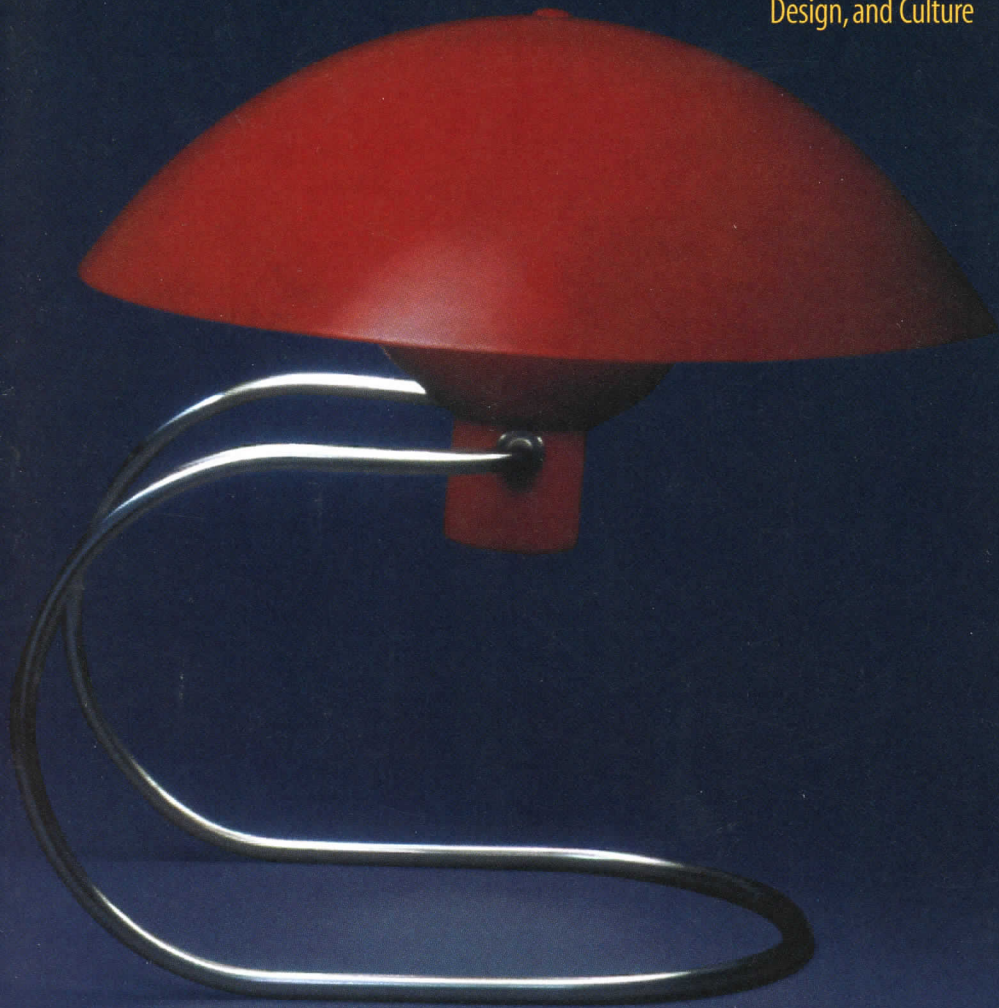


BGC

The Bard Graduate Center  
for Studies in the Decorative Arts,  
Design, and Culture



On view from November 15, 2000  
through February 25, 2001

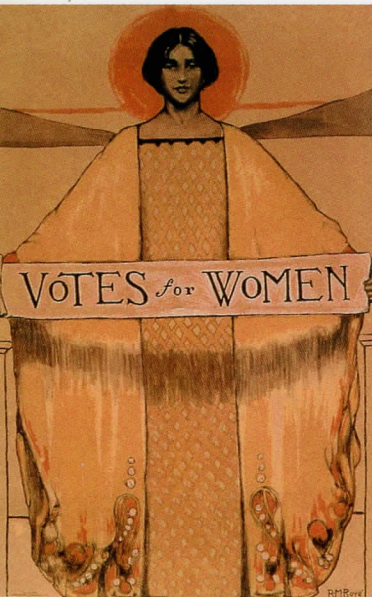
Women Designers  
in the USA, 1900–2000:  
Diversity and Difference

# Women Designers

in the USA, 1900–2000:

## Diversity and Difference

This exhibition celebrates the contributions made by women to the field of design in an exciting hundred-year period labeled by some the “American” century and by others the “Women’s” century. The exhibition takes a multidisciplinary approach by considering the work of women in various realms of design—from ceramics to cinema, furniture to fashion, interiors to industrial products, and gardens to graphics.



Diversity is manifest not only in the objects designed, but also in the backgrounds of women who became designers. Although gender is central to this project, and the relevance of issues such as marriage and motherhood are considered, the exhibition also distinguishes differences among women designers based on criteria such as age, class, and ethnicity. The achievements of women designers are considered separately, yet as part of the complex culture of the modern age.

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# The exhibition is organized chronologically

## Revivals, Survivals, Traditions, and Innovation: 1900–1945

### Why explore the work of women

### in the twentieth century?

The start of the twentieth century saw unprecedented opportunities for women in design work. The Arts and Crafts movement, which emphasized the importance of everyday objects and challenged the inferior status of design in the hierarchy of the arts, particularly embraced female artisans. Specialized schools of design trained a generation of women professionals.

In a contemporaneous development, Native American design traditions were reinvigorated as women began to produce jewelry, baskets, pottery, and textiles that were appreciated for their perceived preindustrial "authenticity." In contrast to Native American work, which was widely collected and admired by European and North American curators and collectors, African-American objects were often dismissed as hybrids of African and American design traditions. Only recently has the output of African-American women designers of the early twentieth century been reevaluated and recognized as a field worthy of scholarly consideration.

## Designing Modernities: circa 1918–1945

### What is meant by "women's work"?

In the second quarter of the twentieth century, many women championed "modern" design. Precepts espoused at European schools of design such as the Bauhaus and American interests such as "skyscraper modern" were manifestly applied within industrial design. Even in this new field, women practitioners were relegated to creating objects for the home and excluded from work in areas such as transportation that were generally associated with "men's work."

While some designers of this generation consciously rejected the past, others chose to revive period styles. Interior designers in particular oscillated between historical reference and contemporary expression. In the years between the two World Wars, however, designers of interiors, textiles, and fashion increasingly sought to meet the needs of a more informal lifestyle that was deemed typically "American."

## Designing the "American Dream": 1945–1980

### Why consider only women designers working in the USA?

In post-World War II America, many designers believed that the benefits of technology and the strong economy would allow every citizen to enjoy the "American Dream" of well-designed domestic and business environments and affordable everyday and leisure possessions. Women designers of such furnishings and products were instrumental in realizing that vision, in the home and in corporate America. Moreover, many talented women were responsible for costuming Hollywood movie stars like Grace Kelly and Elizabeth Taylor, who personified another aspect of the "American Dream."

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# ly according to five themes

## Revivals and Redefinitions: 1970–2000

How are women's multiple identities expressed through design?

The cultural upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s revived interest in preindustrial materials, techniques, and motifs; craft traditions; and multiculturalism in the arts. The repercussions of the civil rights struggles and the feminist movement radically redefined the field of design and the aspirations of women designers. The political and personal changes of the era inspired some women to subvert accepted notions of design as a comment on their marginalization, heritage, and identity.

## Women Designers, 1990s and Beyond

What does the future hold for women designers?

Women are currently represented in most areas of the design community, and female designers are poised to make a significant impact on the digital media of the twenty-first century. *Women Designers, 1900–2000: Diversity and Difference* celebrates their notable achievements and anticipates their future accomplishments.



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## Admission

General	\$3
Seniors (65 and over)	\$2
Students (with valid ID)	\$2

## Hours

Tuesday through Sunday

11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Thursday 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

## Transportation

The BGC is located at 18 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue and is easily accessible by public transportation.

## Bus

86<sup>th</sup> Street crosstown

M10 on Central Park West

M7 or M11 on Columbus Avenue

## Subway

B or C train to

86<sup>th</sup> Street station

## Special Needs

The BGC complies with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act by making its buildings accessible to those with special needs. Please call prior to visiting to discuss arrangements.

## Exhibition Tours

Group tours of the exhibition may be scheduled Tuesday through Friday between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and on Thursday evening until 7:00 p.m. Advance reservations are required for all groups.

Payment must be made in advance via check or credit card. The fees for admission and guide(s) are:

1–20 visitors (single guide) \$ 75

21–40 visitors (two guides) \$100

## Public Programs

An array of lectures, panels, study days, films, and other offerings that feature design historians and practicing designers are presented in conjunction with the exhibition. Special events are held for youth and senior audiences.

## Book/Exhibition Catalogue

A publication accompanying the exhibition contains seventeen essays by prominent scholars on topics such as "A 'Woman's Place?': Women Interior Designers" and "Designing Hollywood: Women Costume and Production Designers."

## Timeline Poster

A timeline poster designed by Deborah Sussman, Jennifer Stoller, and Ana Llorente-Thurik contextualizes the exhibition.

## Journal

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

## T-Shirt

A T-shirt designed exclusively for the BGC by Courtney Sloane celebrates and commemorates the exhibition.

## Upcoming Exhibitions

*Empire of the Sultans:*

*Ottoman Art from the Khalili Collection*

April 26 – July 8, 2001

*William Beckford, 1760–1844:*

*At the Center of the Enlightenment*

Fall 2001

## Website

For up-to-date exhibition-related information, please visit the BGC website at [www.bgc.bard.edu](http://www.bgc.bard.edu).

## Information

For further information, please call the BGC Gallery at 212-501-3023 or TTY 212-501-3012 or e-mail [galler助理@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:galler助理@bgc.bard.edu).

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## Funders

Major funding for the exhibition *Women Designers in the USA, 1900–2000: Diversity and Difference* has been provided by Barbara and Richard Debs. The catalogue was underwritten by Elise Jaffe and Jeffrey Brown. This project has been generously supported by Barbara Goldsmith, Judith Leiber, Grace and Shepard Morgan, Tiffany & Co., and Murray Weber.

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## Images

### COVER:

Greta von Nessen

*Anywhere Lamp*, 1951

Aluminum and enameled metal

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,

Gift of Nessen Lamps, Incorporated, New York

### INSIDE (left to right):

Bertha M. Boyé

*Votes for Women Poster*, circa 1913

Lithograph

Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Lucile Young

*Quilt*, circa 1935

Cotton and wool

The Helen and Robert Cargo Collection of the International Quilt Study Center,

University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska

Carole Bilson

*Kodak Ektascan Imagelink® Ultrasound System*, circa 1992

ABS plastic

Collection of Eastman Kodak, Rochester, New York

Designed by Karen Walker Spencer

Printed by Quality Printing

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