

# Johanna Hofmann-Stirnemann. The first female museum director in Germany

Gloria Köpnick and Rainer Stamm

Art history knows many muses, fewer female artists, some female patrons or gallery owners, but there are only a few prominent female art historians in Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. Most recently, the volume 'Women Art Historians 1910-1980', ('Kunsthistorikerinnen 1910-1980') edited by K. Lee Chichester and Brigitte Sölch, was devoted to 'source texts by pioneering women in art history.'<sup>1</sup> Johanna 'Hanna' Hofmann-Stirnemann (1899-1996), who was appointed the first woman museum director in Germany in 1930, was not included in the text selection. However, Stirnemann was a pioneer in the male-dominated museum landscape. The following text will show her impressive career.

## Studying and starting a career

Johanna Stirnemann was born on October 12, 1899 in Weißenfeld, now part of Saxony-Anhalt. (fig.1) After graduating from high school, she studied art history, philosophy and education in Vienna and Halle/Saale. She also took evening classes at the Burg Giebichenstein there. In 1927 she received her doctorate with honors with a thesis on the 'Stylistic Concept of the Late Gothic in Old German Painting' under Paul Frankl in Halle.<sup>2</sup>

In May 1927, she began her museum career as a 'scientific assistant' at the Oldenburg State Museum of Art and Cultural History, which had opened a few years earlier.<sup>3</sup> Her job title today would correspond to a scientific traineeship (Volontariat). As a research assistant to the founding director Walter Müller-Wulckow, who was a consistent advocate of modernism, she developed a focus on contemporary art and modern decorative arts during her two years of employment. During her tenure, the collection of the 'Modern Gallery' in Oldenburg Castle grew through important acquisitions. A photograph of the collection rooms from 1930 gives an impression of the development of the museum that she witnessed during these years. (fig. 2)

At the Oldenburg State Museum, she also learned about the typical day-to-day work in a museum: Cataloging the collection, setting up, expanding, and

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<sup>1</sup> K. Lee Chichester and Brigitte Sölch, eds, *Kunsthistorikerinnen 1910-1980. Theorien, Methoden, Kritiken*, Berlin: Reimer [2021].

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Johanna 'Hanna' Stirnemann, *Der Stilbegriff des 'Spätgotischen' in der altdeutschen Malerei*, Strasbourg: Heitz 1929.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rainer Stamm, ed, *Der zweite Aufbruch in die Moderne. Expressionismus – Bauhaus – Neue Sachlichkeit. Walter Müller-Wulckow und das Landesmuseum Oldenburg 1921-1937, exhibition catalogue, Landesmuseum Oldenburg 2011/12*, Bielefeld: Kerber 2011.

presenting the permanent exhibition, working with the press, giving tours and lectures, planning and staging special exhibitions, and gaining a basic understanding of new acquisitions and financial appraisals of works of art. She also learned how to set up and expand period rooms, which were common in cultural history museums in the 1920s.

During her time in Oldenburg, the avant-garde 'Association for Young Art' (Vereinigung für junge Kunst)<sup>4</sup> in particular organized exhibitions and events to promote contemporary art. Founded in 1922, the association's program included all branches of artistic creation: authors' readings alternated with concert evenings and dance guest performances. The exhibition program in particular made the association an important venue for modern art in the province. There were solo exhibitions of works by Otto Dix, Paul Klee, and Franz Radziwill, as well as exhibitions on new architecture, modern stage design, and survey exhibitions of contemporary painting and graphic art. Hanna Stirnemann's exhibition reviews for the regional press reveal an articulate and critical observer. In the *Oldenburger Nachrichten*, the art historian reported, among other things, on a special exhibition of the works of the painter Christian Rohlf's (1927/1928) and on the show 'Weavings and Ceramics' (1928), which the association had organized. She reported in detail on the exhibition 'Dutch Painting of the Present' (Holländische Malerei der Gegenwart, 1928) shown at the Oldenburg State Museum in the journal *Der Kunstwanderer*.<sup>5</sup>

Hanna Stirnemann must have been a resolute woman who gave lectures and wore her hair in a modern short haircut. Müller-Wulckow was impressed by her and may have had a more than professional relationship with her. A private photograph ([fig. 3](#)) shows them together with the painter Franz Radziwill and the Dutch art dealer Aaron Vecht on the beach at Dangast; another photo ([fig. 4](#)) documents their joint visit to the artist Bernhard Hoetger in Worpswede.

### **An Oldenburg school?**

Even though Stirnemann already had a talent for practical museum work after her theoretical studies at the university, she first learned her tools of the trade from Walter Müller-Wulckow. From him she learned to examine a collection for its qualities, to sharpen and expand it. Through the experience of the projects implemented in Oldenburg - and with a network of contacts to artists, which was essentially based on her Oldenburg activities - she was well prepared for her subsequent activities in Greiz and Jena. Therefore, links to what she had

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<sup>4</sup> Gloria Köpnick, *Avantgarde in der Provinz – Die Oldenburger 'Vereinigung für junge Kunst' (1922-1933)*, Petersberg: Imhof 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Hanna Stirnemann, 'Ausstellung Christian Rohlf's im Augusteum', *Oldenburgische Landeszeitung*, 1927: December 2; H. St. (Hanna Stirnemann), 'Ausstellung ,Neue Baukunst'. Vorbericht', loc. cit., 1928: January 28; Hanna Stirnemann: 'Ausstellung Webstoffe und Keramik im Augusteum', loc. cit., November 4; *ibid.*: 'Moderne deutsche Webstoffe, Keramik, Spitzen und Gläser', loc. cit., October 21; *ibid.*: 'Holländische Malerei der Gegenwart', *Der Cicerone*, 20: 22, 1928, 738-9; *ibid.*, 'Holländische Malerei der Gegenwart. Ausstellung im Oldenburger Landesmuseum', *Der Kunstwanderer. Halbmonatsschrift für Alte und Neue Kunst für Kunstmarkt und Sammelwesen*, 10: 1/2, 1928, 107-109.

experienced in Oldenburg can be discovered in her actions and decisions in her later years as an independent museum director. One example: Like Alfred Lichtwark, Müller-Wulckow saw the museum as an educational institution. This rubbed off on the young museum director. She established the working group 'Museum and School' in Jena in order to facilitate a closer exchange between the places of learning and to make it easier for young people - in the sense of taste formation and education - to access art and crafts.

In this respect, the question can be asked whether one can speak of an 'Oldenburg school of art historians'; after all, the Oldenburg State Museum produced seven later museum directors under Müller-Wulckow's leadership: Herbert Kunze (1895-1975) became director of the Municipal Museum Erfurt (Angermuseum) in 1925, Otto Holtze (1892-1945) became director of the Municipal Museum Stettin (as successor to Walter Riezler, who was deposed by the National Socialists) in 1934. Walter Dieck (1896-1985) became director of the Trier Municipal Museum, Werner Meinhof (1901-1940) succeeded Hanna Stirnemann in Jena as director of the Municipal Museum, Heinz Köhn (1902-1962) became director of the Museum Folkwang in Essen, and Gustav Vriesen (1912-1960) became director of the Kunsthalle Bielefeld. They all benefited from the impetus that Müller-Wulckow had given them at the Oldenburg State Museum and, to some extent, from the commitment that the association had shown to young art by realizing an avant-garde exhibition and event program. These experiences turned them into creative museum staff (and leaders) with the courage to champion contemporary art, question the existing, gather strategically and forward, implement new concepts, and draw on networks. A closer examination of this 'Oldenburg School' of art history and museum practice seems worthwhile. What is striking here is that Stirnemann is the only woman of the 'Oldenburg School' who has taken up the impulse and developed it further as director.

### **Appointment to Greiz**

In his letter of recommendation to the Lord Mayor of Greiz, Müller-Wulckow affirms her excellent achievements early on, emphasizing only her professional competence and practical museum experience and skills:

Miss Dr. Stirnemann, who has now been working here for a year and a half, has proven herself in practice in the best possible way - which we museum officials can by no means state with all art historians coming to us from the universities. A lively ability to empathize and a natural practical disposition make her superior to many male colleagues, especially in this respect, so that she quickly achieves positive work results with emotional certainty. She is by no means lacking in scientific thoroughness, which she owes to the excellent training she received from Professor Frankl in Halle.<sup>6</sup>

Even during the regular term of her contract in Oldenburg, Stirnemann was given the opportunity to establish a museum in Greiz in eastern Thuringia from the

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Müller-Wulckow to the Lord Mayor Dr. Erbe in Greiz, letter dated October 16, 1928, Greiz City Archives.

disparate collections of the Princes Reuß of the older line, who had formerly resided there, in the Lower Castle. Paul Weber, the founder and director of the Jena Municipal Museum, had given her this opportunity.

Within seven months, she succeeded in building a modern museum out of the 'junk room' (Rumpelkammer)<sup>7</sup> of the abandoned castle. During this time, she not only supervised and accompanied the structural changes in the museum and developed the design of exhibition showcases herself, but also catalogued and expanded the collection. Within a very short time, she thus succeeded in completely re-presenting the holdings. (fig. 5) To this end, she had followed the Oldenburg model and created period or themed rooms. Their presentation and the combination of the courtly relics with objects of contemporary decorative arts and design also show the importance of the experience of the exhibitions of the Association for Young Art - for example, on the New Living: In addition to period rooms - such as a bourgeois cabinet and a rococo room - the 'Guide to the Reußisches Heimatmuseum of the City of Greiz', written by Hanna Stirnemann, notes a 'Modern Department' with 'works from the Central German colleges of modern arts and crafts',<sup>8</sup> particularly the State College of Architecture in Weimar, the arts and crafts workshops at Burg Giebichenstein in Halle, and from the Bauhaus Dessau.

The reconstruction of the specific acquisitions initiated by Hanna Stirnemann is still pending. Only the four photographs by Aenne Biermann, which she acquired for the Greiz Museum in 1929 (and three of which could be found again in 2019),<sup>9</sup> can be concretely named: they were the sheets 'Poplars in Hoarfrost', 'Bag of Nuts', 'Potatoes on Wooden Table', and the famous photograph 'A Child's Hands on Writing Paper.' (fig. 6)

Stirnemann had become acquainted with the work of the avant-garde photographer from Gera in the early summer of 1929 in Oldenburg, when Walter Müller-Wulckow dedicated the first solo museum exhibition to the photographer. After taking up her post in Greiz, Stirnemann had visited Aenne Biermann in Gera and acquired the artist's four photographs for the museum's 'Modern Department'. After the purchases by the Oldenburg State Museum, this acquisition marked the second museum purchase in the photographer's career and the beginning of her recognition in her native Thuringia: a few weeks after the opening of the Reußisches Heimatmuseum on October 12, 1929, Aenne Biermann's only known text contribution, accompanied by eight full-page picture plates, appeared in the magazine *Thüringen* with the essay 'Von der photographischen Darstellung im Allgemeinen und vom photographischen Unterricht im Besonderen' ('Of

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Birgitt Hellmann, '„... nach so einem Leben hat man überhaupt keine Lebensangst mehr und keinerlei Besitzverhältnis zur Welt' Johanna Hofmann-Stirnemann – die erste Museumsdirektorin Deutschlands' in Gisela Horn, ed, *Entwurf und Wirklichkeit. Frauen in Jena 1900 bis 1933*, Jena: Hain 2001, (325-338) 327.

<sup>8</sup> Hanna Stirnemann, *Führer durch das Reußische Heimatmuseum der Stadt Greiz*, Greiz: Vereinsbuchdruckerei 1929, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rainer Stamm, 'Die Moderne in der Provinz', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2019: 243, October 19, 13.

Photographic Representation in General and of Photographic Instruction in Particular').<sup>10</sup>

The outstanding commitment and the success of the installation and reorientation of the museum, which was implemented with astonishing speed, quickly caused Hanna Stirnemann's career to take another leap forward. On November 15, 1929, she became Paul Weber's scientific assistant at the Jena Municipal Museum and only a few months later its director.

### **The first female museum director in Germany**

After the successful establishment of the museum in Greiz, the founder of the municipal museum, Paul Weber, had brought Hanna Stirnemann to Jena as his assistant. The collection consisted not only of historical objects, but also of an important collection of modern art from the Jena Art Association, exhibited in the so-called Prinzessinnenschlösschen (Princess Castle), including works by Ferdinand Hodler, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Emil Nolde and August Macke, which Botho Graef and Walter Dexel had built up here.

When Weber died unexpectedly in January 1930, Hanna Stirnemann succeeded him and was officially appointed - at the age of 30 and as the first woman - as his successor and museum director. (fig. 7) In personal union, she was henceforth also the managing director of the Jena Art Association, which had put itself on the map of modernism since 1916, under Walter Dexel as exhibition director. 'A woman as museum director', the magazine of the Federation of German Women's Associations *Die Frau* announced the social history sensation in May 1930.<sup>11</sup> The magazine *Die Woche* published an article with a portrait photo: 'Miss Hanna Stirnemann has been appointed director of the museum in Jena. She is the first woman to hold such a post in Germany.'<sup>12</sup> — The authors of this article are not aware of any previous use of the job title in its feminine form.

Meanwhile, avant-garde and part of the extremely lively museum reform movement of the Weimar Republic, which for a number of years made the museums in Germany the most modern of their time, was not only Stirnemann's job title, but also the program she implemented in Jena. The first months of her activity already showed the fruits of the network she had built up in Oldenburg and Greiz: in April/May 1930, she presented a solo exhibition at the Jena Art Association of Paula Modersohn-Becker, whose work she had become acquainted with in Oldenburg, Worpswede and Bremen. In June, she presented a solo exhibition of Aenne Biermann with around 200 photographs of the artist. With this, Stirnemann powerfully demonstrated her commitment to women's art, which she consistently continued in the following years.

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<sup>10</sup> Aenne Biermann, 'Von der photographischen Darstellung im Allgemeinen und vom photographischen Unterricht im Besonderen', *Thüringen. Eine Monatsschrift für alte und neue Kultur*, 5: 5, 1929/30, 81-2. The preceding issue reported on the Opening of the Reußisches Heimatmuseum (5: 4, 79).

<sup>11</sup> *Die Frau. Organ des Bundes Deutscher Frauenvereine*, 37: 8, May 1930, 507.

<sup>12</sup> Copy from *Die Woche*, 22, 31 May 1930, Partial estate of Hanna Hofmann, private property.

In September/October 1930, she presented the cycle of Heinrich Ehmsen's 30 etchings of Gerhart Hauptmann's 'Narr in Christo Emanuel Quint', which Walter Müller-Wulckow had acquired for Oldenburg in the spring of that year, along with the painting cycle 'Der Krieg' (The War) by the painter Bernhard Feistel from Greiz.

In October 1930, when the paintings and reliefs of Oskar Schlemmer were removed in Weimar under the first National Socialist Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick,<sup>13</sup> Hanna Stirnemann presented an exhibition of the 'gruppe junger maler vom bauhaus dessau' (group of young painters from bauhaus dessau), with works by students of Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. At the opening of the exhibition, the Bauhäusler - and later Hanna Stirnemann's husband - Otto Hofmann gave a speech on 'Painting in our time'.

Even before the exhibition 'Die billige Wohnung. Wohnräume - Möbel - Hausgerät' (The Cheap Apartment. Living Spaces - Furniture - Household Appliances), which the Association for Young Art in Oldenburg realized in March 1931, Stirnemann presented the exhibition 'New Living. Machine and Craft' with works by former teachers of the State College of Crafts and Building in Weimar, which opened with a lecture by Wilhelm Wagenfeld and was accompanied by a lecture by the architect Ernst Neufert. Wagenfeld later recalled this exhibition as 'the starting point of his entire career as an 'artistic collaborator in industry.'<sup>14</sup> To support the former Bauhaus ceramist Otto Lindig, who continued to run the former Bauhaus ceramics workshop in Dornburg privately after its closure, Hanna Stirnemann founded the 'Friends of Dornburg Ceramics' in 1931, together with the director of the municipal art collection in Wiesbaden Eberhard Schenk zu Schweinsberg.

One of the highlights of Hanna Stirnemann's work in Jena was certainly the exhibition 'Gestaltende Arbeit der Frau' ('Women's Creative Work'), which she conceived in 1932 and about whose concept she wrote to the artist Hannah Höch: 'The exhibition encompasses all areas of artistic women's work. As a matter of principle, only top artistic achievements are to be exhibited.'<sup>15</sup> Works by Käthe Kollwitz, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Clara Rilke-Westhoff, Charlotte Behrend-Corinth, Gabriele Münter, Hannah Höch, Renée Sintenis, Milly Steger, Emmy Roeder, but also works by Bauhäusler Lydia Driesch-Foucar, Else Mögelin, Grete Reichardt and Lou Scheper - as well as photographers Grete Stern and Ellen Auerbach (aka ringl + pit), Annelise Kretschmer, Felicitas von Baczko and Aenne Biermann.

The press response to this exhibition reads - not least with regard to the recognition of the works of the women photographers mentioned - like a triumph of

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Maria Schmid, 'Die Geschichte der Jenaer Kunstvereinsammlung' in *Rausch und Ernüchterung. Die Bildersammlung des Jenaer Kunstvereins - Schicksal einer Sammlung der Avantgarde im 20. Jahrhundert*, Jena: Bussert & Stadeler 2008, (9-44) 24.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Beate Manske, 'Wilhelm Wagenfelds Lehrjahre' in *Zeitgemäß und zeitbeständig. Industrieformen von Wilhelm Wagenfeld*, Bremen: Hauschild 2012, (10-55) 41.

<sup>15</sup> Hanna Stirnemann to Hannah Höch, letter dated May 10, 1932, Berlinische Galerie - Museum für Moderne Kunst, Estate Hannah Höch, BG-HHC K 4251/79.

the avant-garde, of the New Objectivity, and of the irreversible recognition of women artists' part in it: 'One could see in photography a transition to pure art. (...) The best representatives are Ae. Biermann and A. Kretschm[e]r with, above all, excellent depictions of people and things of everyday life.'<sup>16</sup>

With the exhibitions she conceived and numerous guided tours, lectures, and readings accompanying them, Hanna Stirnemann positioned the Municipal Museum and the Jena Art Association as institutions of contemporary art, craft, and design: 'Museums are, or should be, living organisms', she wrote in her program for a 'living museum': 'capable of changing, of growing, of speaking in a language that must always be comprehensible to the living.'<sup>17</sup>

With her exposed position, her wholehearted commitment to contemporary art, and her self-confident appearance, she was a thorn in the side of the National Socialist rulers: an exhibition of Franz Radziwill, whom she had met during her time in Oldenburg, had to be canceled under pressure from the National Socialists in the spring of 1935. 'I do not yet understand in detail the connections and must comply with the higher order and close the exhibition as of today', she informs the painter on April 5.<sup>18</sup> - She herself has also long been in trouble. Denunciators point to a Jewish great-grandfather. The first solo exhibition of the former Bauhaus weaver Grete Reichardt was one of the last projects she was able to realize in Jena.

Hanna Stirnemann preempts her imminent dismissal with her resignation. In her letter of resignation to the Lord Mayor Armin Schmidt, who had been district leader of the NSDAP in Jena since 1932 before he was sworn in as Lord Mayor, she writes: 'I have been informed by city law council Mr. Thomas that there are doubts about my Aryan descent, which I have proven according to the regulations of the professional civil servants law [Berufsbeamten-gesetz], and therefore my dismissal from the municipal services is intended.'<sup>19</sup> Lord Mayor Schmidt then confirmed to her that the dismissal by him 'would already have taken place on June 30 of this year if Dr. Hofmann had not terminated her position herself on December 31 of this year.'<sup>20</sup> Her former fellow student Werner Meinhof, also a doctor in Halle, who had already followed her in Oldenburg as an assistant at the State Museum, took over her position in Jena. He goes down in German history as the father of the journalist and later left-wing terrorist Ulrike Meinhof.

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<sup>16</sup> W. Co., 'Gestaltende Arbeit der Frau II', *Jenaer Volksblatt*, June 17, 1932.

<sup>17</sup> Hanna Stirnemann, 'Das lebendige Museum', *Thüringer Lehrer-Zeitung*, 21: 19, June 3, 1932, (289-291) 289.

<sup>18</sup> Hanna Stirnemann to Franz Radziwill, letter dated April 5, 1935, Franz Radziwill estate, Dangast.

<sup>19</sup> Hanna Hofmann to the Lord Mayor of the University City of Jena, letter dated April 1, 1935, certified copy, State Museum of Art and Cultural History Oldenburg, partial estate of Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann.

<sup>20</sup> Mayor Schmidt, certificate dated November 29, 1935, State Museum of Art and Cultural History Oldenburg, partial estate of Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann.

### **Retreat into the private sphere and a new professional start**

In April 1935, Stirnemann had married Otto Hofmann, a seven years younger painter and former Bauhäusler, in Jena. From the end of 1935 to 1937 she lived with him in Berlin. When life became increasingly difficult for them here as well, the two moved back to Hainichen near Dornburg/Saale, where the couple worked with ceramist friend Otto Lindig. From his French exile, Otto Hofmann's former teacher Wassily Kandinsky advises the couple to emigrate.<sup>21</sup> But Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann and her husband remained in Germany. In 1940 Otto Hofmann was drafted for military service. From 1941 to 1944 he wrote his wife richly illustrated painter's letters from Russia.<sup>22</sup>

After the end of World War II, Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann was rehabilitated. 'Unburdened' by National Socialism, the unusual 'Frau Doktor' became mayor of the small town Hainichen in May 1945 and in 1946 was appointed State Museum curator of Thuringia and director of the Rudolstadt Castle Museum. As State Museum curator, she toured the museums of the state from May to November 1946 and reported:

With the mayors (partly new citizens), the tasks and goals of the museum in question were discussed, its importance for democratic re-education and for a true-to-life local history. (...) During these visits it was often necessary to clear up certain not unjustified prejudices, which had developed from the presentation of the museums as cabinets of antiquities, not to say rumpus chambers. (...) During this first review, the museums also had to be cleansed in many cases of militaristic and Nazi holdings that had remained there despite previous written requests (...).<sup>23</sup>

Due to her achievements, Hann Hofmann-Stirnemann was given honorary leadership of the museum department by the Thuringian Ministry of Education in 1948.

As director of the State Castle Museum Rudolstadt at Heidecksburg Castle, she continued her pre-war activities in Jena: in 1947 she presented a commemorative exhibition on the occasion of Käthe Kollwitz's 80th birthday, in 1948 she showed a solo exhibition of avant-garde picture book illustrations by the former Bauhäusler Lou Scheper-Berkenkamp, and two years later she again presented a solo exhibition of Grete Reichardt. Small catalogs, now difficult to find, were published for both exhibitions. She acquired works from Margarethe Reichardt and Otto Lindig for the museum's collection; in Rudolstadt, however, a reconstruction of the acquisitions she initiated is still pending.

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<sup>21</sup> Wassily Kandinsky to Otto Hofmann, letter dated June 24, 1935, cf. Hermann Wiesler, *Otto Hofmann. Bilder und Aquarelle*, Stuttgart and Ravensburg: Galerie Döbele 1986, 93.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Otto Hofmann, *Malerbriefe aus Russland 1941-1944*, ed. Markus Krause. With a contribution by Marianne Hofmann, Berlin: Kupfergraben 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann, 'Bericht über die Museumsarbeit des Landes Thüringen seit 1945', Typescript, non dated, State Museum of Art and Cultural History Oldenburg, partial estate of Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann.



Due to the increasing political guidelines and harassment and the concrete 'danger of deprivation of freedom',<sup>24</sup> she fled, together with her husband, in October 1950 from the GDR, which had been founded the year before. She left an urgent letter to her 'dear co-workers':

By the time you receive this letter, I will have left Rudolstadt and my sphere of activity there, and you can imagine that this secret farewell has been particularly difficult for me, because how I would have liked to shake hands with each and every one of you, to thank you for your good cooperation, your commitment to the beautiful task and our faithful togetherness. How much I would have liked it to stay that way for a long time, given the many tasks we still wanted to accomplish together.

At the last works meeting, I told you about the resistance I had been facing for years, the intangible slander, threats, denunciations, etc. (...) against our work. (...) were constantly staged against our work and my husband and me, when for us it was never about personal interests, but about the reconstruction of the museums.<sup>25</sup>

'we moved within Stalin's ideas of visual and performing arts, which were surprisingly similar to those of the third reich. we had fallen from the frying pan into the fire', recalled Otto Hofmann's Bauhaus fellow, Hubert Hoffmann, who had himself moved to West-Berlin in 1949, of the exodus of representatives of the artistic avant-garde and abstraction from the early GDR, 'will grohmann, [gustav] hassenpflug, dr. hanna and ott[o] hof[ ]mann, [otto] lindig, [alfred] arndt, [curt] lahs - the leading visual artists left the east zone over the next two years.'<sup>26</sup>

In West-Berlin, Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann, from then on under the name Johanna Hofmann, worked in the 1950s as managing director of the Deutscher Werkbund Berlin. In 1955, she published the booklets on the materials porcelain and glass in the 'Materials Series' in cooperation between the Werkbund and the Academy of Fine Arts Berlin. For the International Building Exhibition *Interbau 1957*, she produced the housing guide 'Wohnen in unserer Zeit' (Living in Our Time) for the Berlin Werkbund. (fig. 8) Although in the following years she was able to continue her journalistic activities of the previous years by publishing individual essays and forewords to catalogs, Hanna Stirnemann, alias Johanna Hofmann, was no longer able to continue her pioneering work as the first female museum director. Her role as apparently the first holder of the professional title 'museum director'

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<sup>24</sup> Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann, 'Lebenslauf und Bildungsgang', typescript, 1951, State Museum of Art and Cultural History Oldenburg, partial estate of Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann.

<sup>25</sup> Hanna Hofmann-Stirnemann to her employees, for the attention of the Works Union Management of the State Museums Heidecksburg, October 8, 1950, transcript, Archive Thüringer Landesmuseum Heidecksburg Rudolstadt.

<sup>26</sup> Hubert Hoffmann, 'die wiederbelebung des bauhauses nach 1945' in Eckhard Neumann, ed, *Bauhaus und Bauhäusler. Bekenntnisse und Erinnerungen*, Bern and Stuttgart: Hallwag 1971, (206-210) 209.

Gloria Köpnick and Rainer Stamm Johanna Hofmann-Stirnemann. The first female museum director in Germany

was forgotten until the museums in Jena and Oldenburg began to commemorate the dawn of modernity associated with Hanna Stirnemann in 2001.

Among the most enduring and haunting testimonies to her pioneering period - and to the clandestine network of women of the avant-garde - is the series of portraits that the painter Gabriele Münter made of Stirnemann in 1934. In 1933, Münter's partner Johannes Eichner had conceived a traveling exhibition of 'Paintings from 25 Years', which started in 1933 at the 'Paula Becker-Modersohn-Haus' in Bremen before being shown in Jena in January 1934. On the occasion of this stop, regional newspapers were already passionately arguing about whether Münter's colorful work was still contemporary in the 'Third Reich'. A friendship developed between the museum director and the painter, and both appreciated the other's achievements. When Hanna Stirnemann visited Münter in Murnau, the latter painted the self-confident art historian - with the attributes of the 'New Woman': the short-cropped hair and a cigarette between her fingers.

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