

# Bauhaus Feminine Power and its Influence on Modern Fashion Design

Zhang Jiawei<sup>1</sup>, AZWADY MUSTAPHA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi, Malaysia, Bandar Seri Iskandar, Perak, 32610, Malaysia.

<sup>2</sup>College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi, Malaysia, Bandar Seri Iskandar, Perak, 32610, Malaysia.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.803085S>

Received: 07 May 2024; Accepted: 16 May 2024; Published: 12 June 2024

## ABSTRACT

The Bauhaus movement, spanning over a century, left an indelible mark on design, particularly through the contributions of female designers. This study explores the influence of Bauhaus women, such as Gunta Stölzl, Anni Albers, and Lilly Reich, who focused on textiles, children's goods, and household accessories. Their emphasis on simplicity, practicality, and emotional expression, characterized by vivid colors and geometric shapes, continues to inspire contemporary fashion labels like byFANG and ZI II CI IE. ByFANG seamlessly blends Anni Albers's artistic features with geometric pleats, while ZI II CI IE celebrates the Bauhaus ethos with multifunctional items exalting female strength. This analysis draws on literature reviews, historical research, and biographical studies to underscore the enduring impact of these female designers on the Bauhaus movement and their ongoing influence on modern fashion.

**Keywords:** Bauhaus; Female power; Modern fashion design

## INTRODUCTION

Bauhaus pioneered foundational courses in color, form, and texture, laying the groundwork for contemporary art education. The institution's workshops, designed to integrate theory with practice, also served the dual purpose of financial self-sufficiency, becoming a widely adopted model for modern art and design education. The enduring impact of Bauhaus teachers and students is reflected in their timeless works, some of which continue to be revered today, shaping successive generations of design professionals. Despite its closure after a mere 14 years and 3 months, driven by political upheavals, Bauhaus's contributions to modern art education and industrial design remain profound. The term "Bauhaus" has transcended its identity as a mere school, evolving into a design philosophy and a catalyst for innovation. This paper delves into the intricate history, educational methods, and lasting influence of Bauhaus, examining the enduring legacy that extends far beyond its temporal existence. This paper aims to fill this gap by summarizing the attributes and characteristics of design central elements and the logical relationships between design methods. It will establish a relatively standardized design process, applying it to the design of maternity wear for validation.

## RESEARCH METHODS

To comprehensively explore the impact of female designers within the Bauhaus movement, this study employs a multi-faceted research approach, integrating various methods to provide a nuanced understanding of their contributions.

## 2.1 Literature Review

The research commences with a thorough literature review to establish the theoretical framework. This involves an exploration of existing studies on the Bauhaus movement, its female designers, and their influence on design. Key themes and gaps in the literature are identified to inform the subsequent analysis.

## 2.2 Historical Research

Gathering historical data about the Bauhaus movement is imperative to understand its founding, evolution, key figures, and approach to gender inclusivity. Primary sources, including letters, diaries, and documents from the era, are scrutinized to provide insights into the socio-political context that shaped the Bauhaus environment.

## 2.3 Biographical Research

Focusing on specific female designers associated with Bauhaus, such as Gunta Stölzl, Anni Albers, and Lilly Reich, biographical research is conducted. This encompasses their backgrounds, education, influences, and significant contributions to design. Their unique perspectives and methodologies are analyzed to highlight the diversity within the Bauhaus female designer cohort.

## 2.4 Contemporary Fashion Analysis

To illustrate the enduring influence of Bauhaus women on modern fashion, a comparative analysis is conducted on contemporary fashion labels like byFANG and ZI II CI IE. This involves an examination of design elements, materials, and stylistic features that draw inspiration from Bauhaus principles.

By synthesizing insights from literature reviews, historical research, biographical studies, and contemporary fashion analysis, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of female Bauhaus designers. Through this multi-method approach, the research seeks to contribute valuable insights into the lasting legacy of these designers and their ongoing influence on the field of design.

## FEMALE POWER IN BAUHAUS

For a considerable period in human history, women were subjugated in patriarchal societies, often denied opportunities for education. However, the development of Enlightenment ideas in France and the impact of two industrial revolutions led to a gradual liberation of thought in the late 19th to early 20th centuries in the Western world. (Friedrich Engels, 1875)Engels asserted that the first prerequisite for women's liberation is their return to public labor. This intellectual awakening prompted women to transition from the confines of the household to active participation in society, setting the stage for the emergence of female designers at the Bauhaus.

Influenced by the liberation of women's consciousness, (Walter Gropius, 1919) the first director of Bauhaus, emphasized inclusivity in the "National Bauhaus Weimar Teaching Program." He declared, Anyone deserving of respect, whose talent and prior education are recognized by the masters, has the possibility of becoming a Bauhaus apprentice, irrespective of age or gender. Gropius further proclaimed in his inaugural speech, Here, there is no distinction between the beauty and strength of the two sexes; each artisan bears the same responsibility for their work. This early stance reflected Bauhaus's ambitious artistic goals and its inclusive approach to students. Consequently, the newly established Bauhaus, positioned as one of the few art schools that did not discriminate against women, attracted numerous aspiring female designers. Surprisingly, the number of female applicants and admitted students equaled or surpassed their male counterparts, defying Gropius's expectations.

(WangXiao, 2018)Despite these strides, gender inequality persisted. Gropius implemented measures to mitigate the influx of female students, such as restricting their enrollment and workshop choices. The majority

of female students were directed towards textile workshops, deviating slightly from Bauhaus's stated commitment to gender equality. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm and creativity of female students remained undiminished. They diligently pursued their studies and artistic endeavors, contributing to the accumulation of a formidable female presence within Bauhaus. This historical context, rooted in the evolving status of women in society, underscores the complexity of gender dynamics at Bauhaus. While the institution initially embodied progressive ideals of equality, pragmatic measures were implemented to address the unexpected surge of female enrollment. These contradictions laid the foundation for the resilience and determination exhibited by female designers at Bauhaus, whose contributions continue to be celebrated and studied.

Scholars such as (Gunta Stölzl), (Anni Albers) and (Lilly Reich) have delved into the intricacies of gender dynamics at Bauhaus, providing valuable insights into the experiences of female designers during this transformative period. Their research complements the exploration of Bauhaus's early commitment to inclusivity and the subsequent challenges faced by female students.

## ANALYSIS OF BAUHAUS FEMALE DESIGNERS

### 4.1 Gunta Stölzl

Gunta Stölzl, during her time at the Bauhaus, dedicated herself to the textile workshop, traditionally considered a realm exclusive to women. She advocated for studying the interplay between form, color, texture, and specific textile materials through weaving. Stölzl adeptly integrated elements of modern art into her weaving, experimenting with innovative materials such as glass paper, and refining technical procedures while establishing a novel teaching model. Her presence significantly contributed to the achievements of the Bauhaus textile workshop. In collaboration with Marcel Breuer in 1921, Stölzl co-created the "African Chair" (see Figure 1), enhancing a wooden stool with vibrant woven fabric, adding a touch of color to the otherwise plain structure. Notably, her large wall hanging titled "Red-Green" (see Figure 2), completed in 1927-1928, featured a composition of rectangles, diamonds, waves, and irregular shapes, evoking a sense of spontaneity. The vivid colors, strong contrasts, and compact richness of the artwork suggest an imaginative space. Stölzl's proficiency in weaving color blocks is evident in her works, underscoring the influence of the foundational courses led by Johannes Itten. Scholars such as (Regina Bittner) and (Sigrid Wortmann Weltge) have extensively explored Gunta Stölzl's contributions to the Bauhaus textile workshop, shedding light on her innovative techniques and the impact of foundational courses on her artistic approach. Through her pioneering work, Stölzl not only advanced the field of textile design but also left an enduring mark on the intersection of art and craftsmanship at the Bauhaus.



Figure 1 The African Chair Figure 2 Red-Green  
(Sources: 1921 .Bauhaus Collection Collected works)

(Sources: 1927. What You Should Know About the Bauhaus 50 Sacred Objects)

## 4.2 An ni Albers

Within the Bauhaus textile workshop, Anni Albers emerged as a significant figure. Born into a privileged family, she was exposed to art from an early age. Contrary to the misconception that she entered the textile workshop due to limitations on women in other workshops, Anni's own health issues led her to this domain. Emphasizing women's independence, she delivered a notable speech at Black Mountain College, advocating for women to break out of their comfort zones and pursue independent exploration—a sentiment widely quoted to this day. Anni Albers believed that "life needs obsession," a philosophy evident in her approach to art. Expressing great admiration for Paul Klee, her works reflect inspiration from the artists who taught at Bauhaus. Her murals and carpets predominantly feature a novel form of abstract art, comprised of non-representational imagery (see Figure 3). Anni ingeniously amalgamated the techniques of the textile workshop, industrial textile production, and the craftsmanship of modernist abstract art to create a new unity. At the time, she was a trailblazer both in tapestry-making and in the application of practical materials. Disdaining trends and fashion, Anni rejected terms like "trend," "fashion," and "profession," asserting that quality and sincerity were paramount. Her work "Six Prayers" (see Figure 4), created in 1966-1967, commemorates the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis. The piece, using a combination of black, white, and gray lines reminiscent of the cover of the Old Testament, incorporates elements resembling written Hebrew. Energetic yet profound, the artwork evokes a deep sense of emotional consciousness, prompting reverence for life. Scholars such as (Nicholas Fox Weber) and (Jeannine Falino) have delved into Anni Albers's contributions to the Bauhaus textile workshop, shedding light on her innovative techniques and the intersection of craftsmanship, industry, and modernist art in her works. Through her pioneering efforts, Anni Albers not only left an indelible mark on the Bauhaus legacy but also challenged conventions in both art and gender roles.



Figure 3 Rug design for children's room Figure 4 Six prayers  
(Sources: The Bauhaus Team: Six The Master of Modernism, 1928)  
(Sources: The Bauhaus Team: Six The Master of Modernism, 1966)

## 4.3 Lilly Reich

Lilly Reich, perhaps not a widely recognized name, is nevertheless renowned for her collaboration with Mies van der Rohe in creating the iconic Barcelona Chair. As the first woman to join the Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen), Lilly made outstanding contributions to architecture, furniture design, interior decoration, and fashion, standing out as one of the few female teachers at the Bauhaus. Emphasizing independence, she once stated, "Who will know in what way new forms may be discovered? Certainly not by staying within the circles now defined. It will come through the intelligence of women, and it will be what it will be. It will be its own foundation." Prior to her tenure at the Bauhaus in 1932, Lilly had already established a solid reputation in the German design community. While Lilly's contributions to industrial design, particularly furniture, are widely acknowledged, her work in fashion design is noteworthy. Commencing fashion design in 1911, she opened a small tailor shop during the war years of 1916-1917, exclusively retailing garments of her own creation. Her clothing designs (see Figures 5-8) exhibit a style marked by simplicity, straight lines, and practical wearability, aligning seamlessly with Mies's principle of "less is more" and ensuring a contemporary sensibility. Lilly's minimalist and elegant approach in clothing, characterized by loose and comfortable fits, liberated women from the constraints of previous fashion norms, possibly influenced by the aftermath loose and comfortable fits, liberated women from the constraints of previous

fashion norms, possibly influenced by the aftermath of World War I. Lilly regarded clothing as utilitarian rather than artistic, emphasizing that garments should integrate with the wearer to express their spirit, enrich their souls, and enhance their overall life experience. Her conviction that clothing serves a functional purpose while embodying a sense of individuality reflects in her designs.



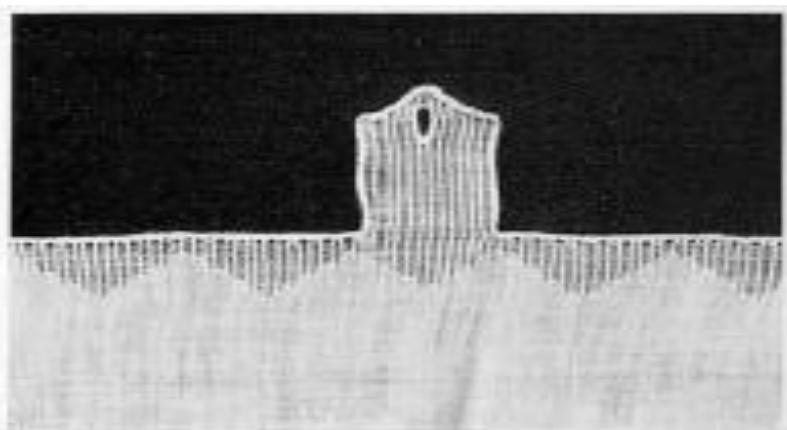
Figure 5 underwear  
(Sources: Questions of Fashion, 1922)



Figure 6 Dresses Figure  
(Sources: Questions of Fashion, 1926)



7. Morning coat  
(Sources: Questions of Fashion, 1926)



(Sources: Questions of Fashion, 1926)

#### 4.4 Other Designers

In addition to the previously mentioned designers, numerous female designers made significant contributions in various domains. For instance, Alma Siedhoff-Buscher excelled in the realm of children's toys and rooms. Her 1923 design of the "Ship" toy remains visible in the market, showcasing her enduring impact on children's play. Lucia Moholy, known for her prowess in photography, accompanied László Moholy-Nagy to the Bauhaus and documented valuable materials, leaving a rich visual legacy. In the metal workshop, Marianne Brandt achieved notable success. Her iconic designs, such as the spherical teapot, flat-bottomed teapot, sugar bowl, cheese separator, and smoking accessories, have gained widespread recognition. These examples demonstrate the diverse accomplishments of Bauhaus female designers across various fields.

### FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Bauhaus Female Designers Design Characteristics

Upon comparing the design works of Bauhaus female and male designers, it becomes evident that despite diverse backgrounds and life experiences, female designers share commonalities in their design focus. Primarily, female designers exhibit a heightened interest in children, textiles, women's lives, and domestic details. Many consciously or unconsciously concentrate their design expertise on areas such as textiles and interior decor, with the Bauhaus textile workshop being a prominent arena for female designers' creativity. In the Bauhaus context, the textile workshop served as a vibrant space for most female designers. Beyond textiles, Bauhaus female designers carved a niche in household items, demonstrating a keen concern for children's lives. Their designs aimed to infuse style into everyday life, transforming homes from sterile, angular spaces to vibrant interiors with rich colors and functional items. However, this also indicates that Bauhaus female designers did not entirely break free from the influences of family and societal expectations, even as they aspired for freedom and independence.

Furthermore, owing to distinct perspectives on life, Bauhaus female designers displayed a meticulous observation of life details, resulting in designs with a heightened emphasis on emotional experiences. In contrast to their male counterparts, female designers' works exhibited a finer, more nuanced quality. For instance, Anni Albers' 1966-1967 creation, "Six Prayers," intricately wove her emotions into the fabric, seeking resonance with society through this expressive medium. Bauhaus female designers' works, when compared to male designers, often carry a certain delicacy. Their societal roles and inherent characteristics lead to a preference for softer, curved lines, demonstrating a mastery of using arcs in their designs. Despite this, female designers' works are inevitably influenced, to varying extents, by male designers. The profound impact of male designers in Bauhaus foundational courses deeply affected aspects such as color and form in the works of female designers, even shaping their future careers. Nevertheless, the distinct and creative personalities of these Bauhaus female designers successfully transformed these influences into unique forms of artistic expression. It is the collaboration and fusion of male and female perspectives that ultimately contributed to the Bauhaus legacy.

#### 5.2 The Influence of Bauhaus Women on Modern Fashion Design

By synthesizing insights from literature reviews, historical research, biographical studies, and contemporary fashion analysis, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of female Bauhaus designers. Through this multi-method approach, the research seeks to contribute valuable insights into the lasting legacy of these designers and their ongoing influence on the field of design. Over the more than 100 years of Bauhaus history, its impact on the design world remains indelible, with Bauhaus designers leaving an imprint on various facets of modern design. The influence of Bauhaus female designers on contemporary fashion design can be categorized into two main directions: designers drawing inspiration from the works of Bauhaus female designers and designers channeling the spirit of Bauhaus female designers into their fashion creations. Firstly, designers often draw inspiration directly from the works of Bauhaus female designers for

their fashion creations. In the F/W 2020 collection "New Boundaries" by the brand by FANG, Bauhaus serves as a prominent design inspiration. Specifically, within this collection, there are garments directly inspired by the works of Anni Albers (see Figures 9-10). The designer at byFANG found a certain resonance between Anni Albers' creations and the signature origami designs of byFANG. Consequently, Albers' intricate interplay of lines was translated into the garments using ribbons, complementing the origami aesthetic of byFANG. This fusion achieved a three-dimensional and layered effect, infusing the clothing with geometric and visual tension. The collection seamlessly combines Western modernist art with innovative elements from traditional Chinese art. Emphasizing clean lines, comfort, and a fusion of modern and traditional elements in terms of color, fabric, and style, the garments reinterpret Anni Albers' work in the language of byFANG, presenting a fresh and innovative expression of Bauhaus influence on modern fashion.



Figure 9,10 byFANG F/W2020 clothing  
(Sources: Taobao store, 2022)

Secondly, designers are inspired by the spirit of Bauhaus female designers for their fashion creations, exemplified by the brand ZI II CI IE. As an example, ZI II CI IE, founded by Zhi Chen, is a rare all-knit brand that focuses on "crafting every sweater to perfection." In their 2020 autumn-winter collection, the brand embraced the concept of "Bauhaus girls simplifying complexity, knowing what they want, achieving a perfect harmony of humanity and technology, and succeeding wherever they go," as the intrinsic meaning guiding both design and promotion. Positioned as an artistic brand, ZI II CI IE redefines the "Bauhaus girl" in modern language, emphasizing that girls should not be confined by definitions, but rather possess infinite possibilities. The collection boldly incorporates vibrant colored fabrics such as lake blue, rose red, yellow, and green, creating a striking contrast and vivid color palette. The garments skillfully combine rich colors and simple, lively patterns, showcasing structural lines within the fabrics and revealing the designer's bold imagination. Whether in terms of color, style, or pattern, the collection presents contrasting effects, maintaining a harmonious balance between warmth and coolness, and blending strength with softness. Designer Zhi Chen pays tribute to the Bauhaus girls who break boundaries and create, using fashion to transform them into "versatile artistic visionaries" (see Figures 11-13).

Arkiiny

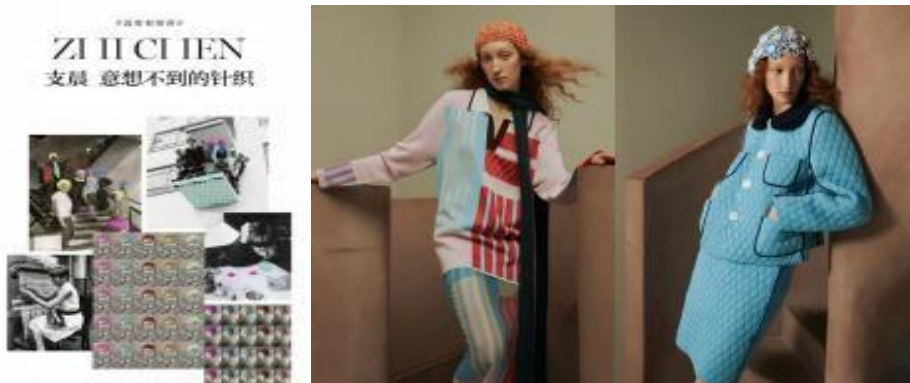


Figure 11,12,13 byZI II CI IEN A/W20 clothing  
(Sources: Official platform of Harper's Bazaar, 2022)

## CONCLUSION

Like the brief existence of Bauhaus itself, female instructors at Bauhaus struggled against gender disparities and inequality, as well as societal and political challenges of their time. Similarly, their works and spirit, intertwined with that of Bauhaus, have endured. Today, Bauhaus female designers are affectionately referred to as "Bauhaus girls," a term not exclusively reserved for the female designers of Bauhaus but extended to those courageous women who break from tradition to explore creative possibilities for the future. This paper, through extensive collection and analysis of images, texts, and literature, exemplifies the characteristics of three female designers: Gunta Stölzl, Anni Albers, and Lilly Reich. It concludes that while female designers are influenced by their male counterparts, they seamlessly integrate these influences to create distinct differences. The impact of Bauhaus female designers on modern fashion design manifests in two aspects: designers drawing inspiration from the works of Bauhaus female designers and those drawing inspiration from the spirit of Bauhaus females. It is evident that Bauhaus female designers not only offer practical inspiration for modern fashion design but also serve as a spiritual catalyst and embodiment for contemporary fashion.

In summary, as society progresses and minds liberate, there is an increasing focus on "female power," with women excelling in various fields. In modern, youthful fashion brands, we witness the influence of Bauhaus female power on contemporary fashion design. This trend provides a robust theoretical foundation for the influence of Bauhaus female power on modern fashion design. The "Bauhaus girls" exemplify the spirit of Bauhaus, simplifying complexities in design, making them the finest embodiments of Bauhaus ideals in modern design.

## REFERENCES

1. Engels, F. (2000). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (3rd ed.). People's Publishing House.
2. Li, D. (2019). Bauhaus Women and Basic Courses. *Chinese Art*, 1, 24-31.
3. Liu, J. (2019). "Impromptu Weaving" and the Reconstruction of Female Myth in Fiber Art. *New Art*, 6, 123-126.
4. Editorial Board of Art and Design Magazine. (2003). *Bauhaus: Masters and Students*. Art and Design Magazine Press.
5. Wang, X. (2019). Design History from a Feminist Perspective: A Case Study of Bauhaus Female Designers. *Journal of Shandong Institute of Arts and Crafts*, 2, 114-120.
6. Yan, L. (2017). Same Origin Design: Paul Klee's Teaching Influence on Bauhaus Weaving Workshop. *Decoration*, 2, 90-91.
7. Whitford, F. (2001). *Bauhaus* (H. Lin, Trans.). Triple Unity Bookstore.
8. Weber, N. F., et al. (2013). *Bauhaus Team: Six Modernist Masters*. Machinery Industry Press.
9. Zhang, C., & Wang, Y. (2014). *Bauhaus: A Design Enlightenment*. Shandong Fine Arts Press.
10. Weber, N. F., & Xu, X. (2019). Where Are the Women of Bauhaus? *Art and Design*, 4, 44-47.
11. Schuldenfrei, R., & Fisher, A. (2014). Lilly Reich: Questions of Fashion. *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, 21(1), 102-120.
12. Müller, U., & Radewaldt, I. (2019). *Bauhaus Women*. Elisabeth Sandmann Verlag.
13. Droste, M. (2002). *Bauhaus, 1919-1933*. Taschen.