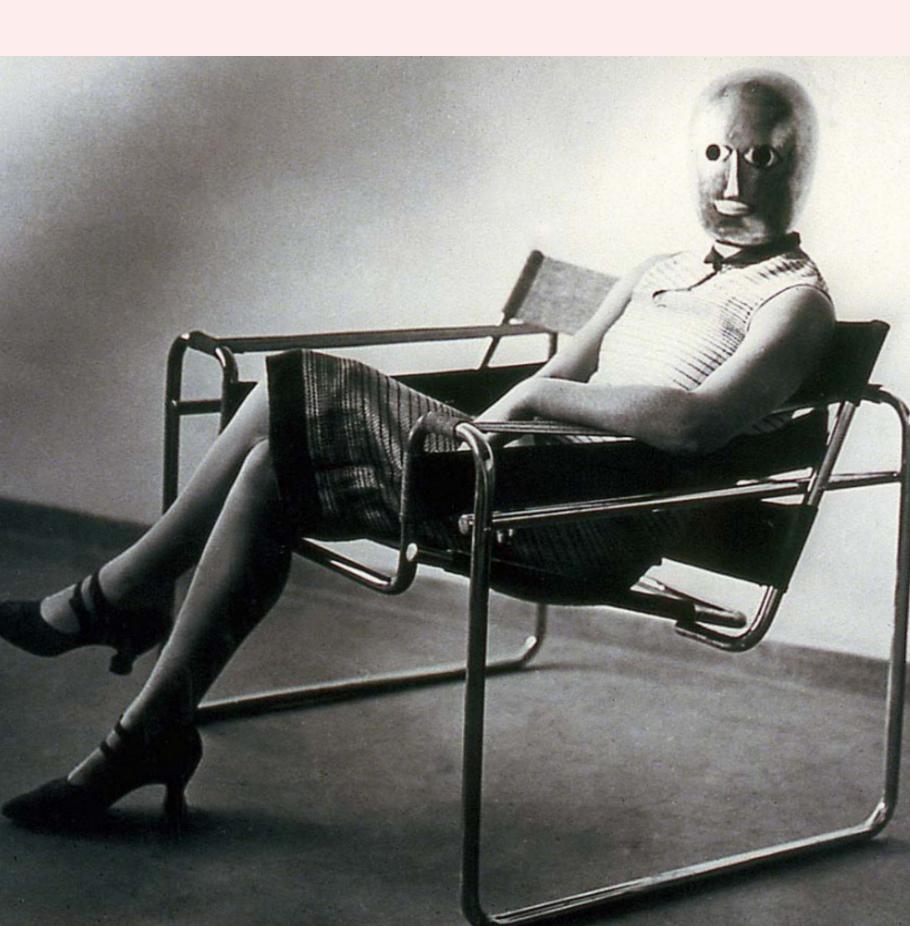
« Our work is unrelenting and unretrospective, it despises tradition and established custom » Marcel Breuer, 1927

# Germany: the beginning

« We have no desire for a purely formal point of view; instead we see our mission in creating a home that is simpler, lighter, more comfortable in the biological sense, and independent of exterior factors » Marcel Breuer, 1931



In 1927 the groundbreaking Weissenhof exhibition opened in

steel furniture by Breuer, Mies van der Rohe and the Dutch

to set up an architectural practice in Berlin, and started the

furniture company Standard-Möbel with a fellow architect.

year, Breuer started to work with the furniture manufacturer

Thonet (known for its bent beech chairs) and designed a

cantilevered tubular steel dining chair. He left Berlin in 1931.

Stuttgart. Sixteen architects designed 33 buildings, and tubular

architect Mart Stam featured in them. In 1928 Breuer left Dessau

Their first catalogue featured eight Breuer designs. The following

Berlin

#### From Hungary to Dessau

Marcel Lajos 'Lajkó' Breuer (1902–81) was born in Pécs, Hungary. At the age of 18 he started studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, but he found the school uninspiring so he headed to Germany and the new Bauhaus school in Weimar, opened a year earlier by Walter Gropius. As an apprentice at the carpenter workshop Breuer designed his first chairs, working in wood and influenced by the De Stijl movement in the Netherlands.

Breuer also studied architecture; Gropius soon recognized his talent and invited him to work in his private architectural practice. When rightwing politicians in Weimar forced Gropius to relocate the Bauhaus school to Dessau in 1925, he made Breuer head of the furniture workshop.

It was at Dessau that Breuer first created furniture made out of tubular steel. His idea came from his Adler bicycle:

« I took the pipe dimensions from my bicycle. I didn't know where else to get it or how to figure it out »

With the help of a plumber he created the most recognizable of all tubular steel furniture: the 'Wassily' club chair – named after Wassily Kandinsky, the first to praise its design. Breuer went on to design many furniture pieces and colour schemes for the interior of the Bauhaus and the adjacent Masters' Houses.

# 2015: Marcel Breuer Isokon 80 years on

Marcel Breuer arrived in England 80 years ago and made the Isokon his home for two years. In celebration of this anniversary, the Isokon Gallery presents an overview of the life and work of the architect and furniture designer.

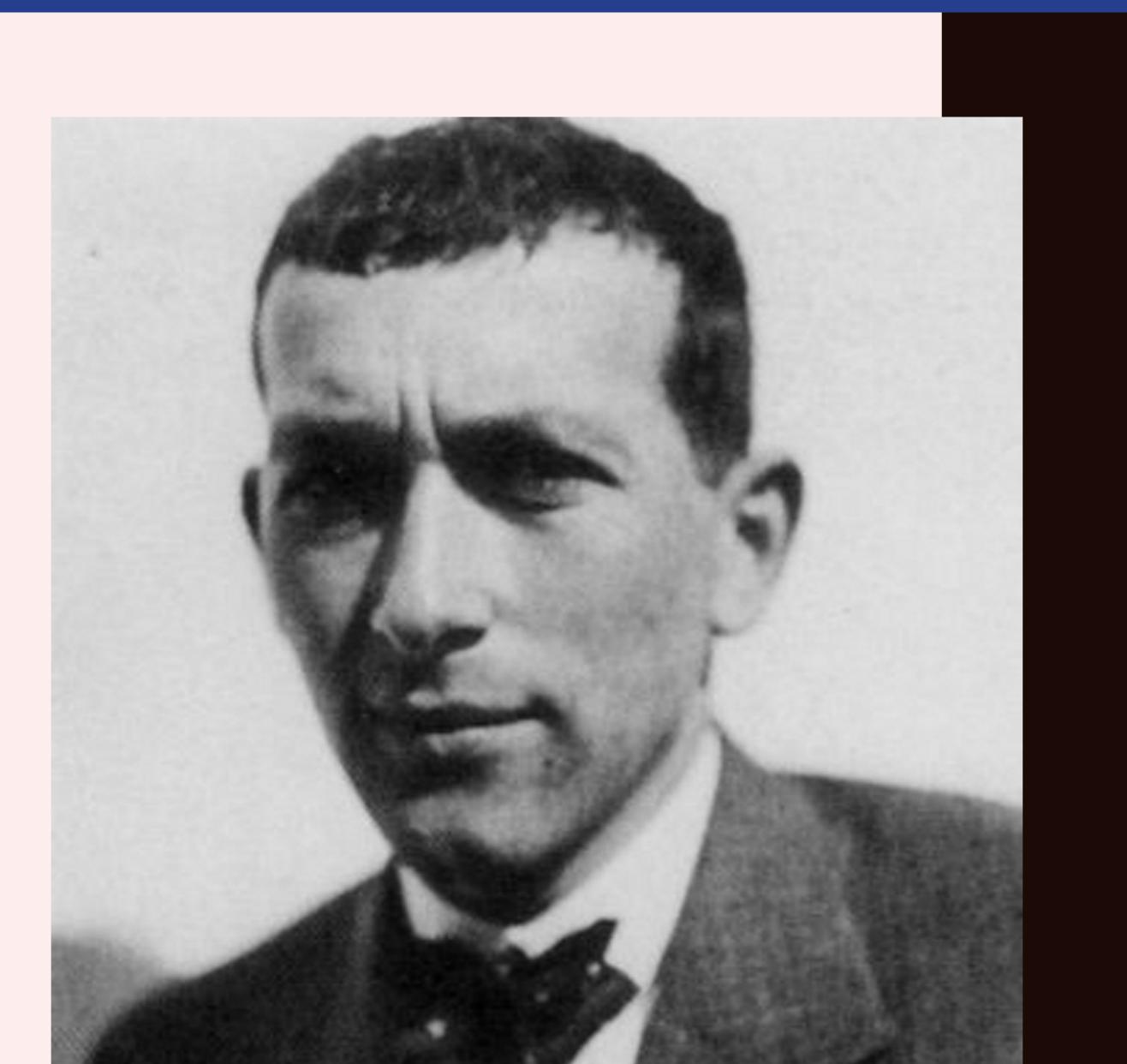
## Switzerland

Settles in Zurich after travelling

extensively in Europe

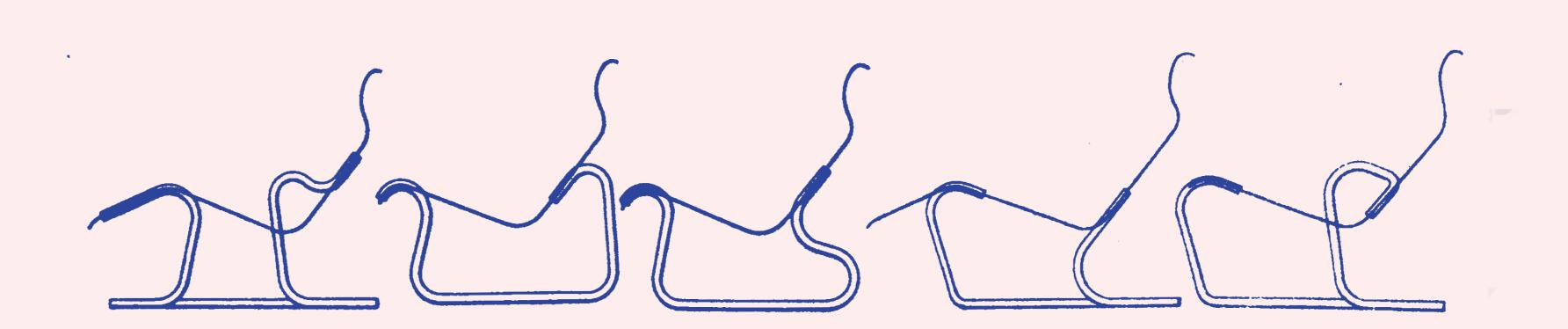
#### Breuer in Zurich: the designer

With Hitler as German chancellor from 1933, and the depression ongoing, Breuer – who was Jewish – started spending time in Budapest and Zürich. The Swiss writer Sigfried Gideon had started CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) with Le Corbusier, including Wells Coates as the British representative. Gideon ran the Wohnbedarf shops in Zürich and Basel, selling Breuer, Aalto and Le Corbusier furniture. Through Gideon, Breuer was commissioned to redesign the shops, as well as a new range of furniture, the most successful being an aluminium long chair for the Swiss company Embru.



Isokon

## « The basis of modern architecture is not the new materials, nor even the new form, but the new mentality» Marcel Breuer, 1937



lounge chairs, applied for 10 July 1936.



Another commission in 1936 was to design the interiors for a large flat in Berthold Lubetkin's Highpoint in Highgate for the Ventris family. Besides using Isokon furniture, Breuer designed several unique pieces, including a wall hung gramophone cabinet, an armchair and a small sofa, a dressing table and several pieces of built-in cabinets.

# Britain

### Breuer in England: chairs and interiors

Gropius left the Bauhaus in 1928 due to political pressure, and in 1933 it was closed down by the Nazis. He emigrated to Britain and Lawn Road Flats with his wife Ise in October 1934, forming a partnership with the architect Maxwell Fry. Breuer followed a year later, having first visited London and the Lawn Road Flats for a month in July 1935. Just like Gropius, Breuer formed a partnership with a local architect to be able to practice in Britain, and he teamed up with F.R.S. Yorke, who like Wells Coates also wrote for Architectural Review. Breuer occupied Flat 16 at the Isokon, one of the small 'minimum' flats. The flat would later be occupied by Agatha Christie from 1941 to '47.

Settles in Zurich after travelling extensively in Europe

Isokon side chair, plywood, 1936

« Simply stated: The home should be neither a colour composition nor a spiritual self-portrait of its architect!» Marcel Breuer, 1931

## America

### Breuer in America: the architect

In the summer of 1937 Breuer followed Gropius to America. Gropius had been frustrated by the lack of work in Britain and readily accepted a position as professor of architecture at Harvard in March of that year. Breuer's intention was to find manufacturers for his Isokon and Embru designs. Despite trying to interest British manufacturers like Pel, Cox, Duncan Miller, Metal Furniture Works, London Aluminium Company, Heal's and Simpsons, in the end they all turned him down. In America he continued to develop plywood furniture designs, but his main focus would become architecture.

Like Gropius, Breuer settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and taught at Harvard. They also built their own houses, widely published at the time, and Breuer later designed his own houses in New Caanan. The influence of these two Bauhaus teachers on American architects cannot be underestimated. At first they worked together in a joint architectural practice, but by 1946 Breuer had his own practice in New York working on several private commissions. He also realised that the plywood designs of Alvar Aalto for Artek and his own work forlsokon was too expensive to manufacture. He made new designs, some introduced at the MoMA 1948 International Competition, for Low Cost Furniture Designs, exhibiting side by side with Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen.

Marcel Breuer died in his apartment in Manhattan in 1981, leaving his wife Connie, son Tom and daughter Cesca. His partners kept the offices going in his name in Paris and New York for several years but each is now closed.

— Magnus Englund with thanks to Christopher Wilk, V&A







# Dies in Manhattan at the age of 79



In 1949 a house designed by Breuer was built in the garden of MoMA. housing, quantitatively, structurally and aesthetically, the house was presented as a good and practical design in the best of materials, equipment and craftsmanship. When the show was over, the 'House in the Garden' was dismantled and barged up the Hudson River for reassembly on a Rockefeller property in Pocantico Hills, near Sleepy Hollow.

TUE ON BULLET ON

The Hanson House, 1950



Whitney Museum New York, 1966. A modernist statement, now recognised as daring, strong, and innovative. It has come to be regarded as one of New York's most notable buildings.

« Uniformity in character and design, combined with variety and individuality of each item, should be achieved » Jack Pritchard

Breuer's most important work for the Isokon Furniture Company was the Long Chair, based on his aluminium chair made for Embru while he was in Switzerland. However, he also also worked on other furniture and architecture projects.

In 1936 he made a pavilion for Crofton Gane in Bristol for the Royal Agricultural Show, using local Cotswold stone. Gane was the proprietor of P. E. Gane, a furniture company. Breuer also redesigned Gane's own house in Bristol and created furniture designs for the company. Also in 1936, Breuer was asked to provide designs for Heal's who staged an exhibition of seven architects, including Gropius and Fry. Breuer designed a wall unit, lounge chair and a reclining chair, but none of them were commercially successful.

Sea Lane House in Angmering-On-Sea in Sussex, 1936. Client: James Macnabb. Grade II listed in 1978 and restored in 2014.

Leaves Germany to travel but never Bauhaus in Dessau





Breuer furniture shown in the Swiss Werkbund's 'Neubühl' housing development, 1932.

