



**HERE
WE ARE >>>**

**WOMEN IN
DESIGN <<**

**1900
> TODAY**



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Introduction

Be it in furniture design, industrial design, or interior design, women have contributed crucially to the development of modern design, both creatively and commercially. And yet books about the history of design tend to concentrate on their male counterparts. The exhibition »Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today« now seeks to redress the balance by giving women designers the visibility their multifaceted work has long deserved.

Around eighty women designers are show-cased in the exhibition, including well-known protagonists of modernism, but also contemporary practitioners and several figures not previously considered under the rubric of design. The collection of the Vitra Design Museum forms the point of departure for this narrative. All the venue partners have the opportunity to add local content and pieces from their own collections to continue research in this field.

Today, we take it for granted that women have successful careers in design. While the exhibition shows how far we have come, it also reminds us that we still have some negotiating to do before equal opportunities truly become a reality. This raises a number of fundamental questions: What are the decisive factors of success in design? Who defines what »good design« entails? What is authorship, anyway? Beyond addressing the role of women in design, therefore, the exhibition also examines where we stand on design – how design was defined in the past, and how we want to define it today. By opening up new perspectives, »Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today« invites us to reflect on the story we have heard so far, and how we want it to continue.



PREVIOUS PAGES:
Key Visual for the exhibition »Here We Are!«

Nanda Vigo 1985 with her designs Light Tree (1984) and Cronotopo (1964)

RIGHT:
Eileen Gray, Untitled / Dressing cabinet for the Tempe a Pailla house, 1932–34



TOP TO BOTTOM:
Clara Porset with a model of a table for production, c. 1952

Six of GM's »Damsels of Design«, photographed c. 1955.
From left: Suzanne Vanderbilt, Ruth Glennie, Marjorie Ford Pohlman, Harley Earl, Jeanette Linder, Sandra Logyear, Peggy Sauer

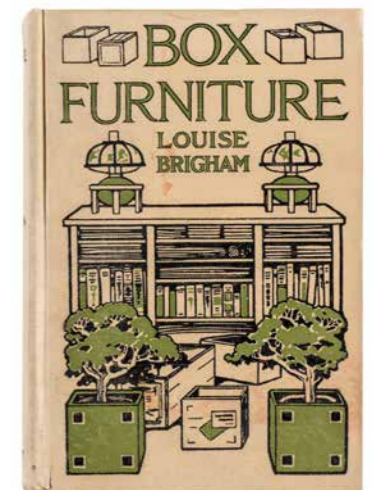
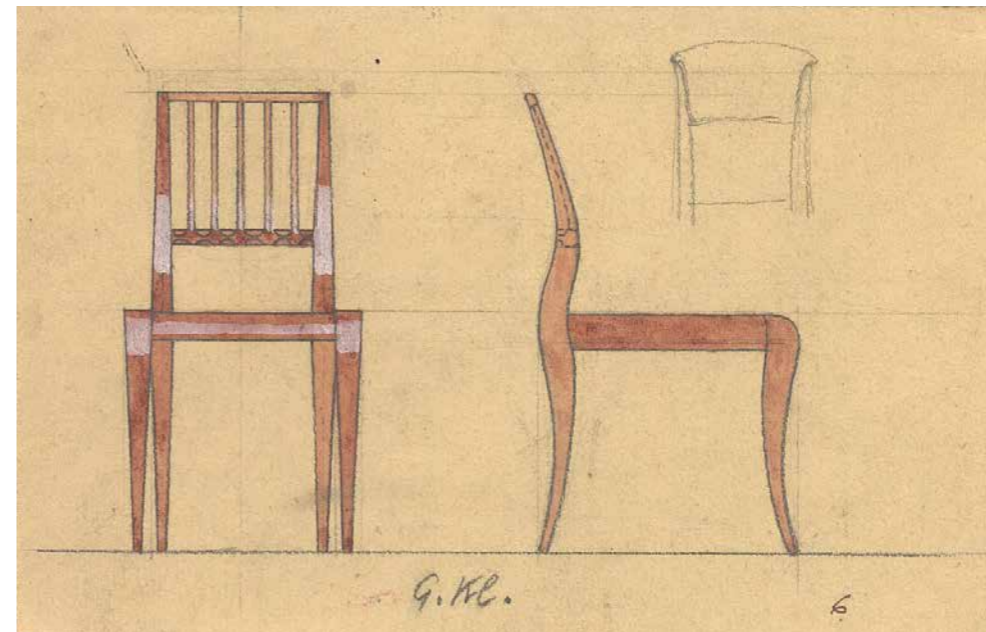
Matri-Archi(ecture), »Weaving Constellations of Identity«, 2021

Reform and Revolution 1900–1930

Until the late nineteenth century, training as a designer or enrolling at a university to study architecture was an option women seldom had. The few creative jobs that were considered suitable, such as drawing teacher, required a certain social status. Still, many women worked in areas related to design, often at home or in factories where authorship was rarely credited.

From around 1900, a number of developments in Europe and North America coalesced to improve women's opportunities in design. As industrialisation picked up speed, design emerged as a profession in its own right. The dedicated work of the women's movement bore fruit: the introduction of universal suffrage meant votes for women, too, and the universities opened their doors to women as well as men.

After the end of the First World War, a new way of thinking emerged all over Europe as avant-garde artists queried traditional views. This movement inspired many women who joined reform-oriented schools and communities to seek new means of expression. However, design practice was still marred by a strong bias linking gender with specific skills and abilities.



OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE:

Gertrud Kleinhempel, Design for a chair, 1899/1915

Newspaper article on suffragettes who protested in the House of Commons, in: *The Daily Mirror*, London, April 27, 1906. From left to right, the photograph shows Annie Kenney, Teresa Billington, and Grace Roe

Louise Brigham, *Box Furniture*, 1909

Alma Siedhoff-Buscher, *Bauhaus Bauspiel*, 1923 (2015)

Artists at the ceramics workshop of the Wiener Werkstätte: Vally Wieselthier, Gudrun Baudisch, and Kotty Rix, c. 1925

Pioneers of Modernism 1920–1950

In Europe and North America – the Global North, as we call it today – the social upheavals of the early twentieth century had given women access to new education and career options in architecture and design.

While patriarchal patterns continued to lurk in the background, women designers began to make a name for themselves internationally and made their presence felt in existing, often male-dominated networks which they used to good advantage. They established their own studios and joined professional organisations and artist's associations. Some collaborated closely with their partners, contributing to the joint works to a degree that research has only recently begun to appreciate fully. If they were frequently overshadowed by their partners, this was in line with social conventions that liked to see women as men's helpmates, an image the media were all too willing to help foster.

A small number of women designers worked in complete independence. Others created signature works that came to stand for entire companies or became successful business leaders themselves, but they rarely sought the public limelight.

While most of the designers presented here have found a place in the history of design with exhibitions and catalogues to celebrate their works, design historians still have much to discover.



ABOVE:
Bangle with clip brooch, Cartier Paris, 1934

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE:
Lilly Reich, No. 258, 1930

Fauteuil tournant by Charlotte Perriand in the dining room of her studio apartment at Place Saint-Sulpice, Paris, 1927/28

Aino Aalto, Bølgeblikk glas series, 1932

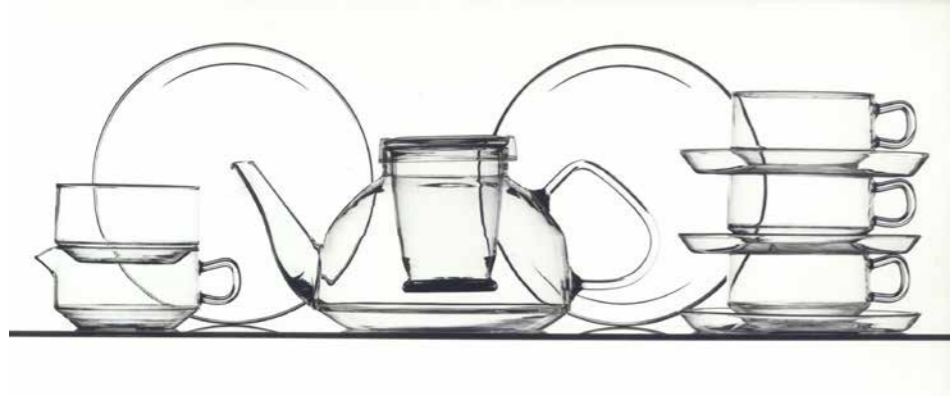
Ray Eames, collage of the »Eames room« designed by Charles and Ray Eames for An Exhibition for Modern Living, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1949

Florence Knoll Bassett, 1956





On the Move 1950–1990



An unprecedented dynamic unfolded in post-war design and architecture as the ideals of pre-war modernism were resurrected and reinterpreted. Technical progress raised hopes of a new society in which people would live healthy and comfortable lives in light-flooded, modern buildings equipped with convenient household appliances and stocked with consumer goods. It was a busy time for designers. Many women established themselves in such traditionally »male« domains as architecture, furniture design, or academe, where they were a formative influence on the coming generation.

Yet women designers in the West still found themselves hamstrung by traditional ideas of women's roles. The production cycle of wares and goods relied on women – but only as consumers, not as producers or creators. Many women, including women in design, managed to turn the stereotypes to their advantage, however, and drew on their alleged domestic talents to make a career for themselves. A different situation presented itself in socialist countries, where women – at least officially – participated in the workforce on the same terms as men.

In the 1960s, calls for equal rights and opportunities increased as a second wave of feminism challenged conservative post-war mentalities of the West. While only few initiatives sought to create an immediate link between design and feminism, they made a significant impact.



PREVIOUS SPREAD:
Charlotte Perriand on the Chaise longue basculante, 1929

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM:
Ilse Decho, Tea set 5000, 1962/63
Anna Castelli Ferrieri, 4814, 1988

ABOVE, CLOCKWISE:
Advertisement for Liisi Beckmann's Karelia lounge chair, 1966
Poster for the Schweizerische Ausstellung für Frauenarbeit (Swiss Exhibition for Women's Work), SAFFA, Zurich, 1958, design by Nelly Rudin

Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, Women in Design – The Next Decade, 1975

Greta Magnusson Grossman in her office at Claircrest Drive, 1959

The Bigger Picture 1900–Today

Many successful design studios are today led by women working under their own name. Their scope reaches from traditional industrial design to social design, where they tackle complex social and humanitarian issues. Linking ability or creativity to gender – and a binary understanding of gender at that – has long been a thing of the past.

Or has it? A new wave of feminism – or rather, feminisms – emerging at the start of the new millennium has uncovered all too many unfair practices. The issues addressed by multiple movements range from the gender pay gap to diversity. Claiming an equal place for women in male-dominated workshops, boardrooms, and history books is only part of the challenge when we need to probe our values at a much more fundamental level. The questions this raises are being asked in design as well: Has our approach been too limited? Too eurocentric, not sufficiently inclusive?

If design is to be a positive force in our future, then we need to take a critical look at past and present to see the way forward and develop new ways of working. Debates about design and feminism can provide ideas and inspiration for a new design practice – one that handles cultural and ecological values with care, thinks outside of the box, and relies on collaboration and the joy of invention. That is precisely what many women designers are doing today.



OPPOSITE PAGE:
BLESS, Furnitureplant #1, Hangout, 2016. From the series
BLESS N°56 Worker's Delight

ABOVE, CLOCKWISE:
Illustration of the feminist Platform Futures, 2021

Julia Lohmann in the Department of Seaweed Studio,
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2013

Christien Meindertsma and her Flax Chair, 2015

Hella Jongerius, Long Neck and Groove Bottles, 2000

Facts

Exhibition Floor Space

600 – 1,000 m² / 6,000 – 10,000 sq ft

Exhibits

Design and art objects, furniture, lighting, fashion, ceramics, installations, magazines, books, drawings, prints, photographs, films, etc.

Curators

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Nina Steinmüller
Susanne Graner

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Exhibition Tour

»Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today« is available to international venues until approximately 2026. The exhibition travels including all exhibits, contextual films and images, exhibition architecture and all media equipment.

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Opposite page: »Chippers«. Women war workers of Marinship Corp, 1942.

Back page: Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in front of the Las Vegas skyline, 1966. Courtesy of Venturi, Scott Brown, and Associates.

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Dates

Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein
23 September 2021 – 6 March 2022

Kunsthall Rotterdam
18 June 2022 – 30 October 2022

Gewerbemuseum Winterthur
25 November 2022 – 14 May 2023

Museu del Disseny de Barcelona
4 October 2023 – 7 January 2024

Vienna Furniture Museum
6 March 2024 – 30 June 2024

Design Museum Brussels
25 October 2024 – 9 March 2025



Installation Shots



> REFORM UND REVOLUTION 1900—1930

Eine umfassende Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts von den Anfängen der Demokratie bis zur Gegenwart. In der ersten Hälfte des Jahrhunderts wurden die Grundlagen der Demokratie gelegt, in der zweiten Hälfte wurde die Demokratie durch die Weltkriege und die Diktaturen des Faschismus und des Stalinismus in Frage gestellt. In der dritten Hälfte des Jahrhunderts wurde die Demokratie durch die Bürgerrechtsbewegungen und die Friedensbewegungen verteidigt und erneuert. In der vierten Hälfte des Jahrhunderts wurde die Demokratie durch die Globalisierung und die Digitalisierung herausgefordert. In der fünften Hälfte des Jahrhunderts wird die Demokratie durch die Klimawandelbewegungen und die Digitalisierung erneuert.

**EIGHT MILLION WOMEN
WAGE-EARNERS
IN THE UNITED STATES**

THERE ARE

- 357,635 women teachers and professors
- 102,291 women in other professional work
- 328,935 women in laundries
- 1,624,522 women in hotels and domestic service
- 481,159 women in stores and offices
- 770,055 women farmers and farm laborers
- 1,362,783 women in factories and workshops, and over
- 2,500,000 women breadwinners in other lines of work.

THEY NEED THE VOTE



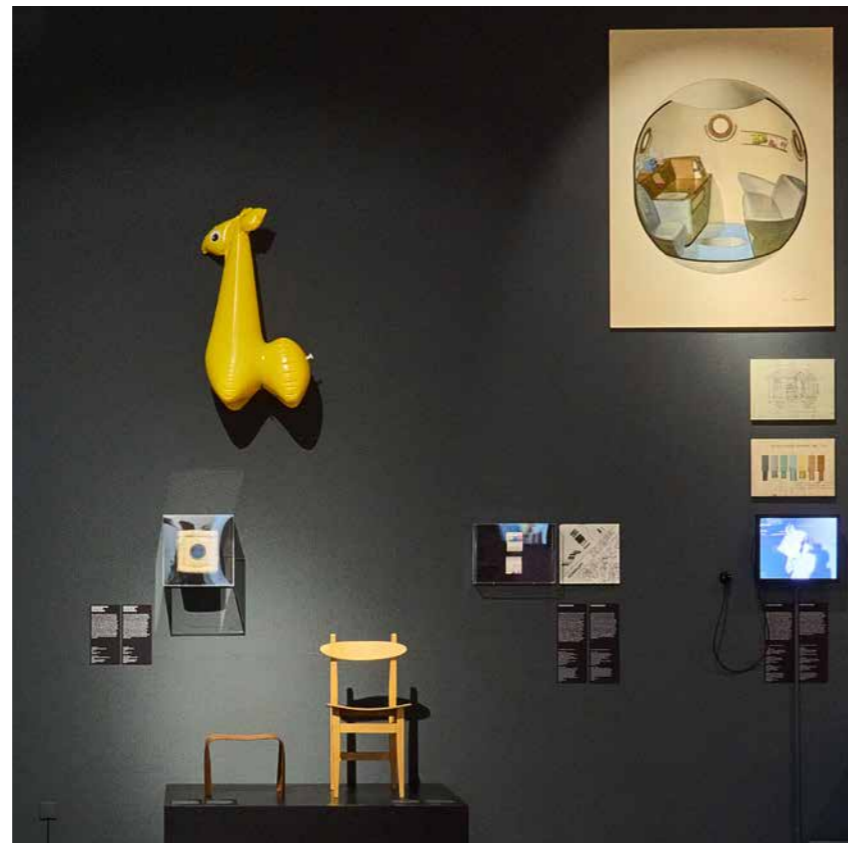
Small informational text panels.

Small informational text panels.



Large informational text panels on the floor.







TELL HER STORY



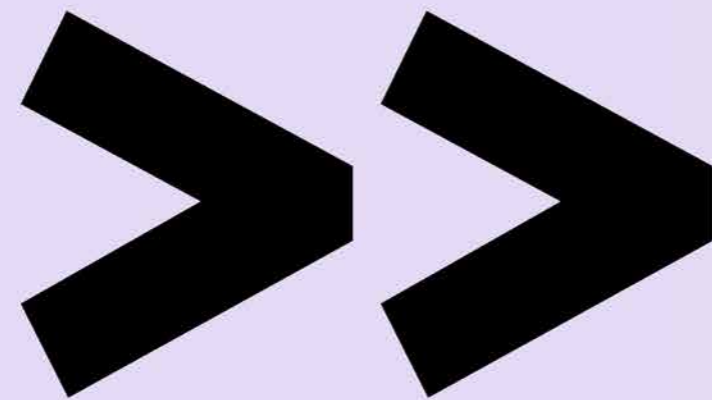
PROJEKT
MUSEUM

RETURNS
TRADITIONS



Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today

Vitra Design Museum
25.09.2021 – 06.03.2022





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