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By Karla Klein Albertson

What women designers did in 100 years

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Three years ago, looking forward to the end of the 20th century, the Bard Graduate Center in New York began planning a major exhibition devoted to "Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference." The brilliantly conceived show, which is running through February, covers miles of artistic ground from the personal creativity of pieced quilts and American Indian baskets to professional pursuits such as architecture and Hollywood costume design.

The graduate center's founder and director, Susan Weber Soros, entrusted the execution of the project to Bard professor Pat Kirkham, who also edited the comprehensive volume that accompanies the show. Kirkham drew on her own experience in teaching design history and then collaborated with a lengthy list of specialist colleagues.

The curator explains, "I themed it a bit, but basically the material in the exhibition is presented chronologically to give people a sense of the progress of the cen-

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Women in design: More than clothes

ANTIQUES from E1

Two of the five thematic sections are "Designing Modernities: circa 1918-1945," during which women artists became champions of the new design aesthetic, and "Designing the 'American Dream': 1945-1980," a period when up-to-date fashion and furnishings became affordable to the masses. Exhibits from this era include Greta von Nessen's aluminum "Anywhere" lamp, 1952, and a red wool Bonnie Cashin suit from 1964.

A different approach

The book produced in conjunction with the show, however, takes a different approach to designing women, by focusing on broad specialties such as interior, landscape, industrial, or costume design. Important contributions in areas rarely explored until now are the chapters "Three Strikes Against Me: African American Women Designers" by Pat Kirkham and Shauna Stallworth and "The Sacred Hoop: Native American Women Designers" by Pamela Kladyk. With 400 color illustrations, a full bibliography, and extensive timeline, the reference is a must-have book for the study of 20th-century art history.

An interesting Pennsylvania connection is provided by the volume's presentation of work by Anna Wagner Keichline. At 14, she was already winning prizes for furniture made in a workshop supplied by her supportive parents. Her photograph appeared in a 1903 *Inquirer* article with the caption "May Devote Life to Industrial Art." After study at Cornell, she became the first woman architect in Pennsylvania and went on to design buildings and create innovative solutions for design problems throughout the home.

Most gratifying to Pat Kirkham has been the response of early visitors to the exhibition, excited by the wealth of information on the accomplishments of woman designers in the last century. "A lot of people say they feel very inspired," she notes. "One designer told me she wanted to go home and do more work."

Special events

This exhibition is accompanied by a broad variety of special events extending into next year. The week of Nov. 27 to Dec. 1, private exhibi-

tion viewings will be coupled with films and lectures on topics such as Florence Knoll Bassett, Eva Zeisel, and African American women designers. A panel discussion Dec. 5 will focus on "Taste in America: Women and the Modern Movement," while a lecture that same day will discuss the pioneering efforts of "Great Women Collectors." For information about these programs and a major symposium planned for January, call the BGC education office at 201-501-3013.

Visitors to the Bard exhibition can also take in two related shows at the museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology, Seventh Avenue at 27th Street (212-217-5800). Through Jan. 6, the American clothing designs and Hollywood costumes of "Bonnie Cashin, Practical Dreamer" are being presented in a major retrospective of the couturier's work from the 1930s to the early 1980s. Also at FIT through Jan. 13, "A Woman's Hand: Designing Textiles in America, 1945-1969" featuring 40 designers who created printed, woven, and knitted textiles for interiors and apparel.

Best book on the subject: More than a catalog, *Women Designers in the U.S.A., 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference*, published by the Yale University Press in association with Bard, presents a collection of 17 essays by eminent scholars exploring the influence of women in design. The volume includes chapters on the Arts and Crafts Movement, American Indian artists, textiles, quilts, the fashion world, and interior design. Order through bookstores or directly from the Bard Graduate Center, 212-501-3023, hardbound only, \$80.

Also available is a special Fall 2000 issue of the BGC journal, *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, devoted to articles and book reviews related to the exhibition.

If You Go**What:** Women Designers in the U.S.A., 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference.**When:** Through Feb. 25.**Where:** Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, 18 W. 86th St., New York.**Hours:** Tuesday through Sunday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.**Admission:** \$3; seniors and students \$2.**Information:** 212-501-3000.