

The Bigger Picture: Design – Women – Society

Exhibition

25 November 2022 to 14 May 2023

Gewerbemuseum Winterthur / Switzerland

Media conference with introduction

Wednesday, 23 November 2022, 11 a.m.

Exhibition launch

Thursday, 24 November 2022, 6.30 p.m.



Graphic design: Völlm + Walther

“The Bigger Picture: Design – Women – Society” highlights the work of female designers over a period of 120 years. The show complements the Vitra Design Museum’s “Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today” exhibition by adding numerous contemporary works from Switzerland reflecting the latest trends. At the same time, the Gewerbemuseum Winterthur is creating a forum for forward-looking discussion which focuses not only on women’s achievements and the social dimensions of design, but also on how we can design our world to be more inclusive and diverse. The exhibition at the Gewerbemuseum Winterthur is accompanied by a varied programme of events.

Today, around half of all design students are female, and women occupy responsible positions in many future-oriented areas of design. Women have also made decisive contributions to the development of modern design, not only as designers of furniture, fashion, graphics and industrial products, but also as architects, entrepreneurs and university teachers. They thus play a wide variety of roles – not least in emerging areas of design, where research and new technologies are increasingly important, while interdisciplinary and collaborative ways of working are becoming more common. Today we are seeing the growing presence and influence of women as both practitioners and teachers. Nevertheless, for many years their achievements were not adequately recognized or appreciated, and a look back at the history of design shows that it has been marked by stereotypical beliefs and role models. Exhibitions throughout the world are currently putting women’s creative work and impact under the spotlight and recounting the history of design in a fresh way. Meanwhile, museums are critically reappraising their own collection practices.

“The Bigger Picture: Design – Women – Society” highlights the work of female designers over a period of 120 years. At the same time, it uses selected items as the basis for an open forum which encourages forward-looking discussion about current developments. Another aim is to examine gender-specific and feminist approaches as part of a social transformation, and to understand them as perspectives and methods that enable gender relations and diversity, as well as social justice in political and economic power structures, to be included in “the bigger picture”. The show thus seeks to make women’s achievements more visible and to cover the social dimensions of design, while asking how we can design our world to be more inclusive and diverse in the future.

Exhibition areas

“The Bigger Picture” traces the creative achievements and working conditions of women in design from early Modernism to the present, with the aid of a wide variety of outstanding exhibits. These range from iconic objects and works that have only recently been rediscovered through to present-day activism networks and feminist design research. In this way it delves into a highly topical social issue that throws new light on modern design.

Works by over 90 female designers are shown, including leading Modernist figures such as Gunta Stölzl, Flora Steiger-Crawford, Eileen Gray, Charlotte Perriand and Lilly Reich, as well as international female entrepreneurs such as Florence Knoll and Armi Ratia, and Swiss businesswomen Rosmarie Baltensweiler, Margrit Linck and Elisabeth Feller. Contemporary works are represented by female designers such as Matali Crasset, Patricia Urquiola, Atelier NL, the Matri-Archi(tecture) collective, the Swiss game designer Philomena Schwab and the feminist platform Futuress.

Reform and Revolution 1900 – 1930

The first exhibition area focuses on the development of design in Europe and the USA, where modern design emerged as a career path in around 1900 – just when women were publicly campaigning for greater political involvement. These efforts to achieve emancipation were also reflected in design, such as in the work of social reformers Jane Addams and Louise Brigham – whose achievements would now be described as ‘social design’. Works by female designers at the Bauhaus, at the Vkhutemas (Higher Art and Technical Studios) in Russia, or at the Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau in Dresden are also explored. A little known world lies ready to be discovered in the section on the Loheland School, which was founded in the same year as the Bauhaus – 1919 – but only accepted women. At the Bauhaus women and men studied together, although women were still generally steered towards certain types of design such as textiles or ceramics. While better education and training made it easier for women to take up careers in design, it is evident that they continued to be pushed into traditional roles only too often.

With exhibits and projects by

Jane Addams/UK, Marianne Brandt/DE, Louise Brigham/US, Klara Fehrlin/CH, Bertha Günther/Lichtbildwerkstatt Loheland/DE, Louise Langgaard/Töpferei Loheland/DE, Ljubow Popowa/RU, Warwara Fjodorowna Stepanova/RU, Lux Guyer/CH, Gertrud Kleinhempel/DE, Alma Siedhoff-Buscher/DE, Warwara Fjodorowna Stepanova/RU, Gunta Stölzl/DE/CH, Edith Sutor/Töpferei Loheland/DE

Female Pioneers of the Modern Movement 1920 – 1950

The second exhibition area is dedicated to the period from the 1920s to the 1950s. In this era, female designers such as Charlotte Perriand, Eileen Gray and Clara Porset were achieving their first international successes in what was still a patriarchal society. Some of the female designers shown here worked closely with their male partners, including Ray Eames with her husband Charles, or Aino Aalto with Alvar Aalto, and Flora Steiger-Crawford with Rudolf Steiger. Although these women were often overshadowed by their partners, the exhibition reveals that many of them contributed far more to their joint projects than has hitherto been recognized. The best-known example of this is Charlotte Perriand. Her significance as a freelance designer has become more widely appreciated in recent years, resulting in the need for a fresh appraisal of her contribution to the legendary furniture designs that she developed with her famous male colleague Le Corbusier.

With exhibits and projects by

Aino Aalto/FI, Ray Eames/US, Eileen Gray/FR, Florence Knoll/US, Charlotte Perriand/FR, Trude Petri/DE, Clara Porset/CU/MX, Lilly Reich/DE, Flora Steiger-Crawford/CH, Eva Zeisel/HU/US

On the Move 1950 – 2000

The third exhibition area looks at the decades from 1950 to the end of the 1990s, when – from the 1960s onwards in particular – a second wave of feminism challenged the conservative post-war mentality. Events such as the Swiss Exhibition for Women's Work (SAFFA) in 1958 indicate that women tended to be associated with household activities even in the world of design, often producing exceptional work despite these limitations. The roles and opportunities available to women in design were steadily changing, and the ambivalence and upheavals of this turbulent period are reflected in the colourful Marimekko designs of the 1970s, or the sometimes spectacular postmodern items produced by Italian female designers such as Nanda Vigo, Gae Aulenti and Cini Boeri. This period also features a wide range of works from Switzerland: by the lighting designer and entrepreneur Rosmarie Baltensweiler, the manufacturer and photographer Doris Lehni Quarella, the interior architect and homes researcher Verena Huber, or the founders of the fashion label "Thema Selection": Sissi Zoebeli, Ursula Rodel and Katharina Bebié.

With exhibits and projects by

Gae Aulenti/IT, Galina Balaschowa/RU, Rosmarie and Rico Baltensweiler/CH, Liisi Beckmann/FI, Susi and Ueli Berger/CH, Cini Boeri/IT, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville/US, Anna Castelli Ferrieri/IT, Johanna Dahm/CH, Nanna Ditzel/DK, Elisabeth Feller/Feller AG/CH, Carmen Greutmann Bolzern/CH, Helene Haeusler/DD, Trix & Robert Haussmann/CH, Margarete Jahny/DDR, Rei Kawakubo/JP, Sandra Kuratle/AMOK/CH, Verena Huber/CH, Martha Huber-Villiger/CH, Grete Jalk/DK, Doris Lehni Quarella/Lehni AG/CH, Margrit Linck/CH, Greta Magnusson/SE/US, Matrix Architecture Collective/UK, Greta von Nessen/SE, Libuše Niklová/CS, Nathalie Du Pasquier/FR, Berta Rahm/CH, Annika Rimala/Marimekko/FI, Martha Rosler/US, Nelly Rudin/CH, Tatiana Samoilova/RU, Enid June Seeney/UK, See Red Women's Workshop/UK, Reiko Tanabe/JP, Thema Selection/CH, Massimo & Lella Vignelli/IT/US, Nanda Vigo/IT, Herta-Maria Witzemann/DE

The Bigger Picture 2000 – Today

The fourth area of the exhibition brings us up to the present day. Works by internationally established female designers such as Matali Crasset, Patricia Urquiola, Inga Sempé, Ilse Crawford and Hella Jongerius prove that the design success now being achieved by women is of course equal to that of men. Many female designers are pushing the established boundaries of their discipline and making a significant contribution to redefining design. They include Julia Lohmann, who is researching seaweed as a new and sustainable material, Christien Meindertsma, who scrutinizes production processes, and Sarah Harbarth, whose Swiss start-up Kuori makes sustainable synthetics from natural resources such as banana skins and nut shells. In addition to better-known areas such as object design and industrial design, this section of the exhibition also presents new and complex fields of design such as interaction design, game design, social design, educational design and so on. Female designers Philomena Schwab, Paulina Zybinska, Meret Wacker and many others are expanding the concept of design.

A selection of current projects also illustrates how social or feminist discourse in design and architecture is questioning the paradigms for authorship, training and recognition and goes hand-in-hand with diversity and intersectionality. In "Weaving Constellations of Identity", a work created specially for the exhibition, the Matri-Archi(itecture) collective explores the personal experience of African and Black female designers, while numerous networks and publications present established narratives and structures of design for discussion. The feminist platform Futuress, together with the research projects finally. and Gender Salon, set out to consider, discuss and communicate social themes dealing with gender, age and cultural background and develop alternatives to conventional ways of thinking.

With exhibits and projects by

5am Games/CH, Atelier NL/NL, Marjan van Aubel/NL, Birsel + Seck/US, BLESS eine GmbH/DE, Matali Crasset/FR, Ilse Crawford/Studioilse/UK, Annette Douglas Textiles AG/CH, finally./CH, Front/SE, Futuress/international, Catharina Grözinger/DE, Gunjan Gupta/IN, Hahn+Zimmermann/CH, Sarah Harbarth/Kuori/CH, Larissa Holaschke/Gender Salon/CH, Hyphen-Labs/UK/US/ES, Hella Jongerius and Louise Schouwenberg/NL, OAZA/HR, Barbara Kruger/US, Julia Lohmann/DE/FI, Matri-Archi(tecture)/CH/international, Christien Meindertsma/NL, Selina Reiterer and Oliver Maclott/CH, Philomena Schwab/Stray Fawn Studios/CH, Inga Sempé/FR, Nao Tamura/JP/US, Sissel Tolaas/NO, Faye Toogood/UK, Zoë Urand and Roman Engler/Flink/CH, Patricia Urquiola/ES/IT, Völlm + Walther/CH, Meret Wacker/CH, Paulina Zybinska/CH

Publication details / Thanks

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Information for media professionals

Media conference: Wednesday, 23 November 2022 at 11 a.m.

Introduction and tour of the exhibition: Nina Steinmüller, Collection Curator Vitra Design Museum and Susanna Kumschick, Director Gewerbemuseum Winterthur

Please let Media Relations know if you wish to attend.

Media Relations

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Press pack

A comprehensive press pack will be distributed at the media briefing. It can also be ordered from Media Relations or [downloaded from our website](#).

Media images

High resolution JPG files for download: gewerbemuseum.ch (→ [Activities for / the media](#))

More media images with shots of the display areas will follow after the opening of the exhibition.

Please use the media images only in connection with reporting on the exhibition “The Bigger Picture: Design – Women – Society” at the Gewerbemuseum Winterthur, and only during the exhibition period, citing the copyright information and crediting the photographers. Thank you!



Life at the Bauhaus: Group portrait of women weavers at the loom in the weaving mill of the Bauhaus Dessau, 1928. Photo: unknown.
© Bauhaus Archive, Berlin



The French architect and designer Charlotte Perriand (1903–1999) on the *Chaise longue basculante*, 1929. Collaboration between Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Jeanneret.
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Gunta Stölzl (1897–1983). From 1927 the first woman appointed to a leading artistic post at the Bauhaus in Dessau. Emigrated to Switzerland in 1931. Founder of the hand-weaving business S-P-H-Stoffe, the S+H-Stoffe weaving workshop and the Flora hand-weaving studio, Zurich; distinguished client list.



Margrit Linck (1897–1983), Linck Ceramics. In the 1930s, the first woman in Switzerland to open her own ceramics studio. She ran the pottery business and worked on the creative development of the products until 1983.



US designer and artist Ray Eames (1912–1988) working on a model, 1950. Numerous sketches of design classics – some jointly with her husband Charles Eames.
© Eames Office LLC



Rosmarie Baltensweiler (1927–2020), Baltensweiler AG, Lucerne. Assembly, 1970. Significant impact on Swiss lighting design with the Type 600 luminaire, 1951. Jointly with husband Rico Baltensweiler until 1987, then head of the family business.



Rosmarie Baltensweiler (1927–2020), Baltensweiler AG, Lucerne. Product designer, entrepreneur. Swiss Grand Prix Design 2019 from the Federal Office of Culture.



Johanna Dahm (*1947), Swiss jewellery designer with a professorship at Pforzheim/DE. Casting using the Ashanti technique. Photo: Fabrice Schaefer



Annette Douglas (*1971), Swiss textile designer, entrepreneur, Annette Douglas Textiles AG. Portrait with transparent acoustic curtain. Photo: Stefan Rapp



Christien Meindertsma (*1980) with the award-winning Flax Chair, 2015. The Dutchwoman, who is described as an “investigative designer”, worked with different firms to develop a new material from flax. © Studio Aandacht



Sarah Harbarth (*1996), Swiss designer, co-founder of cleantech start-up Kuori. Multidisciplinary project team. Portrait, project: From banana skins to shoe soles, 2022. © Kuori GmbH, Sarah Harbarth



Illustration from the feminist platform Futuress, 2021. Design as social and political practice. © Maria Júlia Rêgo



Nanda Vigo (1936–2020). Italian architect and designer. Portrait from 1985 with her designs Licht Tree (1984) and Cronotopo (1964). Photo: Gabriele Basilico, by kind permission of the Archivio Nanda Vigo, Milan



Julia Lohmann (*1977). The German designer in the Department of Seaweed Studio, while designer in residence at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2013. Photo: Petr Krejci



Meret Wacker (*1996), Swiss designer with “Imagicy”, a “serious game”. Its gender-neutral and collaborative approach is currently being developed further in young people’s workshops. Photo: Lukas Hilfiker