

## Open Letter to the Council of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation

Dear members of the council,

We were quite disconcerted to see numerous articles in the local, national, and online press in the past few days that reported that Stephan Dorgerloh, Sachsen-Anhalt's Minister of Culture, would like to "get rid of" Philipp Oswald, the current director of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation. We were equally upset to learn that you, the Council of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, in a silent procedure neither preceded nor followed by any discussion whatsoever, agreed to search for a new candidate to fill the position following the end of Oswald's first period of office.

The refusal to give a substantive argument, as seen in the "replacement of the director in a silent procedure," may appear, within the internal logic of power, to be a particularly clever calculation. However, all reports make it clear that these proceedings are unprecedented in the history of the federal state of Sachsen-Anhalt. No state foundation there has ever sought to replace its director after only a single period in office. Even the press spokesman of the Minister of Culture conceded: "This procedure has never taken place before."

This extraordinary decision is all the more astonishing, as, thus far, no justification for it has been offered. None of you have made the effort to explain the motive behind this plan to search for a new candidate. Sachsen-Anhalt's cultural politics have an "authoritarian streak" is how an article in the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* puts it. But that alone can't suffice as an explanation.

As the members of the foundation board, you bear the responsibility for the Bauhaus in Dessau—for the preservation of its historical heritage and for an ongoing engagement with this epicenter of modernism. And as the institution's work is now receiving worldwide attention, your decision is a signal that will be perceived far beyond the borders of Germany.

In the past five years, Philipp Oswald and his team have impressively demonstrated the extent to which the short era of the Bauhaus in Dessau has retained its relevance to the present day. Under his direction, the Bauhaus Dessau has successfully returned to the international spotlight. The very names of the exhibitions themselves attest to that: "Kurt Kranz: Programming Beauty" (2010), "Kibbutz and Bauhaus" (2011), "The Bauhaus in Calcutta," and "From the Bauhaus to Palestine" (both 2013). And the institution's publications—the Bauhaus paperback series and the bilingual *bauhaus* magazine—have garnered international recognition. Through such projects, the legacy of the Bauhaus has inspired a new generation. Additionally, new educational programs have been founded: a designer- and artist-in-residence program, fellowships, and a summer school. Finally, the much-discussed demography project "Sachsen-Anhalt 2050," and the research project on new energy landscapes that Oswald inaugurated are only two topics with which the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation has strengthened the claim, in recent years, that our society can be "designed".

Under the aegis of Philipp Oswald, the Bauhaus has been reinvigorated—a success that one can neither plan nor sufficiently appreciate. The five years under his leadership were incredibly advantageous—not the least for the city of Dessau and the state of Sachsen-Anhalt. One should be able to expect that such work would garner support from the foundation's council.

With the abrupt decision to end Philipp Oswald's tenure, you are putting a living site of cultural exchange in danger. As the foundation's council, you are surely aware that your decision to begin a candidate search for the position at this time means that the position will remain vacant for many months—and this during a period in which the most important decisions about ongoing and upcoming projects must be made.

For all of the reasons stated above, we write this appeal to you: examine your political responsibility to the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, and prevent this purportedly standard administrative proceeding from bringing about the premature end of an era, one that has already proven itself one of the liveliest in the 80-year "post-history" of the Bauhaus.

Signed,

Dr. Galia Bar Or, Director of Museum of Art, Ein Harod (Israel)

Fred Baumgartner, former head of Sektion Siedlung und Landschaft, Bundesamt für Raumentwicklung ARE, Bern

Frank Berberich, Editor Lettre International, Berlin

Prof. Dr. Barry Bergdoll, Professor for the History Architecture, Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University, Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York City

Prof. Dr. Zane Berzina, Professor for Textile and Surface Design, Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee, Berlin

Prof. Günter Karl Bose, Professor for Typography at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig, Berlin/Leipzig

Prof. Arno Brandlhuber, Architect, Professor for Architecture and Urban Research at the Academy for Fine Arts in Nuremberg, Berlin

Prof. Beatriz Colomina, Professor for the History and Theory of Architecture, Director of Graduate Studies, Ph.D. Program, Director of Program in Media and Modernity, Princeton University, School of Architecture, Princeton

Hans-Jürgen Commerell, Director of Aedes Network Campus, Berlin

Prof. em. Gerhard Curdes, Professor em. for Urban and Regional Planning, RWTH Aachen, Aachen

Chris Dercon, Director of Tate Modern, London

Prof. Diedrich Diederichsen, Author, Professor for the Theory, Practice and Communication of Contemporary Art, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, Berlin/Vienna

Prof. Karl Clauss Dietel, Designer, Chemnitz

Prof. Markus Dreßen, Designer and Publisher, Spector Books, Leipzig

Florian Ebner, Director of the Photography Collection, Folkwang Museum, Essen

Prof. Zvi Efrat, Architect, Former Head of the Architecture Department, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem

Oliver Elser, Curator, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt a.M.

Harun Farocki, Filmmaker, Author, Berlin

Dr.h.c. Kristin Feireiss, Director of Aedes Architekturforum, Berlin

Prof. Jesko Fezer, Professor for Experimental Design at the HFBK Hamburg, Berlin/Hamburg

Prof. Detlef Fiedler, Designer, cyan, Berlin

Dr. Amos Gitai, film builder, Doctor of Architecture University of California, Berkeley, Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, Haifa

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Florian Heilmeyer, Architecture journalist, uncube Magazine, Berlin

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Prof. Nikolaus Hirsch, Architect, Director of Städelschule, Frankfurt a.M.

Louisa Hutton, Architect, Sauerbruch Hutton, Berlin

Prof. Eva Illouz, President of Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem

Prof. Alexander Jordan, Professor for Visual Communication, Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee, Paris/Berlin

Günter Kämpf, Publisher, Anabas Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. und Uzès (France)

Prof. Petra Kellner, Professor for Product Design, Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach am Main

Ulla von Klot, Gallerist, Berlin

Anne König, Publisher, Spector Books, Leipzig

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Prof. Stefan Koppelkamm, Professor for Visual Communication, Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee, Berlin

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Beate Manske, Wilhelm Wagenfeld Foundation, Bremen

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Prof. Reinhold Martin, Director of PhD Program in Architecture (History and Theory), Director of Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture, Columbia University, New York

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Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin, Architect/Politician, Berlin

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Armin Petras, Director of Schauspiel Stuttgart, Stuttgart

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Prof. em Hans (Nick) Roericht, Designer, Prof. em. Universität der Künste Berlin, Ulm

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Tomás Saraceno, Artist, Berlin

Prof. Dr. Saskia Sassen, Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology, Columbia University, Co-Chair Committee on Global Thought, Columbia University, New York City

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Prof. Dr. Bernd M. Scherer, Director, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin

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Ursula Wenzel, Photographer and Designer, Frankfurt a.M.

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Yuval Yasky, Chair of the Architecture Department, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, Co-curator of the exhibition “Kibbutz and Bauhaus: Pioneers of the Collective” at the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation (2011), Tel Aviv

Tobias Zielony, Artist, Berlin