

# Schools of Applied Arts: Forerunners of a *New* Architecture Education?

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Dortmund

DORTMUND UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED  
SCIENCES AND ARTS

Department of Architecture  
Architectural History, Theory,  
and Preservation

TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF DARMSTADT

Department of Architecture  
History of Architecture and Art

STAATLICHE KUNSTSAMMLUNGEN  
DRESDEN, KUNSTGEWERBEMUSEUM

Research Network  
"Pioneers of Design Education.  
New perspectives on German Schools  
of Decorative Arts before the Bauhaus"

Today's departments of architecture and design at Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts date back to the School of Crafts and Applied Arts founded in 1904. The 120th anniversary of architectural teaching in Dortmund is being taken as an opportunity for a conference on the relationship between architectural education and arts and crafts production as well as the influence of schools of applied arts on the architectural discourses of the time.

From the second half of the 19th century onwards, schools of applied arts also played – in addition to technical colleges, academies, and construction schools – an essential role in architectural education. In the course of the transformation of the polytechnic schools into technical colleges and the accompanying academisation of their education, their clientele changed, as the German A-level certificate was now required for admission. For students with artistic, craft and technical talents who lacked a university entrance qualification, there emerged a gap into which the still young institution of the school of applied arts stepped in. It had developed on the basis of the major trade shows at the World's Fairs in London in 1851 and 1862 as well as in Paris in 1867. In 1867, the association of the "Deutsches Gewerbe-Museum zu Berlin" founded first the Kunstgewerbemuseum zu Berlin to promote the art industry, and then in 1868 the associated "Unterrichts-Anstalt," following the English model. Numerous other schools of applied arts were quickly established throughout the German Reich, but only a few included specific architecture classes in their curriculum, alongside topics such as ornamental and figure drawing, modelling, sculpture, or decorative painting. Around 1900, however, the young school format placed the combination of art, craft, and technology as well as the interaction of material, object, and space at the centre of its teaching and thus advanced to become the avant-garde motor of a new architecture. This took place in the wake of the applied arts reform and the simultaneous economic expansion drive of the German Reich, as well as in anticipation of the demands of the Deutscher Werkbund founded in 1907.

The aim of the conference is to reflect on the teaching of architecture at schools of applied arts from a technical, didactic, personnel and structural perspective. The main questions will be centred on specific teaching concepts and content that have been practised supranationally or at individual schools. Which teaching materials were used in architectural education and do they still exist in the form of collections? What is behind the subject of "Raumkunst" (spatial art) at the respective institution, and to what extent interior design and building construction are intertwined? Which was the influence of the resulting progressive conception of material, object and space as an irretrievable unity on the contemporary conception of architecture? What special features are there in new buildings for schools of applied arts – for example in Bielefeld, Dresden, Pforzheim and Weimar – in terms of architecture and furnishings? How did the proximity to industry and its interests affect architectural education, which locations are particularly characterised by this? How did the directors of schools of applied arts, who often worked as architects themselves, and other key figures influence the direction of the educational institution and its curricula? What impact did schools of applied arts, their teachers and students have beyond their respective centres of activity? And finally, the question is raised as to what role the training or work at schools of applied arts played in the further careers of individuals.

The conference is organised by the Chair of Architectural History, Theory, and Preservation at Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts, the Chair of Architecture and Art History at Darmstadt University of Technology and the research network "Pioneers of Design Education. New Perspectives on German Schools of Decorative Arts before the Bauhaus." The conference is also the 4th annual conference of the research network. The organisers ask all those interested to send proposals for presentations by e-mail to: [architekturlehre@fh-dortmund.de](mailto:architekturlehre@fh-dortmund.de) (deadline 1 April 2024). The topic proposals should be submitted in the form of an abstract (max. 400 words) and a concise CV (max. 100 words).

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Research Network „Pioneers of Design Education.  
New Perspectives on German Schools of Decorative Arts before the Bauhaus“  
<https://designcampus.org/lab/pioneers-of-design-education/>

CCSA Center for Critical Studies in Architecture  
[www.criticalarchitecture.org](http://www.criticalarchitecture.org)

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