Women Designers in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s:
Defining the Professional and Redefining Design.

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Abstract

This paper examines the professional relationship between women and design in the inter-war years. As well as documenting the work of women designers the paper examines the importance of biographical information for history writing and the ways in which an examination of the work of women designers also requires redefining existing definitions of design. To define the attainment of women designers on the basis of a predictable career structure or evaluate their work solely through its portrayal of the 'feminine' is inadequate. Definitions need to be flexible and also need to embrace those women who might be called 'taste-makers' or 'communicators'.

1. Introduction

The practice of design is most often judged by its output. An evaluation of the impact those artefacts have on everyday life in industrialised societies includes an understanding of function, aesthetics and the social values of taste and status. Further evaluation can also take place which considers the artefact within industrial production and the role of aesthetics, for both increasing trade and differentiating markets or for creating national or international identities. The designer plays a particular, but significant and identifiable, role in this industrial process. However, general histories of design all too easily lend support to a history of 'heroes'. As well as the gender bias inherent in this approach, its blindness to the contribution of individual women and social context, there is also a refusal to recognise the importance of collaboration in the design process. This reinforces the gendered coupling of women and consumption, and women as the passive 'other' to the active, male creator and producer.

In Britain today there are pressure groups like 'Women in Product Design' (WMD) and the Women's Design Service which seek to expand the opportunities for women designers. Their work includes making sure there are effective role models and that the opportunities for work experience should be improved. Often such initiatives are supported by the evidence gained from historical and critical theory. Whilst there has been a feminist emphasis on equal opportunities, significant debates have explored whether a 'feminine' aesthetic exists and what it might offer. Others have used an analysis based on patriarchy to reveal contradictions in the 'institutions' of design.

Jane Drew, one architect who has been in practice since the 1930s stated: 'in a speech he [Royal Institute of British Architects' (RIBA) President Max Hutchinson] said those words, which are a death knell to me, that I was a role model to women architects. I'd like someone once to say that I'd done some decent buildings.(Drew 1990:14) Drew's real sense of frustration is one which many female designers must have shared on occasion, and her call for an ungendered approach to her work is entirely understandable. But it is undeniable that women designers have, and still do, work under constraints which have not affected their male counterparts in the same way. Knowledge of the personal circumstances of individual designers illuminates those options which were available, helps to explain why certain choices were made, and why careers developed along particular lines. This information must be set against its wider, institutional and professional context.

However, what additionally needs redressing is the tendency, even in feminist work, towards historical and critical analysis that sees women primarily as consumers of design rather than makers and designers. It is from this perspective that this paper makes a contribution to current analysis, by exploring the social context of women designing, during the 1920s and 1930s, at the particular moment when the industrial designer was first recognised as a professional, and when an infrastructure was being created to support that activity.

2. Methodology

The research has been dependent on collecting biographical information and oral history. This has involved the collaboration of several historians and practising designers and students with the results shown in an exhibition held at the University of Brighton Gallery, 7-31 March 1994. For this some authors could only consult written documentation; others have interviewed designers who were then able to reflect, offer assessment of and describe their working lives, aims and achievements. The importance of a biographical method has been related to the transformation of sociology into a multi-theoretical discipline. This reinforces the role of qualitative research and a related shift towards viewing data as 'topic' rather than 'resource'(Bowker, 1993:19). This approach illustrates how history is constructed, and can continue to be constructed, rather than assume that there is one absolute version, based on 'facts'. This was illustrated by several designers' recall of their student days, when the 'greatness' of their tutors, as told in published accounts, was shattered by their contrasting views.

Parallel to this has been the quantitative task of recording the names of women designers who had worked during the 1920s and 1930s, as preparation for and encouragement of further research. A 'Roll of Honour' in the exhibition commemorated their involvement in design in a wide range of areas including architecture, interiors, furniture, pottery and glass, jewellery and metalwork, graphics and typography, textiles and dress, exhibition design, consultancy and retailing. This drew inspiration from Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party' project of 1979 (Chicago, 1979). Currently 396 women have been identified as practising designers during the 1920s and 1930s. Often they were at the beginning of their careers in those years, so have continued to work beyond that period.

The names so far listed have been drawn from a wide variety of sources. Systematic searches through periodicals such as 'The Studio' and 'The Architectural Review' have yielded some. Other names have been discovered through examining archive material at the National Archive of Art and Design at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Women's Art Library, both in London. Further information has been the result of a less conventional approach, dependent on 'academic networking' in which historians and researchers working on parts of this history have been enthusiastic in contributing to an overall view of the period. One further, and not insignificant source of names, has been the surviving relatives of designers. For them it has become very important that the achievements of their wives, mothers or other relations should be recorded in this way. The piecing together of all this information has not only indicated the amount of work which still needs to be done in this area, but also opens up possibilities for future collaboration.

In building on this work one issue that has to be addressed is that of a 'me too' approach, as adding these women into existing gender biased histories is inadequate. This leads to a questioning of accepted definitions of design and how those definitions do not address the social construction of production. It is therefore necessary to consider the value of alternative approaches to aesthetics or ways of solving practical problems. Two polarities which are responsible for currently restrictive stereotypes are that of women's design as 'graceful', decorative and aesthetically marginal or of a judgment of the successful woman designer as 'one of the boys'.

This alludes to a relationship between craft and women's work that needs exploring. Because craft is associated with women, it is considered of secondary importance; its own value being determined by its association with women.

These methodological problems mirror some of the issues of the 1920s and 1930s and imply that they are still live issues. It is necessary to understand the work of the women described here in a way that brings together the discussions of equal opportunities and a celebration of the feminine and not allowing them to destroy or cancel each other out.

As Christine Battersby explained, when describing the woman artist's relationship to tradition. 'A female artist needs to be slotted into the context of male traditions. But to understand what that artist is doing, and the merits or demerits of her work, she will also have to be located in a separate female pattern that, so to speak, runs through the first in a kind of contrapuntal way...Women are not just outside cultural traditions. They structure the spaces that lie between the bold lines picked out by previous generations of art critics...We are at last learning to see the depth of those spaces...We cannot let post-modern attacks on the notions of authorship, historical continuity and tradition deflect us from this task'(Battersby, 1989:152-3). While noting that women designers are answerable to a wider 'critical' public that consumes rather than intellectually appraises their work this approach is equally as true for women designers as it is for artists.

3. Social and Economic Context

In Britain during the 1920s and 1930s there were stark contrasts between the decline of the old coal mining and heavy engineering industries and the growth of new consumer goods and electrical industries. Economic depression and poverty were most felt in those areas of decline in the North of England, and the Scottish and

Welsh coalfields, with a parallel emergence of new industries, and comparative prosperity in the South-east of England, around London, and the Midlands. Women participated in these changes by becoming an important part of the workforce in the new industries(Glucksmann, 1990).

New patterns of consumption emerged with the growth of suburban living. Just under four million new houses were built by both local authorities and private enterprise in the inter-war years. Those built with Government subsidy by local authorities, were considered for general needs during the 1920s; after 1929 most developments were under slum clearance schemes. This reinforcement and strong emphasis on home and family furthered the existing ideology of 'separate spheres', of home and work and the gendered nature of consumption(Wolff, 1990:12-33). Women were seen as consumers, a view identified and developed in America, and epitomised by Christine Frederick's book, 'Selling Mrs Consumer', published in 1929(Cowan, 1981:285).

Although women had gained a new economic identity through war work, during the First World War, any resulting independence was hard to sustain(Braybon, 1981). Similarly, although women over 30 gained the vote in 1918, which was extended to equal franchise in 1928, any related political and professional status was circumscribed by the emphasis on women's role in the domestic sphere. The women's movement in Britain was split between those women who saw equal rights as their ultimate goal and those who saw the provision of social welfare, and the improvement of women's health and living conditions as more important. The latter view was enshrined in the work of Eleanor Rathbone, whose ideas on the male family wage were important for the development of British policies on social welfare after the Second World War.

For women as consumers these ideologies were reinforced by design. The products of design operate across the economic, the social and the political, and reflect and reinforce dominant, often conservative, modes of thinking, yet those products also have the power to offer new ways forward. Design reinforces ideologies where it has the power to heal contradictions(Forty, 1986:221). For example, from the 1920s domestic appliances were sold as 'labour saving' and as a means of replacing servants in the middle-class home. The promises made by the advertising copy and visual appearance of the goods were never attained as the time spent on housework did not change. Instead housework was given a higher emotional status, causing the nature of the work to change. So far from being liberating, it reinforced the role of women as housewives servicing the family within the home(Cowan, 1983). It was against this background that women had to establish themselves as designers. In most cases they were from a middle-class background and in many instances had relatives who were also working in the arts.

4. Women Working in Design

4.1. Overview

Although women were most often found working in the craft areas of design, important individuals were pioneers in industry and manufacturing areas(Seddon and Worden, 1994). Professional status, in this context, often meant achieving a consistent body of work in a coherent style, and peer group recognition by the design societies and associated institutions. Most noted were the designers Enid Marx, Ethel Mairet, Susie Cooper, Marianne Straub and Margaret Leischner, who achieved the status of RDI (Royal Designers for Industry). A significant number of women were able to work independently as self-employed designers, obtaining freelance work. For example: Marion Dorn, Dorothy Braddell, Margaret Calkin James, Marian Pepler, Lilian Dring and Joyce Clissold. Their work was used by large companies such as Shell and London Transport and was always prominent in exhibitions on design held during the 1920s and 1930s. Others like Susie Cooper, who designed tableware.and Ray Hille, who designer furniture and the architect Elizabeth Scott, ran their own companies.

One successful solution to making a living as a professional designer was dependent on a loose distinction between design and craft. The careers of Wilhelmina Geddes, Enid Marx, Ursula Mommens, Theo Moorman and Peggy Angus show ways of moving between craft and design as well as how the crafts continued to be relevant to the conditions of the inter-war years and beyond. Other women, such as Muriel Rose, Elspeth Little and Ceceilia Dunbar Kilburn, ran important retail outlets which in turn provided support for craftswomen.

Isobel Moncrieff, Nicolete Gray and Beatrice Warde did not receive a specialised training in design. Moncrieff became involved in the design of decorative glass through her husband's ownership of a glass manufacturing firm and took on a vital role in its diversification into a range of Art glass. Gray and Warde had significant influence on contemporary typography through their research, writing and professional advice.

Many women were involved in this broader way. They were active as critics and writers about design. For example: Alison Settle, the editor of British 'Vogue', who also acted as a design consultant for manufacturing firms; or Caroline Haslett, Secretary of the Women's Engineering Society and the Electrical Association for Women; or Muriel Rose who was a writer on studio ceramics and gallery owner.

Some areas of employment did open up for women in the 'new' industries. For example, in the design of domestic appliances and in advertising where they were expected to provide a women's perspective as consumers. The retailing outlets that were run by women can also be seen as a development of women's influence on consumption. In this respect their role as taste makers influencing the quality of craft and, by implication, industrial design for the home is significant. But their encouragement and support of an increasingly successful professionalism through supplying outlets for other designers is equally, if not more, important.

An issue which is unavoidable in any examination of this period is the relationship of women designers to Modernism. In the case of potter Grete Marks this can be represented as a clash between a Bauhaus-inspired design philosophy and a conservative ceramic industry at Stoke-on-Trent. Architect Sadie Speight's close involvement with modernist ideas is complicated by questions concerning partnership, while Jane Drew appears to have realised her ambitions as an architect, despite her complaints about having to serve as a role model! An event which highlights the contradictions within women designers' relationship to modernism was the British Art in Industry exhibition held at the Royal Academy in London in 1935. This was one of a whole series of exhibitions promoting 'good' design which were a marked feature of the 1930s. Women were well represented on this occasion, but the exhibition upset Modern Movement critics by its acceptance of a broad range of styles. Such attitudes indicated both a prejudice against women and an inflexible aesthetic.

4.2. Professional Perceptions

The ways in which these designers were perceived by their prospective employers and clients was of crucial importance. Enid Marx has described how she had to sell her work in a more forceful manner than her male counterparts.

Something as seemingly trivial as what hat to wear for business occasions also reveals how far ordinary everyday events were challenges in the battle for professional recognition. Beatrice Warde's attitudes to professionalism makes this clear. Caroline Haslett and Margaret Partridge, who were involved with the Electrical Association for Women, found this problematic and corresponded, in a light-hearted way, about what kind of hat might allow them to take their rightful position as engineers at conferences and not be sent off to join the 'special side stunts' organised for the delegates' wives. The solution, for Margaret Partridge, was to take her father's top hat, put a red scarf around it and a tassel at the side in order to give it a 'hybrid semi-feminine air'(Purcell, 1993:93-4). Theirs' was one pragmatic solution; the other was to seemingly defy conventions about femininity. This was the impression given by the workers at the Footprints textile printing workshop through their enthusiasm and acceptance of the hard labour and physical exertion necessary in a craft process. Similarly, graphic designer Margaret Calkin James' decision to have her hair cut short may be seen less as a gesture of defiance than as an expression of her design beliefs in fitness for purpose. None of these instances were rejections of femininity but were ways of working through the contradictions of their time.

Arguments for women staying at home were intensified during the depression of the 1930s when there were accusations that women who worked outside the home were depriving men who had families to support of opportunities for employment. The pressure to conform was felt in more personal ways. For example Jane Drew's personal feeling about her mother's views on her divorce had repercussions for her ability to think positively about her independence and thus her career. Home and work were often physically as well as mentally close; Drew's home was always situated above her office. Margaret Calkin James first set up her own design workshop and then worked at home after marriage.

5. Case Studies

It is useful to examine in more detail the professional lives of a number of women, who worked in very different fields of design, to illustrate this direct relationship between life and work. The first two of these profiles are drawn from interviews or discussions with relatives; the second two take advantage of archive collections, which include personal documents as well as published works.

5.1. Sadie Speight

Speight was born in 1906, the daughter of a Lancashire doctor and both she and her sister studied at Manchester University before pursuing professional careers, the former as an architect, the latter in modern languages. Speight was very successful in her course in architecture and graduated with first class honours in 1929. There followed a period of travel and study abroad as the recipient of various scholarships. Speight's career as a qualified architect really began to develop from 1935, the year in which she married Leslie (later Sir Leslie) Martin, who had been a fellow student at Manchester.

They collaborated on a number of projects, but perhaps this period is as important for their theoretical writings which indicate their close involvement in attempts to bring about in Britain a rapprochement with

International Modernism. Leslie Martin, with Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo edited 'Circle, International Survey of Constructive Art' in 1937 and in 1939 he and Speight published 'The Flat Book'. The publication of 'Circle' was important, coming at a time when a small group of architects and designers, inspired and reinforced by refugees from Germany, such as Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, might have established a distinctive form of Modernism in Britain had not those very events from which the refugees fled escalated into the Second World War. Speight's involvement in 'Circle' was much more marginal. There is no reason to doubt that she endorsed the ideas about modern architecture, art and design put forward in the book but her views are not recorded in print. Her help is noted in the acknowledgements. On the letter headings of correspondence concerning the book and the loose grouping of people associated with it, she is credited as secretary.

Speight's role as a writer, influencing ideas about 'good' design is much more apparent in her participation in the production of 'The Flat Book. In this Speight and Martin offered advice on all aspects of creating the modern home, from colour schemes and the arrangement of furniture, through heating, lighting, ventilation and sanitary equipment, to pottery, glass and silverware. In essence it is a catalogue of well designed furniture and equipment available at that time in Britain. Speight and Martin included examples of their own work, primarily pieces from the Good Form range, designed for a manufacturer in Scarborough.

The history of these pieces provides an instructive case study in the vagaries of attribution, which impinge directly on the recognition of the work of women designers. On the front of the manufacturer's leaflet which accompanied a showroom exhibition of the furniture in about 1938, the designers are clearly named as J.L. Martin and Sadie Speight. When these same pieces were illustrated in 'The Flat Book', a year later, they were attributed solely to Martin. This was possibly because he had been responsible for drawing out the designs, and virtually certainly with Speight's approval. This attribution was perpetuated in the catalogue of a major exhibition, 'Thirties: British Art and Design Before the War', held at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1979-80. Thus Speight's contribution to the design of this furniture has become obscured but this is not due to the more common cause of wilful neglect which has been the lot of many female designers.

Through her co-authorship of 'The Flat Book', Speight identified herself as an invaluable chronicler of the Modern Movement in design as well as one of its leading practitioners. Her familiarity with the wide range of new developments in Britain and throughout Europe provided a sound foundation for the diversification which characterised the latter part of her career. During the Second World War she was a founder member of the Design Research Unit and became involved in the design of household appliances. She continued her architectural practice, designing a cafeteria for the Festival of Britain held in London in 1951 and then by specialising in the design and fitment of shops and exhibition stands. This work was not carried out in partnership with her husband, but another architect, Leonard Manasseh. Speight's last years (she died in 1992) were devoted to documenting her husband's career as a leading architectural practitioner in Britain and Chair of the School of Architecture at the University of Cambridge.

Speight's career has been written about in terms of the way in which it was subsumed into that of her more eminent husband. However, as has been shown in recent writing on the subject of creative partnerships, this is a complex area which does not always involve the eclipse of one partner's work by the other, but can involve a subtle process of negotiation(Chadwick and de Courtivron, 1992). Speight's decision to move into the areas of interior and product design, where she contributed to Government supported initiatives aimed at raising the profile of British design and encouraging trade, may have been her own strategy for establishing a career for herself which was *not* continually in the shadow of her husband's.

5.2. Ursula Mommens

The choices and negotiations which affected Sadie Speight's career were mostly determined in relation to her husband. The potter Ursula Mommens faced a different set of expectations from family and teachers before her career had begun. She was born in 1908 and continues to work at her pottery in South Heighton, Sussex. She comes from a family which has had a number of eminent members, the most famous of whom were her great-great grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood, founder of the pottery firm and her great-grandfather, Charles Darwin. With such a background, and at a highly regarded girls' school, St Paul's, in London, Mommens was expected to attain a high academic standard. When she did not do so, she was reproached by her teachers as not living up to the standards set by her family. Her parents were perhaps more realistic, appreciating and supporting Mommens' desire to leave school early and train as a potter. However, she was not able to go to St Ives in Cornwall to become an apprentice to Bernard Leach, the pioneer studio potter, as she wished to do, as her mother was in bad health and she was expected to help nurse her. A compromise was reached and Mommens attended pottery classes at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London, but, for the same reason, on a part-time basis. Mommens

found her stay at Central frustrating, as she was not taught to throw pots in the way in which she wanted. A chance encounter at a ceramics exhibition resulted in more satisfactory, although unofficial, attendance at the classes of the American potter, William Staite Murray at the Royal College of Art in London. Luck also played a part in Mommens' going to work at the Devon pottery of Michael Cardew with whom she learnt a great deal of her craft.

Once she had established herself as an independent studio potter. Mommens does not seem to have experienced great difficulties in pursuing her career in the way that she wanted, apart from a period in the late 1940s when, having separated from her first husband, she felt forced to take a potting job where she was exploited as it was one of the few places which would accept her six year old son.

5.3. Alison Settle

Alison Settle(1891-1980) was a journalist so not someone who would automatically be called a 'designer'. However it is indisputable that she had a career in which she attempted to improve design standards in all areas of design, manufacture and production in the fashion business. In her later years, after a serious accident caused her to retire from journalism, she wrote on the history of fashion. Her journalism was in some respects, a career followed out of necessity.

She was brought up in Brighton, England by grand-parents and because her two brother's education came first she was sent to secretarial college instead of taking up the bursary she had won, in about 1907-8, for Somerville College, Oxford. After her secretarial course she worked for various Daily and Sunday newspapers and women's magazines, becoming editor of British 'Vogue' in 1929. She had married a lawyer, Alfred Towers Settle in 1918, but he contracted tuberculosis, so she had to support them both. When he died, in 1926, she had two children to support.

Her work for 'Vogue' was adventurous. She commissioned many, now famous, British writers including Virginia Woolf and Edith Sitwell. This was not in keeping with the American owners expectations. She was fired in 1936 and left with £2,000 in compensation(Newman, 1986). In 1937 she joined 'The Observer' and was in charge of the women's features. Her work in the late 1930s also included being an advisor to Wedgwood, the ceramics manufacturing company. She was also a member of the Council for Art and Industry during the 1930s. This was a Government body set up to raise the standard of design in British industry. Settle was a founder member of the Women's Press Club when it started in 1943. In the 1950s she was a member of the Council of Industrial Design. After retiring from 'The Observer' in 1960 she worked for the 'Lady' magazine.

During the late 1930s she was on a jury to judge designs for the British Plastics Design Award and was described as 'ideally equipped to judge from the woman's point of view'. This was the position imposed on all women working in design at this time. From Settle's private notes it is evident that she saw herself as an intermediary. There is some ambiguity in this as she put herself forward as one who could speak on behalf of the consumer and she also intended to act on behalf of the manufacturer when she was selling her skills as a 'style' consultant.

For her consultancy work for Wedgwood she was paid £50 per annum plus expenses. In this work she was in correspondence with the Director of the firm. In rough notes, dated July 1937, she advised them to influence the buyer in the shops as a means of influencing the wider public. She also stressed advertising over publicity as 'It is when the thing is beaten into the mind of the public that the public asks for it'(Settle, 1937). She also thought that 'the snobbish element cannot be overlooked in influencing British markets' and suggested the use of using titled hostesses to arrange table displays for use in publicity. She said, 'Lady Londonderry... always gets cooperation of this kind from Society women for the Irish Linen industry. I do not for one second, suppose that the women will arrange their own tables: you and Old Bleach(linen company) will arrange them for them!'(Settle, 1937)

Settle also got Constance Spry, a flower arranger who 'went through the front door' and worked for Royalty, Court and Society women, to advise Wedgwood on their pottery shapes and colour. In this work she was obviously using her knowledge of journalism, advertising and fashion and business connections and capitalising on her understanding of the social construction of taste.

She also gave talks to art college students who were studying fashion. In a lecture of 1938 she described the designer as the one who 'stands at the very heart of the whole fashion business', currently the 'cinderella' but due to become more important. To be successful the prospective designer had to understand the skills of the trade and be able to draw but the additional ingredient was to be able to understand trends and tendencies; to be able to anticipate was was going to happen next, by knowing what was happening in Paris.(Settle, 1938)

Through this description of some aspects of Settle's career it is evident that a journalist could have a

respected role influencing the design process as a 'communicator'. As with other women who entered the field of advertising she was expected to put the women's point of view. In Settle's case she was also raising the status of fashion, by seeing and promoting it as a vital part of business and trade.

5.4. Caroline Haslett

Caroline Haslett (1895-1957) was an untiring and effective campaigner for women's involvement in all aspects of the electrical industries with design always central to her concerns. After war work at the Cochran's Boiler factory in Scotland, in 1919 she became secretary to the Women's Engineering Society (WES) and then, in 1924, a founder member of the Electrical Association for Women (EAW) earning respect from those working in the electrical industries while working as its Director until 1956. She was was associated with other women's organisations including the British Federation of Business and Professional Women. She had numerous public appointments; they included being a member of the Council of the British Institute of Management; the Industrial Welfare Society; and member of the Council and first woman Vice-President of the Royal Society of Arts.(Worden, 1989:131-150)

Haslett was influential in a public way but she was also helpful through her support of individual women. In the areas within which she was working this also meant confronting class differences within the feminist movement. Women like her, who were creating a professional place for themselves as working women, were caught between the leisured wealthy upper-class women and working-class activists. She also had to counter press reports which highlighted her single status and put forward the positive aspects of being the 1920s independent 'batchelor girl'(Purcell, 1993).

She was supported by many other women who shared her enthusiasm and commitment to home-making, healthy living and scientific management in the home. She was equally keen to create opportunities for women to obtain professional work in the electrical industries. The Electrical Association for Women ran a school that trained women to become demonstrators of domestic appliances in shorooms. As a feminist she wished to work for all women, in the workplace and the home.

To be successful in this area meant exploiting the collaborative nature of design prevalent in the industry. The design process included various levels of discussion, including the feedback of information to the manufacturers. The Electrical Association for Women organised surveys of domestic appliances then in use. They also planned show houses and flats for both middle-class and working-class consumers. It was here that women like Caroline Haslett could be influential. In recognition of this, when looking at the achievements of the women who contributed to the design of appliances in the inter-war years, it is necessary to rethink design history as a study of the processes of negotiation rather than of the finished object or work of one individual. But because it was the engineer who took a leading role in determining the appearance as well as function of the appliances, any woman wishing to succeed as a designer in this area had to fight discrimination on attempting to enter the 'masculine' world of technology. It is therefore important to understand how women designers negotiated the social and economic conditions that made it difficult for them to realise their aspirations in the technological spheres of design and production. Most opportunities were created by women through their own determination but this was again, most often, in areas where they could speak for other women and put the 'women's point of view'.

6. Conclusion

The examples of these women designers illustrate the range of social and professional restraints placed upon them and the ways in which they developed their individual ways of working. This is not to argue that men did not face pressures from a variety of sources when choosing and establishing careers. Only that the process of negotiation and compromise is often more fundamental and more demanding for many women.

This has led to the conclusion that the intimate circumstances of individual women's lives have influenced their careers in design to an extent which far exceeds that of their male counterparts. Such circumstances include family responsibilities (as daughters, wives, partners and mothers), financial dependency and social conventions, not least those associated with class.

To define the attainment of women designers on the basis of a predictable career structure or evaluate their work solely through its portrayal of the 'feminine' is inadequate. Definitions need to be flexible and also need to embrace those women who might be called 'taste-makers' or 'communicators'.

Women were encouraged to work as designers in those areas where the 'feminine' point of view was a means of increasing consumption of mass-produced consumer goods. Any definition of design suggested by the work of these designers calls into question a rigid division between production and consumption. In this context the value of collaborative work can also be recognised.

Debates on design in the inter-war years revolved around the idea of Modernism as the progressive, inevitable way forward. In key areas of British design this was tempered by a lingering inheritance from the Arts and Crafts Movement. In many instances choices were made between abstraction or naturalism, hand or machine, mass-production or craft. Women designers contributed to these debates and, in addition, sought to break down patriarchal values within industry. Their particular contribution shows a flexible approach, often combining craft and design, home and work, art and industry, in personal but effective ways.

Writing their history not only means celebrating individual achievements. It also means recognising the negotiations that had to take place during their struggle for recognition within society. Our definition of design needs to embrace and value these qualities.

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