

Art-School Reform of the Weimar Republic: Change as Chance for Women Artists as Teachers?

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The history of art education is characterized by a constant succession of crises and reforms. Especially since the nineteenth century, artists have recurrently asked how art should be taught and whether it *can* be taught at all. During the 1920s, artistic training went through major changes all over Europe. This paper focuses on Weimar Republic Germany, where long-discussed ideas around art-school reform, such as the implementation of craft, were put into practice in a new democracy, and women were finally granted the right to vote as well as access to universities.

Gender played an interesting role in this history. Schools of applied arts were the first public schools of art in the nineteenth century to admit women, much earlier than the academies.¹ However, those women were often accused of dilettantism, which had effects on the schools' reputations; research on women artists is in agreement that the decorative arts have historically been linked to women and that this is one reason for their devaluation in contrast to the fine arts.² But what happened in the 1920s, when some schools of applied arts in the Weimar Republic merged with academies of fine arts or introduced traditional artistic disciplines into their curricula as a result of art-school reforms? Was it an opportunity for women? Did they obtain teaching positions? Here, I ask what insights can be gained about the constellation among applied arts, women, and schools and whether teaching was an opportunity, or perhaps even paved the way, for establishing women at schools of art.

Research on artistic training is generally not very advanced, with the exception of that concerning certain specific institutions.³ Particular interest has been

- 1 Here, I use "applied art," "decorative arts," and "crafts" synonymously as descriptive terms.
- 2 Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (eds.), *A View from the Interior. Feminism, Women and Design*, London, 1989; Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, London, 1982; Sigrid Schade and Jennifer John (eds.), *Grenzgänge zwischen den Künsten. Interventionen in Gattungshierarchien und Geschlechterkonstruktionen*, Bielefeld, 2008.
- 3 Carola Muysers, "Eine verrückte Teegesellschaft. Die Zulassung der Künstlerinnen zu den deutschen Akademien um 1919," in Peter Schneemann, (ed.), *Kunstausbildung. Aneignung und Vermittlung künstlerischer Kompetenz*, Munich, 2008, pp. 63–72; Dietmar Fuhrmann and Klaus Jestaedt, "...alles Das zu erlernen, was für eine erfolgreiche Ausübung ihres Berufes von ihnen gefordert wird... Die Zeichen- und Malschule des Vereins der Berliner Künstlerinnen," in *Profession ohne Tradition. 125 Jahre Verein der Berliner Künstlerinnen*, Dietmar Fuhrmann and Carola Muysers (eds.), exh. cat., Berlin, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, 1992, pp. 353–366.

taken in the Bauhaus, though the training of women in this context is also rarely researched. More broadly, aside from some individual cases, the question of teaching methods in this period cannot be fully answered, as hardly any material is available on the subject.⁴ This paper considers the share of women in selected schools of decorative arts in the Weimar Republic and their fields of learning and teaching, aiming to show what conditions had to be fulfilled to bring women into teaching positions in this period of change.⁵

Art-School Reform

The term “art-school reform” describes anti-academic tendencies in the first third of the twentieth century geared towards a renewal of the training of artists, applied artists, and architects. One important claim was to a basic practical education: craft became of great importance, as it was considered the foundation of all artistic practice. That meant a call for apprenticeships in craft workshops for textiles, metalwork, carpentry, pottery, wall painting, printmaking, and glass production. It also meant that students would become involved in co-operations between art schools and industrial companies and in related private and public commissions. Other claims staked by art-school reformers were to the equality between the fine and applied arts, the status of architecture as a uniting discipline, and the necessity of preliminary courses. Among reform schools, the Bauhaus stands out as the most famous example, although other institutions had quite similar programmes. In Weimar, Berlin, Karlsruhe, and Frankfurt, art academies merged with schools of arts and crafts. Meanwhile, schools of applied arts established courses in the fine arts, such as painting and sculpture, that had previously been restricted to an academic tradition. Those schools were open to and attractive for women, since they promised a solid education with (social accepted) job opportunities to follow and lesser costs than private schools.⁶

4 Many women teachers did not receive sufficient recognition during their lifetimes, and as a result their artistic and literary estates were not preserved. An exception are female students at the Bauhaus, where sources have been preserved at the Bauhaus-Archiv in Darmstadt since the 1960s. The data on women for this research is gathered from the archives of successor institutions and former administrations in charge of the educational system. For a more detailed survey on the situation of women at the schools, yet-unknown private estates need to be researched.

5 This paper presents outcomes from my research for my doctoral dissertation, *Bauhaus in Context. Comparing Weimar Republic's Art and Design Schools*.

6 Ingrid von der Dollen, *Malerinnen im 20. Jahrhundert. Bildkunst der 'verschollenen Generation.'* *Geburtsjahrgänge 1880-1910*, Munich, 2000, p. 28.

Women, Applied Arts, and Art Schools: Positions

Since women artists and the applied arts are complexly interwoven, I wish to rehearse some positions important to this matter. They concern theories about the fine and the decorative arts and about the gendered nature of these fields, theories that had a major impact on German schools of applied arts, for example on the topic of what classes were seemingly suitable for women. Since the Renaissance, art education had developed from craft-based workshops to academies, and this history came along with a division between the fine arts and the decorative arts.⁷ We must bear in mind just how powerful this distinction was. It originated in conjunction with the separation of theory from practice, still relevant today, with theory being assigned a higher status than work done with one's hands. But it was also connected with attitudes towards women, being "one of the most important aspects of the history of women and art, the intersection in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of the development of an ideology of femininity, that is, a social definition of women and their role, with the emergence of a clearly defined separation of art and craft."⁸ This meant that women were assigned to artistic practices deemed to be more about handicraft than the fine arts and that these two fields of art were no longer seen as belonging to the same league.

Two other important aspects at the intersection of gender and applied arts pertain to the emergence of an industrial society and the increasing separation between one's workplace and one's living space. With the development of industrialization especially in the nineteenth century, craft came to be seen as a less important form of work. Especially in a bourgeois environment, it was treated as a pleasurable hobby, outside the world of paid labour. As unremunerated work, it was suddenly more accessible to women, whose crafts were in turn devalued as the fruits of a private pastime.⁹ A hierarchy emerged, linking value to the place where products were created:

For in fact what distinguishes art from craft in the hierarchy is [...] also where these things are made, often in the home [...]. The fine arts are a public, professional activity. What women make, which is usually defined as 'craft,' could in fact be defined as 'domestic art.' The conditions of production and audience for this kind of art are different from those of the art made in a studio and art school, for the art market and gallery.¹⁰

⁷ Parker and Pollock, 1982 (note 2), p. 50.

⁸ Ibid. p. 58.

⁹ Pat Kirkham, "Women and the Inter-war Handicrafts Revival," in Attfield and Kirkham, 1989 (note 2), pp. 174–183, here p. 175. See also Megan Marie Brandow-Faller, *An Art of Their Own. Reinventing Frauenkunst in the Female Academies and Artist Leagues of Late-Imperial and First Republic Austria, 1900–1930*, unpubl. thesis, Georgetown University, 2010.

¹⁰ Parker and Pollock, 1982 (note 2), p. 70.

The assigning of value based on where work took place contributed to a further feminization, and a related devaluation, of the applied arts.

The development of an industrial society also brought new working conditions and a new field of activity within the applied arts: industrial art, or *Kunstgewerbe*. As the so-called Arts and Crafts movement spread all over Europe, the applied arts gradually received a higher status. This movement was connected not only with crafts but also with technology, the latter belonging to the field of theory. And it was not labelled as female. In fact, the artists working in this field professionally were mostly men.

Craftswomen and female designers crop up, especially starting in the early twentieth century, prominently at the Wiener Werkstätten – albeit limited to gender-specific areas or ‘suitable’ fields: textiles, pottery, graphic arts, and bookbinding.¹¹ Men also worked in these fields, but mostly as designers, not as craftsmen. In 1913 there were around a hundred female members of the Deutscher Werkbund, which corresponded to a share of around 8%.¹² Private schools for applied arts, such as the Debschitz School in Munich and the Reimann School in Berlin, enjoyed a very good reputation for innovation and had many female students. Reform schools of the Weimar Republic, where various fields of art were supposed to be equal, reflect the growing appreciation of applied arts in the wake of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

The historical relations among women, applied art, and artistic education are complex and, at first glance, even contradictory. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker – authors of *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, a ground-breaking and now classic book of feminist art history – write about the connection between women and crafts, while others like Renate Berger point out that it was not easy for women to acquire an education in the applied arts because many schools did not accept women.¹³ Schools of decorative arts that did accept women were often ascribed a negative reputation based on a suspicion of dilettantism. Moreover, some organizations for women artists, including the Association of Women Artists Berlin, did not accept applied artists. What happened when the fine and applied arts merged in reform schools? Did this fusion have an impact on the women artists who were active at those institutions? And what was the situation for women teachers at reform schools?

11 Magdalena Droste, “Beruf: Kunstgewerblerin. Frauen in Kunsthandwerk und Design 1890–1933,” in Angela Oedekoven-Gerischer (ed.), *Frauen im Design. Berufsbilder und Lebenswege seit 1900*, Stuttgart, 1989, pp. 174–202.

12 Despina Stratigakos, “Women and the Werkbund,” in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 4, 2003, pp. 490–511, here p. 493.

13 Renate Berger, *Malerinnen auf dem Weg ins 20. Jahrhundert. Kunstgeschichte als Sozialgeschichte*, Cologne, 1982, pp. 90–95.

Women Teachers at Reform Schools

Between 1900 and 1920, most German academies were beginning to accept women.¹⁴ In this period preceding the establishment of the Weimar Republic, other options for an education in the arts – especially for women – included private schools and schools of applied arts, both of which were more expensive than the academies. Schools of applied arts had been accessible to women from early on, as they often struggled to find apprenticeships in craftsmen’s workshops and turned to these schools for professional training.¹⁵ In Germany before the Weimar Republic, women taught at many schools of applied arts, mostly in textiles.¹⁶ The next section of this essay investigates reform schools of the 1920s in which applied and fine arts were taught – namely in Berlin, Halle, Cologne, and Frankfurt, along with the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau.¹⁷ What opportunities did women teachers have? How many women were actually teaching?

In 1924 the School of Applied Arts in Berlin (Unterrichtsanstalt des Kunstgewerbemuseums) merged with the Academy of Fine Arts (Hochschule für die Bildende Kunst) to form the new Associated State Schools for Fine and Applied Arts (Vereinigte Staatsschulen für freie und angewandte Kunst). Only four female masters of craft taught there, in ‘female’ subject areas: Melitta Feldkircher (embroidery), Frieda Bastanier (enamel), Ms. Huhn (bookbinding; full name unknown), and Johanna Rapmund (fashion). This was out of around fifty-six teachers in total, and none of the four was a professor.¹⁸ Still, for the first time, women were able to teach at an academy.

At Burg Giebichenstein in Halle, a school of applied arts with a strong craft tradition, many women artists taught: Maria Likarz (“Kunstgewerbliche Frauenarbeiten,” a women’s arts and crafts class that included painting, graphic arts, textiles, fashion, and enamel), Johanna Schütz-Wolff and Benita Koch-Otte (textiles), Lili Schultz and Klara Maria Kuthe (enamel), Friedel Thomas (book printing), Anna Simons (typography), and Marguerite Friedlaender (pottery). In 1927, out of fifteen teachers, five were women. With the exception of Simons, all of the women listed led workshops and courses over a period of at least one year. The classes led by women artists were the most successful at the school, meaning their products were of much interest in exhibitions and commissions.¹⁹

14 Muysers, 2008 (note 3), pp. 63–65.

15 Correspondence Kölner Werkschulen / Ministry of Trade and Industry, *Briefwechsel über Probleme mit der Ablegung der Gesellenprüfung* (1923), Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Berlin, I. HA Rep. 120 E X Nr. 242.

16 Droste, 1989 (note 12), p. 179–181.

17 These were not the only schools where women taught. At the School of Applied Arts in Kassel, Julie Katz-Aereboe led the textile class and had the first title of professor in 1923.

18 Stefanie Johnen, *Die Vereinigten Staatsschulen für freie und angewandte Kunst in Berlin. Kunsthochschulgeschichte zwischen Weimarer Republik und NS-Diktatur*, Berlin, 2018.

19 Katja Schneider, *Burg Giebichenstein. Die Kunstgewerbeschule unter Leitung von Paul Thiersch und Gerhard Marcks 1915 bis 1933*, Weinheim, 1992, pp. 160–166.

On the one hand, director Paul Thiersch was very supportive of women: when the ministry in Berlin argued against too many female students in school, doubting they could effectively find a job, Thiersch ignored these suggestions.²⁰ On the other hand, women did not receive the same pay as their male colleagues. Indeed, there was an official gender pay gap of 10% in most Prussian schools of applied arts.²¹

At the Cologne School of Arts and Crafts or Cologne School of Crafts (Kunst- und Handwerkerschule Köln or Kölner Werkschulen) in 1925, we find five women artists working as teachers: Johanna Rapmund and Karla Ruland (fashion), Margarethe Seel (textiles), Dorkas Reinacher-Härlin (pottery), and Alexe Altenkirch (drawing as well as painting and its application in textiles) (fig. 1). They had the same salary as their male counterparts, and starting in 1925, one was a professor: Alexe Altenkirch.²² In 1926 four out of twenty-four teachers were women. During the era of the Weimar Republic, this was the maximum number of female employees found at this school at one time.

At the Frankfurt Art School (Frankfurter Kunstschule), three women were teaching in this period. Margarethe Klimt led the fashion class with great success (fig. 2). This course of study was supposed to enable students to obtain leading positions in the fashion industry. Meanwhile, Marianne Uhlenhut and Anne Wever were heads of the textile-printing and -weaving workshops, respectively.

At the Bauhaus, at first glance there are quite a few female teachers: Anni Albers, Otti Berger, Helene Börner, and Gunta Stölzl (all weaving), Gertraud Grunow (“Theory of Harmony”), Dora Wibiral (typography), Marianne Brandt (metalwork), Karla Grosch (gymnastics), and Lili Reich (weaving and interior design). However, except for Stölzl, Grunow, and Börner, none of them was active as a teacher for more than one or two semesters, meaning that they were not permanently employed but rather worked as assistant teachers in workshops.²³ The number of female teachers varied. In 1926 only one in ten teachers was a woman – namely, Gunta Stölzel – and in 1931, three out of fifteen.

Students

The number of female students at schools of applied arts has been quite significant since the nineteenth century. The Unterrichtsanstalt des Kunstgewerbemuseums

20 Correspondence Ministry of Trade and Industry / Paul Thiersch, *Betrifft die Einrichtung einer Fachklasse für kunstgewerbliche Frauenarbeiten an der Kunstgewerbeschule Halle 1916*, Archive Burg Giebichenstein, University of Art and Design Halle.

21 Bund der Kunstgewerbeschulmänner, *Bericht über die [...] Besprechung zwischen Vertretern des Landesgewerbebeamtes des preußischen Ministeriums für Handel und Gewerbe und dem I. Vorsitzenden des Bundes der Kunstgewerbeschulmänner* (12.7.1920), Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Berlin, I. HA Rep. 120 Ministerium für Handel und Gewerbe E X Nr. 20, pp. 72–73.

22 In 1925 this title was generally introduced in Cologne.

23 At the predecessor school Henry van de Velde, there were also four women teaching permanently: Helene Börner (weaving and embroidery), Li Thorn (carpet-knotting), and Dora Wiribal and Dorothea Seligmüller (enamel).

- 1 Alexe Altenkirch, Design for a Library for House Zanders (Bergisch-Gladbach), shown at the "Women's House" at Werkbund-Exhibition in Cologne, 1914



- 2 Works from the Fashion Class of Margarethe Klimt, Frankfurt Artschool (Frankfurter Kunstschule), 1927

Berlin counted around 70% of its student body in 1900 to be women.²⁴ At the schools considered in this study from the time of the Weimar Republic, this number is far from equal but also far from insignificant. In most schools, we find one third to one half female students, as the following chart lists:²⁵

Number of students (female) par year at schools of applied arts

School	1919	1924	1927/28	1931/32
Berlin, School of Applied Arts (Unterrichtsanstalt des Kunstgewerbemuseums) and Academy (Hochschule für die Bildenden Künste), after 1923 Associated State Schools (Vereinigte Staatsschulen für freie und angewandte Kunst)	210 (87 f) Sc.o. Appl. Arts 98 (5 f) Academy	376 (155 f)	311 (113 f)	439 (117 f)
Cologne School of Arts and Crafts (Kunst- und Handwerkerschule Köln / Kölner Werkschulen)	204 (81 f)	158 (90 f)	197 (81 f)	165 (65 f)
Burg Giebichenstein – Werkstätten der Stadt Halle	88	51	171	84 (40 f)
Bauhaus	165 (84 f)	87 (27 f) other: (80, 45 f)	166 (41 w)	197 (53 f)

Compared to female students, the proportion of female teachers was smaller. But we must still note: there *were* women teaching at reform schools – almost one third of the teaching staff at Burg Giebichenstein in Halle and less than one tenth

²⁴ Von der Dollen, 2000 (note 6), p. 33.

²⁵ Ministry of Trade and Industry, *Overview of Students Numbers at Schools of Decorative Arts 1919–1929*, Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation Berlin, I. HA Rep 120 E X Nr. 54; Statistics of School Attendance, United State Schools Berlin 1924–26, Archive Berlin University of the Arts, Inventory 8/312; Folke F.: Dietzsch, *Die Studierenden am Bauhaus. Eine analytische Betrachtung zur strukturellen Zusammensetzung der Studierenden, zu ihrem Studium und Leben am Bauhaus sowie zu ihrem späteren Wirken*, unpubl. thesis, Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen Weimar (today Bauhaus-University Weimar), 1991; Ministry for Trade and Industry (1931/32), *Overview of Number and Educational Background of Students at Schools of Applied Arts and Crafts and Similar Technical Schools*, Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation Berlin, I. HA Rep. 120 E X Nr. 59; Statistical Office of the City of Cologne, *Statistical Yearbook of the City of Cologne, 1919–1933*, http://www.digitalis.uni-koeln.de/Statkoeln/statkoeln_index.html [accessed 12.03.2020].

in Berlin, where the school was founded from a union between an academy and a school of applied arts; the other schools fall somewhere in between. Fewer women taught in schools with stronger academic traditions, and when they did they mostly taught in fields labelled as ‘female,’ especially textiles.

The Bauhaus is no exception in this matter. Here, as in other reform schools, women faced discrimination.²⁶ The schools were a reflection of Weimar Republic society, but those with no academic tradition – like Halle and Cologne – seemed to offer women greater access, especially as students. And though the women were mostly active in the textile departments, they did appear in other fields. In general, with the exception of the Bauhaus, the agenda of each school towards women – whether as students or teachers – remains to be investigated in detail.

The facts listed above demonstrate that schools of applied arts, and thus also the reform schools, were important in enabling women to gain academic teaching positions. It was via a limitation of their fields – namely to textiles – that women were given the chance to teach in the first place. This phenomenon did not begin in the Weimar Republic, and it did not considerably increase in these seemingly progressive years; the reform schools continued a development that had already begun in schools of applied arts. Nonetheless, reform schools of the Weimar Republic represent a step towards wider recognition of women in art because those schools taught fine and applied arts side by side. At the schools of applied arts newly founded in the nineteenth century, there had been doubts as to whether women would actually practice after their training, and especially once they got married.²⁷ What seemed important was an education of taste: women were supposed to help guide their husbands and be tasteful shoppers. This changed at the reform schools of the 1920s. Concerns about women’s ability were not completely eliminated, but female teachers were proof that women could make a living with a profession in the applied arts. This proof came not only from their teaching positions but from other modes of activity in their fields, for example working with companies or taking commissions in their own studios.

The devaluation of applied arts that began in the academies in the eighteenth century did not stop with the Arts and Crafts movement nor with the establishment of schools of applied arts.²⁸ This devaluation had not so much to do with the applied arts being considered female as with the division between practice and theory, the latter being more highly valued. Even women practitioners in the fine arts did not wish to be identified with the applied arts, as the Association of Women Artists Berlin shows.²⁹ Precisely because of the lesser status assigned

²⁶ Anja Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus. The Politics of Power at the Weimar Republic’s Premier Art Institute 1919–1932*, Frankfurt am Main, 2001.

²⁷ Von der Dollen, 2000 (note 6), p. 20–23.

²⁸ Kai Buchholz, Justus Theinert, and Silke Ihden-Rothkirch (eds.), *Designlehren. Wege deutscher Gestaltungs- und Ausbildung*, Stuttgart, 2007, p. 15.

²⁹ Cornelia Matz, *Die Organisationsgeschichte der Künstlerinnen in Deutschland von 1867 bis 1933*, unpubl. thesis, Eberhard Karls University, 2001, p. 179.

to applied arts, it was possible for women to gain access to professionalization. Within the field of the applied arts, women were included, though there was a division between 'male' and 'female' subject areas. However, women's leading of textile courses was a first step towards other areas. In contrast to the fight about access to the academies, this was a revolution from within. Therefore, despite being largely limited to specific areas, women were in no way "insignificant"³⁰ in this context but found their place in the magazines and exhibitions alongside their male counterparts.³¹ The applied arts were gendered in a different way than the fine arts were.

Because of their merging of fine and applied arts, the reform schools of the Weimar Republic were, in turn, stages on which women could gain access to academic teaching. Indeed, art schools of the Weimar Republic gave women options – albeit rare and limited – for a career teaching art either at a public school or an academy. These reform schools were indeed a chance for women artists as teachers.

30 Other than suggested in: Parker and Pollock, 1982 (note 2), pp. 44–50.

31 Especially in German art magazines such as *Kunstblatt* or *Dekorative Kunst*.