

## The New Ones are Coming!

### Women in Avant-garde Architecture in the 1920s

15<sup>th</sup> June to 2nd September 2005

**Curators:** Regina Prinz, Ute Maasberg

**Press tour:** Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2005, 10.30 am

**Opening:** Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2005, 6.30 pm

**Exhibition venue:**

Wiener Städtische Allgemeine Versicherung AG

Ringturm Exhibition Centre

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**Opening hours:**

Monday to Friday: 9.00 am to 6.00 pm; admission free

Thursday 9.00 am – 7.30 pm

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*Photographic material is available on our website [www.wienerstaedtische.at](http://www.wienerstaedtische.at) ("Arts & Culture" section) and upon request!*

**This exhibition documents for the first time ever the wide-ranging influence exerted by women – architects, artists, designers, film-makers and architectural theoreticians – on the avant-garde architecture of the 1920s.**

**The ARCHITECTURE IN THE RINGTURM series presents a show rich in materials featuring a wealth of previously unpublished documents relating to a representative selection of more than 30 female artists.**

The exhibition examines the training and daily work practices of the women, but also the difficulties and obstacles they encountered in their professional lives.

**A new type of woman.** In the 1920s there was a strong desire for change across all aspects of life – in the home, at work, in education and training and in architecture. Most importantly, cultural and social transformation opened up the prospect of a change in the social position of women. A younger generation of women began deliberately and dynamically to try out new things, to realise their full potential and to knock on the door of traditionally male-dominated areas such as technology, medicine and law.

Equipped with a knowledge of technical drawing, they also entered the architectural arena and little by little opened up a new professional field for themselves. The number one architectural priority for the new generation of female architects in the 1920s was the home and social housing and the majority still work in this field today.

Designing and realising buildings, writing and theorising about architecture and photographing and filming the architecture of the Weimar period became the professional occupation and artistic pursuit of a new generation of women. In the 1920s, increasing numbers of “new women” enrolled on courses at the technical colleges: architecture or design at the Bauhaus and the two architecture courses – taught by Oskar Strnad/Oswald Haerdtl and Josef Hofmann – at the “Applied Arts” in Vienna, which until 1919/1920 had been an exclusively male preserve. This they did with the intention of playing an active role in shaping modern life.

**Modern architecture with an emphasis on the functional:** the women of the 1890–1910 generation pursued their goals determinedly and pragmatically and often in silence. Crucial for them was the notion of architecture as a harmonious whole and in this area they played a reforming role. Less interested in short-lived aesthetic fads, they sought practical solutions to real, everyday problems. They focused their attention on redesigning and modernising the home with a view to rationalising everyday life. The “new women” of the 1920s wanted to dispense with the decorative style of the pre-war period and saw these developments as offering a way through to clear, honest, contemporary forms.

“New living” was – and is still today – a key arena for female architects. In their designs the members of this female architectural avant-garde strove for a practicality and simplicity inspired by their experience of everyday household tasks. The idea was to bring building and living into harmony with the new spirit of the age and the idea of a “new kind of person” as postulated among others by Adolf Behne – a leading proponent of avant-garde architecture in the 1920s – in *New Living, New Building*, his classic of architectural writing published in 1927: “New building presupposes a new way of living (...) and a new way of living in turn presupposes a new kind of person.” Bauhaus architect *Wera Meyer-Waldeck* added: “Technology is there to make life more pleasant, but it is art that makes it valuable and worth living in the first place.” *Meyer-Waldeck* was just one of this generation of “new female

architects” who studied architecture or design at the Bauhaus and technical colleges before practising architecture as a “social art” (Behne) and helping to shape modern life inspired by their ideas and visions of this “new kind of person”.

The range of designs and finished buildings of the young female architects of the 1920s was extremely broad and extended from synagogues to kindergartens, terraced houses, villas, spa hotels, “drive-in apartments”, department stores, post offices, workers’ housing estates, savings banks, filling stations, shop and coffee-house interiors, theatre foyers and much, much more.

A prime example of this type of design, and the highlight of the exhibition, is the legendary first-ever fitted kitchen. The “Frankfurt Kitchen”, designed by *Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky* (1897–2000), was designed to reduce to a minimum the amount of walking and reaching needed in the kitchen. Schütte-Lihotzky’s “Professional Woman’s Apartment” consisted of an approx. 20-m<sup>2</sup> area equipped with flexible furnishings with integrated sanitary and kitchen areas. The work of this Vienna-born architect and collaborator of Adolf Loos is mentioned in every book on 1920s architecture and interior design. Her work focused on the mass production and rationalisation of furnishings and fittings and the design of standard housing units, schools and kindergartens.

Another successful and award-winning “new architect” was the German *Paul Marie Canthel* (1912–1986), who collaborated with her husband Dirk Gascard on the creation of a “Growing House” (extendible to 52 m<sup>2</sup>) designed to accommodate a family of three. Despite its compact nature, this house, resembling a functional organism, offered a high standard of accommodation.

Also represented in the exhibition is the well-known Bauhaus architect *Friedl Dicker* (1898–1944, born Vienna, died Auschwitz). With Franz Singer *Dicker* ran a design studio that specialised in interior furnishings and fabrics for luxurious homes and shops. At the heart of their success were her wide-ranging talents as an interior designer, painter, graphic artist and architect.

Not all the women in the exhibition went to college to study architecture, however. The multi-talented artist *Lilly Reich* (1885–1947), for example, an associate of Mies van der Rohe who designed outstanding furniture and fittings for many of his buildings, was a machine embroiderer, craftswoman, window dresser and exhibition designer.

**Unknown architects.** The names of relatively few modern female architects are remembered today – Eileen Gray, Lilly Reich, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky are among a mere handful. Many have been neglected simply because their work has been published and documented in only scattered fashion. Name changes have also contributed to a number of architects all but disappearing from view. The political history of the day also played in this neglect, particularly the persecution and expulsion of numerous female architects of Jewish origin.

In keeping with the research focus of curators Ute Maasberg and Regina Prinz, most of the work in the exhibition is by German female architects. Austrian women are also represented, however, despite the considerable research work still needed in this area. Alongside well-known names such as *Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky* and *Friedl Dicker* are the names of less well-known but no less innovative women such as *Ella Briggs-Baumfeld* (1880/Vienna–1977/London), *Anna-Lülja Praun* (1906/St. Petersburg–2004/Vienna), *Carmela Haerdtl-Prati*

(1901/Bolzano–1989), *Liane Zimbler* (1892/Prerau in Bohemia–1987/ Los Angeles), *Rosa Weiser* (1897–1982).

**Exhibition.** The exhibition includes original architectural photographs, drawings, documents and publications as well as furniture, sculpture and paintings. Much of the material has been drawn from private collections and has remained unknown up until now. Also featured are sound recordings and films from the 1920s.

On display is the work of Bauhaus architects Friedl Dicker (furniture and photographs of architectural work) and Kath Both, furniture by Lilly Reich and works by artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp. A walk-in original of Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's famous "Frankfurt Kitchen", developed for Ernst May's "New Frankfurt" housing project in 1926 has been loaned by a private collector. Fully equipped with period kitchen utensils, it offers a vivid illustration of the key problem with which so much of the work of these architects, who often found themselves in the role of sociologist or educationalist (though never neglecting that of designer), was concerned.

Alongside sketches and drawings by architects Lucy Hillebrand, Marlene Moeschke-Poelzig and Gretel Norkauer are photographs and drawings by Munich architect Hanna Loev, who worked with Robert Vorhoelzer at the Munich *Postbauschule*.

The exhibition is based on a research project conducted by the architectural historians Ute Maasberg and Regina Prinz at the Institute for the History of Architecture and Urban Development at the Technical University at Braunschweig.

**Catalogue** (German): Ute Maasberg, Regina Prinz: *Die Neuen Kommen. Weibliche Avantgarde in der Architektur der zwanziger Jahre*. Junius Verlag, Hamburg 2004, 171 pages with approx. 150 b/w illustrations, price: 20 euros.

*Press releases and photographs relating to the ARCHITECTURE IN THE RINGTURM series of exhibitions can be found at <http://www.wienerstaedtische.at> in the "Arts & Culture" section.*