DESIGN MUSEUM BRUSSELS

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PRESS KIT

Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today
16.10.2024 > 09.03.2025

Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1980
16.10.2024 > 13.04.2025

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SUMMARY

1 LETTER OF INTENT

Together with the museum team, we are delighted to be dedicating all our exhibition spaces and programming from mid-October to spring 2025 to the visibilisation of women designers and their too-long overlooked impact on the history of design.

Following *The Bauhaus #itsalldesign* and *Night Fever* exhibitions, we are very pleased to be working with the Vitra Design Museum on the exhibition *Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today*.

By hosting this exhibition, we have also had the opportunity to explore the subject in Belgium. *Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1980* is a unique and original proposal, which will be accompanied by a publication in January. This new look at the history of design has also been an opportunity to take a closer look at the women designers in *the Plastic Design Collection*, as demonstrated by the installation in the window of our Reserves.
A museum cannot be neutral or indifferent to the issues facing our societies, and the Design Museum Brussels is no exception. Since its opening, and with a view to meeting the expectations of our visitors, the museum has set out not to share a single story, but to give an account of the multitude of sometimes untold stories, and to contribute to an understanding of the history and experience of design in our diverse societies.

Arnaud Bozzini, director of Design Museum Brussels

2 PRESS RELEASE

The Design Museum Brussels is putting the spotlight on female design talent with two new exhibitions opening on 16 October: '**Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today**', an international retrospective curated and produced by the Vitra Design Museum, and '**Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1980**'. With these two exhibitions, the museum dedicates a comprehensive programme to the visibility of women throughout the design history of the 20th century.

After a presentation in Weil am Rhein, Rotterdam and Vienna, the highly anticipated exhibition 'Here We Are! Women in Design, 1900 – Today' comes to Brussels. Through a rich collection of creative designs, the exhibition - curated by Susanne Graner, Viviane Stappmanns and Nina Steinmüller from the Vitra Design Museum team - traces the work and working conditions of women in design - from the beginnings of modernism to the present day. A journey through 120 years of design history that tells a multifaceted story of design in light of the struggle for equal rights and appreciation.
Women have made crucial contributions to the development of modern design, both creatively and commercially, and yet they are often overlooked. The exhibition puts the spotlight on 80 women designers who have helped shape the design industry, including pioneers Charlotte Perriand, Eileen Gray, Lilly Reich and Clara Porset or entrepreneurs Florence Knoll and Armi Ratia, as well as discoveries such as the socially-minded Jane Addams. The exhibition - structured chronologically in four sections - offers a fresh perspective on modern and contemporary design.

THE VIEW ON BELGIAN DESIGN

The museum is adding its own exhibition: 'Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1980' shows work by more than 50 female designers and makers active in Belgium between 1880 and 1980. Curators Javier Gimeno-Martinez, Katerina Serulus and Marjan Sterckx compiled a selection of mostly never-before-seen objects that represent a range of fields of applied arts and design. Rather than trying to make a statement about a 'feminine' style, the systems and networks that led to the work and to the low visibility of women in design are scrutinised. Through the thematic oppositions visibility-invisibility and professionalisation-home-making, the stories of women makers and their material culture are explored.

From the little-known work of Maria Sèthe to Hélène Denis-Bohy's bold modern typography for her feminist pamphlets, printed on the La Cambre press. From belle-époque ceramics made by designers trained at the first vocational school for women, the Institut Bischoffsheim, to raffia lacework made by anonymous hands in Congolese mission schools. The exhibition highlights the valuable but undervalued creativity of women in Belgium and the social context in which they were working professionally or not.

"If you look in books now, you would think those women did not exist. The exhibition brings out a lot of new names", the curators note. And this invisibility of women also has an impact on their canonisation in design history. "It is a necessary intermediate step to create an

exhibition entirely dedicated to women designers that creates awareness both within the academic field, museums and the general public, so that eventually it becomes automatic to include women."

A MUSEUM ANCHORED IN ITS TIME

The two exhibitions underline the mission of the Design Museum Brussels: to provide a context for the history of design and to play an active part in the debate. "A museum is not neutral; its mission is to take part in the societal issues of our time and to respond to the expectations of our audiences. It can make a multitude of sometimes untold stories visible, and so reflect the history and experience of our plural societies," comments Arnaud Bozzini, the museum's director.

Besides these two exhibitions, the Design Museum Brussels also proposes a rich programme of lectures and activities, which will also create links between this history and today's creation. During the guided tours 'through the eyes of', for example, visitors can discover the exhibitions through the eyes of contemporary designers.

3 HERE WE ARE! WOMEN IN DESIGN 1900 – TODAY

3.1 PRESENTATION OF THE EXHIBITION

Vitra
Design
Museum

Press release

Here We Are!
Women in Design 1900 – Today

23 September 2021 – 6 March 2022, Vitra Design Museum
Press conference and preview: 22 September 2021, 2 pm, Vitra Campus, Dome

Be it in furniture design, fashion 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 often fail to mention them. The exhibition »Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today« at the Vitra Design Museum seeks to help redress the balance. Presenting women designers from the past 120 years, it tells a new, many-voiced story of design against the background of the struggle for equal rights and recognition. Around eighty women in design are showcased in the exhibition, including protagonists of modernism like Eileen Gray, Charlotte Perriand, Lilly Reich, and Clara Porset, business leaders like Florence Knoll and Armi Ratia, but also lesser-known figures like the social reformer Jane Addams. Contemporary positions and future outlooks are represented by such designers as Matali Crasset, Patricia Urquiola, Julia Lohmann, and the Matri-Archi(tecture) collective.

In the present day, nearly half the design students are women, and women lead the way in many pathbreaking areas of design. With its rich display of fascinating exhibits, the exhibition »Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today« traces the work and working conditions of women in design from early modernism to the present – from iconic objects created by Eileen Gray to little-known new discoveries, contemporary activist networks, and feminist design research. It defines a clear stance on a key social issue and presents modern design in a new light.

The exhibition consists of four parts and takes visitors on a journey through the past 120 years of design history. The first part focusses on the development of design in Europe and the United States in around 1900, when design emerged as a profession in its own right. This was a time of intensifying struggle for female suffrage, too, and the bid for emancipation is reflected in the design produced, for example, by such social reformers as Jane Addams and Louise Brigham, whose works would today be described as »Social Design«. In New York, Elsie de Wolfe helped shape the new professional field of interior design, and women designers trained or taught at the Bauhaus, the Russian VKhUTEMAS, and the Deutsche Werkstätten in Dresden-Hellerau. A whole world as yet undiscovered by design history can be found at the Loheland School, which like the Bauhaus was established in 1919, but did only admit women. The Bauhaus accepted both male and female students, but many women who enrolled there found themselves studying crafts like textiles or ceramics. In presenting their activities, the exhibition demonstrates that while improved education may have meant increased professionalism, women were still being urged towards traditional roles.

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The exhibition's second part concentrates on the 1920s to 1950s, an era during which women designers like Charlotte Perriand, Eileen Gray, and Clara Porset began to make their name internationally even though patriarchal patterns endured. In the Parisian luxury industry, Cartier's creative director Jeanne Toussaint defined the style of jewellery creations for many decades. She led the »Département S« with its products for the modern woman and promoted ornaments and accessories projecting a progressive, self-confident image. Some of the women designers portrayed in this section collaborated closely with their partners: Ray Eames with her husband Charles, Aino Aalto with Alvar Aalto. While frequently overshadowed by their male counterparts, they often contributed far more substantially to the joint works than was assumed in the past. The best-known example in this context is Charlotte Perriand, whose share in the legendary furniture designs she created with her famous colleague Le Corbusier has been widely publicised in recent years, resulting in a complete reassessment of her work. The exhibition also features designers who worked independently all their lives, like the ceramic artist Eva Zeisel, who had her first solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art as early as 1946, and reminds us of those who merit far more attention than they have been given in the past, like Trude Petri.

The third part of the exhibition addresses the period from 1950 to the end of the 1980s. A second wave of feminism emerged in the 1960s to oppose the conservative post-war mentality evident, for example, in the Swiss Exhibition on Women's Work held in 1958. Women's work was still defined as domestic work, the home as women's proper sphere, but despite this limited view of their activities, many women were extraordinarily creative and productive. As role models and opportunities continued to change and evolve, the ambivalences and upheavals of these turbulent decades is evident both in the brightly colourful Marimekko design of the 1970s and in some of the spectacular postmodern objects created by such Italian designers as Nanda Vigo, Gae Aulenti, and Cini Boeri. Few people are aware that the futuristic interiors of the Russian space programme's orbital modules were also designed by a woman, Galina Balashova, whose work is gradually being discovered.

The exhibition's fourth part brings us to the present day. Works by established international designers including Matali Crasset, Patricia Urquiola, Inga Sempé, Ilse Crawford, or Hella Jongerius prove that today, a successful career in design is equally possible for both men and women. Some women designers have been pushing the boundaries of their discipline and make crucial contributions towards redefining the meaning of design as such. These include Julia Lohmann, whose research into marine algae promises to yield new, sustainable materials, as well as Christien Meindertsma with her critical examination of production processes. This part of the exhibition also introduces a number of recent initiatives demonstrating how feminist discourse questions patterns of authorship, education, and recognition in design and architecture in the light of such concepts as diversity and intersectionality. In »Weaving Constellations of Identity«, for example, the Matri-Archi(tecture) collective addresses the personal experience of African and Black designers in a work created specially for this exhibition, while numerous networks and publications put the established design narratives and structures up for discussion. The workshops and community platform offered by the Futuress collective, for example, outline a striking alternative to academic education with its many limitations.

In offering a broad survey of different positions, the exhibition »Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today« is as multifaceted as developments and ongoing debates on feminism in our society. It thus provides a fresh, updated look at the story of modern design and gives plenty of thought-provoking impulses about what design should be in the twenty-first century, who defines it, and who it is for.

The exhibition is accompanied by a rich programme of workshops, online talks, and events on the Vitra Campus.

General information:

Exhibition title:	Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today
Duration:	23 September 2021 – 6 March 2022
Curators:	Viviane Stappmanns, Nina Steinmüller, Susanne Graner
Assistant curator:	Josipa Špehar
Exhibition Design	Nathalie Opris, René Herzogenrath, Stefani Fricker
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3.2 TEXTS OF THE EXHIBITION

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 showcased 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 majority of the works on display are from the Vitra Design Museum's collection.

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 the quality of good design? 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.

DESIGNING PROTEST

The vast number of posters and handbills addressing voting rights for women illustrates how important design was in promulgating the women's movement. At a time when commercial advertising was just beginning to discover the advantages of professional design, Britain's suffragettes successfully created an identity for the movement that helped spread their message far and wide. White for purity, purple for dignity, green for hope: the editor of the Votes for Women newspaper, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence (1867–1954), designed the colour scheme for the suffragettes' flags and badges in 1908. When combined with their signature white dresses, this enabled women of all social classes to project an elegant image while ensuring a strong impact in the black and white images of the rapidly evolving mass media.

IN THE MEDIA

The campaigns of the women's movement beginning in the mid-19th century gave rise to a more general awareness of women in society. The 1873 World's Fair in Vienna was the first to devote special displays to their lives and work, with numerous 'Women's Exhibitions' following in its wake. While De Vrouw, Salon des Arts Ménagers or the Swiss SAFFA did not fail to address women's career options, all too often the desire for autonomy and visibility clashed with a stereotyped understanding of women's roles. The exhibits tended to focus on needlework and other crafts that conformed to middle-class ideals of femininity and presented careers centred on the family or social work. Journals like Die Welt der Frau (Woman's World), a supplement to the popular Gartenlaube (Pergola), cautiously began to

broach political issues raised by the women's movement, but mostly they were concerned with childcare, housekeeping and fashion tips.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF DESIGN

'Social design' may be a new term, but the ideas and objectives have been around since the late 19th century, when high-minded citizens set out to improve living conditions for the less privileged. Many of the leaders of this endeavour were women. Jane Addams (1860–1935) hailed from a prosperous family based in Illinois, USA. In 1889 she joined forces with a college friend, Ellen Gates Starr (1859–1940), to establish a community centre in one of the most poverty-stricken areas of Chicago. Modelled on British settlement houses like Toynbee Hall, Hull House catered to the needs of a swiftly growing immigrant population by offering literature, history and art classes, as well as crafts workshops. Many educated women from the higher echelons of society volunteered to teach there. The settlement movement also inspired Louise Brigham (1875–1956), who designed homemade furniture built from inexpensive materials and thus became an early pioneer of recycling and Do It Yourself.

REFORM AND REVOLUTION
1900—1930

Until the late 19th 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 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.

WOMEN AT WORK

As industrialisation accelerated in the mid 19th century century, a number of movements advocating social and design reform arose to counter its effects. Their proponents criticised the mass production of substandard wares and called for a marriage of arts and crafts to produce beautiful, well-made things. The schools and workshops they established have become household names, for example the Wiener Werkstätte; what is less well known is that many women trained and worked there. In recent years, however, their contribution is gradually receiving the recognition it deserves. Between 1898 and 1938, the Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau in Dresden counted more than fifty women among its creative staff,

including figures like Gertrud Kleinhempel and Else Wenz-Viëtor. The Hellerau product catalogues even listed their names next to their designs – a novelty at that time which, incidentally, makes it possible for us to get a fuller idea of their oeuvres.

EMANCIPATION AND EDUCATION

Few institutions have rivalled the reputation and stature of the Bauhaus School. Established in Weimar in 1919, the Bauhaus accepted women students on a par with men – an exhilarating idea given most art schools' discouraging policies at the time. Disillusionment was in store, however, for many of the numerous female students who enrolled at the Bauhaus only to find themselves shunted to classes teaching stereotypically feminine crafts. In recent years, design historians have at last begun to acknowledge and study their work. A look at the VkhUTEMAS art and design school operating in Moscow from 1920 to 1930 reveals how political conditions and organisational structures can influence the nexus between options, perceptions and gender. A whole world as yet undiscovered by design history can be found at the Loheland School, which offered education and training in an artists' community. It was founded in 1919, like the Bauhaus, which it resembled in many respects. The crucial difference was that Loheland did not admit men.

PIONEERS OF MODERNISM
1920—1950

In Europe and North America – the Global North, as we call it today – the social upheavals of the early 20th 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 artists' 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.

JEANNE TOUSSAINT AND CARTIER

For more than fifty years, Jeanne Toussaint's (1887–1976) assured taste determined the style of Cartier creations. She joined the jewellery manufacturer about 1920, first looking after the leatherwares and accessories departments. Her role increased with the establishment of the Département S in the mid-1920s, not least because she was also appointed to the inner circle that discussed and developed new creations. Toussaint's influence was crucial, especially when she took over as creative director in 1933 after the departure of Louis Cartier, with whom she had long been romantically involved. Every piece of jewellery made by Cartier is the product of collective projects, but it was Toussaint who decided which items were to be manufactured.

PROFESSIONALS

Although women's education improved steadily in the 20th century, those who studied art and design often found themselves learning skills that had long been considered particularly suited to women: drawing and illustration, crafts and needlework. With a diploma or a degree under their belt, however, they now had access to careers that had previously been inaccessible to them. In the ceramics industry, women first worked as porcelain decorators and later as designers. For many of them, years would pass before they received the recognition they deserved. Two of these designers are introduced here. Eva Zeisel began her career as a ceramic artist working for employers all over Europe before she emigrated to the USA in 1938, where she was successful both as a designer and as a teacher. Her contemporary Trude Petri was also trained along traditional lines and mostly worked for Königliche Porzellanmanufaktur KPM in Berlin. A detailed study of her work has yet to be made.

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.

1949
ONE IS NOT BORN, BUT RATHER BECOMES, A WOMAN.

In her book The Second Sex, French writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) confronts a centuries-old understanding of gender with a completely new concept. For de Beauvoir, there is no such thing as a 'female character'. She suggests that being a woman is a social fact, since gender roles are shaped by society. In what is probably the most frequently quoted sentence from the book, de Beauvoir says: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'. The second Sex is translated into more than 40 languages.

1950
BUILDING SUBURBIA

In the industrialised countries, the housing shortages of the post-war period trigger an unprecedented building boom that continues as prosperity returns. More and more private households are motorised, and the radius of cities expands. The coveted single-family homes are designed for small nuclear families and their stereotypical role models.

1963
THE PROBLEM THAT HAS NO NAME.

The attack launched by American writer Betty Friedan (1921–2006) on the idealised image of the stay-at-home housewife and mother strikes a chord with millions of women who feel trapped in their roles. Her book becomes an instant bestseller and is considered the cornerstone of the so called 'second wave of feminism'. Friedan is later criticised for presenting the interests of a privileged middle class as a universal problem.

1971
WHY HAVE THERE BEEN NO GREAT WOMEN ARTISTS?

A cornerstone of feminist art history, the essay Why Have There Been no Great Women Artists? by American art historian Linda Nochlin (1931–2017) unmasks the male-dominated structures that motivate criteria like artistic genius or authorship and calls for a paradigm shift. Similar approaches emerge in architecture and design in the 1980s. A key text in this context is the essay Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design published in 1986 by design historian Cheryl Buckley (1956).

1972
LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS

The works of Denise Scott Brown (1931) and Robert Venturi (1925–2018) help foster postmodern architecture. Together with Steve Izenour, they publish Learning from Las Vegas

in 1972, a pathbreaking study of the communicative and symbolic functions of Las Vegas architecture. Scott Brown and Venturi begin working together in 1967, but when he is awarded the Pritzker Prize in 1991 – architecture's most prestigious award – his partner is not included in the honour. Denise Scott Brown is an advocate for women in architecture and an outspoken critic of the biased 'Star System' that marginalises women architects.

1973
THE WOMAN'S BUILDING

The attempts by feminists in the early 1970s to overhaul the archaic structures prevailing at art and design schools in the USA were largely unsuccessful. Following their rejection by established institutions, graphic designer Sheila Levrant de Bretteville (1940), artist Judy Chicago (1939), and art historian Arlene Raven (1944–2006) in 1973 decide to set up the Woman's Building in Los Angeles. For nearly twenty years this independent school provides a place for self-determined education in art and design for women.

1974
SEE RED WOMEN'S WORKSHOP

A call issued in a feminist publication lays the foundations for See Red Women's Workshop, a British collective that combats stereotypical depictions of women in the media by inviting designers and visual artists to create posters and calendars of their own. Bold graphics and tongue-in-cheek messages express the personal experiences of women and their role in wider struggles for change. For sixteen years the collective produces works of its own as well as posters commissioned by radical groups and campaigns.

1975
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR

The UN General Assembly designates 1975 as International Women's Year. The first UN World Conference on Women is held in Mexico City in July with the aim of promoting gender equality, integrating women into economic development, and fostering peace. The initiative's emblem, designed by Valerie Pettis (1948), combines a dove, a Venus symbol, and an equal sign. While it is adopted in many countries, sceptical voices object to women's equality being treated like corporate advertising campaign.

1975
SEMIOTICS OF THE KITCHEN

In a six-minute video, American conceptual artist Martha Rosler (1943) explores the media image of the housewife. Referencing the choreography of cooking shows, she displays and describes the 'ingredients' of everyday domestic life from A to Z. The work has become one of the best-known works of feminist art.

1976
COURAGE

The 1970s are a dynamic decade for feminist publications. While these journals and magazines address important issues, the working models tested in their editorial offices are equally remarkable. The German magazine Courage, for example, is created by a non-hierarchical group with no clear allocation of tasks. Decisions are made in the collective, as suggested by the cover of its inaugural issue.

1980
MATRIX FEMINIST DESIGN CO-OPERATIVE

By addressing the relationship between gender and the built environment, the London-based Matrix collective tackles an issue that has largely been ignored. They publish a highly praised book revealing the deficits of cities produced by male-dominated urban planning. At the practical level, Matrix design social housing and women's shelters and launch a number of initiatives aimed at making the architectural profession more accessible to women.

1984
THE MASTER'S TOOLS WILL NEVER DISMANTLE THE MASTER'S HOUSE

In the late 1960s, women's movements begin to draw criticisms for being too preoccupied with the situation of privileged, white, middle-class women while neglecting the issues faced by women of colour, immigrant women, and women who are poor. In the mid-1980s, women like Black feminist and poet Audre Lorde (1934–92) give these criticisms a voice. In a much-quoted essay Lorde writes: 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.' Some years later, in 1989, American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw coins the term 'intersectionaliy' to describe the overlap of different forms of discrimination, for example due to gender or colour.

1985
GUERRILLA GIRLS

The New-York-based Guerrilla Girls campaign for more gender equality and diversity in the art world. Beginning with simple posters, the anonymous female artists – they always appear in gorilla masks – soon diversify their range of expression to include performances and subversive actions that draw attention to bias and prejudice, often in a humorous way. The Guerrilla Girls have remained internationally active and continue to expose gender and ethnic bias in society and the art world of the twenty-first century.

A NEW GENERATION

Although a growing number of colleges, universities and art academies had opened their doors to women by the 1920s, many years passed before women graduates were no longer seen as bold individualists. It was only after the Second World War that a whole generation of highly skilled women with excellent qualifications and extensive professional networks appeared on the scene. Like their male counterparts, they founded studios and conquered

markets. In Italy, women designers often began their careers after obtaining a degree in architecture, while in the Nordic countries, it was more common to train as a joiner or cabinetmaker or study at an applied arts school. Leading journals like Domus now began to recognise the work of women designers, who also won awards and prizes at international exhibitions.

WOMAN'S SPHERE

In the 1950s, the ideal of the stay-at-home housewife who looked after her family and kept everything neat and tidy in a home of their own continued to hold sway in many Western countries. Some women designers managed to turn the stereotype into successful careers, and if the design canon largely ignores them, this is not only because their work was often seen as having a distinctly 'feminine' touch. The legend of the artist working and creating in splendid isolation is well established in design, too, but women designers were often members of a larger team. While Brownie Wise (1913–1992) may not have designed the iconic Tupperware containers, she did invent the innovative homebased 'party plan' marketing system for which the product is famous. The decoration Enid Seeney (1931–2011) designed for the Homemaker series of tableware, which sold in its millions in the 1950s, helped popularise the forms and shapes of post-war modernism. Until recently, both these designers rarely received mention.

ON DISPLAY

Few exhibitions made about women by women shed as glaring a light on the ambiguity of such ventures as the Swiss Exhibition for Women's Work SAFFA held in Zurich in 1958. The show's premiere thirty years earlier in Bern had been a product of the women's suffrage movement. Planned as a trade fair to promote the achievements of women in society, business and industry, the 1958 SAFFA touted a conservative image of women, cementing the cliché of more and less feminine occupations. A specially selected team of women architects and women artists designed the exhibition grounds as well as the buildings in which 'typical' women's jobs such as teacher or nurse were showcased. Another focus of the exhibition was homemaking, with a residential tower and model houses that sought to reconcile tradition with modernity, all the while presenting the home as women's proper sphere.

DESIGNING UNDER SOCIALISM

In Europe's socialist countries, women's equality and independence was just as important as collectivism. Women were to participate fully in public life and in the production of wares and goods. That, at least, was the official line, but there were gaps between ideals and reality. Many working women had to manage their family and household as well as organising supplies in the face of continual shortages. Ideology ruled everywhere, including in design, which was defined as a collective task. Most women designers were engineering or design graduates who went on to work for state-owned institutes or industrial combines. Independent careers were extremely rare. In recent years, research has started focusing on the achievements of women designers in socialist countries as well.

DESIGN FOR LIVING

The market for printed furnishing textiles and wallpaper in light colours and cheerful patterns flourished in the post-war reconstruction boom. People were ready for a breath of fresh air. More than in other areas of design, modern, abstract art became an important source of inspiration. In a bid to boost demand for consumer goods, ambitious shows like the 1949 Werkbund exhibition Neues Wohnen in Cologne or Britain Can Make It, held in London in 1946, brought modern design to wide audiences. Wallpaper patterns and furnishing fabrics were often conceived by women who had started to work as designers with textile and wallpaper manufacturers after graduating from art school or studying textile design. Their influence on consumer tastes was all the more far-reaching because they generally stayed with leading companies for many years.

TOGETHER

All design requires close collaboration. A concept absorbs many ideas and passes through many hands before it is ready for production. A particularly interesting situation occurs when two designers are partners in business and private life. In many parts of the world, their gender identity is largely irrelevant nowadays and these couples can focus on their joint work at eye level, but it took a long time for women designers' share in a partnership's success to be acknowledged. Designer couples Trix and Robert Haussmann and Lella and Massimo Vignelli are examples of equal partners projecting a joint image. While this makes it difficult to determine each designer's share in their creations, there are always some instances where one partner alone was in charge of a project's development.

MAKING A MARK

When we see design, we usually see the work of one particular designer, but we do not usually understand the role played by entrepreneurs behind the scenes. Yet it is their vision and adventurous spirit that make many design projects possible in the first place. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Harry Bertoia or Achille Castiglioni are household names – less so Maddalena de Padova (1928–2016) or Florence Knoll, two of the businesswomen who promoted their success. The Finnish company Marimekko is something of a phenomenon in this context. Co-founder Armi Ratia was a trained textile designer and the company's memorable fabric patterns were mostly created by women designers. Marimekko's bold clothing and accessories in vivid colours became hugely popular in the 1960s and '70s, not least because they projected an up-beat, active image that influenced generations of women.

TEACHERS, LECTURERS, PROFESSORS

When assessing the achievements of women designers, it is important to bear in mind that many were active in teaching roles as well as working creatively. In those arts and crafts traditionally considered suitable for 'women', such as drawing, needlework, textile design and ceramics, this had been possible from around 1900. Unsurprisingly, the first Bauhaus workshop to be headed by a woman – Gunta Stölzl – was the weaving workshop. One of the first women to obtain a degree in industrial design from the Pratt Institute in New York was Lucia

DeRespinis. Graduating in 1952, she later became one of the first female professors there. Many women designers have influenced design history by passing on their skills and knowledge to future generations. More than that, their teaching activities have helped establish less prominent disciplines like textile or interior design within the academic system.

DESIGN AS RESEARCH

Plywood, tubular steel, plastics, injection moulding, 3-D printing: design and innovation go hand in hand, resulting in ever new materials and manufacturing processes. This has brought design into close alliance with industry – a web of relationships that is only recently beginning to be picked apart. At the forefront are a number of women designers who scrutinise and often rethink how raw materials are sourced, how businesses operate and how production works. They revive traditional manufacturing techniques and rediscover lost materials, which they combine with new inventions of their own to address what innovation might look like if sustainable resource management – and not only commercial success – were the goal.

WORKING ON PROGRESS

New research projects and critical debates soon rode in on the fresh wave of feminism that formed around the turn of the millennium. While feminist scrutiny of design history has revealed a preponderance of male protagonists, it also shows that our view of everyday objects and those who created them has been largely determined by a small circle of Western designers and academics. The initiatives presented here illustrate how designers today are working to remedy this. A new generation of women designers is drawing attention to the works of their predecessors, major schools and universities are beginning to discuss gender mainstreaming and
marginalisation. Feminists are developing education networks focused on fairness rather than elitism, and the need for fresh narratives and non-biased language finally has reached design, too.

INTERFACES

Design as a profession is becoming ever more complex and multifaceted – less about the shape of things and more about bringing together different areas of research to provide innovative and sometimes provocative answers to present and future challenges. Working in a transdisciplinary field requires a great deal of expert knowledge, but vision and team spirit are even more important. These are exactly the qualities characterising women designers who over the past few years took methodology to a new level by, for example, tapping solar energy or integrating synthetic scent molecules. When design, natural science and information technology meet, new products emerge that make our everyday lives easier, help us protect the environment – or inspire us to take a critical look at new technologies.

RETHINKING TRADITIONS

Design is about much more than simply finding solutions to specific problems. Objects tell stories, they define our place in our culture, strengthen our sense of identity, and mirror everyday habits and traditional customs. What do objects reveal about their origins and the ideals embraced by the society that produced them? A number of contemporary women designers have begun to scrutinise the canon of forms and materials on which the objects we use every day are based, pointing out a path to a more diverse, more integrative, more openminded approach to design. This includes new perspectives for non-Western design traditions as well. The objects created by Gunjan Gupta, for example, draw on India's cultural history to reference traditional moving, sitting and working patterns. The work of transdisciplinary design studio BLESS offers a humorous twist that turns our expectations of everyday objects inside out and thus pushes us to reexamine our habits and routines.

THE BIGGER PICTURE 1990—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 maledominated 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 our past and our 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.

3.3 COLOPHON

Atomium + Design Museum Brussels

Chairwoman: Zoubida Jellab

General Director: Julie Almau Gonzalez

Deputy Director: Johan Vandenperre

Deputy Director: Arnaud Bozzini

Design Museum Brussels

Director: Arnaud Bozzini

Exhibitions: Valentine Mathieu

Public and Activities: Terry Scott, Vesara Molla

Communication and Press:
Rachel Van Nevel, Elisabeth Wielemans, BE CULTURE

Technical team:
Johan Vandenperre, Vargas L.A.

Graphic design: Sign

Graphic production: Bulle Color

Condition reports: Soline Heurtebise, Amélie Van Liefferinge

Translation: Alex Stockman, Blurs

Interns: Elise Aymon, Marie Lafrance, Natascha Watt

Welcome Team and Maintenance:
Zouhair Ftouh, Younes Louchi, Fatima Stitou, Silke De Corte, Louis Voet

Acknowledgements to the Design Museum Brussels team

Cristina Bargna, Cristina M. Carnelos, Glenn Olivier, Jérôme Petit, Florent Sandron, Gadiel Ulanovsky and the team of the Atomium.

Vitra Design Museum

Curators: Viviane Stappmanns, Nina Steinmüller, Susanne Graner

Curatorial Assistant: Josipa Spehar

Exhibition Design: Nathalie Opris, René Herzogenrath, Stefani Fricker

Exhibition Graphics: Judith Brugger

Adaptation for the Design Museum Brussels: Lisa Cipriano

Technical Director: Stefani Fricker

Technical Planning: René Herzogenrath, Nathalie Opris

Senior Art Technicians: Olaf Krüger, Niels Tofahrn

Conservation: Susanne Graner, Lena Hönig

Partnerships: Jasmin Zikry

Exhibition Tour: Isabel Serbeto, Cora Harris

Director: Mateo Kries

COO, Deputy Director: Sabrina Handler
Head of Finance: Heiko Hoffmann

Our sincere thanks go to our lenders.
An exhibition by the Vitra Design Museum

3.4 ABOUT THE CURATORS

SUSANNE GRANER

Susanne Graner has been Head of Collection and Archive at the Vitra Design Museum since October 2010. She is in charge of developing and implementing strategies for its expansion and consolidation and oversees the conservation of the collection. Susanne Graner has also been involved in numerous exhibition projects at the Vitra Design Museum, including "Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today" (2021), "Colour Rush – An Installation by Sabine Marcelis" (2022) and "Science Fiction Design: From Space Age to Metaverse" (2024). She writes for specialist publications and magazines, gives lectures at universities and museums and is a member of the jury at design competitions and design fairs.

Previously, she was at Die Neue Sammlung / The International Design Museum Munich from 2006 to 2010, where she specialised in the use of plastics in design. She has worked as a conservator, both freelance and staff, for the workshops of the Bavarian Office for the Preservation of Historical Monuments and for the Bavarian Administration of Palaces, Gardens and Lakes.

Susanne Graner holds a Master of Arts degree in Art Technology and Conservation Science from the Technical University of Munich.

VIVIANE STAPPMANNS

Viviane Stappmanns (b. 1976) was part of the team at Vitra Design Museum from 2013 to 2024. From 2018, she has been working as a Curator, initially for the Vitra Design Museum Gallery, where she has been in charge of exhibitions including "Christien Meindertsma: Beyond the Surface" (2018), "Lake Verea: Paparazza Moderna" (2018), "Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg: Better Nature" (2019), and "Typology: An Ongoing Study of Everyday Items" (2020). Viviane Stappmanns has also been involved in the exhibition project »Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today« (2021) at the Vitra Design Museum.

Previously, she was editorial coordinator and later editor at the "(inside) Australian Design Review" (2002–2005) and curator of the Audio Design Museum (a project by the Australia Council for the Arts, 2010–2011). From 2002 to 2009, she taught in the Design History and Theory stream at the RMIT School of Architecture and Urban Design in Melbourne. As a journalist and editor, she was part of numerous publication projects, including the series "The Design Guides" (2006–2012), published by Alphabet Press, which she also co-founded.

Viviane holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and a Master of Arts degree in Interior Design from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Melbourne, Australia. She is currently a Guest Professor at Karlsruhe University of the Arts (HfG).

NINA STEINMÜLLER

Nina Steinmüller (b. 1979) is the Collections Curator at the Vitra Design Museum. She was assistant curator of the exhibition "Night Fever: Designing Club Culture 1960 – Today" (2018) and served as editorial manager and co-editor of the "Atlas of Furniture Design" (2019). Among the exhibitions she co-curated are "Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today" (2021), "Colour Rush! An Installation of Sabine Marcelis" (2022), "Garden Futures: Designing with Nature" (2023) and "Science Fiction Design: From Space Age to Metaverse" (2024).

Previously, she was a member of the Bild und Zeit postgraduate research group, part of eikones / NCCR Iconic Criticism at the University of Basel, from 2009 to 2011. In 2013 she co-published the anthology "BildBewegungen / ImageMovements" with Pirkko Rathgeber. Nina studied Arts Management in Potsdam and holds a Master of Arts degree in Art History and Cultural Studies from Berlin's Humboldt University. She has a DPhil in Art History from the University of Basel. Her doctoral thesis on contemporary art at the University of Basel has been published in 2021 by Brill Publishers | Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

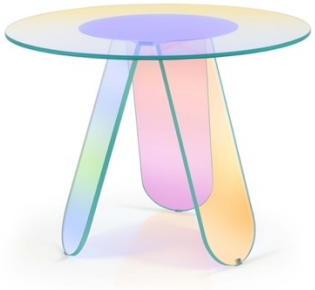
3.5 VITRA DESIGN MUSEUM

The Vitra Design Museum numbers among the world's leading museums of design. It is dedicated to the research and presentation of design, past and present, and examines design's relationship to architecture, art and everyday culture. In the main museum building by Frank Gehry, the museum annually mounts two major temporary exhibitions, such as "Plastic: Remaking Our World" (2022), "Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today" (2021), "Home Stories: 100 Years, 20 Visionary Interiors" (2020), "Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design 1924 – Today" (2019), "Balkrishna Doshi: Architecture for the People" (2019), or "Charles & Ray Eames. The Power of Design" (2017/18). In addition, smaller shows are presented in the Vitra Design Museum Gallery, which often follow a more contemporary and experimental approach.

The Vitra Schaudepot which was designed by Herzog & de Meuron, presents approximately 400 key objects from the extensive collection and hence resembles one of the largest permanent collections and research sites on modern furniture design world-wide. The annual presentation at the Vitra Schaudepot reveals the collection in a fresh light every year. Often developed with renowned designers, many of the museum's exhibitions cover highly relevant contemporary themes, such as future technologies, sustainability or questions like mobility and social responsibility. Others are presenting historical topics or monographic exhibitions on iconic designers.

The work of the Vitra Design Museum is based on its collection, which includes not only key objects of design history, but also the estates of several important design personalities. The museum library and document archive are available to researchers upon request. The museum conceives its exhibitions for touring, and they are shown at venues around the world. On the Vitra Campus, they are complemented by a diverse programme of events, guided tours, and workshops.

3.6 IMAGES



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2019
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RolyPoly
2018
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Cini Boeri
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1952
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1932
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4 UNTOLD STORIES - WOMEN DESIGNERS IN BELGIUM 1880-1980

4.1 TEXTS OF THE EXHIBITION

This exhibition gathers for the first time works of more than 50 women designers and creators who were active in Belgium between 1880 and 1980. Relying on recent research, the Design Museum Brussels presents objects and designs from various disciplines spanning applied and graphic arts to product and interior design. The pieces are curated from more than 40 public and private collections, many of which have never been shown publicly before. Due to the patriarchal forces that historically shaped design, the work of women designers is often absent or invisible in collections, archives and academic literature.

This exhibition seeks to highlight the (still) largely unknown and undervalued creativity and innovation of women in various fields of applied arts. Represented are not only more famous names, but also the anonymous women who worked behind the scenes in corporations and/or domestic or colonial contexts. Moving away from the focus on individual "pioneering" designers, the attention turns towards collaboration, networks and material culture through a thematic approach. Using the axes of "visibility-invisibility and professionalisation-domesticity", the exhibition explores several as yet untold histories of women designers and creators.

VISIBILITY

Some women knew early on how to generate visibility for their designs. Clara Voortman-Dobbelaere from Ghent's liberal bourgeoisie, for example, signed her work explicitly and visibly with her feminine first name in full. Others claimed visibility for their work by participating in shows: group exhibitions at home and abroad, or specific in "women's exhibitions". These were organised numerous times during the Belle Époque to highlight the decorative achievements of both known and lesser-known women, often to demonstrate their so-called virtue and charity.

From the interwar period onwards, female designers attained visibility by joining modernist networks. Mig Quinet maintained close ties with the editors of the influential Brussels avant-garde magazine *7 Arts* and with artists such as Akarova and Marcel-Louis Baugniet. After World War II, ceramists Louise Servaes and Lutgart De Meyer were the only female founding members of the Antwerp art circle G58, where they also exhibited their work. Awards also played a role; for example, textile designer Anne Beetz received institutional recognition in 1980 when the prestigious Design Centre in Brussels presented her with the triennial Signe d'Or design award.

Design, more specifically graphic design, was sometimes employed as a form of activism and empowerment by women such as Hélène Denis-Bohy, Danielle Siongers, Anne Delcoigne and Nicole van Goethem. Through feminist pamphlets, posters and graphic design for the women's rights movement, they contributed to the visibility of the struggle for gender equality in all its dimensions.

INVISIBILITY

In many cases, the work of women in design has remained anonymous and underexposed, restricting their visibility in modern design history. Occasionally, authorship was simply concealed by misattribution, as it happened with sculptor Jenny Lorrain's bronze vases exhibited at the First International Exposition of Modern Decorative Arts in Turin in 1902.
As well as in later years many women worked behind the scenes at home, in factories and in design offices. Take for example Belgian lace: despite its huge importance as an export, little is known about the countless lace-makers who designed and created the pieces, except for a few names like Jenny Minne-Dansaert. At the Saint-Ghislain ceramics factory established in 1881, scores of anonymous working-class women were responsible for the colourful designs of its ceramic tableware.

Other women developed their own practice while also working on an individual basis for firms, which released the designs under the brand name. Sylvie Feron, for example, designed furniture, wallpaper, carpets and lighting fixtures for the Brussels department store Vanderborght. Illustrator Marie Wabbes drew patterns for fabrics of the famous Brussels children's brand Dujardin for 25 years.

Within artistic couples or design duos, women often remained in the shadow of their male partners. Thus, the works of Maria Sèthe, Elisabeth Van Hoegaerden, Aimée Huysmans and Dani Franque are still insufficiently known and recognised.

PROFESSIONALISATION

Starting in the late 19th century, women in design made great strides in terms of their professionalisation. Education was crucial to this. The founding of the Bischoffsheim Institute in Brussels in 1865, an initiative of the liberal bourgeoisie, was a milestone in vocational design education for women. The initial aim was to give working-class girls and women access to better-paying professions in the field of industrial arts through high-quality secular schooling. The Art Nouveau artists Adolphe Crespin and Philippe Wolfers worked there as teachers. In later years, women, some of them alumni, such as Marcelle Jasinski and Elisabeth Prin, began teaching at the school.

Following in the footsteps of the Bischoffsheim Institute, other "women-only" schools and applied arts courses were created. Thus allowing women access to general artistic education, something they had long been denied. In Brussels and Antwerp, academies slowly opened their doors to women in the late 1880s. The Ghent Academy established a course in "Women's Artistry" around 1911, taught by Hélène De Bie-Buyst, with design assignments for decorative objects in various materials, such as leather, metal and textiles.

At the Higher Institute of Decorative Arts in Brussels, better known as La Cambre, men and women were welcome as students and as teachers since its founding by Henry van de Velde in 1927. Soon the female students outnumbered the male students. The school became an incubator for an important generation of women designers. Elisabeth De Saedeleer left La Cambre after World War II to establish her own weaving school in Uccle, following in the

footsteps of designer Henriette Bosché, who had started a studio for decorative arts in her home in Ixelles in 1910.

DOMESTICITY

The field of "domestic crafts" shows how women, mainly by and for the decoration of their homes, shaped their own visual and material culture. Their craftwork was often considered as inferior. This section highlights the ingenuity and creativity of women makers, as individuals or collectively, in building and expressing their vision.

Early on in school, girls and young women learned the manual skills aimed at building their future as homemakers, such as embroidery, crochet and sewing. The embroideries presented here exemplify that exemplify these women's aptitude and skill. Oftentimes in Catholic education, the goal of these activities was to convey both Christian and paternalistic values and virtues. Beguines and nuns also engaged in domestic crafts, sometimes for charity.

Adult women and housewives were further shaped by women's groups organised around the traditional family structure. These groups advised women on how to arrange their homes and how to develop into conscious educators of their children. Housewives were expected to create the optimal climate for the personal development of every family member. Functional interior design was a significant aspect of this.

The second wave of feminism in the 1970s brought about other perspectives on women's role in society. Feminist groups linked the oppression of women to patriarchy and capitalism. To reinforce their views, they developed their own posters, pamphlets, signs and fanzines. From then on, they used the skills meant to teach "virtuousness" to build their protest.

4.2 COLOPHON

Curated by Javier Gimeno Martinez, Katarina Serulus and Marjan Sterckx

Exhibition produced by Design Museum Brussels

Atomium + Design Museum Brussels

Zoubida Jellab, Chairwoman

Julie Almau Gonzalez, General Director

Johan Vandenperre, Deputy Director

Arnaud Bozzini, Deputy Director

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Johan Vandenperre, Vargas L.A. Technical team

Valentine Mathieu, Marie Lafrance Scenography

Esther Le Roy Studio
Esther Le Roy, Sarah Cleeremans, assisted by Pauline Marechal and Olivia Sauser Typography and Graphic design

Soline Heurtebise, Amélie Van Liefferinge Condition Reports

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Elise Aymon, Marie Lafrance, Natascha Watt Interns

Zouhair Ftouh, Younes Louchi, Fatima Stitou, Silke De Corte, Louis Voet, Welcome Team and Maintenance

Acknowledgements to the Design Museum Brussels team

Cristina Bargna, Cristina M. Carnelos, Glenn Olivier, Jérôme Petit, Florent Sandron and the team of the Atomium

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Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (Werner Adriaenssens,

Ria Cooreman), École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels de La Cambre (Régine Carpentier), AVG-Carhif (Els Floor), Keramis (Ludovic Recchia), Marie Becuwe, Thierry Belenger, Jo Braeken, Lissa Choukrane,

Sara De Bondt, Sofie De Caigny, Els Degryse, Virginie Devillez, Caroline Dumalin, Fredie Floré, Carlee Forbes, Ko Goubert, Bart Hellinck, Noelle Hennebert, Alain Hens, Pia Jacques, Apolline Malevez, Caroline Mierop,
Tine Poot, Sarah van Beurden, Lyse Vancampenhoudt, Anne Van Loo, Eva Van Regenmortel, Robin Vinois,
Sofie Vandenbussche, Apolline Vranken, Pascale Welvaert, Miche Wynants.

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The exhibition was made with the help of an enthusiastic group of master students in Art Sciences at UGent,
as part of a research moduleled by Marjan Sterckx: Febe Buysse, Charlotte Clerinx, Johanna Dams, Gustav-Adam Dendooven, Jade Duysan, Céline De Foor, Pauline Janssen, Céline Meeuws, Anouk Roosen, Louise Schiepers,

Hanna Sezgin, Stien Vanderstede, Suzanne Vanderveken, Lisa Van de Woestyne and Eva Vervacke.

The history of women designers in Belgium is still to this day largely left untold. The exhibition makes a first attempt to bring their names, objects and stories to the surface, but many puzzle pieces are still missing. If you have any information that could contribute, please do not hesitate to contact the museum.

SUPPORTED BY

With the support of the National Lottery

4.3 ABOUT THE CURATORS

JAVIER GIMENO-MARTÍNEZ

Javier Gimeno-Martínez is an associate professor of design history and theory at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam where he teaches in the MA Design Cultures and the BA Media, Kunst, Design en Architectuur. His research interest encompasses issues of national identity and displacement as related to design. His articles have been published in academic journals such as *Journal of Design History*, *Design Issues*, *Design and Culture*, *The Burlington Magazine* and *Urban Studies*. He is the author of the books *Design and National Identity* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) and *Design History and Culture. Methods and Approaches* (Routledge, 2025). He is a member of the International Committee for Design History and Design Studies.

KATARINA SERULUS

Katarina Serulus is an independent researcher and curator. She studied art history and design cultures at the KU Leuven and the VU Amsterdam. In 2016 she defended at the University of Antwerp her PhD thesis entitled *Design & Politics: The Public Promotion of Industrial Design in Postwar Belgium (1950-1986)* that was published in 2018 by the Leuven University Press.

In 2020 she initiated as project manager at the Flanders Architecture Institute in Antwerp the project *Wiki Women Design* in which more than 27 partners and 250 volunteers wrote women architects out of the folds of history. Serulus curated several design exhibitions. She was the curator of the exhibition *Panorama. A History of Modern Design in Belgium* (Design Museum Brussels, 2017) and *Designing the Night. Graphic Design and Belgian Club Culture 1970-2000* (Design Museum Brussels, 2019). She co-curated *Léon Stynen, architect* (Vlaams Architectuurinstituut, 2018) and made together with Cat Rossi and Jochen Eisenbrand the first comprehensive overview of the design history of the nightclub *Night Fever. Designing Club Culture 1960 to today* that opened at the Vitra Design Museum in Germany in 2018 and toured internationally until 2022.

MARJAN STERCKX

Marjan Sterckx is associate professor of Art History at Ghent University, where she lectures on the histories of nineteenth-century art and of interior design. She is the founding chair of the research group *The Inside Story: Art & Interior 1750–1950* (ThIS). Sterckx is co-editor of Brepols publishers' book series *XIX. Studies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Visual Culture* and of the journal *Tijdschrift voor Interieurgeschiedenis en Design*. Her research considers the intersections between art, gender and space for the period c. 1750–1950. She co-edited some volumes on nineteenth-century art and curated the exhibitions *Crime Scenes. Interwar interiors through the lens of forensic photography* in Ghent (2021) and *Yvonne Serruys. Sculpteur de la femme nouvelle* in Menen in 2023, while also editing the books of the same name.

4.4 INTERVIEW WITH THE CURATORS & ARNAUD BOZZINI

Can you explain the decision to showcase this exhibition at the Design Museum Brussels?

AB: The Design Museum Brussels wants to dedicate a programme to the visibility of female designers in the history of design. This programme will take on many forms, but one of its key aspects will be the two major exhibitions. One of these exhibitions, *'Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today'*, a production of the Vitra Design Museum, has already toured across Europe: its first stop was the Vitra Design Museum itself, followed by Winterthur, Rotterdam, Barcelona, and Vienna, and now Brussels. This exhibition is based on the Vitra Design Museum's own collection and aims to highlight the work of women designers from the 19th and 20th centuries up to the present. Eighty designers will occupy the exhibition space of 800 m². It promises to be a fine retrospective.

When we were discussing this project in Brussels with the Vitra Design Museum, they suggested— just as they had done with other institutions— to include a Belgian section. There were two options: either to integrate the Belgian section into the exhibition or to create a separate exhibition. We chose the latter, *'Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1980'*. I reached out to Katarina Serulus and proposed that she take on the project. She agreed to do so, in collaboration with Marjan and Javier. The museum enjoys collaborating with the academic world as it's a way to share research with the wider public. We are a museum that seeks to tell a broad story about design, a story that is accessible to as many people as possible. But you can't tell this story without a scientific basis. The focus is also on the history of design, so it's really about the historical aspect.

We are very enthusiastic about this project. We want to be a museum that engages with themes that question contemporary society. A museum is not neutral; it has something to say and, above all, something to share with its audience. We want to make stories visible and diversify them. We don't tell stories for just one audience; we want to reach different target groups. We are organising two exhibitions, but there will also be a publication in January in collaboration with Maison CFC. In addition, there will be an extensive programme of activities, where for example, we will build bridges to the contemporary design world.

We are organising an initial lecture on October 14, with the curators of both exhibitions, where we will discuss and reflect on the search for stories about women in design. Why is this necessary? What are the challenges? Everyone is aware that this exhibition is just the first step in a much larger endeavour.

What is the role of Belgian women in the history of 20th-century design?

KS: We were not specifically searching for pioneers. Our interest was in the question: how were women active during that period in design, and what were the social or professional conditions? We looked at the systems that led to women's work in design rather than trying to make a statement about a female or Belgian style.

JG: For us, it's important to highlight female designers and question the existing canon. If we look at books on Belgian design, it seems like only men were involved. That perception is incorrect, and that's what this exhibition aims to demonstrate. There is more to the story than what the current canon suggests.

KS: Arnaud Bozzini (director of Design Museum Brussels) approached us with the question for this exhibition, and we wanted to base it on existing research. We had just completed a publication together (a themed issue on 'Women and Design' for the *Journal of Interior History and Design*), which served as the starting point for the exhibition. But the deeper we dug, the more the search seemed never-ending. Names and objects continue to surface. The exhibition only shows the tip of the iceberg. We hope it sparks a movement and that many more names will come to light. If you dig deeper, there is still so much to discover about women in design.

Did certain domains emerge during the research where female designers appeared to be more active?

KS: We tried to involve as many different fields as possible in the research. There were women who were active as teachers, women who had their own practice or studio, women who collaborated in groups or with their partners. There were also women who weren't professionally active. We really took a broad look at women as creators, including in factories or as lacemakers.

MS: Interestingly, we found few women in the field of product design. Historically, they were less present in that field of study. On the other hand, they were well represented in other areas, such as textile design or ceramics. This was also true in the Bauhaus. In a way, this confirms existing stereotypes, as these are the domains people tend to think of when it comes to women and design. They were very strong and innovative in these fields. However, these delicate objects also require demanding and specific 'art handling', such as light intensity and climatic conditions, which means we cannot display some beautiful pieces.

KS: It's a vicious circle. Women were often active in fields that are now difficult to showcase due to the fragility of the objects. Moreover, these objects were often poorly or not preserved at all, leading to a kind of double invisibility. In addition, social norms dictated whether women were considered suitable for certain professions. Often, they had limited access to certain design training programmes. We also put this narrative into context: which schools or academies admitted women, and when did this happen? A significant Brussels example, and an important milestone, is the first vocational school for women, the *Institut Bischoffsheim*, where they were trained for careers in industry or applied arts.

JG: Another field where women were very active was graphic design. That doesn't necessarily mean they had more interest in it than, for example, industrial design, but it is an accessible medium with which you can start on a small scale. Not only professionally, but amateurs and activists also used these skills for feminist purposes in the 1970s, for example. Women learned certain skills in school within the framework of indoctrination, which they later used for their

activism. They might knit balaclavas, for example, or use their drawing skills to make posters for women's shelters.

KS: Hélène Denis-Bohy is one of the designers discovered thanks to this research. She was one of the first students at La Cambre to study typography and used that knowledge to print feminist pamphlets, which she wrote herself, on the presses at the school. In the exhibition, we showcase one of these pamphlets, printed in the 1930s in the modernist font Futura.

Why did you choose to highlight the period from 1880 to 1980?

MS: The oldest object we are showing is a soup tureen, painted by Virginie Loveling, a Belgian writer who did it in her spare time. The tureen is signed on the bottom with the date 'November 1879'. This marks a period that coincides with the first feminist wave and the opening of educational programmes for women. The *Belle Époque* is also the period in which female artists and designers in Belgium became more numerous and visible.

KS: The exhibition concludes with the second feminist wave, which ended in the 1980s. Thus, the exhibition shows a century of design by female creators.

Why are so many of these female designers so little known?

KS: There are several mechanisms that contributed to this. On the one hand, you have the history-writing itself. The methods used for this were often focused on authorship, which excluded anonymous makers and lesser-known names. The historiography was and still is often focused on the individual 'genius', while in design it is very often about collaborations. So, often only one person was put forward, even though they owed a lot to others, and thus many names have been filtered out of history.

MS: On the other hand, of course, there is the patriarchal society, which led to exclusion even at the time itself, through social processes. It was more difficult for women to start an education and then to continue working professionally. Women were often expected to take responsibility for the household and raising children. Continuing to work professionally was often a challenge, especially if there were children, but many nevertheless succeeded. When their partner was also a designer, as was the case with Maria Sèthe or Elisabeth Vanhoegaerden, they invariably received less attention than their husbands, and their contributions were often overlooked. It was sometimes also harder to participate in exhibitions, and there were even cases where misattributions occurred, with their work being attributed to men. The so-called 'women's exhibitions' set up specifically for them during the *Belle Époque*, though well-intentioned, implicitly reduced the importance of their work. So, on the one hand, there was often less recognition at the time itself and, on the other hand, during the later process of historiography.

JG: Starting an independent practice or office was particularly difficult for women. Until 1958, married women in Belgium even had to ask their husbands for permission to open a bank account, as they were legally considered 'incapable of managing their affairs'. One of the themes in the exhibition highlights this invisibility. They were sometimes active under the

name of a large firm or manufacturer, such as Sylvie Feron for Vanderborght or Marie Wabbes for Dujardin. We are aware that women also produced outside the professional context.

MS: It may be a somewhat unexpected and bold choice to also include 'domestic crafts'. We also want to highlight female creativity that is rarely or never recognized, but that required a lot of work and skill. These objects provide an image of certain skills that, for centuries, were considered suitable for women, such as embroidery, knitting, or cross-stitch. They contributed to the image of the 'good housewife', who could make the home more beautiful and pleasant for all family members through these crafts. We expect these crafts will surprise and appeal to a broad audience, both a younger generation that is showing renewed interest in them, as well as an older generation that may have less positive memories of them. We also hope that these pieces will spark conversation and bring out *untold stories* from the visitors.

Do you feel that these female designers have something in common, that there is something that connects them?

KS: I think it's a really diverse group; there are many different women among them. But we certainly notice connections between certain pieces and between design schools. *La Cambre*, for example, is an important school that nurtured a kind of first generation of female designers. You can see those connections very clearly in the exhibition.

MS: There's a risk with this kind of exhibition, where you group people together based on their gender, that you make essentialist statements, like: 'this is typically feminine design'. We want to avoid that. There are just as many differences among women as there are between women and men. However, there are some commonalities in terms of circumstances, such as more limited educational opportunities and other structural mechanisms we just discussed.

JG: We deliberately looked at intersectionality within the group. We didn't just want to choose women from higher social classes, who sometimes had easier access to education or professionalisation, but also women with fewer resources. The experience of female designers in Belgium was also different from that of female designers in Congo during Belgian colonisation. That's a domain we find important but is unfortunately less represented in the exhibition than we had hoped, due to some loans that couldn't go through. However, we do show pieces of Congolese raffia lacework made in the Congolese mission schools, an example of imperialist feminism, where Western models and Christian moral values were imposed on the local population through education.

The exhibition aims to shine a spotlight on female designers; is there another message you want to convey?

MS: Creating an exhibition with only women's design is, in my opinion, a necessary interim step to bring many unknown and valuable names and objects to light. It's important to raise awareness around this, both among scholars, museums, and visitors. It should eventually become automatic to include women's work, without it being seen as something special or treated separately. You might even wonder if this exhibition is still necessary, but it's only because of the Design Museum's request to create this exhibition that we started looking

beyond the few names and objects that were already known, and so much new material came to light—too much for just this one exhibition. For me, that alone shows it's still useful and necessary to do this.

JG: Women may have operated under similar circumstances, but they are, of course, also different. That's why we consciously talk about women, not 'the woman'. We don't want to create a monolithic discourse. The circumstances are often similar, but they dealt with them in very different ways, resulting in different experiences.

KS: We really tried to question the existing canon. The exhibition brings forward many new names.

MS: We don't want to argue that all those names should now enter the canon. The canon remains a strict selection, and there are also many interesting male designers whose work we don't know enough about yet. But it's thanks to initiatives like this that the canon can be questioned, adjusted, nuanced, and possibly expanded.

Are there any specific designers or objects you've fallen in love with?

KS: A particularly interesting figure for me is Elisabeth Vanhoegaerden, who was married to Louis Herman De Koninck, the well-known architect. She designed wallpaper and carpets, but she also collaborated with him during the first part of his career. Very little is known about her, and you can sense that there's material to further investigate her work.

MS: What I find so amazing about Clara Voortman-Dobbelaere is that she was active in so many different fields. She was a painter but also worked with metals and leather. Her designs are often not just superficial decorations of, say, a book or a bowl; she thinks on a meta-level about the design of an object. For example, she designed a leather book cover that makes it look like a package, complete with a large bow around it. That's very original for that time, around 1900. I also find it striking how much she wanted to make her name known: she signed her work surprisingly visibly, on the top of a bowl, for example, while it was usually done on the underside, or she signed a book cover, which was uncommon.

JG: The collective *Heks* designed graphic material and also carried out actions with it. For example, there was an advertising campaign in the 1970s with a photo of a woman and the caption: 'Liever Belgische boter' ('Preferably Belgian butter'). They changed the text on those large billboards to 'liever lesbisch' ('preferably lesbian'). That was in a public space in Ghent, so it made the newspaper. I find that very inventive, conveying a political message through humorous design.

4.5 IMAGES

Anonymous/ Class photo of twenty-four pupils from the lace school of the pauline sisters in Poperinge / 1913

Bruges, Episcopal archive

Anonymous / Five lacemakers with lace / around 1914-1918

Bruges, Episcopal archive

Anonymous / Class photograph of group of senior lace pupils, 1930. Black-and-white photograph, 15.5 x 10.5 cm. Bruges, Episcopal Archives. / 1930

Bruges, Episcopal Archives

"Anonymous, Anonymous Photo “Colonie Scolaire Moanda “, Foto ‘Colonie Scolaire Moanda’, Photo of the Moanda School Camp
n.d. reproduction, foto, reproduction, Tervuren, Africa Museum"

Africa Museum

N.A. / A class photograph with a.o. Martha Van Coppenolle at the Technisch Instituut van Sint-Maria in Antwerp, ca. 1930. Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuis. / ca. 1930

Letterenhuis

Greta 'Spandoek' Craeymeersch / Dolle Mina in the 1 May procession in Ghent
AF/4108 / 1977

AVG-Carhif

Greta 'Spandoek' Craeymeersch / Dolle Mina in the 1 May procession in Ghent
AF/4109 / 1977

AVG-Carhif

Greta 'Spandoek' Craeymeersch / Dolle Mina in the 1 May procession in Ghent AF/4110 / 1978

AVG-Carhif

Greta 'Spandoek' Craeymeersch / Protest against the confiscation of the "Guide des Luttes en Belgique" AF/4118 / 1977

AVG-Carhif

Greta 'Spandoek' Craeymeersch / Demonstration abortion out of criminal law, 31 March 1979 (Brussels) AF/4070 / 1979

AVG-Carhif

Mig Quinet, Chair, ca. 1929, Collection CIVA, Brussels. Copyrights: Mig Quinet Foundation

5 ACTIVITY PROGRAM

Guided tour *Here We Are!*
10.11.2024 and 09.03.2025 – 14:00 (FR) / 14:30 (NL)
In collaboration with Korei Guided Tours

Soetkin Elbers (soprano) and Jennifer Blom (double bass)
Electro-baroque performance
28.10.2024 – 19:00
In collaboration with Pizzicato asbl

Duo Aita Semea – Christophe (double bass) et Raphaël (guitar) Bereau
Eclectic program inspired by the Bayonne area
25.11.2024 – 19:00
In collaboration with Pizzicato asbl

Meet the Curator – Marjan Sterckx, curator of *Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1980*
08.12.2024 – 14h:00 (NL)

Design Brunch
Visit of the exhibitions, activities for kids, behind-the-scenes during a convivial brunch
15.12.2024 – 11:00 > 14:30

Guided tour *Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1980*
12.01.2025 et 13.04.2025 – 14:00 (FR) / 14:30 (NL)
In collaboration with Korei Guided Tours

Meet the Curator – Katarina Serulus, curator of *Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1980*
19.01.2025 – 14h:00 (EN)

Through the eyes of Carole Baijings, industrial designer
Discover the *Here We Are!* exhibition through the eyes of Dutch designer Carole Baijings
25.01.2025 – 11:15 (EN)
In collaboration with MAD Brussels

Presentation and discussion on the publication published as part of *Untold Stories*
30.01.2025 – 19:00 (EN)
In collaboration with Maison CFC

Guided tour *the women of the Plastic Design Collection*
09.02.2025 – 14:00 (FR) / 14:30 (NL)
In collaboration with Korei Guided Tours

Talk - Re-balancing: gender bias in the design world

11.02.2025 – 19:00 (EN)
In collaboration with Platform voor Architectuur en Feminisme (PAF)

Marie-Laure Coenjaerts (mezzo-soprano) and Jasper Bärtling-Lippina (theorbo, lute, guitar)
Barbara Strozzi's Oeuvres (1619-1677)
17.02.2025 – 19:00
In collaboration with Pizzicato asbl

Nocturne
Visit of the exhibitions, DJ set and performances
06.03.2025 – 19:00 > 22:00

Meet the Curator – Javier Gimeno-Martinez, curator of *Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1980*
23.03.2025 – 14:00 (EN)

This program is subject to modification. We invite you to consult our website for the latest information and to register to the activities: designmuseum.brussels/agenda

6 WOMEN DESIGNERS IN THE PLASTIC DESIGN COLLECTION

Echoing *Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today* and *Untold Stories - Women Designers in Belgium 1880-1990*, the collections department of Design Museum Brussels presents the results of a study into the composition and representation of gender in *the Plastic Design Collection*. This collection of 2300 objects illustrates the relationship between design and plastic materials, as well as their impact on our everyday lives.

Through an installation visible from the museum's reserves, visitors will discover how, since 2016, the acquisition policy implemented, and the curation of the exhibition itinerary have contributed to enriching the collection and improving the representation of women creators in the field of plastic design.

This research has taken, and will continue to take time, as well as human and financial resources. By presenting a selection of the acquired objects, this installation showcases the evolution of the numbers in gender representation since the Design Museum Brussels established itself as a place for conservation and promotion of 20th and 21st century material cultural heritage. New pieces and names have been added to *the Plastic Design Collection*, marking the beginning of a desire to interpret the collection the collection from a gender perspective.

In addition to this aspect, which is a long-term objective, the curation of the pieces on display in the exhibition allows the museum to present visitors with a selection that lessens the existing gap in the collection. The permanent exhibition highlights, throughout the exhibition circuit, a representation of women creators active since the Second World War. At present, 22,4% of the objects by women creators in the collection are on display compared to 28,3% of men creators.

This study is the starting point that encourages future initiatives and enables us to continue gathering information about women in the field of plastic design, their recognition and visibility as well as their association with design history.

7 DESIGN MUSEUM BRUSSELS

The Design Museum Brussels, established after the acquisition of a private collection by the Atomium, is a place dedicated to design and its history. Since 2015, the museum's collection, the Plastic Design Collection, circumscribes the landscape of plastics in design from the 1950s to the present day. Alongside this collection, in September 2020 the museum opened belgisch design belge, a new permanent exhibition space dedicated to Belgian design and its history.

Enriched by a programme of temporary exhibitions, the Design Museum Brussels also explores other fields of design creation and its impact on society and our daily lives.
Through exhibitions, guided tours, workshops, conferences and events, the museum aims to ensure that design is intelligible to one and all.

8 PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Design Museum Brussels
Place de Belgique 1
1020 Brussels

Facebook: @designmuseumbrussels
Instagram: @designmuseumbrussels
TikTok: @designmuseumbrussels
LinkedIn: @designmuseumbrussels

Opening hours: everyday 11:00 > 19:000
Tickets: 10 € (+ other reductions)

Permanent exhibitions:

the Plastic Design Collection
belgisch design belge

designmuseum.brussels

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