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Women as Patrons and Intermediaries: A Footnote Introducing the Articles of the First MoMoWo E-book

The first MoMoWo conference-workshop, held from 23 to 25 September 2015 at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, focused on women designers, craftswomen, and architects and engineers between 1918 and 1945 in relation to the breakthrough of modernism. This was, however, a less homogeneous modernist period than it might seem. Between 1918 and 1925, principled functionalist modernism was not yet established, and in those years avant-garde developments culminated in the Dutch movement called De Stijl. Besides this, the majority of women worked in a modernist idiom that was derived from Art Deco or local traditional or vernacular design. Their work was of considerable interest, and examples were included in the MoMoWo project's publication *MoMoWo 100 works in 100 years. European women in architecture and design 1918–2018* (Ljubljana/Turin: France Stele Institute of Art History ZRC SAZU, 2016).

International modernism with its focus on functionalism became visible only after 1925. The Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), founded in June 1928 in Switzerland and active until 1959, stimulated the international dissemination of this particular form of modernist architecture. The congress was organised by Le Corbusier in collaboration with Héléne de Mandrot (1867–1948, Fig. 1). Héléne de Mandrot was a patron of Le Corbusier and owned the Swiss Château de la Sarraz where the first meeting was held. Architectural critic and historian Sigfried Giedion –who, with his wife, the art historian Carola Giedion-Welcker turned his own house in Zurich into a meeting place for artists– was the secretary-general. Héléne had attended the famous private art school, Académie Julian in Paris and had been active as a decorative designer and artist in Paris as well. From 1922, she organised various meetings with a focus on modern art and culture at her Château, in which she had created a Maison des Artistes; in 1929, a year after CIAM, there was a meeting on international independent cinema.¹



Fig. 1. Héléne de Mandrot, Le Corbusier, and Paul Otlet in Geneva, autumn 1929. Web, accessed 20 September 2017.

¹ A. Baudin, *Héléne de Mandrot et la Maison des Artistes de La Sarraz* (Lausanne: Payot, 1998).

In modernist architecture and CIAM, Hélène's role was equally significant. In his book *Space, Time, and Architecture. The Growth of a New Tradition*, Giedion recalled:

In February 1928, I received a letter from Madame Hélène de Mandrot, telling me she was about to visit Zurich. The purpose of this visit was to arrange for a meeting of architects connected with this new movement at her château of La Sarraz, a few kilometers north of the lake of Geneva in the canton of Vaud. Madame de Mandrot had already spoken of this possibility with Le Corbusier and other friends (P. Chareau, G. Guevrekian, and others) in Paris. The term "congress" was to be employed in its original sense of "working together." ... Three circumstances favored an international union of young architects. One was the initiative of Hélène de Mandrot, who had founded the *Maison des Artistes* and had already held a meeting of young painters. She now invited young architects from Belgium, Germany, France, Holland, Italy, Austria, Spain, and Switzerland to meet at this neutral spot in the center of Europe.²

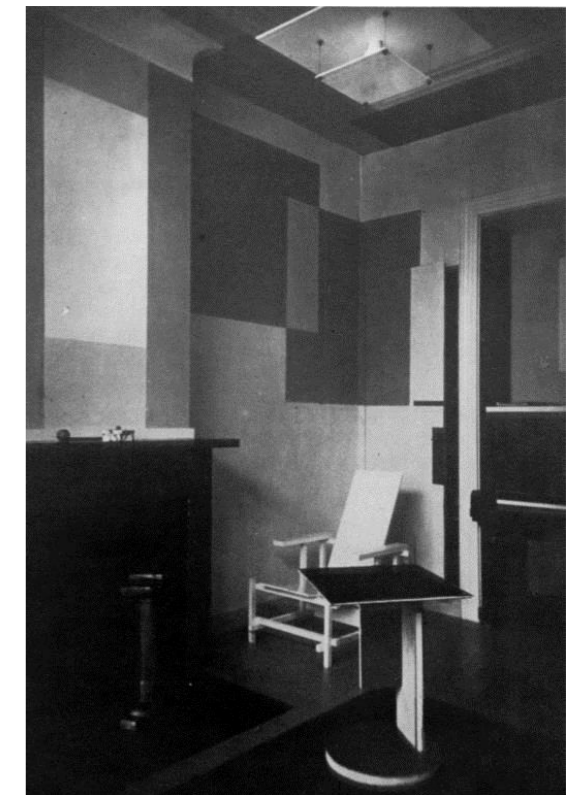
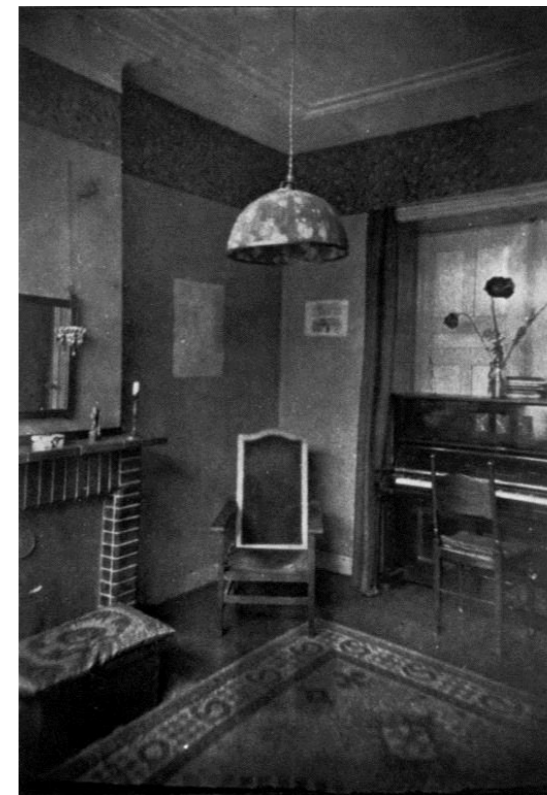
Interestingly, Giedion's canon-forming overview *Space, Time, and Architecture*, narrating the historical development of architecture towards modernism, was translated in 1954 to Dutch by a female patron of the Dutch avant-garde of De Stijl, Mathilda Brugman (1888–1958, Fig. 2).³

In 1922 or 1923, Til Brugman had commissioned Hungarian-born artist Vilmos Huszár to devise a new colour scheme for the living cum music room of her old city-house in The Hague where she lived with her friend, the singer, Sienna Masthoff. Huszár's *Spatial-Colour-Composition in Gray* of white, black and gray planes of rectangles and squares was furnished with a lamp by himself and a white-painted chair and a red-blue-yellow side table by the designer Gerrit Rietveld (Figs. 3 and 4).⁴

This white-painted chair is as remarkable as though much less famous than Rietveld's *Red-Blue* version of the chair, which today can be admired in museums all over the world. Til Brugman was not



Fig. 2. Til Brugman. Web, accessed 30 September 2017.



Figs. 3 and 4. Til Brugman's refurbished living cum music room; left, original appearance; right, refurbishment with wall composition and lamp designed by Vilmos Huszár and chair and side table by Gerrit Rietveld, Ligusterstraat 20, The Hague, 1923. Photographs Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

a visual artist or designer, but a poet of dada-inspired 'sound poems' and an essayist. She earned an income by teaching languages and translated texts from various languages. A friend and supporter of many architects and artists who formed the international avant-garde networks, she corresponded with figures such as Russian artist El Lissitzky and German artist Kurt Schwitters.⁵ Their letters give a lively impression of the contacts between Til and the artists. In July 1923, for example, Lissitzky wrote –addressing her as Tisi– that Rietveld had made a chair for him:

Liebe Tisi, von den Tag wie ich bin weck aus Holland, wollte ich jeden Tag Ihnen Lange Briefe schreiben ... Heute ist angekommen ein Brief von Rietfeld. Schreibt das er hat für mich ein Stuhl gemacht⁶

² *Space, Time, and Architecture. The Growth of a New Tradition* was first published in 1941; this quote is from the fifth revised and enlarged edition (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 696. French architect and furniture designer Pierre Chareau, together with Dutch architect Bernard Bijvoet, designed the early modernist glass and metal Maison de Verre in Paris in 1928–32. Armenian architect Gabriel Guevrekian was most known for the design of a Cubist garden at Villa Noailles in Hyères in southeast France.

³ The Dutch version is Siegfried Gideon, *Tijd, Ruimte, Bouwkunst. Vertaald door Til Brugman en inleiding door C. Van Eesteren* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1954). This does not include the later texts by Gideon about CIAM.

⁴ In Dutch, the room was called a 'Ruimte-Kleur-Compositie in Grijs'. See also Nancy J. Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge Mass/London: MIT, 1983), 46–49; Marijke Kuper, Lex Reitsma, *De stoel van Rietveld/ Rietveld's Chair* (Rotterdam: nai010 uitgevers/publishers, 2012), 99 and plate 19.

⁵ The 25 letters, written between 1923 and 1926, were discussed in 1997 by Carel Blotkamp, "Liebe Tilit, brieven van El Lissitzky en Kurt Schwitters aan Til Brugman, 1923-1926", *Jong Holland* 13 (1997) 1, 32–46, and *Jong Holland* 13 (1997) 4, 27–47, 62. The letters are preserved in Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD) in The Hague.

⁶ 'Dear Tisi, from the day I left Holland, I want to write you long letters every day... Today has arrived a letter from Rietfeld. Writes that he has for me made a chair ...'. *Blotkamp* 13 (1997) 1, 39. [Translation MG; El Lissitzky's writing is a mixture of German and Dutch words.]

From 1926 Til lived in the house together with German dada artist, Hannah Höch from Berlin. The room remained as avant-garde as it was: a photograph from 1929 shows another chair by Rietveld, a painting by Höch and, on Rietveld's side table, an abstract sculpture by Schwitters called *Vertikal*.⁷ In the same year Hannah Höch had a solo exhibition at the De Bron gallery for design and decorative art in The Hague. This gallery was managed by Ditte van der Vies-Heyting, the lover of the designer Chris Lebeau, who was the founder of the gallery and, from 1904, active as one of the most outstanding designers and craftsmen of the Netherlands.⁸

Both Til Brugman and Hélène de Mandrot, as well as Ditte van der Vies-Heyting, deserve attention in this footnote introduction because the first MoMoWo conference-workshop devoted relatively little attention to women as patrons, gallery leaders, or journalists. Rather, it favoured women as architects and designers who actively designed the international modernist canon, including some less modernist case studies compensating for this one-sided perspective as well. Many of those women architects and designers from different countries feature in this sumptuous e-book by authors from as many different countries. However, as other scholars have also argued, the role of women as intermediaries—be they collectors, patrons, or journalists—is of vital importance for a more inclusive history of architecture, design, art, and culture in general.

7 Reproduced in Blotkamp 13 (1997) 4, 31 fig. 7.

8 De Bron means The Source. Report of the opening of Gallery for Art and Decorative Art De Bron in 'Kunstkroniek', *De Residentiebode*, 20 June 1925. For Lebeau: Mechteld de Bois e.a., *Chris Lebeau 1878–1945* (Assen/Drents Museum, Haarlem/Frans Halsmuseum, 1987), 122, 189, 192–193, 253. For Til Brugman: Marleen Slob, *'De mensen willen niet rijpen, vandaar': Leven en werk van Til Burgman* (Amsterdam: VITA, 1994). For Höch's stay in the Netherlands: Chris Rehorst, 'Hannah Höch und die Niederlande', in: *Hannah Höch 1889–1978: Ihr Werk, Ihr Leben, Ihre Freunde* (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie and Argon, 1989), 41–52; and Maud Lavin, *Cut with the kitchen knife. The Weimar photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1993), 65–67.