

Gender

Chiara Barbieri

In recent years, gender equality has been gaining currency. Nevertheless, it is hardly news that the history of graphic design, and design in general, has been affected by a gender bias: work experiences within the industry have been far from gender-neutral, and neither has its history. However, we still need more in-depth discussions on how gender and gendered discourses have impacted the practice of graphic design. In the last three decades, design historians—especially women—have been addressing this issue in an attempt to rebalance the historiography.¹ Some scholars have focused on gender disparities in graphic design by acknowledging the contributions of female graphic designers and problematizing the impact of gendered culture and discourses on their careers and the perception of their work.² Designers do not always want to have these conversations. Some did not feel comfortable having their perspectives reprinted in this volume, which in itself highlights the work that is still needed.

Gender disparity in the field of graphic design has many faces: it is expressed in the pay gap, in the shortage of women in senior positions and leadership roles, in the smaller number of

women talking on stage at industry events, and in the fact that female designers have been underrepresented in the history of graphic design.³ Some of these aspects are broached more or less explicitly in the following passages in which interviewees address the topic of gender, and suggest how their work experiences were affected by gender stereotypes and expectations.

These passages from our interviews offer insights into female representation and women's experiences within the graphic design industry. They give voice to different generations of female practitioners and show how gender is still an everyday issue, even though some change might have occurred. Mixed-gender and women-only design studios have met with problematic reactions. In 1970s Paris, Niklaus Troxler found the presence of women in the Studio Hollenstein provocative, while women-only graphic design studios are still an exception in 2010s Zurich, as is evident from Hi's comment on the studio Bringolf Irion Vögeli. Misconceptions reveal the underlying sexism of an industry that is still patriarchal—as is society at large. Overall, the passages selected offer a personal perspective on gender disparities in the field of graphic design.

Gender stereotypes and biases resonate loud and clear in the words of Ursula Hiestand. In 1960, she established the graphic design studio E+U Hiestand with her then husband, Ernst. Wife and husband worked

together until 1981, when they distanced themselves from each other in both their professional and private lives. Ursula's words address the benefits and disadvantages of partnering with a male next-of-kin, from a female perspective. Historically, the gender bias of design history has resulted in a focus on the achievements of the male partners to the detriment of their female counterparts.⁴ In this case, her partnership might have eased Ursula's inclusion into AGI as one of the first female members (if not "the" first) of an association that has often been criticized for being an elite club for white, middle-aged men.⁵ She recalls how her father dissuaded her from

pursuing a career as a fashion designer, and so she chose something instead that he believed to be more appropriate, given her gender and the future expectations that went with it. She frequently refers to her children, thereby implying that motherhood might have both limited her career choices and pushed her to be resourceful and proactive. Hers is a case study that cannot be generalized. However, Ursula Hiestand's voice offers valid points about how the multiple identities of female graphic designers—as practitioners, women, wives, and mothers—can impact on career decisions, and how they come into play and are lived out in everyday practice.

1 Anscombe 1984; McQuiston 1988; Attfield & Kirkham 1989; Sparke 1995; Kirkham 2000; Gomez-Palacio & Vit 2008; Sellers 2017.

2 Triggs 2000; Breuer & Meer 2012; Owens 2015; Baum, Scheer & Sievertsen 2019.
3 Morley 2019; *Eye on Design* & notamuse 2019.

4 Scotford 2012 (1991).
5 See "Associations," in the present volume.

Ernst Wolfensberger

Public speech held at the philatelists' association in Winterthur, Nov. 22, 1956 (Wolfensberger 1957).
Introductory note by Ueli Kaufmann.

In the 1950s, Ernst Wolfensberger, the director of Kreispost Zürich (the postal services of Zurich), gave several speeches to the Philatelistenverein Winterthur (Philatelists' Association of Winterthur) that were devoted to the life and work of stamp designers. In the introduction to his lecture of November 1956, published as a small booklet in the following year,

Wolfensberger emphasized that women were given little attention and that he found it appropriate to first shine a light on two female designers: the lauded Bernese graphic artist Maya Allenbach and the Basel painter Faustina Iselin. His ensuing discussion of Allenbach's works reveals the persistence of common stereotypes.

EW Es fällt mir heute nochmals die Ehre zu, einen Beitrag an Ihr Interessensgebiet zu leisten, und zwar habe ich mir vorgenommen, meine bisherige Vortragsreihe über das Leben und Wirken unserer Briefmarkenkünstler mit einigen weiteren biographischen Notizen zu beschliessen. Dabei scheint mir angebracht, von den bisher wenig berücksichtigten Frauen zwei Künstlerinnen voranzustellen. Am Murtensee, versteckt im romantischen Gezweig der Birken, liegt der Feriensitz der Graphikerin Maya Allenbach aus Bern, einer gebürtigen Baslerin. Ihr Mann, Architekt von Beruf, schuf dort seiner Gattin eine anregende, besinnliche Erholungsstätte ausserhalb ihres Berufsalltags. Man darf annehmen, dass in dieser Idylle manche Idee zu gut gelungenen Postmarkenentwürfen entstanden und ausgereift ist. Jedenfalls hat sich Maya Allenbach mit den von ihr entworfenen Sondermarken einen Namen gemacht. Besondere Beachtung fanden ihre Olympiade-Markenserie aus dem Jahre 1944 mit den drei Taxwerten zu 10, 20 und 30 Rp., übrigens die ersten schweizerischen von einer Frau entworfenen Postmarkenbilder. Glücklicherweise wusste sie die hellenistische Figur des Apollo mit den fünf Ringen in eine klassische Form zu bringen. Das gewählte Motiv des Gottes von Korinth, des Ursprungsortes der olympischen Spiele, verrät ihren historischen Sinn. Die imposante Gestalt des Götterbildnisses beherrscht eindrucksvoll den Bildraum der Marke. Von der Vorliebe der Künstlerin für geschichtliche Darstellungen zeugt ebenfalls die 100 Jahre Bundesstaat-Marke von 1948. In einfachster Aufmachung hat Maya Allenbach auf einer Pergamentrolle die 100-jährige Zeitspanne zum Ausdruck gebracht. Sinnvoll erinnert die rotfarbene

Schriftrolle mit dem überragenden Freiheitsbaum an den heutigen Bundesstaat. Von den Werbepostmarken 1955 ist ihr Motiv für das Winzerfest in Vevey, der gefällige waadtländische Trachtenhut, sehr geschmackvoll geraten. Die Darstellung ist gepaart mit Eleganz und fein abgestimmten Farbenspiel. Es verwundert daher nicht, dass diese Marke grossen Absatz fand. Die Marken, die Maya Allenbach geschaffen hat, geben das geschichtliche Denken in echt fraulich ansprechender Form wieder. Das künstlerische Zusammenwirken mit ihrem Mann, wie zum Beispiel an der Landi 1939, an den Ausstellungen für die Zentrale der Handelsförderung in Budapest, Plovdiv und Agram an der Nationalen Briefmarkenausstellung in Genf 1943 und an der Gestaltung der "Imaba" in Basel 1948, lässt der Schluss zu, dass männliche Idee und frauliche Ausdrucksform beider Schaffen glücklich ergänzen.

EW Today I have the honor once again of making a contribution to your field of interest, and I have resolved to conclude my series of lectures on the life and work of our stamp artists with a few more biographical notes. It seems appropriate to me that I should first consider two of those women who have so far been given little consideration. The graphic artist Maya Allenbach is a native of Basel but lives in Bern, and has a holiday residence on the banks of Lake Murten, hidden among romantic birch trees. Her husband, an architect by trade, created a stimulating, contemplative recreation area for his wife to enjoy away from her everyday working life. One can assume that it was in this idyll that some of her ideas for successful postage stamp designs were first developed and came to maturity. In any case, Maya Allenbach has made a name for herself with the commemorative stamps she has designed. Her 1944 Olympic series of stamps for 10, 20 and 30 centimes were the first Swiss postage stamps to be designed by a woman, and attracted particular attention. She was skillfully able to present the Hellenistic figure of Apollo in classical form, together with the five Olympic rings. By choosing the

god of Corinth, the place of origin of the Olympic Games, she revealed her sense of history. The imposing image of the god impressively dominates the stamp's pictorial space. The artist's penchant for historical depictions is also evidenced by the stamp commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Swiss federal state in 1948. Maya Allenbach expressed the 100 years by the simplest means, using a red, parchment roll to symbolize today's federal state, over which there towers a tree of freedom. On the stamps for 1955, her motif for the vintner's festival in Vevey is a charming, traditional Vaud hat, and it is executed very tastefully. The presentation is paired with elegance with a finely tuned play of colors. It is therefore not surprising that this stamp sold very well. The stamps created by Maya Allenbach reflect historical thinking in a truly appealing, feminine way. Her artistic collaboration with her husband, as for example at the Swiss National Exhibition ("Landi") in 1939, at the exhibitions for the headquarters of trade promotion in Budapest, Plovdiv and Zagreb, at the national stamp exhibition in Geneva in 1943, and in their design for the "Imaba" in Basel 1948, lets us conclude that male idea and female expression find themselves happily complemented in each other's work.

Niklaus Troxler

E-mail to Constance Delamadeleine, Oct. 18, 2018.

Niklaus Troxler joined the Studio Hollenstein as art director from 1971 to 1972. This studio comprised creative specialists (art directors, copywriters, illustrators, photographers, typesetters, and typographers), administrative members (an accountant, secretaries), and salesmen, and numbered 100 employees in the early 1970s, who worked in mixed-gender teams. As revealed here in this quotation by Troxler, their gender mix seemed to be an uncommon practice in Switzerland, at least within the graphic design practice.

NT De travailler dans un team composé de filles était aussi une provocation. [Fig. 27]

NT To work in a team made up of girls was also a provocation [Fig. 27].



Fig. 27
Studio Hollenstein, women employees at the entrance of the studio in Paris, ca. 1960, photographer unknown, Albert Hollenstein archive, Ville de Paris, Bibliothèque Forney.

Hi (Megi Zumstein and Claudio Barandun)

Conversations with Jonas Berthod, Zurich, Apr. 6, 2017 and Nov. 13, 2017.

JB [Bringolf Irion Vögeli] were three women. Did that play a role at all? It was quite rare to have a women-only studio.

CB It's also funny that everyone in Zurich always talks about the "lesbian bureau." But none of them is a lesbian. Just because they're women ...

MZ Yeah, it was like that: "Oh, you work with the *ladies* ..."

CB It's sexism in its purest form.

JB Wow. And was the fact that it was a women-only studio a criterion for you to work for them?

MZ No. I mean, I thought they were good. I admired their work. They had been running it for more than ten, twelve years at the time.

Anna Monika Jost

Conversation with Davide Fornari, Paris, Dec. 7, 2015.

AMJ À l'époque, quand j'y étais, c'était dur pour une femme. Surtout pour une femme qui était jeune et qui n'était pas conventionnelle et pas traditionnelle. D'ailleurs Monsieur Ballmer, il m'avait fait le reproche quand j'ai été à Londres avec une amie et j'étais revenue avec une minijupe et j'étais allée travailler chez Olivetti avec une minijupe. Le lendemain j'ai mis autre chose et il m'a dit: "Ce que vous avez mis hier, je ne veux plus voir!" Je suis rentrée à midi et j'ai remis ma minijupe, et il n'a plus jamais rien dit. J'ai fait exprès parce que j'étais jeune et jolie à l'époque et ce n'était pas provocant, mais lui il était dans la tradition.

AMJ At the time when I was there [in Milan at Olivetti in the second half of the 1960s], it was hard for a woman. Especially for a woman who was young and unconventional and untraditional. In fact, Ballmer reproached me when I went to London with a friend and I came back with a miniskirt and went to work at Olivetti in it. The next day I put on something else and he said: "What you put on yesterday, I don't want to see it anymore!" I came home at noon and put my miniskirt back on, and he never said anything again. I did it on purpose because I was young and pretty at the time and it wasn't provocative, but he was traditional.

Ursula Hiestand

Conversation with Chiara Barbieri and Robert Lzicar,
Zurich, Dec. 4, 2017.

RL Wie war es dann später, nach 1980, als Ernst [Hiestand] weg war? Du hattest dann dein eigenes Studio, wie ging es dann weiter mit Jobs, du musstest dann selber networken, oder wie hat es sich entwickelt? Wie ist es für dich weitergegangen?

UH Natürlich ist da die Angst einer Frau mit drei Kindern, “wie kann ich überleben”? 20 Jahre war ABM schon einer unserer grossen Auftraggeber. Ich bin zum Direktor gegangen, habe mit ihm über meine neue Situation und meinen Wunsch auf weitere Zusammenarbeit gesprochen. Er hat mich unterstützt. Ich hatte sein Vertrauen weil die ABM Werbung und das Fotostudio schon lange in meiner Verantwortung lagen. Insgesamt war ich 35 Jahre lang für ABM tätig. Weitere Auftraggeber waren Werbeagenturen, Architekten, Ausstellungsmacher. Ich habe es immer geschafft, meinen Unterhalt zu verdienen, mit einer Arbeit die mir Freude macht und mich erfüllt. Nebst meiner Arbeit im Atelier hatte ich noch andere Tätigkeitsfelder. Durch mein Interesse an Fragen der Erziehung und Ausbildung wurde ich in die Aufsichtskommission der Berufsschule für Gestaltung, Medien Form Farbe, gewählt, wo ich viele Jahre Präsidentin war. Und früher, von 1974 bis 1980, engagierte ich mich am SWB Projekt Thearena Aktionshalle Zürich. Mit konkreten Produktionen wurde versucht, alternative Kulturvermittlung zu leisten. Vor allem stand das spontane und direkte Mitwirken und die Konfrontation mit ungewohnten

Erfahrungen im Zentrum. Dreimal fanden Thearena-Wochen in einem Zelt in Zürichs Innenstadt und zweimal in der Roten Fabrik am See statt. Als Präsidentin der Thearena organisierte ich Veranstaltungen und gestaltete in unpräziser Art sämtliche Werbemittel und setzte ihnen mit dem Signet den Stempel drauf. Das Thearena Experiment der alternativen Kulturvermittlung war ein Publikumserfolg und hat sich bewährt. Rückblickend stelle ich fest, dass mein Werdegang unüblich war für die 50er- und 60er-Jahre. Ich wollte als junges Mädchen an die Kunstgewerbeschule gehen und Modezeichnerin werden. Aber ich erhielt von meinem Vater keine Unterstützung: „Du wirst sowieso heiraten und Kinder kriegen“. Und dann habe ich gedacht: „Ja, Schriftenmalerei will ich lernen, mit diesem Beruf kann ich Geld verdienen und selbständig werden.“ Mein Vater hatte ein Atelier für Beschriftungen. Ich habe bei ihm eine 3,5-jährige Lehre gemacht, und ich war damals das erste Mädchen mit dieser Ausbildung. In Abendkursen habe ich mich dann an der Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich und später in Paris weitergebildet und alles weitere war „learning by doing“ und auch Glück.

RL What was it like later, after 1980, when Ernst [Hiestand] left? You had your own studio, but how did things proceed? Did you still get jobs, did you have to engage in networking yourself? How did things develop for you?

UH Of course there is the fear of a woman with three children: “How can I survive?” ABM had been one of our major clients for twenty years. I went to the director, talked to him about my new situation and my wish for further

cooperation. He supported me. I had his trust because ABM advertising and the photo studio had been my responsibility for a long time. In total I worked for ABM for thirty-five years. Other clients were advertising agencies, architects, and exhibition organizers. I have always managed to earn my living with work that I enjoy and that fullfills me. Besides my work in the studio I had other fields of activity. Because of my interest in issues pertaining to education and training, I was elected to the supervisory committee of the vocational school for design, Medien Form Farbe, and was its president for many years. And before that, from 1974 to 1980, I became involved in the SWB project Thearena Aktionshalle Zürich. We wanted to use actual productions to try and provide alternative forms of cultural education. It focused above all on spontaneous, direct participation and on confronting people with unfamiliar experiences. "Thearena Weeks" took place three times in a tent in downtown Zurich, and twice in the Rote Fabrik at the lake [a venue on the outskirts of Zurich]. As President of the Thearena, I organized events, designed all the advertising material in an unpretentious manner, and put my stamp on it. The Thearena, as an experiment in alternative cultural education, was a success with the public and has proven itself. Looking back, I realize that my career was unusual for the 1950s and 1960s. As a young girl I wanted to go to the School of Arts and Crafts and become a fashion designer. But I received no support from my father: "You'll be getting married and have children anyway." And then I thought: "Well, I want to learn sign painting; with this profession I can earn money and become

independent.” My father had a studio for lettering. I did a three-and-a-half-year apprenticeship with him, and I was the first girl to have done that training at the time. I continued my education at the School of Applied Arts in Zurich at evening courses, then later in Paris and everything else was “learning by doing” and also luck.

Ursula Hiestand

Conversation with Chiara Barbieri and Robert Lzicar,
Zurich, Dec. 4, 2017.

CB Comment c’était l’ambiance à l’AGI, en particulier pour une femme?

UH Je crois que j’étais die erste Frau in der AGI Schweiz. Mais tu sais quelque chose qui est très important pour moi, am Anfang wir waren das Ehepaar E+U. Doch nach unserer Trennung war ich weiterhin Mitglied. Ich habe mich nie als Anhängsel, sondern als eigenständiges Mitglied behandelt gefühlt. Ich bin freundschaftlich in den Männerverein aufgenommen worden. Die jährlichen, internationalen AGI-Treffen in aller Welt verbunden mit Vorträgen von AGI Mitgliedern, Plakat-Ausstellungen und dem Besuch deren Ateliers und Agenturen, waren immer ein grossartiges Erlebnis. Die Begegnung mit Persönlichkeiten wie F.H.K. Henrion, Jaques Richez, Anton Stankovski, Walter Ballmer waren die interessantesten und inspirierensten meines Lebens. An den jährlichen Treffen ist man mehrere Tage zusammen gewesen und hatte Zeit um sich auszutauschen und Probleme die der Beruf mit sich

brachte unter Kollegen zu diskutieren. Daraus sind auch tiefe und langanhaltende Freundschaften entstanden. Viele Mitglieder der AGI waren Professoren an Hochschulen. Man hat sich deshalb auch mit der Ausbildung von grafischen Gestaltern auseinandergesetzt. Politische Fragen standen dabei im Hintergrund: Alle waren der Meinung, Design verbessere die Welt. [Figs. 28–29]



Fig. 28
Ursula Hiestand (in the background) and other AGI members visiting Walter Ballmer's studio (Unidesign) in Milan, 1977. From left to right: Ernst Hiestand, Ursula Hiestand, Anton Stankowski, Walter Ballmer, and Hans Neuburg. Walter Ballmer Archive.



Fig. 29
AGI members visiting Walter Ballmer's studio (Unidesign) in Milan, 1977. From left to right: Ernst Hiestand, Walter Ballmer, and Ursula Hiestand. Walter Ballmer Archive.

CB What was the environment like for a woman at AGI?

UH I believe I was the first woman in AGI Switzerland. But you know something that was quite important for me, at the beginning we were “the married couple E+U.” But after our separation I continued to be a member. However,

I never felt treated as an appendix, but as an independent member. The annual, international AGI meetings all over the world, combined with lectures by AGI members, poster exhibitions, and visits to their studios and agencies, were always a great experience. I was accepted amicably into the men's club. The meetings with eloquent personalities like F.H.K. Henrion, Jaques Richez, Anton Stankovski, Walter Ballmer were the most interesting and inspiring of my life. At the annual meetings we spent several days together and had time to exchange ideas and discuss problems that the profession brought with it among colleagues. This has also resulted in deep and long-lasting friendships. Many members of the AGI were also professors at universities. Therefore, the AGI also dealt with the education of graphic designers. Political questions were in the background: everyone was of the opinion that design improves the world. [Figs. 28-29]