, practical, household accessories and furniture, such as Marcel Breuer's



LEFT, TOP: Margaretha Reichardt, *Fischweib* (Fishwife), 1931; wool; loom woven; 16" x 14". Images courtesy of Angermuseum, Erfurt, Germany, and Bauhaus 2009. Photo: Dirk Urban. LEFT, BOTTOM: Margaretha Reichardt, *Quadrat—Black and White I*, 1978; wool; loom woven; 21¾" x 21¾".



tubular steel furniture, appreciated for its light weight and easy assembly.

Ongoing political turbulence forced the Bauhaus to close in Dessau in 1932. It continued as a private institution in Berlin, but lasted only a year under the Nazi regime. The Bauhaus closed, but its teachings did not disappear.

Anni Albers studied weaving at the Bauhaus under Stölzl, where she created innovative functional textiles that explored light reflection and sound absorption. After her arrival in the United States, as professor at Black Mountain College in North Carolina from 1933 to 1949, she promoted the role of hand weaving as the first step in the production process. A prolific writer who compared thread to text, she continues to inspire a new generation of students through both her weavings and her words.

Margaretha Reichardt also studied under Stölzl and attended Paul Klee's painting class. "The harmonic concurrence of all the arts—that was the principle animating my life's work," she wrote. After graduating in 1931, she moved to Holland, where she established a Weaving Workshop in The Hague. Returning to Germany in 1933, she opened a home weaving business on the outskirts of Erfurt, where she worked for more than five decades and trained some fifty students. Today her home belongs to the Angermuseum and is cared for by Christine Leister, who apprenticed with Reichardt from 1976 to 1978, and

ABOVE, LEFT: Margaretha Reichardt's home in Erfurt, Germany; designed by Bauhaus artist Konrad Püschel in 1939 after Reichardt's proposals. Image courtesy of Bauhaus 2009. ABOVE, CENTER: Christine Leister, former Margaretha Reichardt apprentice, working at the loom. Photo: Cynthia Elyce Rubin. ABOVE, RIGHT: Hand-woven cloth by Christine Leister displayed on the loom. Photo: Cynthia Elyce Rubin.

completed her master exam in 1983. Leister weaves Bauhaus-style rugs today on Reichardt's looms, two of them from the original Bauhaus.

Commercial firms also keep the legacy alive. Vorwerk & Co., of Hameln, Germany, introduced the Dialog line of wall-to-wall carpeting in 1994, making the "inexhaustible potential of Bauhaus textile design accessible to a wider public." In 2006, Design Within Reach, a modern furniture company in the United States, commissioned three rugs from designs in Stölzl's family archives. Matthew Bourne, of Christopher Farr Rugs, a producer of the rugs, described the impact of Stölzl's designs in the Autumn 2005 issue of *Modern Carpets+Textiles*: "They are seen as more than designs for floor-coverings but as decorative objects that can be hung on walls [and] that work within a decorative scheme when placed on the floor and surrounded by furniture. . . . It is testament to Stölzl's great talent that her work transcends the boundaries of time and place." Indeed, Bauhaus textiles gave the world an understanding of modern fiber design, and live on in works produced today. ●

To learn about Bauhaus design rugs commissioned by Design Within Reach, visit www.dwr.com

Exhibits:

Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity will be on display November 8–January 25, 2010, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; www.moma.org. (See a Preview on Page 18)

Recommended Reading:

- Friedewald, Boris. *Bauhaus*. New York: Prestel, 2009. (Read a review on page 32)
- Straßer, Josef. *50 Bauhaus Icons You Should Know*. New

York: Prestel, 2009. (Read a review on page 32)

- Weltge, Sigrid Wortmann. *Women's Work: Textile Art from the Bauhaus*. San Francisco: Chronicle, 1993. (Out of print, but the most detailed study of the Weaving Workshop.)

On the Bauhaus Trail in Germany:

- General info: bauhaus2009.de
- **Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung, Berlin:** (small permanent display and changing thematic exhibitions in a Walter Gropius-designed building. Excellent library and document

collection): Klingelhöferstraße 14, D-10785 Berlin. +49 (0) 302 540 020; bauhaus@bauhaus.de; www.bauhaus.de.

- **Bauhaus, Dessau** (landmark modernist buildings, Walter Gropius building with its signature Bauhaus sign and masters' houses built according to designs by Gropius): Gropiusallee 38, D-06846 Dessau-Roßlau. +49 (0) 340 6508 250; www.bauhaus-dessau.de.

- **Margaretha Reichardt House, Erfurt** (tour and weaving demonstration available by appointment): Am Kirchberg 32, 99094

Erfurt-Bischleben. +49 (0) 361 796 8726.

- **Bauhaus University, Weimar:** (the original Bauhaus school, with wall murals painted by Herbert Bayer and the director's office designed by Walter Gropius): Geschwister-Scholl-Straße 8, 99423 Weimar. +49 (0) 36 43/58 -0; info@uni-weimar.de; www.uni-weimar.de.

- **Neues Museum, Weimar** (Bauhaus works in different media on view, including textiles): Weimarplatz 5, 99423 Weimar. www.klassik-stiftung.de; www.weimar.de.