

By [Griff Witte](#) and
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WEIMAR, Germany — The Bauhaus design school emerged in an age of democratic turbulence, political polarization and rising extremism.

But in a modern era of tumult 100 years after its birth, the school that inspired products from Ikea chairs to the iPhone with its form-follows-function philosophy is being celebrated across Germany.

The commemorations, which last weekend included the opening of a \$30 million museum here in the heart of cobblestoned Weimar, have inspired ogling aplenty over the minimalist objects that made the school so radical for its time and brought it such renown in the years to come: the primary-color cradles, arched-neck teapots and rectangular concrete-and-glass buildings.

Nationwide, Bauhaus design is being reexamined, reappraised and reimaged through lectures, gallery exhibits, concerts and dance performances — an artistic tour de force that echoes in its ambition and scope the grand visions of the movement's founders.

But the parallels between the environment in which Bauhaus came to be and the poisonous political present have given the centenary added resonance. Even as Germany celebrates Bauhaus, the far right has been surging across Europe, [intolerance is on the march](#) and the [center is struggling to hold](#).

For many in Germany, the Bauhaus school — which the Nazis shut down just 14 years after its founding — has become synonymous with a path not taken, a utopian ideal of

modernity that was snuffed out by hatred and mass killing only to rise again after its leading lights had fled abroad.

“We can't remember the founding of Bauhaus without remembering its expulsion,” said Benjamin-Immanuel Hoff, the culture minister in the German state of Thuringia.

Hoff spoke as workers scurried to get [Weimar's newest museum](#) ready for a grand opening and dramatic homecoming for Bauhaus.



A photograph from the Buchenwald concentration camp is part of an awareness campaign coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus movement. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images)

Through much of the past century, the school was either unwelcome or invisible in Weimar, a small city in eastern Germany best known for the short-lived republic to which it gave its name as well as the poets, artists and musicians who long before had made it a cradle of German classicism.

The founders of Bauhaus — German for “building house” — sought to bring art and beauty to the masses through everyday objects. The movement rose as a response to the horrors of World War I and as a reflection on where humans fit in a world increasingly dominated by machines.

In an era marked by political and economic eruptions, said Eric Weitz, a history professor at the City College of New York, Bauhaus represented “hopefulness, optimism, belief that a flourishing art, an integrated art of the Bauhaus type, would also help democracy and a brighter future for everyone.”

It didn't happen, of course.

The Nazis ejected the school from Weimar. The communists of East Germany later appropriated its legacy. In the entire city, there is only one original Bauhaus building, even as Bauhaus has been emulated from the design studios of Sweden to the tech corridors of Silicon Valley.

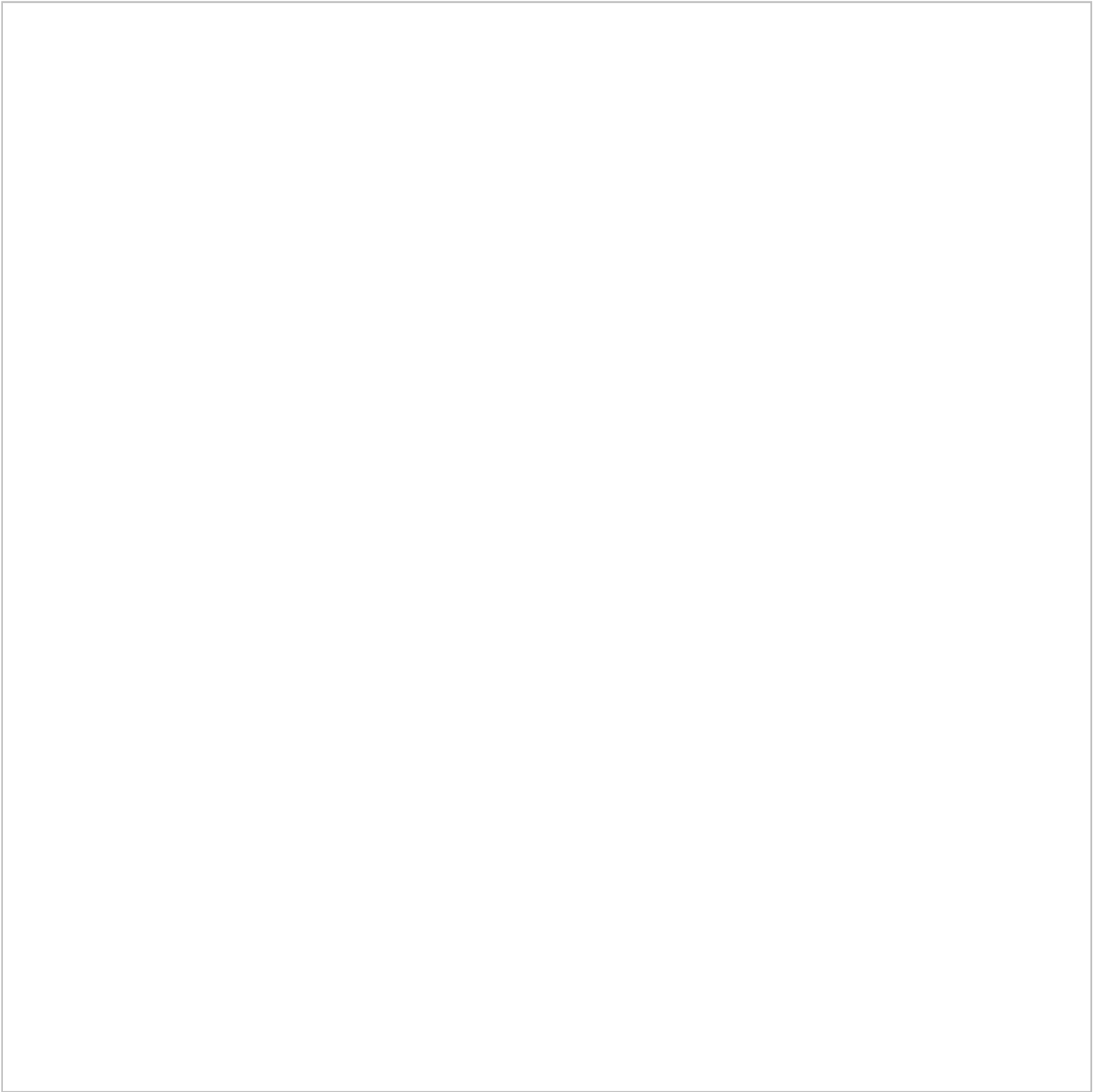
It is only in recent years that Bauhaus has been rehabilitated in Weimar, and only with

the opening this weekend that the movement has been allowed to take center stage.

With the new museum, “we will become a different city,” said Weimar Mayor Peter Kleine. “We are not just the classical town administering the legacy of the great poets. We will become a city of invention.”

The museum — somewhat boxlike with an LED display that gives it some sparkle at night — is situated in a symbolic spot that carries weight. Across the street is a Nazi-era building that was used to administer slave-labor programs. Visible from an upstairs window is the memorial tower at Buchenwald, which was a concentration camp.

Inside, the 168 objects that Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius assembled as representative of the school's work — carpets, pots and urns among them — form the basis of the collection. Thousands more complete the picture and tell the story of a school that defies easy characterization.



Marionettes on display at the museum. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images)

“There is no one Bauhaus style,” said Ute Ackermann, the museum curator, who has been at work assembling the collection for the past eight years. “More than any particular form or style, Bauhaus is the courage to have a vision and to experiment — to be willing to correct your path as you go, rather than have a predetermined route.”

That was true for the museum. Early plans to clad the building in glass had to be abandoned as costs spiraled and the problem of bathing the museum's precious collections in natural light sank in. The building was ultimately sheathed in concrete.

Another museum is planned for Dessau, the school's second home, and [the Bauhaus archives](#) are adding a building in Berlin, the final stop before the school was disbanded in 1933 as the Nazis took charge.

The celebration of Bauhaus this year has spanned a range of artistic forms.

In Berlin, a jazz pianist [operated a grand piano with punch cards](#) to explore what Bauhaus might have sounded like. A French choreographer [deconstructed hip-hop moves](#) into geometrical elements, and two artists performed a [duet with amplified sewing machines](#).

Farther east, in the industrial city of Eisenhüttenstadt, an exhibit on Bauhaus design reflected on the style as it was adopted to Soviet dreams of efficiency.

Just down the road from Weimar's Bauhaus museum, in a yellow house that once

belonged to the 18th-century German poet Friedrich Schiller, art students from 19 different countries have exhibited their Bauhaus-inspired visions for the future.

In rooms filled with giant hanging moons, plastic sausages and mechanized light displays, their messages range from the whimsical to the political to the deeply personal.

In one project, titled "Imaginary letters to a grandfather I never got to know," Yael Peri, a student from Israel, conjured a correspondence between herself and David Bleistift, a Bauhaus architect who immigrated to Tel Aviv in 1933.

In another room, Moawya Al Khadra looped an audio recording of a soft voice that relates what it's like to be a Kuwaiti-born Palestinian who was raised in Syria, lives in Germany and holds a passport for Morocco, a country to which he has never been.

"I belong to nowhere," the voice intones. "I belong to everywhere."

