

The Bauhaus
Residency—
Between Artists'
Villa, Academy,
Studio, and
Artists' Colony

Michael Diers,
Magdalena Droste,
and Ariane Beyn
in Conversation
with Julia
Rosenbaum
and Alexia Pooth

[Alexia Pooth]

Ms Droste, you've occupied yourself with the Bauhaus for many years and also experienced the rehabilitation of the Masters' Houses: Could you have imagined that 'young masters' would once again live and work in the Masters' Houses?

[Magdalena Droste]

I don't know whether the artists-in-residence are 'young masters', and I also question whether the reference to the historical Bauhaus is really that strong. The model of the Bauhaus residency basically did not exist at the historical Bauhaus.

The Bauhaus itself was an educational institution that was founded on vibrant relationships between the masters, young masters, and students. Though the residents of the Masters' Houses were also visual artists, they rendered the majority of their services for the school.

That context doesn't exist in connection with the Bauhaus residency today. Frankly speaking, I would have expected that the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation would have limited use of the Masters' Houses purely to a museum context. Lots of visitors would like to see the purely historical ambiance.

[Michael Diers]

At the same time, the houses were designed for people to work and live in; that's a lot of cubic meters to be filled with life!

[Droste]

But when the historical context is overlaid with the private life of the artists living there today and the other houses are closed every now and again for renovation, then there's little for visitors to see, even though the renovations are, of course, important for maintaining the houses.

[Julia Rosenbaum]

Ms Beyn, to move on: In your opinion, what significance do residencies have as a form of cultural promotion?

[Ariane Beyn]

They are important instruments of artistic dialogue and global cultural exchange. They provide free space for artistic experiments and the possibility to build up long-term contacts. Another point that I would identify as being an important aspect of many residency programs and that might, at the same time, span a bridge to the historical Bauhaus is the transdisciplinary exchange that takes place as a result of encounters between artists in different disciplines.

Today, it is possible to recognize a trend towards inter- and transdisciplinary work in the programs of museums and galleries, which, to some extent, require very different types of facilities for their events. I am interested in whether the culture of collaboration at the Bauhaus might serve as a model for this.

Residencies are obviously only *one* instrument among many for promoting culture. I find it correct and important that there is a wide range of different instruments for supporting artistic practice. Residency programs frequently offer outstanding conditions.

The Artists-in-Berlin Program (BKP) of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), for example, provides a stipend, flat, and studio in Berlin, travel costs, German courses, if desired, assistance with applying for a visa, health insurance, good supervision and networking, as well as the possibility, but not the responsibility, to develop new works and present them to the public.

The residency period thus offers free space to do outstanding work, but, ultimately, there are no other conditions connected with the residency. In the case of the residencies, we, in principle, offer a protective space for artists: there is protection from financial pressure, and, unfortunately, sometimes from political persecution in an artist's home country as well.

[Rosenbaum]

What happens in such a protected space?

[Beyn]

From it, a richer or more sustainable cultural exchange can develop, and a resilient network for both the artists and those who offer the residency program as well. Achieving that in three months is, of course, not as realistic as doing so over the course of one year. But artists becoming visible here and being present here for a longer period of time does result in ongoing contacts for the State of Berlin as well as for Germany and Europe.

[Pooth]

Would such a synergy effect also be conceivable for Dessau?

[Diers]

Since the historical institution of the school no longer exists as such, I would instead think that the artists live in the Masters' Houses to pursue their own projects. What kind of connection to a city such as Dessau can come about in three months? In addition, the artists-in-residence at the Bauhaus have to fulfil an objective. To be a bit critical, I would like to ask whether it is actually a real residency program at all.

[Pooth]

What term would be more suitable in your opinion?

[Diers]

Residency, artist-in-residence, 'Residenzprogramm': the German translation of this term strongly reminds me of a 'Fürstenresidenz' (prince's residence), which is the case in connection with the 'Meisterhäuser' (Masters' Houses) as well—the term then becomes quite elitist and seems as if it were behind the times. For me, it sounds really posh, like an artist-prince, but you can't become an artist-prince like Franz von Stuck or Franz von Lenbach in three months. They were true painter-princes, and they also resided. But in such a small Bauhaus house . . . ? Perhaps it would be better to find a different term, something like 'Studienprogramm' (study program).

[Beyn]

The German term 'Künstlerresidenz' (artist's residence) has been heard more often in recent years. I always use the mixed English-German word 'Residency-Programm', but most programs in Germany use the linguistically correct term 'Künstlerresidenz', regardless of whether it refers to a flat, a villa, or a castle.

[Droste]

'Künstlerhaus' (artists' house) might work well . . . But I don't really have that many problems with the term 'Künstlerresidenz'—if you now asked me what an artist's residency is, I would reply that it is a place to which artists are invited for a temporary stay.

[Beyn]

Maybe it's not really so much about the particular type of real estate, but about the living and working conditions. In the case of the BKP, five studios are available for six guests from the field of visual art each year—so we can assume that one of them doesn't need a studio, and that's generally also the case. But, at the same time, a studio is, of course, a place not only for artistic work, but also for encounters, a place where various activities can take place. Mr Diers can surely say a bit more about the history of artists' studios.

[Diers]

I've visited lots of artists in their studios with my students. There are also artists who don't even have a studio anymore: Mona Hatoum, for example, only does brief sketches and then contracts external companies to produce the works. Then there is the other extreme, for instance the artists Elmgreen & Dragset, who run a huge studio in Berlin, where some things are actually screwed together and assembled here and there, but their pieces are usually made by art production companies.

A studio continues to be an important place for the self-determination and work of an artist, even when the

artist only sits there in a chair and thinks. It is therefore not really a question of whether the possibility to work in a studio is a great offer for young artists—which includes, in my mind, artists up to the age of around thirty-eight. Artists today often first leave the art academy when they are about thirty-two years old and are then, of course, very proud when they receive an invitation to travel to stay somewhere—and it's that much better if it is also called an artist's residency. That's very important, since the cost of a studio, for instance in Berlin, has increased tremendously. The result is then live-in studios or collaborative projects, such as Scholle 51 in Potsdam, where artists join forces and also try to get funding from the city so that they can rent shared spaces together. I see that as a good alternative model, though it is, of course, not an artist's residency, but more of an artists' house.

[Pooth]

Residencies always have something to do with movement and mobility. How important is it for artists to leave their home situation?

[Beyn]

That plays a big role for a lot of people: what's particularly exciting for everyone involved is when someone introduces an artistic position that's still unknown here in Germany, or comes from an art context that isn't that familiar here or from regions with which there are less contacts to Berlin and/or Germany. That generally leads to an interesting exchange, to an exploration of unusual points of view, and to the development of new networks.

[Diers]

You can also ask yourself whether you like to travel during your holidays or want to have new experiences in foreign countries! I, for example, have just returned from a 'residency' at the Getty Center in Los Angeles, which is so luxurious that I am having trouble getting my bearings in Berlin again. I really did have differ-

ent experiences there than I ever could have had here in Berlin. I'm speaking now as if I were an artist, but such a form of residency also exists for scholars. I think that it's incredibly important in resetting your mind—and, at the same time, that it is also a kind of recognition, an underscoring of rank and significance. I read that 700 artists from around the world applied for the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation's open call—of which only two were then selected. You should discontinue the open calls and have proposals submitted by competent partners. That would be less expensive and easier on the nerves . . .

[Pooth]

The open call was an experiment: we've also invited artists and worked with institutions such as the Kurt-Weill-Gesellschaft (Society) and the International Ensemble Modern Academy or the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea and incorporated their proposals. In the open call, it was, however, important for the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation to find out which artists are interested in living and working in the Masters' Houses, who in the art scene we can reach, and the ideas with which artists approach us. For that, the open call process was very important, even if we didn't reckon with the fact that so many would apply. Perhaps the high number of applicants is connected with the status of the Masters' Houses? Ms Droste, could you give us a brief overview of their historical significance?

[Droste]

After the school in Weimar was closed for political reasons in 1925, the Bauhaus was immediately invited to come to Dessau: the city expressed its willingness to finance not only a new building for the school, but also a small Masters' House colony. As an architect, Gropius aspired to build in an exemplary manner: as a result, he didn't want to construct five Bauhauses or one hundred villas, but just wanted to erect one ex-

emplary school and, in addition, he designed exemplary residential buildings for its teachers—as new housing and as an option for serial production. The layouts of the Masters' Houses are mirrored and rotated by 90 degrees, so he was able to claim that one layout could be used several times. These were his two most important objectives in realizing the Masters' Houses.

Gropius also pursued the idea of a house as a total work of art in which the artist was free to do what he liked, while his wife did the housework and represented her husband. Although Le Corbusier's flats and houses were much more radical than those of Walter Gropius, neither he nor Gropius had a particularly modern concept of gender.

[Pooth]

What was it then like to live in the Mueche/Schlemmer House?

[Droste]

I must begin by criticizing something: Schlemmer received only half a month's salary and had three children, while Mueche and Kandinsky had no children and Klee had only one son. But the same living space was provided for every master.

[Diers]

What's also interesting is that the estate was intentionally erected close to the school building: today, many university lecturers regularly commute between their home and their workplace, often across great distances, so that such an ideal combination of living and working in direct proximity barely exists anymore.

[Droste]

Yes, they could go on foot from the Masters' Houses to the school. They celebrated, worked, and lived together, so shared traditions emerged. Gropius already got the idea for this in Weimar—there were also lots of festivities there, social activities that helped the Bauhaus members grow together as a group.

The offer that the City of Dessau made was very generous. When

Klee went to Düsseldorf, he wasn't offered a similar situation. Many of the masters later mourned the wonderful housing options in Dessau.

[Pooth]

On the other hand, the first residents—Georg Mueche and Oskar Schlemmer—did not live in the house very long: various conversions were then held. The young master Gunta Stözl moved in, as did Alfred Arndt and Hinnerk Scheper and their families. What did the privilege of living there mean for their artistic work?

[Droste]

The living conditions were hard. Georg Mueche, for instance, only lived in the house for about one year. I think that was sort of embarrassing for Gropius, the fact that a master left so early on. It was also dealt with in a pretty discreet way. Oskar Schlemmer could barely afford the rent and therefore sublet his house to Hannes Meyer. If you only live there for one year, then it is hardly possible to set yourself up, not even as a painter.

I think that Klee and Kandinsky were the two who lived in the houses the longest; Feininger was primarily there for representational reasons.

The City of Dessau would not have provided the funding for such a house for a 'young master' like Marcel Breuer. The tendency towards breaking down hierarchies between 'minor masters' and 'great masters' that is identified today only functions from the perspective of the present: the big names were important, and they still are today!

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of the
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[Diers]

But having the Masters' Houses directly proximate to the Bauhaus Building was supposed to give rise to a conceptual, collective way of living. It was a really strong program,

and to a certain extent, it was artists who resided there in semi-detached houses in their own park—so, in that way, it was really more democratic than aristocratic.

[Beyn]

I wonder whether the social community that the masters shared can be brought to life again with a residency. Exchange between the respective guests takes place in an intensified way during the residencies, perhaps because they are somewhat isolated there. But in Berlin as well, where there are so many other possibilities, we try to provide inspiration and to encourage the guest artists to do things together by means of the many events that we organize along with our guests.

For me, how the artists network with the city would also be an important aspect. What possibilities are there for that here in Dessau? After all, the historical school doesn't exist anymore, but, in exchange, lots of very interested international tourists do come here . . .

[Droste]

The artists are pretty isolated in Dessau, which means that they barely know where to go out for dinner . . .

[Pooth]

The networking possibilities aren't really all that bad: for example, we have an international master's degree program in cooperation with the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and with the Hochschule Anhalt (Anhalt University of Applied Sciences) in the building, in which eighteen to twenty students participate each year. The Kurt-Weill-Gesellschaft with the Kurt Weill Fest also plays an important role. But it of course really depends on the artists: there are those for whom networking is important, while others concentrate on their projects and the Master's House. The desire to engage with a location plays a role. We ourselves organize small events again and again, such as the Tafeln im Gropiusgarten (Dinners in the Garden of Gropius House), to which we invite

guests from the city, from Saxony-Anhalt, and from the art scene as well.

[Droste]

The Wissenschaftskolleg (Institute for Advanced Study) in the Grunewald area of Berlin also has a custom of shared meals, the strict tradition that people there always eat together.

[Pooth]

Is such a framework really helpful or more of a 'loss of freedom'?

[Diers]

It's helpful, no question. People don't avoid each other; they have to make small talk or even become friends. It's a density that comes about solely due to the closeness produced by the architecture. In the end, that was also the ideal concept in the Masters' Houses. As I've said, I would always see that in connection with the school: the students know that the teachers are nearby, which is a different feeling than when an artist lives in Venice, California, and regularly flies in to teach at a university in Germany. That means that it is possible to encourage a sense of community by means of architecture. But that's also just an ideal that is aspired to.

At the Hochschule für bildende Künste (University of Fine Arts) in Hamburg, for instance, artists don't have studios anymore. In the 1970s, the artists still worked at the university, but, today, art academies are bursting at the seams and artists are also no longer interested in having a studio at the academy. There are only still classrooms and small offices.

[Pooth]

So, the separation of teaching and artistic work is much more rigid today than in the 1920s?

[Diers]

Yes, they are two separate professions. Teaching is a job, so, in the best sense, a second profession, but the first profession is that of being an artist.

[Beyn]

There are exceptions: Ólafur Elíasson, for instance, established the Institut für Raumexperimente (Institute for Spatial Experiments) in Berlin and brought students into space set up specifically for the institute above his studio, which was located outside the university. That was an attempt to encourage a sense of community, even if for a limited time and organized as a pedagogical experiment.

[Droste]

We are now really talking about the top league of global artists: Elíasson, Elmgreen & Dragset, who have up to one hundred employees and don't depend on museums. They either no longer differentiate at all between art and commerce or they make use of the difference in an ingenious way.

[Beyn]

Indeed, it's not so much about what constitutes engaged teaching, but about whether the pedagogical model of the Bauhaus, the aspect of a community of artists, still plays a role in teaching or the art world today. Within that context, it would also perhaps be possible to include many of the studio initiatives or self-organized initiatives by artists who are looking for and maintain studio spaces that function as a social community or as a location for events.

[Diers]

Or the producer galleries in the 1970s, which developed based on political and social experiences. A really outstanding idea: artists join forces because they have shared interests and can therefore work at a remove from the market—that's barely still imaginable today. The idea developed out of the awareness that young artists, when they enter the market after receiving their diploma, would have been lost on their own.

[Rosenbaum]

Artists often emphasize how important a space for idleness, for dis-

tance from the fast-paced life of an artist and from the art market is. What was it like in the Masters' Houses? Were they also a place of calm?

[Droste]

The original residents were all very hardworking. Moholy-Nagy, for instance, travelled constantly and Kandinsky wrote lots of letters, because his star had begun to fade by the early 1920s, so he did everything he could to continue to be able to publish, exhibit, and sell. And Klee was also very restless. Today, we can retrace how he organized the bookkeeping for his works, how he took the selling of it, in part, into his own hands.

[Rosenbaum]

How important is it for artists today to say: 'I'm not going to do anything at all for one year'?

[Beyn]

Such openness helps many artists develop interesting, new approaches. The guests of the BKP are generally already somewhat more advanced in their artistic development, so, for them, such an 'exceptional year' can be an opportunity to realize a new step in their work again. Some of them seclude themselves to do research or to work on a book. Without any compulsion or pressure to disseminate their work, the artists are able to try out new things. It sometimes takes years before a work results. A three-month stay, like that of the Bauhaus residency, is shorter, but, in exchange, probably also associated with less logistical organization.

[Diers]

My critique is not really aimed at the short period of time, but rather at the fact that something in the spirit of the Bauhaus—if I may express it so dramatically—is supposed to be created during the Bauhaus residency program. I would much rather leave that up to the artists themselves: if the inspiration that comes

from the spaces and surroundings is strong enough, then people assimilate it; that happens by osmosis.

[Pooth]

The reference to the Bauhaus is, for a start, made in the open call with the invitation for artists from the fields of painting, design, textile, architecture, sculpture, photography, and film to apply. These artistic media were already taught at the Bauhaus and/or have developed to date from the historical media at the Bauhaus. With respect to content, the concept in each artist's application is supposed to make reference to the specific annual theme of the foundation, and thus to the themes of Movement, Substance, and Standard.

What the artists produce during their stay, however, remains open. And it can definitely be the case that a concept is then completely changed again, particularly because the Masters' Houses represent a very special source of inspiration.

Why the artists are interested in the Bauhaus also differs quite a bit. Anael Berkovitz, for instance, was interested in the history of the Bauhaus as a history of migration—a very personal approach that is based on her own family history. Amor Muñoz, in contrast, again and again makes reference in her works to DIY techniques; for her, an interest in handcraft and textile techniques was decisive in applying during the open call.

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[Beyn]

At the same time, there are actually lots of artists who occupy themselves very explicitly with the Bauhaus and its legacy. The big topic of 'How do we want to live?' is also becoming more important again. The interest in the Bauhaus and its history, in its pedagogical approach, but also in the question of housing, is hence very much present in the work of many artists.

[Diers]

You're right. In 2018, the Swiss contribution to the Architecture Biennale in Venice, for instance, won the Golden Lion: it shows a very normal living space with baseboards, heating elements, light switches, and so on. An identically equipped room then appears in the adjacent space, but suddenly in a miniaturized form, while in the next space, the door handles are then mounted at the height of a couple of meters so that visitors feel like dwarves. The starting point was the standardized ceiling height of 2.40 meters. Maybe that's even a Bauhaus tradition as well, the 2.40-meter ceiling height?

[Beyn]

Exactly, Neues Bauen and the Bauhaus are indeed good examples of relatively cramped living spaces, as are also found in the flats of Le Corbusier and Bruno Taut.

[Pooth]

If you talk to the Bauhaus artists-in-residence, the aspect that seems to fascinate them in particular is examining the Bauhaus legacy: they all want to come to where the Bauhaus was. That's an attraction, isn't it?

[Diers]

It does really appeal to artists. But I imagine that it must be stressful to have to produce something in the end that fits into the framework of the call for proposals. In the case of someone like Sebastian Stumpf, however, who develops interventions in existing architecture again and again, I can imagine that the program appealed to him.

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[Droste]

At the same time, creativity often arises specifically as a result of the fact that a framework is specified.

[Pooth]

For instance, the status as a UNESCO World Heritage site?

[Diers]

That term is invoked much too often. For the artists, it's totally marginal, and rather problematic: since the use is therefore severely limited by the stringent requirements for landmarked buildings, which really hamper the potential. In addition, there's also the tension that resonates solely in the term 'UNESCO World Heritage': both ideologically and historically.

[Pooth]

And how about the legend of living where Oskar Schlemmer and Georg Muche once lived?

[Diers]

That's perhaps important for sentimental artists, but otherwise . . .

[Beyn]

In connection with the flats of the BKP, the guest artists frequently want to know exactly which artists have lived there before them. A famous predecessor already lends a certain aura. But the BKP flats aren't set up in such a way that they might call to mind such predecessors in any way.

[Pooth]

The furnishings of the Muche/Schlemmer House aren't original. They're simply functional and minimalist.

[Beyn]

So, it is basically the Master's House itself, their concept of living, that accounts for the appeal?

[Diers]

No, I think that it's more the concept of the Bauhaus that people find attractive. Having 700 applications for two residencies naturally shows that the demand is huge, and perhaps the desire to get out a bit as well. But it can also indicate that lots of people really want to experience the closeness to the Bauhaus and its aura.

[Pooth]

We see the residency program as an innovative form of historical mon-

ument preservation. Ms Droste, could you perhaps imagine that re-activating the living function of the houses again can also be a form of preservation?

[Droste]

As Mr Diers already said, people do have to live there very carefully—and I can also imagine that there are lots of restrictions. Why do you only invite artists? Why not architects, designers, scholars, or even university lecturers?

[Pooth]

The program isn't really set up that one-sidedly: designers, musicians, and architects are also very explicitly invited to apply in the open call process. For example, we have co-operated with the SYN Foundation and, through the Kurt Weill Zentrum, with the International Ensemble Modern Academy as well. Scholarship isn't excluded either: Gabi Schillig, for instance, is a trained architect and became a professor at the Hochschule Düsseldorf (University of Applied Sciences) in 2012 and is currently at the Universität der Künste (University of the Arts) in Berlin. Markus Hoffmann also works at the interface between scholarship and art—he calls his transdisciplinary way of working 'speculative archaeology'. In his works, he makes reference to scientific concepts, such as the age of the Anthropocene, and examines phenomena like climate change. But you're right: the work that's done in the Masters' Houses is more artistic than scholarly or scientific, even though particular practices can definitely be referred to as artistic research.

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[Diers]

It would also be possible to host someone there who then actually takes up a position, whether at the foundation, in the master's program, at the university. I don't think that it's the World Heritage status that at-

tracts people. It is the name 'Bauhaus' that is widely disseminated and highly respected internationally. In Los Angeles, nearly every taxi driver knows about FC Bayern Munich, Angela Merkel, and the Bauhaus. Artists jump at that legend. This also functions entirely without the status of being a UNESCO World Heritage site.

[Rosenbaum]

Are artist residencies then more attractive than thirty years ago?

[Droste]

Yes, travelling has simply become much more attractive. Today, every student has travelled more than I have.

[Diers]

It is also important to understand how poor many students are today: we are educating a legion of artists, but the opportunities aren't increasing along with them. Most of them have a day job. That's a life that is very stressful, always precarious, and threatening to one's survival—I have the greatest respect for that. That's why every form of support is needed.

[Rosenbaum]

How important, therefore, is the aspect that artists achieve a certain visibility as a result of such a residency, also with respect to their career?

[Beyn]

It is very important. Being selected for a residency is a special distinction that enhances an artist's reputation. In the case of the BKP, the presence of the artists in Berlin and/or in Germany, in my experience, generally leads to more invitations from institutions and galleries. But there's no automatism in that respect. New possibilities frequently come about especially if an artist is already known to various informed curators or gallerists but has still not been exhibited there to a great extent. In addition, we also mediate our guests' artistic positions by means of net-

working and our own exhibitions and events. But not everyone benefits from that to the same extent.

[Diers]

Let's take artists from the United States: the American art market is relevant, but artists still build their reputation here in Europe. So it is still important to score points in Europe. On the other hand, it is also necessary to ask: What does the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation want from the artists that it invites: something that reflects back on it? Why does one let Olaf Nicolai create a wall work in the Gropius House? Because he has a big name. You've said yourself that you also want to use the artists-in-residence to revitalize the Masters' Houses.

[Pooth]

That's right. On the other hand, it is also about questioning the relevance of the Bauhaus for the production of art today. What do you think is the knowledge about the Bauhaus that is carried out into the world as a result of the residency?

[Diers]

The artists' engagement with the Bauhaus already begins earlier on. They read everything they can get their hands on at the latest when they decide to apply. Whether the engagement with the Bauhaus in connection with the experience of living in the historical rooms really inspires the creation of works that one would not have been able to realize without this experience is a question that the artists themselves have to answer.

[Droste]

The interest often begins with the artists. I recently visited the artist's house of Otto Meyer-Amden, which I absolutely wanted to see since we are currently working on his correspondence with Schlemmer. That means that the phenomenon also exists the other way around: interest in an artist makes us curious about where he or she has spent time. So, it works in both directions.

[Pooth]

Of course, most applicants occupy themselves with the Bauhaus theoretically in advance. But being on site then once again inspires many of the artists-in-residence anew: Rudy Decelière, for instance, came to us as a sound artist but was then inspired by the silence and the architecture to create an experimental photographic work.

That being said, all of the artists-in-residence are fascinated by the transdisciplinary work of the Bauhaus members. Might one say that there is a link between the Bauhaus and artists today?

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[Diers]

You're right that there are hardly any artists who work only in one field these days. Anselm Reyle is a painter and sculptor, and he also designs furniture, while Tobias Rehberger designs spaces: the Bauhaus principle of bringing the arts together and reconciling so-called arts and crafts with so-called free art is something that many artists are also doing today. Perhaps not necessarily with respect to a real social and political dimension, but in the sense of integration: the boundaries between fields have become more fluid.

[Droste]

In my opinion, the Bauhaus ultimately had a shared aesthetic basis. The concept of aesthetics has now become totally fractured, but the Bauhaus was still part of a classical tradition, particularly as far as the mastering of craft as a basis of character-building was concerned. That's why it is hard for me to let today's present be explained based on the Bauhaus. Naturally, if you consider the experimental aspect and the creativity, then there is a connection. But, overall, I see more ruptures than continuities.