

4: The second wave of emancipation

One of the major threads of this exhibition is women's emancipation in design. We are presenting two waves of young women who entered the design circles. The first two figures to illustrate this pioneering role of women in design are Parisian Sonia Delaunay and Jutta Sika, who worked in Vienna. The women we present here have not yet been professional artists. They entered the world of design as if through the back door. Sonia Delaunay—because she was part of the artistic bohemia. Her husband was Robert Delaunay, creator of Orphism. She stood by his side as a wife, but she was also an artist in her own right who found her creative path in painting and fabrics design. At the World's Fair in Paris in 1925, she presented fabrics designs she made in her own boutique.

Jutta Sika, worked in Vienna and went into design thanks to Viennese Workshops. That was another way for women to begin in design – through art groups. She designed mostly ceramics. So we have two domains that are very feminine – fabrics on the one hand, and ceramics on the other. Only the following generation of women would be able to create projects that go beyond these areas, previously attributed to women.

Subsequent designers whose works we feature in our exhibition are the artists who are peers and contemporaries of Julia Keilowa. Sylvia Stave who is looking at us from the portrait, and Christa Ehrlich who hailed from Vienna, but worked in the Netherlands. All three designers share a similar life story. They were born almost at the same time, they graduated from regular art schools, they went on to do metalwork, which was an area previously reserved for men. In the past this had been regulated by guild rules, then social conventions. They all started collaborating with factories and they all became famous as metalwork designers, mostly of everyday use objects, such as cutlery and crockery, or office accessories. The later stages of their careers were also similar. They were forgotten after the war, and their memory, alongside the appreciation for their work, reemerged only in the 1990s.