

# Old threads woven into new dimensions

Heidrun Rosenberg

You may be surprised, but an international conference on 'Great Women Art Historians' in 2021 was a first. Of course, not the first feminist conference by art historians. For instance, in German-speaking countries, between 1982 and 2002, women art historians organized seven congresses, one of them in Vienna (1986), and also some German university colloquia, where researchers have already dealt with the invisibility of women art historians in 1994 (Kiel) and in 1997 (Marburg).<sup>1</sup> They, for instance, discussed the role of male art historians at universities as authoritarian constructors of androcentric art historiography.<sup>2</sup> And even more and very wisely, Barbara Paul and her colleagues Barbara Lange and Gabriele Hofner-Kulenkamp warned as early as 1994 that it could not be a matter of contrasting the existing canon of great male art historians with a corresponding female one. Instead, they

---

<sup>1</sup> The seven women art historians' conferences took place at regular intervals in German-speaking countries between 1982 and 2002: Marburg (1982), Zürich (1984), Vienna (1986), Berlin (1988), Hamburg (1991), Trier/Tübingen (1995/1996), Berlin (2002). See: Hildegard Frübis, 'Kunstgeschichte', in Christina von Braun, Inge Stephan, eds, *Gender-Studien. Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart, Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler 2000, 262-275; Anja Zimmermann, 'Gab es doch einen Tomatenwurf der Kunsthistorikerinnen? Die Kunsthistorikerinnentagungen (1982-2002) in der Perspektive von 1968', *FKW // Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur* 65, december 2018, 28-43. For the university colloquia at the Christian-Albrechts-University Kiel 1994 and the Philipps-University Marburg 1997 see Gabriele Hofner-Kulenkamp, Barbara Lange, Barbara Paul, eds, 'Kunsthistorikerinnen – ein Thema für die Wissenschaftsgeschichte', *kritische berichte* 22, 1994 (4) 4-5. Barbara Paul, 'Kunsthistorikerinnen seit 1970: Wissenschaftskritik und Selbstverständnis', *kritische berichte* 26, 1998 (3) 5-9. An overview of the research that began in parallel with the above-mentioned congresses in the 1980s before the fall of the 'Iron Curtain' can be found in the following publications that appeared after our call: K. Lee Chichester, Brigitte Sölch, eds, 'Einleitung & Editorische Notiz', in K. Lee Chichester and Brigitte Sölch, *Kunsthistorikerinnen 1910-1980. Theorien, Methoden, Kritiken*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag 2021, 9-37 and: Brigitte Sölch, Jo Zibritzki, Anja Zimmermann, eds, *Die Kunsthistorikerin? Bilder und Images` kritische berichte* 49 4/2021. See also the insightful and complementary reviews on this publication and the Viennese conference: Stephanie Marchal, Julia Ziegler, 'Von den "unkritischen Gewohnheiten des Geistes" (Raymond Williams)' *Kunstchronik* 75, Februar 2022, 62-69. Marianne Koos, 'K. Lee Chichester / Brigitte Soelch (Hg.) (2021): *Kunsthistorikerinnen 1910-1980. Theorien, Methoden, Kritiken*, Berlin, Dietrich Reimer Verlag', *FKW // Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur* 72, Februar 2023, 109-115. As for the social-historical orientation of German-language theorizing on gender discourse, see: Regina Becker-Schmidt, Gudrun Axeli-Knapp, eds, *Feministische Theorien zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Junius 2000, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Silke Wenk, 'Einleitung', in Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, Silke Wenk, eds, *Mythen von Autorschaft und Weiblichkeit im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Schriften zur 6. Kunsthistorikerinnen - Tagung (2. Sektion) in Tübingen: 11. bis 14. April 1996) Marburg: Jonas Verlag 1997, 12-32.

called for a critical study of the scientific (*Wissenschaftliche*) system and for developing an alternative understanding of science that considers both women and men, recognizing that women more often pursue their professional practice outside established institutions.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, or maybe precisely because of this, the conference in Vienna was the first internationally aligned congress on women art historians in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary manner and did not leave out the sphere of Eastern European academia. The lectures were about women art historians since the foundation of the discipline in universities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. They were also about women who have never studied at universities, but dealt with art, participated in art discourses in various media and institutions, and were involved worldwide as essential actors in cultural life. For a few days, the Academy of Fine Arts' Vienna auditorium became an international forum picking up old threads and weaving them into new dimensions.<sup>4</sup> Since we received applications for the conference from nearly all parts of the world, we extended its duration to four days. This special section of the *Journal of Art Historiography* presents a representative selection of the papers in a revised form.

However, the idea for the conference emerged from a source-based, micro-historical-local perspective on the art historiography of the 'Vienna School'. The introduction will explain how the project has evolved: Its starting point was a tribute to Renate Wagner-Rieger, the first art history woman full professor at the University of Vienna in 1971. The second section shows how the long-forgotten women students in the first half of the 20th century in Vienna came to attention through a new memorial to the 'Excluded, Emigrated, and Murdered Members of the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna 1933/1934 – 1938 – 1945', which was erected in 2008. The third section discusses early encounters between professors and these women students as reflected in the Viennese archives.

---

<sup>3</sup> Hofner-Kulenkamp, Lange, Paul, eds, 'Kunsthistorikerinnen', 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> The conference could not have taken place without the generous support of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Public Service and Sports (BMKoeS), the cultural department of the city of Vienna, the University of Vienna, the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Zukunftsfonds Austria. Special thanks go to Johan Hartle (Director of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna), Christoph Bazil (President of the BDA), Sabine Haag (Director of the Kunsthistorische Museum) Fani Gargova, Raphael Rosenberg and Lioba Theis (University of Vienna), Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat (Academy of Applied Arts Vienna), Irene Below and Grazia Buchwald. Sensitised to the absences of women in art history, we became aware of a study group founded in 2018 within the 'Ulmer Verein'. Researchers around Annette Dorgerloh and Lee Chichester were focusing on the history of women art historians mainly before 1970, and are now located at the Humboldt University in Berlin. <https://www.kunstgeschichte.hu-berlin.de/forschung/laufende-forschungsprojekte/wege-methoden-kritiken-kunsthistorikerinnen-1880-1970/> (14. June 2023). We thank them for continued support.

### **A nightly chat about the first full professor of art history in Vienna, Renate Wagner-Rieger (1921-1980)**

The first ideas for the conference emerged in a short conversation with Julia Rüdiger in 2019. She was preparing a symposium in memory of Renate Wagner-Rieger.<sup>5</sup> Born in 1921, the Austrian art historian belonged to the generation whose studies were strongly affected by the crises of World War II and the Nazis.<sup>6</sup> Despite the troubled times, she was the youngest of the first four women appointed to a full professorship at the University of Vienna and the first at Vienna's Department of Art History in 1971.<sup>7</sup> She remained the only one for a long time, even after her untimely death in 1980. It was not until 1996 that the department appointed a second woman chairholder, Deborah Klimburg-Salter.<sup>8</sup> A third followed in 2005 with Lioba Theis.<sup>9</sup> Unlike her predecessors, she was recruited from the outside, from Germany.

When Renate Wagner-Rieger embarked on an academic career, the usual path in Vienna was within the institution: once you're in, you go even further. It seems to me that this longstanding practice of internal appointments, which was maintained in Vienna officially until 2002, had its consequences for women.<sup>10</sup> Whether this practice led to a university community closing itself off and strengthening the internal, mostly male-dominated, hierarchical networks should be discussed. Women were allowed to habilitate but did not reach top positions. Of the five women who habilitated in art history at the University of Vienna between 1991 and 2004, the American Deborah Klimburg-Salter was the only one to receive a full

---

<sup>5</sup> call: [Renate Wagner-Rieger \(1921–1980\), \(Wien, 11-13 Nov 21\) - ArtHist.net: Fachforum der Kunstgeschichte / Archiv](#) (9. June 2023) program: [Renate Wagner-Rieger. Leben, Werk und Wirkung \(online, 11-12 Nov 21\) - ArtHist.net: Fachforum der Kunstgeschichte / Archiv](#) (9. June 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Hans Sedlmayr und die Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Wien 1938-1945' *Kunst und Politik* 5, 2003, 161-194.

<sup>7</sup> Ingeborg Schemper-Sparholz, 'Ein Tor der Erinnerung ist noch lange keine Triumphpforte. Auf den biografischen Spuren der Kunsthistorikerin Renate Wagner-Rieger (1921-1980)' in Marianne Klemun, Hubert D. Szemethy, Fritz Blakolmer, eds, *Science Tracing: Spuren und Zeichen im öffentlichen Raum. Kulturhistorisches Wissen der Universität Wien*, Wien, Köln: Böhlau Verlag 2021, 193-218. For archive-materials see: [Wagner-Rieger Renate \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (9. June 2023). Cordula Bischoff, 'Professorinnen der Kunstwissenschaft – Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft', *FKW // Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur* 5, may 1989, 9-18, provides an overview of women art history-Professors in German-Speaking Academia (on Wagner-Rieger 12). On the situation for women full professors at the University of Vienna in the life time of Renate Wagner-Rieger: Brigitta Keintzel and Ilse Korotin, eds, *Wissenschaftlerinnen in und aus Österreich. Leben-Werk-Wirken*, Wien Köln Weimar: Böhlau 2002. Besides Renate Wagner Rieger (780-785), there were three women full professors: Sylvia Bayr-Klimpfinger (1907-1980), full professorship in psychology 1956 (50-52); Bertha Karlik 1904-1990, full professorship in physics 1956 (353-356); Gertrud Thausing (1905-1977) full professorship in egyptology 1969 (745-747).

<sup>8</sup> For biographical data see [Klimburg Lebenslauf \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (23. August 2023).

<sup>9</sup> For biographical data see [Theis Lebenslauf \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (17. August 2023).

<sup>10</sup> [RIS - Universitätsgesetz 2002 - Bundesrecht konsolidiert, Fassung vom 17.06.2023 \(bka.gv.at\)](#) (17. June 2023), see §§98.

professorship in 1996.<sup>11</sup> As the chair of Asian Art had been newly established and there were several external competitors, this was not in fact an intra-institutional career in the traditional sense.<sup>12</sup>

What was the key to the success of Renate Wagner-Rieger? Her autobiography, written in 1976 on the occasion of her appointment as a Corresponding Member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, delivers interesting answers.<sup>13</sup> She was first trained as a typist. However, a strong desire for a career prompted the young woman to take a high school diploma at night school. As she wrote, this was the crucial challenge of her life:<sup>14</sup> she became the first woman in her family to enrol at a university.

It is likely that she did not know exactly what to expect, or which women had studied art history in Vienna before her. None had been allowed to habilitate in Vienna, and many had to flee just before Renate Wagner-Rieger could start her studies in 1942. Ingeborg Schemper-Sparholz has already pointed to her silence regarding ideological exclusions under the institutional leadership of Hans Sedlmayr.<sup>15</sup> One can assume that her role models could only be male. Adaptation was the silver bullet to success. She habilitated in 1956 and was appointed associate professor in 1962.<sup>16</sup> The academic atmosphere would have been similar to what Irene Below experienced at the universities in Munich, Bonn, and Berlin in those years. In terms of content and methodology, a conservative climate prevailed, limited to form analysis and iconography, and the local historiography of the subject was quietly ignored.<sup>17</sup>

Renate Wagner-Rieger was also very active in the non-university sector, using her knowledge to campaign for preserving historical monuments and cultural policy in Vienna. Perhaps this duality launched her career as a woman in academia? We should consider two points of view:

On the one hand, there is no doubt about her greatest merit. It was the interdisciplinary research project 'Die Wiener Ringstraße. Bild einer Epoche'. Renate Wagner-Rieger initiated the project, acquired funding from the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, the first major private science-funding foundation in the history of the

---

<sup>11</sup> Women's habilitations in Art History remained a rarity in Vienna even after Renate Wagner Rieger. To date, there are only five: The American Deborah Klimburg-Salter 1989 and the Austrians Martina Pippal 1991, Monika Dachs 2004, Michaela Krieger 2004, Ingeborg Schemper-Sparholz 2004.

<sup>12</sup> [Geschichte des Instituts \(univie.ac.at\)](https://www.univie.ac.at) (23. August 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Hermann Fillitz, Peter Haiko, Walter Krause, eds, *Renate Wagner-Rieger*, Wiesbaden: Steiner 1981, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Fillitz, Haiko, Krause, eds, *Renate Wagner-Rieger*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Schemper-Sparholz, 'Ein Tor der Erinnerung', 199.

<sup>16</sup> Fillitz, Haiko, Krause, *Renate Wagner-Rieger*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Irene Below, 'Kontexte der Erinnerung – Zur Wahrnehmung exilierter Kunsthistorikerinnen seit den 1960er Jahren in Deutschland und Österreich' in Inge Hansen-Schaberg and Hiltrud Häntzschel, eds, *Alma Maters Töchter im Exil. Zur Vertreibung von Wissenschaftlerinnen und Akademikerinnen in der NS-Zeit*, München: Ed. text + kritik 2011, (248-278), 248.

Federal Republic of Germany, and edited its sixteen volumes (1969-1981).<sup>18</sup> This enterprise had a far-reaching significance for a novel positioning of the Vienna Department after the Second World War. Wagner-Rieger not only introduced a new collegial and collective working style that undermined established hierarchies and sought dialogue with students and lecturers. Regarding gender, it should be noted that one-third of the contributing authors were women. Two of them were later appointed as full university professors.<sup>19</sup> The percentage of women whose dissertations Wagner-Rieger supervised was somewhat higher at 12 to 31, that is 37,2%.<sup>20</sup> However, it is remarkable that this number was lower than the female rate among the students of Josef Strzygowski (1862-1941), which rose to 54% in 1932 as calculated by Jo Ziebritzki in her article for the present issue. This may indicate the fracture in gender balance caused by the Nazi terror and the Second World War.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, methodologically Renate Wagner-Rieger was anything but progressive. She remained deeply rooted in the habitual mindset of the Viennese School, going back at least to Alois Riegl (1858-1905) and continued by researchers such as Hans Sedlmayr (1896-1905), one of Renate Wagner-Rieger's teachers.<sup>22</sup> Was it due to her adopted profile that she is the only woman named in

---

<sup>18</sup> Renate Wagner-Rieger, *Die Wiener Ringstraße: Bild einer Epoche; die Erweiterung der Inneren Stadt Wien unter Kaiser Franz Joseph*, Graz: Böhlau 1969-1970, Wiesbaden: Steiner 1971-1981. With Renate Wagner-Rieger, the team numbered twenty-one researchers, including eight women: Elisabeth Lichtenberger, Ulrike Planner-Steiner, Mária Pötzl-Malíková, Mara Reissberger, Elfriede Mejchar, Renata Kassal-Mikula, Elisabeth Springer, Renate Wagner-Rieger.

<sup>19</sup> Mária Pötzl-Malíková was head of the independent Department of History of Visual Art in 1999-2002 at the Comenius University Bratislava. [History of the Department \(uniba.sk\)](#) (10. June 2023); Elisabeth Lichtenberger (1925-2017) became a full professor at the University of Vienna in the department of geography and regional research in 1972. See Keintzel and Korotin, eds, *Wissenschaftlerinnen in und aus Österreich*, 469-474.

<sup>20</sup> Fillitz, Haiko, Krause, eds, *Renate Wagner-Rieger*, 43-44.

<sup>21</sup> Below, 'Kontexte der Erinnerung', 264.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher S. Wood, ed., *The Vienna School Reader. Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*. New York: Zone Books 2000, 15 (Hans Sedlmayr). Richard Woodfield, ed., *Framing Formalism*, Amsterdam 2001; Tanja Jenni, Raphael Rosenberg, 'Die Analyse der Objekte und das Studium der Quellen – Wiens Beitrag zur Etablierung einer universitären Kunstgeschichte', in: Karl A. Fröschl, Gerd B. Müller, Thomas Olechowski, Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber, eds, *Reflexive Innenansichten aus der Universität. Disziplinengeschichte zwischen Wissenschaft, Gesellschaft und Politik*, Wien: Vandenhoeck-Ruprecht 2015, 121-134; Jan Versteegen, *The New Vienna School of Art History. Fulfilling the Promise of Analytic Holism*, Edinburgh: University Press 2023. New analysis of Renate Wagner-Rieger's conservative methodological framework: Vybíral Jindřich, 'Die Stilgeschichte in der Auffassung von Renate Wagner-Rieger' *Umeni* 70, Issue 2, 2022, 149-155. In her autobiography (1976) Renate Wagner-Rieger identifies with the so-called 'Vienna School' of art history, when it comes to the Ringstrassen project but does not name its formalistic approach: 'Ein solches Programm weiß sich den erprobten Prinzipien der Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte verpflichtet, die immer auf Verankerung eines Kunstwerks in den realhistorischen Gegebenheiten Wert gelegt hat, ebenso wie das Bestreben, die außerkünstlerischen Aspekte nicht über die objektnahe, kunsthistorische Betrachtung hinauswachsen zu lassen, der Wiener Tradition entspricht.' in: Hermann Fillitz, Peter Haiko, Walter Krause, eds, *Renate Wagner-Rieger*, 7-12.

Metzler's dictionary of art historians in 1999? The authors have dared to place the daughter of fathers in the male line.<sup>23</sup>

In 1982 Artur Rosenauer succeeded Renate Wagner-Rieger. Currently, six of the seven chairs at Vienna's Department of Art History are occupied by male colleagues, while Lioba Theis' chair has not yet been filled. How is it that Wagner-Rieger did not become a shining role model for women's university careers? Was it her early death, her traditional methodological approach, or rather deeper structural problems of an androcentric institutionalization?

The night's chat with Julia Rüdiger ended with the decision that a further conference was necessary to contextualize and evaluate Renate Wagner-Rieger's achievement as a woman art historian, individually and for political reasons, and also to make the appalling current gender gap visible.

### **A sad testimony for women art history students in Vienna: The Memorial to the Excluded, Emigrated and Murdered Members of the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna 1933/34 – 1938 – 1945**

From the winter semester of 1897/1898, women were admitted to the Philosophical Faculty in Vienna. Only a few took lectures in art history.<sup>24</sup> It was not until 2004 that the planning and erection of a memorial in front of the Department of Art History in Vienna unexpectedly brought this hidden tradition back to awareness. The memorial is dedicated to members of the department who were threatened by Austrofascism and Nazi terror. Although it was supported but not initiated by the university members themselves, in retrospect, it seems no coincidence that it was created at a time when the university was striving to achieve new international standards.<sup>25</sup> This opened the view to the outside academia and beyond the borders of Austria since 1955. In her essay on the perceptions of women art historians in exile since the 1960s, Irene Below cites the memorial as a successful example of how the memory of emigration is kept alive in a university setting while contemporary witnesses have died out.<sup>26</sup>

As Irene Below reports further, the department's 150th anniversary in 2004 triggered a discussion-rich planning phase. Financed and fought through by a private association with the strong voice of Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat the monument was finally built by the architect and art historian Hans Buchwald (1933-2013) based on ideas by the author, art dealer, and P.E.N. president Wolfgang Georg Fischer (1933-2021).<sup>27</sup> Both initiators were personally affected by the Holocaust,

---

<sup>23</sup> Peter H. Feist, 'Renate Wagner-Rieger' in Peter Betthausen, Peter H. Feist, Christiane Fork, eds, *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon. Zweihundert Porträts deutschsprachiger Autoren aus vier Jahrhunderten*, Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler 1999, 446-449.

<sup>24</sup> Almut Krapf-Weiler, ed, *Erica Tietze-Conrat. Die Frau in der Kunstwissenschaft. Texte 1906-1958*, Wien: Schlebrügge 2007, 282-291.

<sup>25</sup> [RIS - Universitätsgesetz 2002 - Bundesrecht konsolidiert, Fassung vom 17.06.2023 \(bka.gv.at\)](https://www.ris.bka.gv.at) (17. June 2023), see: §§98.

<sup>26</sup> Below, 'Kontexte der Erinnerung', 266-269.

<sup>27</sup> Wolfgang Georg Fischer, *die Rückseite der Bilder*, Salzburg: Mury Salzmann 2022, 223-224. See various documents and a model of the monument in the Department of Art History at

were lucky to be able to flee Vienna as children. Both shared a passion for art history.



Figure 1 *The Memorial to the Excluded, Emigrated, and Murdered Members of the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna 1933/1934 – 1938 – 1945*

Walk-through installation by Hans Buchwald (1933-2013) based on the ideas of Wolfgang Georg Fischer (1933-2021), planned since 2004 and erected in 2008. The monument is made of steel. Torn in two parts, it is shaped like a dysfunctional circular table around a tree. A glass stele rises in between the fragments. It is inscribed with the names of 72 people representing victims affected by Austrofascism and Nazi terror, more than a third of them women. © Tim Schmelzer

The signed installation is made of steel. It has the shape of a dysfunctional circular table standing on a lawn around a tree. The latter symbolizes hope for growing confidence in the future. Eight chairs are grouped around the slightly oversized table. They are shifted against each other, making it difficult for those sitting to make eye contact and communicate. Torn in the middle, the two halves of the table cannot be put back together again. A glass stele slides in between the broken pieces. It is inscribed with the names of seventy-two people representing victims affected by Nazi terror, more than a third of them women.<sup>28</sup>

---

the University of Vienna, and a sketch by Hans Buchwald (2005) in the collection of Herbert Posch, Vienna.

<sup>28</sup> The Twenty-five women out of seventy-two are: Gertrud Bamberger (1904–1965), Franziska Fried-Boxer (1904–?), Lili Fröhlich-Bum (1886–1981), Erna Harth (1904–?), Else Hofmann (1893-1960), Marguerite Kaufmann (?–?), Betty Kurth (1878–1948), Hilde Kurz (1910–1981), Karolina Lanckoronska (1899–2002), Susanne Lang (1907–1995), Gertrude Langer (1908–1984), Ilse Meiler (1918–?), Elise Lotte Morgen (1912–2008), Friederike Nobl-Stern (1906–1983), Doris Oppenheim (1919–?), Lizzy Rapp-Bauer (1915–2006), Berta Segall (1902–1976), Hedwig Spiegel (1903–1985), Melanie Stiassny (1876–1960), Erica Tietze-Conrat

This is a very high proportion if compared with the number of women who could study at this time: by order of Julius von Schlosser, Rudolf Hahnloser published a chronological list of the graduates of the 'Vienna School' from its foundation until 1934.<sup>29</sup> Only 13 % were women, and more than half had a Jewish background. Of particular importance seems to be that the pioneers, i.e., the first three women to earn doctorates, were of Jewish origin.<sup>30</sup> However, Hahnloser's publication is of limited reliability. It aimed at a *damnatio memoriae* of his emeritus colleague Josef Strzygowski and blanked out his graduates. Jo Ziebritzki will show that many women studied with him, also from Jewish families.

As written on the glass stele, the list on the memorial is a representative one and rather intended as an open list and ends with the appeal to remember those whose names remain unknown and all other persecuted members of the university. This legacy was implemented into the Institute's teaching program by Lioba Theis and has led to several digital exhibitions since 2010. The last one accompanied the conference.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it should be emphasised that not all the women mentioned by Hahnloser who were later persecuted are to be found on the glass stele. There were even more. Thus, it becomes increasingly evident that the first generations of women to study in Vienna were severely affected by the Nazi terror far more than their male colleagues.

The memorial is unique in several respects: Firstly, the period it is meant to commemorate does not begin with the year of the 'Anschluss' in 1938 but with the exclusion and harassment under Austrofascism in 1933/1934. Secondly, it is the first memorial dedicated to the social group of an academic community, the members of the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna. Thirdly, and that is most important for the argument of this paper, the twenty-five women named are not only an important sign that the history of women studying art history in Vienna began at the end of the 19th century. It is also a sad testimony to the fact that the early history of these women is closely connected to the history of persecution and exile and cannot be written as a local Viennese institutional history, but must be part of a world art historiography written mostly in places other than universities and sensitive to a nonadaptive and non-hierarchical way of thinking.<sup>32</sup>

---

(1883–1958), Emmy Wellesz (1889–1987), Julia Wilde (1895–1970), Alma Wittlin (1899–1992), Alice Wolfe (1905–1983), Hilde Zaloscer (1903–1999).

<sup>29</sup> Hans R. Hahnloser, 'Chronologisches Verzeichnis der aus der "Wiener Schule" bzw. dem Österreichischen Institut für Geschichtsforschung, hervorgegangenen oder ihr affilierten Kunsthistoriker' *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, Ergänzungsband XIII, 2, Innsbruck: Wagner 1934.

<sup>30</sup> Hahnloser, 'Chronologisches Verzeichnis', Nr. 60 (Erica Conrat-Tietze: Phd. 1906), Nr. 75 (Karoline Bum Fröhlich: Phd. 1910), Nr. 79 (Betti Kurth Kris: Phd. 1911).

<sup>31</sup> [Denkmal für Ausgegrenzte \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (17. August 2023), [Wiener Kunstgeschichte Gesichtet – Kunsthistorikerinnen aus der „Wiener Schule“ 1905-1980 \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (18. June 2023).

<sup>32</sup> Below, 'Kontexte der Erinnerung', 266-269. Doris Ingrisch, 'Weibliche intellektuelle Kulturen in Wien und ihre Vertreibung 1938', in Hansen-Schaberg und Häntzschel, eds, *Alma Maters Töchter im Exil*, 226-236.



### **Searching in the Viennese archives: what did the professors think of their new women students?**

In the following weeks, I searched for the women whose names I had read on the stele. My aim was to gain operationally new perspectives on the topic. Vienna seemed to be a relevant example. Situated in the geopolitical centre of Europe, the capital was a vibrant multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural melting pot with great attraction for East and West. The progressive milieu, which developed strongly in the second half of the 19th century, can be seen as influential for the academic spheres at other universities. While women were admitted as full and associate students to the Philosophical Faculty at the University of Vienna as early as 1897, this did not happen in Prussia until 11 years later.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized once again that not all women who were professionally involved in art history had attended a university before, but this social group of academics who had enrolled followed a path that had been mapped out by men, who were also the main authors of the historiography of the discipline. What do we know about the first encounters between male professors and female students?

Now, I would like to briefly present two types of sources kept in the archives of the University of Vienna and this university's Department of Art History.<sup>33</sup> They provide a singular basis for quantitatively and qualitatively addressing the question of woman art history students.

On the one hand, the gradual inclusion process is reflected in the accountancy of enrolments. While women students were ranked after males in the general 'Nationale' at the end of each semester until 1903, their enrolment registration received its own book cover from the winter semester of 1903/04 onwards.<sup>34</sup> It was not until 1919, after World War I, that an integrative register was created according to the alphabet only. The 'Nationale' source type provides information on the status, religion, age, and origin of students, as well as the courses they attend.

On the other hand, there are the 'Rigoroakten', a source that can be used especially for qualitative research. In addition to the applications for admission and a personal curriculum vitae, they also contain the two supervisors' written assessment of the dissertation.

The fundamental question of how many of the enrolled women in Vienna attended art history courses has not yet been systematically investigated. After browsing the 'Nationale', it can be said that the number was vanishingly small compared to those registered in natural science subjects. In the winter semester of 1903/1904, the proportion of women interested in art history was only 5% of nearly

---

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Polleroß, 'Das Archiv des Institutes für Kunstgeschichte der Universität Wien', *VoeKK Journal* 2/2021, 12-14. [Archiv Institut Kunstgeschichte VoeKK Journal 02 2021.pdf](https://www.kunsthistoriker-in.at/Archiv-Institut-Kunstgeschichte-VoeKK-Journal-02-2021.pdf) ([kunsthistoriker-in.at](https://www.kunsthistoriker-in.at)) (13. June 2023).

<sup>34</sup> [Nationale \(Inskriptionsformulare\) von Frauen, Philosophische Fakultät \(1903-1919\)](#) (14. June 2023).

200 enrolled, among them Erica Conrat (1883-1958), who in 1905 was the first woman to submit a dissertation. A high degree of diversity can be observed regarding age, background, and life plans. What seems to unite women students is a family background with an affinity for education, and presumably also curiosity and the courage to be non-conformist. Whether there are differences between them and their male colleagues remains an open question. K. Lee Chichester and Brigitte Sölch denied this recently.<sup>35</sup>

A difference that needs to be mentioned here is that not all of the pioneer women were young when they began their studies. Taking the high school diploma was not yet possible at all schools for girls and hence needed more time. Some women students, like Irene Adler, already had adult children when they began their studies: Born in 1879, she submitted her dissertation in 1926 at the age of 47.<sup>36</sup> More detailed research has yet to be done, but this one case shows that for women at the time, studying art history was not synonymous with a male career in a paid male profession. On the contrary, Hedwig Gollob's (1895-1983) wish to habilitate was rejected by Schlosser with the argument that a career desire must not be the father to the thought.<sup>37</sup>

Conversely to the post-2002 dynamic of unveiling step by step the hidden history of women students in Vienna, looking beyond the first supervisor-assessments in the first quarter of the 20th century points in a different direction. Indeed, the number of women students increased, as Jo Ziebritzky will show in her text. But for various reasons, the initial open-mindedness to women gradually disappeared. While Erica Conrat-Tietze's doctoral supervisor, Franz Wickhoff (1853-1909), was still unbiasedly positive in 1905, both Julius von Schlosser (1866-1938) and Josef Strzygowski (1862-1941) complained in the 1920s, similar to Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945) about the burden of 'dependent women's work'.<sup>38</sup> To illustrate this change of mind, I would like to quote from selected archive files. As mentioned earlier, the relative proportion of Jewish persons among early art history women students was high. It may be considered appropriate that the following statements concern women students from Jewish homes.<sup>39</sup> Two of them come from areas of the former Austrian crown lands, and one of them grew up in Vienna.

Appreciation, respect, and a fair, transparent approach can be read in the words of Franz Wickhoff about the first women's dissertation by Erica Tietze Conrat from 1905.<sup>40</sup> The question should be considered whether this friendly opinion might

<sup>35</sup> Chichester and Sölch, eds, *Kunsthistorikerinnen 1910-1980*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> [PH RA 9371 Adler, Irene, 1926.07.03-1926.07.14 \(Akt\) \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (18. June 2023).

<sup>37</sup> [Institutsakten bis 1945 \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (18. June 2023): Mappe 4, letter from Hedwig Gollob to Julius Schlosser from 25.12.1925: 'Heute behaupten Herr Hofrat, dass Vorteile der Karriere kein Motiv zur Anstrengung einer Habilitation sein dürfe. Hochachtungsvoll H.Gollob'. For biographical data see Ute Georgeacopol-Winischhofer, 'Hedwig Gollob', in Keintzel and Korotin, eds, *Wissenschaftlerinnen in und aus Österreich*, 260-265.

<sup>38</sup> For Heinrich Wölfflin see Chichester and Sölch, eds, *Kunsthistorikerinnen 1910-1980*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Below, 'Kontexte der Erinnerung', 248.

<sup>40</sup> Erica Tietze-Conrat, 'Unbekannte Werke von Georg Raphael Donner', *Jahrbuch der k.k. Zentralkommission* 1905 N.F. 3,2. Teil 195-268, <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.47867#0293> (18. June 2023).

also be related to her marriage only four days before her doctoral examination to her fellow student Hans Tietze (1880-1954), another of Wickhoff's students, who graduated in 1903:<sup>41</sup>

With great skill, the candidate has tracked down a number of previously unknown works of Raphael Donner, described them in their stylistic features, and, in part, with the help of previously unpublished files, placed them in the history of the life and development of the artist. Everything is examined with care and decided with certainty; the candidate shows a remarkable knowledge of Austrian sculpture of the 18th century.<sup>42</sup>

It seems that not all colleagues shared Franz Wickhoff's pioneering appreciation for women. An ironic photo collage preserved in the archives of the Vienna Department of Art History shows that Erica Conrat fellows were ambivalent about her. This unique document can be dated to 1904. Larger than all the others and maintaining her own scale, the high-necked dressed and untouchable Erica Conrat occupies the centre of the picture. She appears as a nimbused saint, immaculate mother, and muse evoking the mystical aura of a sphinx. The creator was the later theatre director Paul Eger (1881-1941). He graduated in the same year as Erica Conrat and dedicated the collage to their common doctoral advisor Franz Wickhoff. In the long verses on the back, there is no lack of mockery: 'In the middle stands 'Virgo Sancta Erica'. She never works but inspires the room. When you see her red blouse, you know: Here comes the muse.' The androcentric message is clearly spoken out. In the social class of women who studied art history, work seemed incompatible with a woman's life plan to Erica Conrat's male fellows. Indeed, no further institutional path was foreseen for this versatile and gifted young woman after her marriage and graduation in 1905. Instead, Franz Wickhoff hired her husband as an assistant.

---

<sup>41</sup> For biographical data see Krapf-Weiler, ed, *Erica Tietze-Conrat*, 282-291 and Krapf-Weiler, ed, *Hans Tietze. Lebendige Kunstwissenschaft. Texte 1910-1954*, Wien: Schlebrügge 2007, 308-315. Files in the archive of the university of Vienna: [PH RA 1574 Tietze, Hans Karl, 1903.03.27-1903.06.18 \(Akt\) \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (18.June 2023), [PH RA 1962 Tietze, geborene Conrat, Erica, 1905.10.25-1905.11.28 \(Akt\) \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (18. June 2023)

<sup>42</sup> [PH RA 1962 Tietze, geborene Conrat, Erica, 1905.10.25-1905.11.28 \(Akt\) \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (18. June 2023): 'Die Candidatin hat mit großem Geschick eine Anzahl von bisher nicht bekannten Werken Raphael Donners aufgefunden, mit Berücksichtigung von Stileigentümlichkeiten beschrieben und zum Teile mit Hilfe von noch unpublizierten Acten in die Lebens- und Entwicklungsgeschichte des Künstlers eingeordnet. Alles ist mit Vorsicht geprüft und mit Sicherheit entschieden, die Candidatin zeigt dabei eine bemerkenswerte Kenntnis der österreichischen Plastik des 18. Jahrhunderts.'



Figure 2 *The Vienna Department of Art History in 1204*. Ironic photo collage (1904) by the student Paul Eger: Erica Conrat as muse and saint between Max Dvorak (left), Ludwig v. Ficker (right), in her arms the student Ernst Ebenstein. Above the spectacles of Alois Riegl (left) and Ernst Diez, a student of Josef Strzygowski as a bird (right). At this time the latter was still teaching at the university of Graz. The artwork was addressed to Franz Wickhoff, the supervisor of Erica Conrat.

Embossed tin foil paper with floral pattern, mounted on cardboard. 32 x 42,1 cm, collage with original photographs, glued on, partly inscribed and contoured with black ink, partly with gold lacquer. On the back mocking poem by Paul Eger. Archive of the Department of Art History, University of Vienna. © Institut für Kunstgeschichte Universität Wien, Karl Pani

Twenty years later, after Austria had become a republic, the attitude toward women had become even more critical. Schlosser, who was Erica Conrat Tietze's second supervisor, also supervised Irene Adler (1879- ?) in 1926. The files in Vienna University's archive are the only source providing information about her so far. Born in Orsova, Romania, she was taught privately. Since she was strongly motivated to study art history, her first step in that direction was to catch up a high school graduation. The mother of two sons earned her 'Matura' [examination for matriculation] at the age of forty-three from the Reform Realgymnasium in Vienna's Albertgasse. In 1922 she began to study art history. A lady with style and obviously financially independent enough, she undertook some research travels to France to write her thesis on Clouet.<sup>43</sup> Julius Schlosser was not only visibly impressed by this achievement but preoccupied with his fame while having his eyes on the unloved rival, Josef Strzygowski, when he wrote the following evaluation of the dissertation:

The present case is an almost exact repetition of another that took place [in 1921] a few years ago (in the other institute [id est Prof. Strzygowski]: Dr. Stiassny): A woman of mature years, mother of grown sons, catches up with

<sup>43</sup> Irene Adler, Die Clouet. 'Versuch einer Stilkritik', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, N.F. 3.1929, 201-246.

studies with remarkable diligence and finally gets around to submitting a diss. I must confess that my scepticism about women's work in general, in this particular case, actually has been disavowed against expectation. Incidentally, at my instigation, the work was subjected to a thorough intervening revision and supplementation before the official submission.<sup>44</sup>

Despite his high admiration for Irene Adler's straightforward personality, Julius von Schlosser feels a kind of shame in admitting intellectual success to a woman, which was in complete contradiction to his conceded basic misogynistic attitude. Almost as an apology, he emphasizes later his own support and, moreover, his involvement.

In the same years Josef Strzygowski struggled with the doctoral theses of Hilde Zaloscer (1903-1999) on 'Die frühmittelalterliche Dreistreifenornamentik, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der südslavischen Denkmäler'. Since he did not allow her first submission, two doctoral reports from his pen can be found in the archives of the University of Vienna.<sup>45</sup> They date from 1925 to 1926. The argument for the first rejection on 28.12.1925 was the accusation of being unscientific. In addition, like Julius Schlosser, he felt the burden of 'supervising totally incompetent ladies'. Denying them independent thought, he forced female students to submit their work before the deadline.

One has to admit that she does everything possible, but unfortunately, she has no potential in academic thinking. I am in a difficult situation because I demand that the dissertation be presented to me before submission: the completely incompetent ladies may then present the revised dissertation to me again. But where there is nothing, it is impossible to achieve a result. [...] I have told Mrs. Zaloscer that her efforts are futile [...]. I cannot deal with her any longer. She has already harassed all the assistants.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> [PH RA 9371 Adler, Irene, 1926.07.03-1926.07.14 \(Akt\) \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (18. June 2023): 'Der vorliegende Fall ist die fast genaue Wiederholung eines anderen, der sich [1921] vor ein paar Jahren (im anderen Institut [id est Prof. Strzygowski]: Frau Dr. Stiassny) abgespielt hat: Eine Frau in reifen Jahren, Mutter erwachsener Söhne, holt mit bemerkenswertem Fleiss die Studien nach und gelangt endlich dazu, eine Diss. einzureichen. Ich muss gestehen, dass meine Skepsis gegen Frauenarbeiten im allgemeine, in diesem besonderen Fall eigentlich wider Erwarten desavouiert worden ist. Die Arbeit ist übrigens auf meine Veranlassung vor dem offiziellen Einreichen einer gründlichen eingreifenden Überarbeitung und Ergänzung unterzogen worden.'

<sup>45</sup> [PH RA 9442 Zaloscer, Hildegard, 1926.10.30-1927.11.27 \(Akt\) \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (18. June 2023).

<sup>46</sup> [PH RA 9442 Zaloscer, Hildegard, 1926.10.30-1927.11.27 \(Akt\) \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (18. June 2023): „Man muss zugeben, dass sie alles Mögliche leistet, das für sie Mögliche liegt, leider nicht im wissenschaftlichen Denken. Ich bin dadurch, dass ich verlange, die Dissertation müsste mir vor Einreichung vorgelegt werden, in eine schwere Lage geraten: den die gänzlich unbefähigten Damen legen mir dann die umgearbeitete Dissertation womöglich nochmals vor. Wo aber nichts ist, ist unmöglich ein Ergebnis zu erzielen. ... Frau Zaloscer habe ich vorgehalten, dass ihr Bemühen aussichtslos sei. Ich kann mich nicht länger mit ihr beschäftigen. Sie hat schon sämtliche Assistenten belästigt.“

It deserves great admiration that Hilde Zaloscer submitted again and passed more fairly than poorly. She also contributed to the Festschrift of her supervisor.<sup>47</sup> Not married like Erica Tietze-Conrat or Irene Adler, Hilde Zaloscer sought employment as a researcher but failed and managed to keep her head above water with jobs in the cultural sector in Vienna until she left the country in 1936.<sup>48</sup>

The lack of prospects for a continuing institutional career seems to have become entrenched in a systemic negative spiral. The legitimation for a dissertation or even a habilitation, which some in Vienna were already striving for in 1925, was difficult to provide when trained women art historians could only contribute their skills as wives of art historians or — hard-won — as librarians or in the service of popular education. From the professorial point of view, the supervision of women soon represented a waste of their capacities. The shaping of female role models for the next generation was thus prevented despite no differences can be found in the topics worked on compared to the dissertations of fellow students. Hahnloser's list shows that they published in the same journals.<sup>49</sup> As a result, there were voids not only in the historiography of art history but also in the history of well-trained women working in the cultural field.

Last but not least, two questions remain unanswered: How could these women not adapt themselves to their supervisors? Second, if the supervisors were highly involved in their women students' dissertations, as they claim, then one must concede that the latter played a major role in the discourses of the 'Vienna School'.

The greatest setback for this generation of women art historians at the University of Vienna was, however, the period of Nazi terror. If women researchers had to emigrate, they succeeded — and Irene Below has already pointed this out — in returning much less frequently than their colleagues. For some of them, however, such as Hilde Zaloscer, exile brought the recognition that was denied them in Vienna. In 1950 she was appointed to a professorship at the newly founded University of Alexandria in Egypt. Erica Conrat-Tietze also lectured at Columbia University in New York in 1954-56.<sup>50</sup>

What would a historiography of the 'Vienna School' of art history look like if one were to include all these women art historians, those who continued to cultivate art history only in private and self-published, or those who devoted themselves to popular education, and also those who expressed their education in forced

---

<sup>47</sup> Hilde Zaloscer, 'Malende Dichter und dichtende Maler' *Josef Srzygowski Festschrift. Zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von seinen Schülern*, Klagenfurt: Artur Kollitsch Verlag 1932, 189-192.

<sup>48</sup> Alisa Douer, Hilde Zaloscer - eine Biografie, in Margit Franz, Heimo Halbrainer, eds, *Going East - Going South. Österreichisches Exil in Asien und Afrika*, Graz: Clio 2014, 177-191. Keintzel and Korotin, eds, *Wissenschaftlerinnen in und aus Österreich*, 826-829.

<sup>49</sup> Hahnloser, 'Chronologisches Verzeichnis'.

<sup>50</sup> Hilde Zaloscer, 'Kunstgeschichte und Nationalsozialismus', in Friedrich Stadler, ed, *Kontinuität und Bruch 1938 – 1945 – 1955. Beiträge zur österreichischen Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, Münster: Lit Verlag 2004, 283-298. Hilde Zaloscer, *Eine Heimkehr gibt es nicht. Ein österreichisches curriculum vitae*, Wien: Löcker 1988. For Erica Conrat Tietze see Keintzel and Korotin, eds, *Wissenschaftlerinnen in und aus Österreich*, 749.

emigration and laid the foundations for new scientific disciplines outside the country?

### **Conclusion: on the threshold of a new inclusive art historiography**

During our engagement, the topic's horizon became increasingly global. The surprising responses from almost every part of the world challenged us to think beyond the Western traditions of gendering. The time had come to look for a new framework and new criteria for future art historiography that does not only consider the pen of male subjects educated or working in male-run institutions. In the course of enlightening discussions, it became clear that the conference title inspired by Linda Nochlin had to be transformed from a question (call) to an assertion (program).<sup>51</sup> To repeat Linda Nochlin's question over and over again would imply that there were and that there are no women art historians. But now we knew: there were many, and they were working not in the structures that Nochlin had questioned 50 years earlier.<sup>52</sup>

**Heidrun Rosenberg** is an art historian and curator. She has been working at the *Kurpfälzisches Museum Heidelberg* and teaches at the universities of Freiburg and Vienna, including on gender issues. In 2019, she conceived the 21st International Conference of the Association of Art Historians of Austria on the theme 'Great Women Art Historians' with accompanying events, such as the exhibition 'From Irene Adler to Hilde Zaloscer. Women Art Historians of the "Viennese School" 1905-1980' at the Vienna Department of Art History.

heidrun.rosenberg@univie.ac.at



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

---

<sup>51</sup> Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' in Vivian Gornick, Barbara K. Moran, eds, *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*. New York: Basic Books, 1971, 480-510.

<sup>52</sup> Rhoda Eitel, Raphael Rosenberg and Richard Woodfield have improved this paper with great patience. I would like to thank them very much.