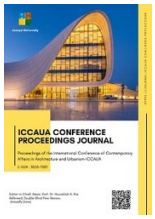

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Bauhaus Principles and Reflection on Design by Women

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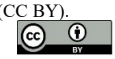

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A b s t r a c t

The Bauhaus school was a revolution in itself, it had an entirely different approach to teaching students and that is what made it famous and a milestone in design education. But what is often forgotten is that apart from important men at Bauhaus, there was this group of women at Bauhaus who made innumerable contributions to making it the Bauhaus it ultimately became. They became the masters of their respective arts and this was an entire journey that displays their hard work and determination to learn. They made many artifacts not only in the women-dominated weaving workshops but also in the ceramic, wood, and metal departments. This research aims to explain Bauhaus movement, the impact of the women at Bauhaus movement, and their concept on design. The examined examples has been chosen among the valuable units in order to be clear and compare the way the supporters express their examples.

K e y w o r d s : Bauhaus Movement, Women at Bauhaus, Bauhaus Design.

1. Introduction

The *Staatliches Bauhaus*, commonly known as the Bauhaus was a German Art School that combines arts, craft, design, and architecture under one roof. Bauhaus School established in Weimar in 1919 by architect Walter Gropius to teach modern arts and architecture. In under two decades from 1919 to 1933, when it moved first to Dessau, then Berlin under director Mies van der Rohe, the institution revolutionized the art-world with its controversial, cultish ideals, leaving a legacy of inspired ideas and inspiratory that not only impacted Western art education and cultural production philosophy of the 20th century, but radically altered the look of material culture, from architecture to book production (Ambler, 2018; Droste, 2006; Heathcote, 2019; Hochman, 1997; Ott, 1997; Whitford, 1992).

Enduring contributions in fields from architecture to graphic arts and visual culture is seen today, as Bauhaus continues to generate social conversations and research criticism, one century into its founding (100 Years of Bauhaus, n.d.; Rix-Standing, 2019). But what truly makes the Bauhaus core ideology a cultural shift is that it's teaching principles and ideologies emphasized cooperation between, and integration of, creative arts and the knowledge of technologies of production.

The Bauhaus combined elements of both fine arts and design education (Aziz Amen 2017; Aziz Amen and Ahmad NIA 2021; Aziz Amen and Nia 2018) . The curriculum commenced with a preliminary course that immersed the students, who came from a diverse range of social and educational backgrounds, in the study of materials, color theory, and formal relationships in preparation for more specialized studies.

Following their immersion in Bauhaus theory, students entered specialized workshops, which included metalworking, cabinetmaking, weaving, pottery, typography, and wall painting. Although Gropius' initial aim was a unification of the arts through craft, aspects of this approach proved financially impractical. While maintaining the emphasis on craft, he repositioned the goals of the Bauhaus in 1923, stressing the importance of designing for mass production. It was at this time that the school adopted the slogan "Art into Industry."

In 1925, the Bauhaus moved from Weimar to Dessau, where Gropius designed a new building to house the school. This building contained many features that later became hallmarks of modernist architecture, including steel-frame construction, a glass curtain wall, and an asymmetrical, pinwheel plan, throughout which Gropius distributed studio, classroom, and administrative space for maximum efficiency and spatial logic.

2. Material and Methods

The year 2025 will mark the 106th birthday of the Bauhaus. As that date approaches, this bias toward the school's male students is being revised, and its many integral female members recognized by scholarship and institutional exhibitions. Weavers, industrial designers, photographers, and architects like Anni Albers, Marianne Brandt, and Gertrud Arndt not only advanced the school's historic marriage of art and function; they were also essential in laying the groundwork for centuries of art and design innovation to come after them.

The Bauhaus approach is evident from Gropius's note that "No difference between the beautiful and the strong gender, absolute equality, but also absolute equal duties. No deference to the ladies" (Wortmann, 1993)

Female students, for instance, were encouraged to pursue weaving rather than male-dominated mediums like painting, carving, and architecture. Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius encouraged this distinction through his vocal belief that men thought in three dimensions, while women could only handle two.

Women at the Bauhaus influenced modernist design through their explorations of abstract form, industrial materials, and functional objects. They often integrated arts and crafts with emerging technologies, creating designs that were both innovative and practical. Their work directly contributed to the modernization of everyday life by making functional objects that were aesthetically appealing, embodying the ideals of simplicity, functionality, and beauty that are central to modernism.

Despite facing gender-based challenges, women at the Bauhaus were instrumental in shaping the school's ethos and output, and their legacies have had a lasting impact on modern design, art, and architecture. Today, their contributions are increasingly recognized and celebrated, with a broader understanding of their critical role in the development of modernist thought.

Several women at the Bauhaus made significant contributions to the movement, exploring new forms, materials, and design principles. They were influential in fields ranging from textile design and weaving to architecture, painting, and industrial design.

Below, highlight 10 female Bauhaus members who contributed fundamental work, instruction, and innovation to the school over the course of its relatively short existence, between 1919 and 1933, and bolstered its lasting legacy.

3. Results - Women at Bauhaus

Anni Albers

Albers arrived at the Bauhaus in 1922, with the hope of continuing the painting studies that she had begun at the School of Arts and Crafts in Hamburg. By 1923, however, she was spending most of her time in the school's weaving workshop, where she became a quick master of the loom. Influenced by Paul Klee and "what he did with a line, a point or a stroke of the paintbrush," Albers used weaving to develop a signature visual vocabulary of hard-edged patterns. Her early tapestries would go on to have a considerable impact on the development of geometric abstraction in the visual arts, along with the work of several of her Bauhaus peers, including her husband, Josef Albers, who she met at the school.

Albers explored the functional possibilities of textiles with focus and passion; in 1930, she designed a cotton and cellophane curtain that simultaneously absorbed sound and reflected light. In 1931, she was appointed to helm the weaving workshop and became one of the first women at the Bauhaus to assume a leadership role. Several years after immigrating to the U.S. in 1933, she began to teach at the influential Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Albers became famous for the fabrics she crafted for large-scale companies like Knoll. She was also the first female textile artist to have a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in 1949.

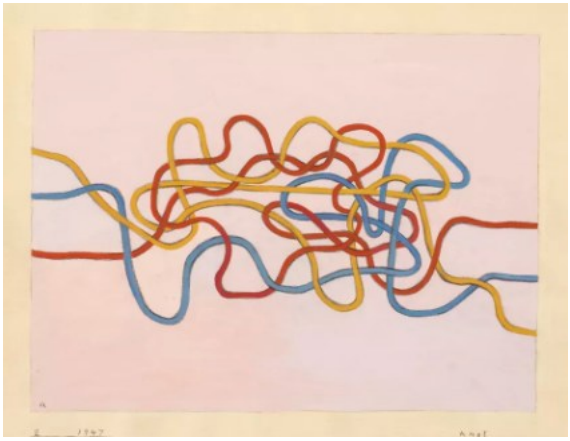

Figure 1. Anni Albers, Knot 2, 1947. © 2017 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Photo: Tim Nighswander/ Imaging 4 Art.

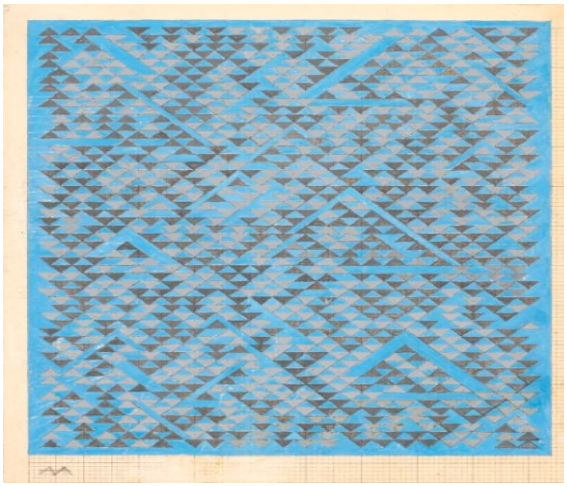

Figure 2. Anni Albers, Study for A, 1968. © 2017 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Photo: Tim Nighswander/ Imaging 4 Art.

Marianne Brandt

Brandt's early work so impressed László Moholy-Nagy that, in 1924, he opened a space for her in the metal workshop, a discipline that women had previously been barred from. She went on to design some of the most iconic works associated with the Bauhaus. These include an ashtray that resembles a halved metal ball, an edition of which is housed in MoMA's collection, and a silver tea infuser and strainer, which was her first student design and today is owned by both the Met and the British Museum, among other institutions.

During her years at the Bauhaus, Brandt became one of Germany's most celebrated industrial designers. And after Moholy-Nagy stepped down as head of the metal workshop in 1928, it was Brandt who replaced him, beating out her male counterparts for the position. During the same year, she developed one of the most commercially successful objects to come out of the school: the best-selling Kandem bedside table lamp. After leaving the Bauhaus in 1929, Brandt became director of the design department for the metalware company Ruppelwerk Metallwarenfabrik GmbH.

Figure 3. No. 15 Kandem Table Lamp, 1928.

Figure 4. Théière et passe-thé, ca., 1924.

Gertrud Arndt

Arndt's ambition was to become an architect, but it was only after she landed at the Bauhaus in 1923 that she realized architecture classes were not yet available at the school. She ended up crafting geometrically patterned rugs in the weaving workshop. One of these textiles famously decorated the floor of Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius's office. But despite Arndt's success at the loom, it was her photography practice, which she honed outside of the structured Bauhaus workshops, that would become most influential to modern and contemporary artists.

As a self-taught photographer, Arndt began by shooting the buildings and urban landscapes around her. She also assisted her husband's architecture firm by photographing their construction sites and buildings. It was Arndt's series of imaginative self-portraits titled "Mask Portraits," however, that ultimately shaped her legacy. The series—which shows Arndt performing a range of traditional female roles, and wearing a profusion of veils, lace, and hats—is now seen as an important precursor to feminist artists like Cindy Sherman.

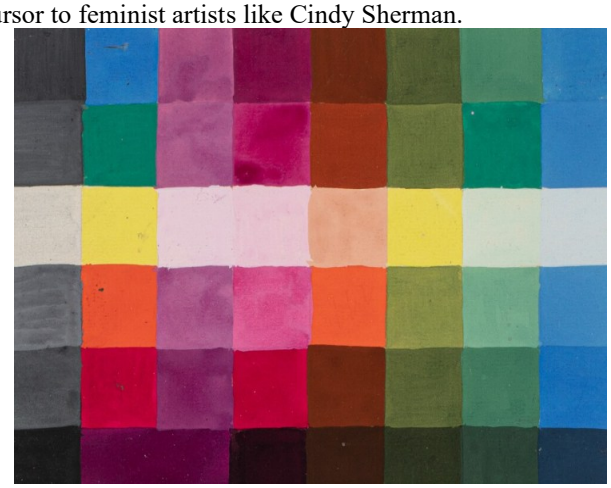

Figure 5. Study on color at Bauhaus Weimar, probably circa 1924.

Gunta Stölzl

Stölzl was one of the earliest Bauhaus members, arriving at the school in 1919 at the age of 22. The same year, she penned confident diary entries that would foreshadow her success as a leading designer of the era. "Nothing hinders me in my outward life, I can shape it as I will," one reads. "A new beginning. A new life begins," goes another. While she experimented with a diverse range of disciplines at the Bauhaus, Stölzl focused on weaving, a department that she helmed from 1926 to 1931. There, she was known for complex patchworks of patterns, composed of undulating lines that melt into kaleidoscopic mosaics of colored squares. They took the form of rugs, wall tapestries, and coverings for Marcel Breuer's chairs.

After being driven from Germany by the Nazi regime for marrying a Jewish man, fellow Bauhaus student Arieh Sharon, Stölzl established the hand-weaving company S-P-H-Stoffe in Zurich with former Bauhaus peers Gertrud Preiswerk and Heinrich-Otto Hürlimann. She ran the company until 1967 and designed countless popular carpets and woven textiles. "We wanted to create living things with contemporary relevance, suitable for a new style of life," she once said. "It was essential to define our imaginary world, to shape our experiences through material, rhythm, proportion, color and form."

Figure 6. Gunta Stölzl, The African Chair, Image Source: Bauhaus 100.

Figure 7. Gunta Stölzl, Wall Hanging, 1924. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, NY.

Benita Koch-Otte

Koch-Otte had already taught drawing and handicraft at a girls' secondary school for five years before she joined the Bauhaus, shifting her focus to her own studies. There, with fellow weaver and painter Stölzl, Koch-Otte used textiles to explore new approaches to abstraction. To further develop their skills, the two also took classes at the nearby Dyeing Technical School and the Textile Technical School.

Koch-Otte married the director of the Bauhaus photography department, Heinrich Koch, in 1929. Together, they relocated to Prague when the Nazi regime rose to power. After her husband's unexpected death, however, Koch-Otte returned to Germany. There, she became director of a textile mill, and continued to teach until the very end of her life—and her fabrics are still in production today.

Figure 8. Benita Koch-Otte, *Woven Wall Hanging,* 1923-24. Manufactured by Bauhaus Weaving Workshops, Weimar. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, NY.

Otti Berger

Berger was one of the most creative members of the weaving workshop, with a more expressive and conceptual approach than that of many of her contemporaries. After Stölzl abdicated her seat as head of the department in 1931, Berger assumed the position and established her own curriculum, but remained there only until 1932, when she set out on her own.

Berger went on to open her own textile atelier in Berlin, and began the process of applying for a visa, with the goal of relocating to the U.S. There, she planned to join Moholy-Nagy's New Bauhaus school in Chicago and escape Hitler's regime (she was Jewish), but her application stalled. While waiting for approval, she returned to Croatia, where she was arrested by the Nazis and taken to Auschwitz. She died there in 1944, but her fabrics live on in collections from the Met to the Art Institute of Chicago.

Figure 9-10. Courtesy of Rogers Fund, by exchange, 1955.

Ilse Fehling

Fehling had a natural talent for creating sculptural forms and theater designs, skills that she honed further while at the Bauhaus. There, she took classes with painter Paul Klee and sculptor Oskar Schlemmer, among others, between 1920 to 1923. Her objects and theater sets married whimsy and function; in 1922, she patented a rotating round stage for stick puppets.

After leaving the Bauhaus, she moved to Berlin and established a multifaceted freelance practice, splitting her time between concocting costume and stage designs and sculptures, the latter of which were celebrated in a solo show at Fritz Gurlitt Gallery in 1927. After studying in Rome in the early 1930s, Fehling returned to Germany, where her sculptures—forged in metal and stone and fusing cubism and corporeality—were deemed "degenerate." She pushed on, continuing to develop her diverse oeuvre throughout her long life.

Figure 11. A rare statuette of a bathing female nude. Brown patinated bronze, 1943.

Margarete Heymann

At just 21 years old, Heymann refused to follow the majority of her female peers into the Bauhaus's weaving workshop, convincing Gropius to open up a place for her in ceramics. There, the young, free-thinking artist began to create angular objects, composed of triangles and circles and spangled with constructivist patterns and colorful glazes. She left just a year later, though, after butting heads with her teacher Gerhard Marcks.

Heymann and her husband went on to establish a workshop, Haël-Werkstätten, that produced her designs. They were a quick hit, selling at chic shops in Europe, Britain, and the U.S. alike, but Heymann was forced to sell the company in 1934. As European political conflict stirred, Heymann, who was Jewish, fled to England to escape persecution. There, she established a new company, Greta pottery, and would later devote her days to painting.

Figure 12. Margarete Heymann-Marks, Kandinsky Inspired Teacup, 1929. Courtesy of The Ellen Palevsky Cup Collection, Gift of Max Palevsky. Courtesy of Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Figure 13. Margarete Heymann-Marks, Haël Werkstätten, *Disk Handle Teacup and Saucer*, 1930. Courtesy of The Ellen Palevsky Cup Collection, Gift of Max Palevsky. Courtesy of Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Lou Scheper-Berkenkamp

Like many of her Bauhaus contemporaries, Scheper-Berkenkamp was a passionate colorist, an interest she pushed in the school's mural painting workshop, where she was one of only several women. Her work took her to Moscow with her husband, Bauhaus peer Hinnerk Scheper, where the couple established an "Advisory Centre for Colour in Architecture and the Cityscape," and concocted color schemes for the exteriors and interiors of buildings across the Russian capital.

After the Bauhaus shuttered in 1933, Scheper-Berkenkamp worked as a freelance painter in Berlin and published a number of whimsical children's books, coming-of-age narratives told through the lens of fantastical adventures. Tales like "The Stories of Jan and Jon and their Pilot Fish" (1947) are today considered part of the children's book canon. They were some of the first to pair surrealistic drawings with outlandish plots; two of the books have recently been re-released by the Bauhaus Archive in Berlin.

After her husband's death, Scheper-Berkenkamp took over his color design business, spearheading the schemes for Hans Scharoun's Philharmonie building in Berlin, the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, and the Berlin Tegel airport building, among others.

Figure 14. Figurines of the Triadic Ballet at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1922.

Alma Siedhoff-Buscher
Bauhaus's few women to switch from the weaving workshop to the male-dominated wood-sculpture department. There, she invented a number of successful toy and furniture designs, including her "small ship-building game," which remains in production today. The game manifested Bauhaus's central tenets: its 22 blocks, forged in primary colors, could be constructed into the shape of a boat, but could also be rearranged to allow for creative experimentation. The toy could also be easily reproduced.
Siedhoff-Buscher also became known for the cut-out kits and coloring books she designed for publisher Verlag Otto Maier Ravensburg. But her most pioneering work proved to be the interior she designed for a children's room at "Haus am Horn," a home designed by Bauhaus members that exemplified the movement's aesthetic. Siedhoff-Buscher filled it with modular, washable white furniture. She designed each piece to "grow" with the child: a puppet theater could be transformed into bookshelves, a changing table into a desk.

Figure 15-16. Alma Siedhoff-Buscher. © Klassik Stiftung Weimar.

4. Discussions and Conclussions

1. Educational Opportunities;

Initially, women were discouraged from applying to the Bauhaus, as it was predominantly male. However, as the school evolved, women began to enroll and were encouraged to participate in workshops, particularly in textiles and crafts, which were viewed as more appropriate for women.

2. Challenges Faced;

Despite their contributions, women at the Bauhaus often encountered gender discrimination. They were frequently relegated to less prestigious roles and faced challenges in being recognized as equals to their male counterparts.

3. Impact on Modern Design;

The work of women at the Bauhaus had a lasting impact on modern design, influencing fields such as textile design, furniture design, and architecture. Their legacy continues to inspire contemporary designers.

4. Cultural Context;

The Bauhaus coincided with significant social changes in the early 20th century, including movements for women's rights. While the school aimed for equality and innovation, the realities of sexism in the early 20th century often limited the recognition and opportunities for women.
The contributions of women to the Bauhaus were significant and helped to shape modern design, despite the challenges they faced. The evolving narrative around their roles continues to inspire discussions about gender equality in art and design today.
In conclusion, while the Bauhaus provided a platform for women to express their creativity and challenge societal norms, it also reflected the gender biases of its time. The legacies of women at the Bauhaus remind us of the ongoing struggle for equality in the arts and design, highlighting both their achievements and the need for greater inclusivity in creative fields. Their contributions continue to inspire future generations, emphasizing the importance of diverse voices in shaping the narrative of design history.

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Conflict of Interests
The Author declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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