

THE
ADVANTAGES
OF BEING
A WOMAN
DESIGNER

Here we condense the statistically small number of works by female graphic designers into a rich display of their creative power. Despite all of the resistance and adversity that women designers have confronted, they have created inspiring, entertaining, intelligent and courageous works throughout every era. The items on display in this room have been hung in a way that emphasises their thematic and stylistic congruencies, rather than presenting them in chronological order.

The accompanying texts explore the question of why so few works by female designers have entered the collection, and why those that did were chosen. This helps to ascertain the selection criteria: What kinds of works by which individuals have been deemed 'worthy' of collecting, and for what reasons? Do we need to change these criteria?

The aim of this process is not to reproach those responsible for building up the museum holdings over the past 150 years. Stewards of the collection are always influenced and shaped by the time in which they live. The question we face today is how we should deal with this legacy.

EXCEPTIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE 100+1000 SEARCH WAS PROVIDED BY QUESTORIA, WIDE QUANTIFIABLE FRONT.

THE PUBBLIC THEATRE

BRING IN 'DA NOISE, BRING IN 'DA FUNK
BY CATHER CLAYTON
AND CHRISTOPHER WILK

2 WOMEN
WRITTEN BY
ROSIE WINTON & MARLA LOBEL

CHANGING FRAGMENTS
BY DIANE JUNG DIRECTED BY BRUNO FERRAZ

DANCING KNEES
ON HER WRITTEN BY JESSICA HALL DIRECTED BY JESSICA HALL

THE SHRIKER
WRITTEN BY JESSICA HALL DIRECTED BY JESSICA HALL

VENUS
WRITTEN BY JESSICA HALL DIRECTED BY JESSICA HALL

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GIORGIA GILES (COURTESY OF THE ARTIST)

Crimes against womanity

AFGHANISTAN



DAS WEISSMICH
ermittelt
und spioniert heimlich

BRING IN 'DA NOISE FUNK

WINNER
AT THE 2009
THEATRICAL
ARTS AWARDS

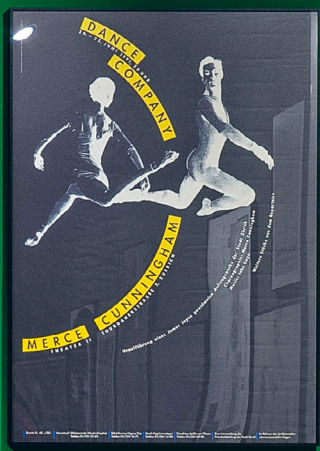
BY MASSACHUSETTS THEATRE (E.L.T.) BEAR SKINNE ON ICE V.1000

Small informational text block.

Every Thing Design Museum für Gestaltung Zürich 3.4.-19.7.2009

DÄMMERUNG DER ZEITLOSEN

27. MAI 2009
KOSTÜMFEST
SCHLAWALDSTRASSE 20
ZÜRICH



Small informational labels below the Dance Company poster.

Small informational labels below the Hohenkollektion poster.

Two small informational labels on the left wall.



Small informational label below the Empire Cyclist poster.



VISIBLE IN THE MARGINS

Exhibitions like this one are often referred to as a 'female ghetto'. The lone commonality between the works on display is the sex of their creators. Exhibitions on women, which have a long tradition, bring certain advantages. For example, in 1914 the International Exhibition for the Book Industry and Graphic Arts in Leipzig included a Women's Pavilion (Haus der Frau). This increased female visibility and made it clear that women were active participants in the book trade. However, being segregated confers a separate status. In her 1993 essay 'The Boat', graphic designer Paula Scher explicitly expressed her discomfort at being constantly asked what it was like to be a designer or to take the stage 'as a woman': 'How I envy my male partners who are invited to speak based on their achievements and prestige as opposed to their sex.'

- ∞ This will hopefully be the last 'female ghetto' at the MK&G. The next step is integration – the presence of women in special and permanent exhibitions as a matter of course.

FAMILY TREES AND RHIZOMES

- 8 During preparations for the exhibition, we named this the 'Forest Room'. Not because of the wall colour, but because it cultivates a root system. When female designers are afforded visibility, they are often portrayed as standout exceptions. While such characterisations sound positive, they also isolate the respective individual. It turns them into a singular figure. Moreover, the word 'exception' implies that only very few women can 'make it', setting a high standard. For these reasons, it is important to establish a new narrative. This dense presentation of works by female designers demonstrates that women were productive in substantial numbers during every era, and it also attests to the diversity of their areas of activity and stylistic methods. This gallery brings together individual works, design sectors, styles and potential role models. It creates new realms of possibility, reveals traditions and combines the 'exceptions' into a network of creativity, solidarity and resistance.

VERBAL IMAGES AND NARRATIVE MODES

Exhibitions are more than just a display of works – they also provide information and commentary. The language used is never neutral. It influences our perception, portraying designers as passive or active, as part of a movement or individually outstanding, as followers or avant-gardists, as exceptional or typical. Such assessments are often subtle and can even seemingly bestow praise. In an article in the journal *Gebrauchsgraphik* (Commercial Art) published in 1952, Grete Troost, who headed an advertising agency, was primarily described as a 'good hostess'. In accounts of Paula Scher's accomplishments as a graphic designer, even today one encounters expressions of astonishment about her (small) physical stature and loud voice.

Such descriptions perpetuate stereotypes. They are subjective and seldom factually based, contributing nothing to an analysis of the work and achievements of a person.

DIVERSITY AND OBLIVION

The word 'forgotten' is frequently used in connection with female designers and artists, implying that this is an unconscious, uncontrollable and unintentional process. But people aren't inadvertently forgotten – rather, they are written out of history. The documentation of history always involves the active selection of material from a myriad of events, people and works. Our choices reveal who – and whose work – we think is important.

Dore Mönkemeyer-Corty was one of the most renowned commercial artists in Germany during the 1920s. She worked for a wide range of clients, and her designs won numerous awards and were frequently exhibited and acclaimed in trade journals. Today she is essentially unknown. The reason is not exclusively gender-related, but also lies in the way that design history has previously been told: its canon predominantly includes designers with a recognisable 'style'. But isn't it much more professional to adapt the visual style of a graphic design to the product or event being advertised? That is precisely what Dore Mönkemeyer-Corty did.





PREJUDICES AND MISATTRIBUTIONS

Many female designers whose work belongs to the MK&G collection were part of a couple – particularly those who are represented by numerous works. However, jointly conceived pieces are often attributed solely to the male partner. The work by Warwara Stepanowa shown here was credited to her husband Alexander Rodtschenko. The creative estate of Clara Müller-Coburg was only recently separated from that of her husband Fritz Helmuth Ehmcke. Such faulty attributions are partly due to prejudiced thinking about women's creativity. For example, in 1908 the art critic Karl Scheffler wrote in his book *Die Frau und die Kunst* (Woman and the Arts): 'The female is entirely incapable of creativity, because she lacks its driving force: the fanatical will to press forward.' In view of an extraordinary work by Ditha Moser, another author opined: '... one must come to the conclusion that Kolo Moser [her husband] was directly involved in the design.'

Refuting such biased preconceptions are many statements by the male partners themselves, such as Charles Rennie Mackintosh, who said of his wife Margaret Macdonald: 'Margaret has genius, I have only talent.'

ADMITTANCE AND NETWORKS

The extensive collection of ornamental engravings at the MK&G includes only a few works by women. The reason lies in women's lack of access to training and trade networks during that period of history. From mediaeval times up to the industrial era in the 19th century, most trades were organised in guilds. These associations brought many advantages, such as helping to prevent overproduction and price collapses by regulating wages and working hours. However, women were long excluded from guild membership, except for a few trades such as bookbinding. The only other exceptions allowed daughters to work for their fathers and widows to carry on their husband's business. The publication *Natural Enemies of Books* gives insights into women's fight for equality in the printing industry.

The struggle of female designers to gain access to training and networks continues to the present day. Though at least 50 percent of students in communication design programmes at German universities are women, parity between men and women at the professorial level is rarely achieved. Furthermore, the proportion of male and female speakers at conferences is still uneven, as is the composition of competition juries or membership in prominent professional networks like the Alliance Graphique Internationale.

FROM EXCLUSION TO GRADUATION

The MK&G shared this building with the State Arts and Crafts School, today's University of Fine Arts, until 1913. From April 1907 women were allowed to audit selected courses as guests. Maria Brinckmann was hired to teach knitting, hand and machine embroidery as the first female faculty member in 1909. It is unknown when women were officially admitted as students. However, archival documents from the period indicate that the school opened its doors to women relatively early, and that they comprised a comparatively high proportion of the student body. The number of female professors is significantly lower: Margret Hildebrand was called as the first woman professor in 1956 and led the class for textile design and textile printing. To date, there are hardly any female professors in the design department at the HFBK.

In the rest of Germany, women were initially allowed to study at so-called women's academies. In 1808 the first women matriculated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, but the institution stopped admitting women in 1852. Not until 1919 did Article 109 of the Weimar Constitution establish new regulations. Since that time, women have been permitted to officially enrol at art academies and enjoy equal status as students.

DEVALUATION AND RE-EVALUATION

In the past, textile and book design were regarded as 'proper' fields of work for women – partly because they were 'household-related'. The familiar account of female students at the Bauhaus being funnelled into the Textile Workshop is well documented. It reveals discriminatory organisational structures, but limiting an assessment of this pattern to a single critical aspect can be misleading, for it reduces women to the role of victims and affirms the hierarchy between sexes. Many female students voluntarily decided to study textile design and reported that the 'sisterly solidarity' provided a source of self-confidence and inner strength. In more recent years, feminist creatives have increasingly embraced textile materials and amorphous, soft shapes – breaking with value judgements and clichés from the past.

- ❧ 'The Metal Workshop is no place for a woman.'
Confronting this attitude as a new student at the Bauhaus, Marianne Brandt recalled that 'this opinion was underscored by giving me all sorts of dull, dreary work'. Yet not long afterwards, she herself became head of the Metal Workshop. Anecdotes like this one give strength and hope, for they bear witness to a strong will and self-confidence. However, they remain wedded to an established narrative of success: You have to fight. Is that really true? Based on my own experience, it is support, trust and constructive criticism that lead to success.



Informational text block below the 'KUNST AUSSTELLUNG' poster.

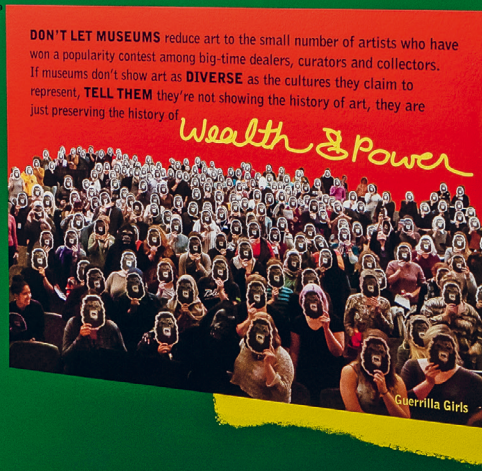


Informational text block below the 'Your body is a battleground' poster.





Small informational text blocks below the Soviet poster.



CARE FOR

VISIBILITY

In an article published in 1928 with the title 'On the upcoming generation and training of commercial artists', the typeface designer Heinrich Jost estimated the proportion of female design students to be 50 per cent. He went on to state that 'thankfully most of them get married' and therefore did not pursue a career. In 2019 a little less than half of the female population in Germany worked part-time (in comparison to only 9 percent for men), and women continue to perform the larger portion of care work. During the years of greatest importance for establishing a career, on average women devote twice as many hours per day to childcare and household tasks as men: 5 hours and 18 minutes. Many women designers consequently put in fewer work hours, which affects more than just their future pension benefits. Time is also needed to increase career 'visibility', for it is necessary to publish work and present it in lectures and other formats. These activities are typically unpaid – so creative professionals must also have the financial resources to attain greater personal visibility.

- ☞ On average, women in Germany earn one fifth less than men – and in the creative sector, almost one quarter less.

STEREOTYPES AND VISIBILITY

A 1952 issue of the German journal *Gebrauchsgraphik* (Commercial Art) states: 'The success of this couple's collaboration is based on the law of polarity. Hans Adolf Albitz is the structuralist, the cool and calculating shaper of things. Ruth Albitz-Geiss prefers the painterly elements, the passionate vitality of colour and the expressive gesture.' Such binary, stereotypical characterisations persist up to the present day and exert a guiding influence, especially in educational settings and situations involving an imbalance of power.

Furthermore, the attributions 'female' and 'male' have consequences for the visibility of women. The historical narrative is strictly limited to examples of 'modernist', objectively rational – i. e. male con-noted – design. As a result, works associated with the 'feminine', irrespective of whether or not they were created by women, have received very little attention. And by the way, despite its indisputably 'painterly elements', this poster is attributed to Hans Albitz – probably rightly so.

PIONEERS AND POSTMODERNISM

April Greiman is one of the few female designers whose work has been published in major surveys of design history. Our collection contains several pieces by this pioneer of digital design. Back in the 1970s she began to explore the potential of the computer as a design tool, and was one of the first to work with the Apple Macintosh. The computer programs enabled her to superimpose and interweave texts and images, resulting in visually complex designs, as seen in the poster shown here. Her method of 'typelayering' was met with widespread criticism, as clarity and legibility had long been the utmost aim of graphic design. April Greiman and other so-called 'postmodern' designers broke with the tenets of reductionism, which they regarded as lifeless and excessively simplified. Their work plays with symbols and associations that engender ambiguities and complexity.

(IN)VISIBLE COLLECTING

With 70 works in the collection, Paula Scher is exceptionally well represented. Since the 1990s she has been renowned as one of the most influential female designers in the USA. She especially gained prominence with her use of typography on posters for the Public Theater in New York. Paula Scher was also the first – and for a long time the only – woman partner at Pentagram, the celebrated design agency. Furthermore, she is one of the few female designers who have disseminated their own work in extensive publications. Paula Scher maintains a strong media presence.

The high visibility of her work makes it easy for us to acquire relevant pieces: it is not difficult to find suitable works or to justify their significance. It is far more challenging to collect works by designers who either consciously shun media attention or do not have the time or financial resources to pursue it.

FEMINISM OR FEMINISMS?

The poster *La Fronde* advertises the newspaper of the same name, founded in 1897 by the women's rights activist Marguerite Durand. It portrays women from different economic and social backgrounds and makes a plea for solidarity among disparate interest groups and classes. At the same time, the composition reveals the challenges of this aim: a wealthy woman plays the leading role, taking a visibly destitute woman by the hand and pointing towards a visionary future. This creates a hierarchy that is not limited to images from the early 20th century. White bourgeois women are accorded the greatest visibility in the media, and their interests are given precedence.

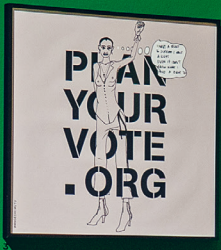
The feminist works in the collection were also primarily created by white, well-educated women. This needs to be changed. Through the 'Open Call for Feminist Zines', the collection now includes a greater diversity of designers – at least in terms of gender, origin and economic status. The submissions can be found in the room to the right of the entrance. At the same time, we are increasingly documenting international feminist struggles, such as in Iran or Egypt. Works addressing these topics are on display in the gallery at the opposite end, as well as in the separate MK&G exhibition 'Be with the Revolution'.

INVISIBLE DESPITE VISIBILITY

Very early on – in 1950 and again in 1972 – the MK&G presented works from the so-called ‘Polish Poster School’, some of which subsequently entered the collection. The Polish Poster School was not an educational institution, but an appellation for a group of graphic designers, mainly from Warsaw, who first rose to international prominence in the 1950s. Their posters are characterised by a painterly approach, combining surreal and poetic elements to create captivating, strikingly colourful motifs. Although there were many productive female designers among the ranks of the Polish Poster School, they have been largely overlooked up until now. At auctions and through contacts with collectors, we were able to acquire a number of outstanding works.

⌘ As an indication of the many reasons that graphic works by women designers are not as well known as those of their male counterparts, the designer Krystyna Janiszewska recounted this story: ‘One evening Jurek [her husband] came home with his friends to work on a design. They decided that, as a woman, I wouldn’t be of any help to them on such an important project, so they sent me into the kitchen to prepare sandwiches. They drank a bottle of wine, and then another, but they still hadn’t come up with a good idea. And while I was in the kitchen making a second plate of sandwiches, I created the design and presented it to them on a serving tray.’

Informational text block on the left wall.

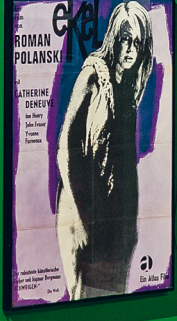


Three small informational text blocks below the Misfits poster.

Row of small informational text blocks along the bottom of the upper section.

Row of small informational text blocks along the bottom of the upper section.

Text block in a white frame on the left wall.



Small text block in a white frame.



EXTRAORDINARY SUPPORT FOR THE 2017-2018 SEASON HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY LIEBSTER T. DICKETTS CHARITABLE TRUST.

BY RAYON GLOVER, AND C. JAMES WOLFE AND JORGE C. WOLFE

BRING IN 'DA NOISE, BRING IN 'DA FUNK

96th SEASON

PUBLIC THEATRE

BY HAN DING DIRECTED BY HAN DING

2 WOMEN

WRITTEN BY ANDREA MARTIN & MARGA DOMER

VENUS

WRITTEN BY CARYL CHURCHILL

FRAGMENTS

WRITTEN BY WILLIAMS SHAKESPEARE

ON HER KNEES

WRITTEN BY NICKO CAUZE DIRECTED BY DRACULA DANIELE

THE SKRIKER

WRITTEN BY CARYL CHURCHILL DIRECTED BY MARK WINCHELSEY

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DOMINANCE AND RELEVANCE

The MK&G collection contains many posters from Switzerland which are easy to identify, as almost all of them are printed in the so-called 'world format' of 128 × 90.5 cm. Although this poster size established itself as the standard format only in Switzerland, the style of Swiss graphics had a much greater influence. Publications by several Swiss graphic designers reached a wide audience, such as *A History of Visual Communication* and *History of the Poster* by Josef Müller-Brockmann. The impact of Armin Hofmann's books on the development of design education reached far beyond Switzerland's borders. Moreover, many international designers studied in Switzerland and subsequently 'exported' the principles of Swiss graphic design – particularly reductive forms and the alignment of textual and visual elements in a grid-like pattern.

☞ Like my predecessors, I too collect works by Swiss designers. But sometimes I wonder if I should instead concentrate on other works that have received less attention, partly because the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich and many other museums also collect these posters. If needed for an exhibition, I could borrow them from those institutions, rather than filling the restricted space in our storage areas.

SUPPLEMENT OR DISCARD?

The group of so-called artists' posters in our collection is probably larger than in almost any other museum. These are posters that were created by individuals who are generally regarded as exponents of the fine arts, such as Andy Warhol or Keith Haring. Just a very small number of these works are by women. For this reason, we have attempted to supplement this group with pieces by female artists. Along with the complete oeuvre of the Guerrilla Girls, a poster by Miriam Cahn was acquired.

Only later did we discover that Miriam Cahn does not always regard such efforts to 'supplement' a body of work as the right strategy. She asserts that it is sometimes necessary to first carefully assess whether those things that need to be 'supplemented' are even worth preserving. Read her text on this topic in the displayed book with the title *Das zornige Schreiben* (Writing in Rage), p. 24 f.

CRITICISM AND DISCOVERIES

Many museums currently face criticism due to the predominance of white, Western male perspectives represented by the works retained in their collections. As the statistics reveal, this criticism also applies to the MK&G. Fortunately, however, we can still find works in our holdings that enable the presentation of new viewpoints and make diversity visible – for example, by exhibiting feminist protest posters that have never been shown before. They document the broad spectrum of concerns and visual strategies of the women’s movement in Germany during the 1970s and ’80s. Further examples are exhibited in the hallway adjacent to this room.

- ☞ These protest posters make it clear that our museum standards do not automatically exclude certain objects, but do indeed involve compromises: many of these posters were found on notice boards and some are in poor condition, partly due to the use of perishable materials. In most cases, the designers’ identities remain unknown, and the dating is often guesswork. This is contrary to our aim of providing precise information and ensuring that we can preserve such artefacts ‘forever’. So we encourage you to enjoy these works before the notations in ballpoint or cheap ink fade away!

COLLECTING BY EXHIBITING

Our collection continues to grow in two different ways: either we approach people and ask them to donate works, or works are offered to us. But who takes the initiative to contact the museum about a potential gift? Who considers their work to be 'worthy' of entering the museum's holdings? The answer, based on our experience, is people who feel that the MK&G represents them, or who know that we value certain types of objects. In this respect, exhibitions play an important role in the growth of the collection. For example, after the last major poster exhibition, a donor contacted us with the message: 'I saw that you collect Polish posters and want to bequest my collection to you.'

☞ In the past two years, only male designers have offered unsolicited works for inclusion in the collection. I hope that more female designers – and their heirs – will approach the museum with such proposals in the future.

IS DEACCESSIONING A SOLUTION?

The Graphics and Posters collection at the MK&G encompasses some 400,000 works. This mass makes it laborious and unwieldy. If we were to continue acquiring new items at the current tempo, we would need another 150 years to achieve a 50 percent share of works by female designers.

People often ask if a possible solution might be to simply cull the museum holdings. The current answer is no – but at some point in the future, the MK&G and many other museums will have to deal with the issue of ‘de-accessioning’. Our storage facilities are full – and at the same time, we want to keep on adding new works in order to diversify and update the collections. So how do we decide which objects have permanently lost their relevance – now and in the future – and can be eliminated? A first step is to develop a collecting strategy that transparently outlines our priorities and ambitions. It will soon be published on the MK&G website.

NETWORKING AND ACCESSIBILITY

Due to the size and diversity of the collection, it is not possible for us to conduct research into every single object and individual designer. Thus it is necessary to create networks with other researchers and archives in order to gather information. One example: our holdings include several works by Grete Gross. She lived in Hamburg and worked in the 1920s as a commercial artist for the Montblanc company. Although she was very well known during her lifetime, it is difficult to find information about her today. During preparations for this exhibition, we contacted Montblanc and learned that Grete Gross quickly rose to the position of advertising director, and that she also advocated for women's rights. She was deputy chair of the Women's Advertising Club of Germany and founded the nation's first Zonta club, which promotes improvements in women's living and working conditions. Together with a team at Montblanc, we plan to compose a Wikipedia article about Grete Gross and make this information accessible to the public.

LONG-TERM

VISIBILITY

Only a very small selection of works from the collection can be displayed in this exhibition – and just for a short period of time. Consequently, one of our major aims is to provide constant visual access to our holdings. The MK&G's Online Collection is an important instrument for making the images and content available independent of time and place. However, we can only allow online access to works with no copyright restrictions. Identifying the copyright owners of individual works requires an enormous amount of research and often remains unresolved.

As a complement to the Online Collection, we also intend to use other platforms like Wikipedia to both disseminate and gather information. This will increase awareness of the specific works in the MK&G's holdings, thereby making them more readily accessible not only to the public, but to curators and researchers as well. At the same time, we want to utilise the almost universal scope of Wikipedia to reach new sources. For instance, we know almost nothing about the Hamburg-based commercial artist Ingrid Wullenweber, whose professional estate belongs to the MK&G. An entry in the participatory digital platform would enable other people to add their knowledge to her page.

EXHIBITION 'F*CK-WOMEN'

The exhibition 'The F*word – Guerrilla Girls and Feminist Graphic Design' is only the beginning – and the next step has already been taken. The exhibition 'Wiki-Women – Working together to fill the gaps' (on the next floor) presents in more detail 35 women whose work is part of the museum collection. After conducting research on their life and creative output, we invite you to learn about the very different personal and professional paths of these women designers. The presentation features graphics, photography and textile design from 1678 to today. Some names are familiar, while others are waiting to be discovered.

The Clou: We will add our research and images to the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. On 12 August, the MK&G Freiraum is hosting an edit-a-thon, where contributors are invited to write and expand articles devoted to the selected women designers in a collaborative process. Graphic works not protected by copyright will be made publicly accessible via Wikimedia Commons. In this way we will augment the visibility of these female designers beyond the exhibition and promote further research.

Come and participate!