

Towards a modern museum. Women in the German museum association

Andrea Meyer

The German museum association (Deutscher Museumsbund/DMB) was founded in 1917, during World War I. With an exclusive circle of twenty-two founding members consisting of museum directors, it positioned itself after the war as a reformist organization aligned with liberal republican cultural politics. Yet its activities soon declined.¹ Annual meetings became irregular, membership remained low in comparison with similar organizations in other countries, and multiple changes in management led to upheaval rather than continuity in the association's work. Only at the end of the 1920s did a change for the better occur: as the organization had agreed in 1928 to accept natural history and ethnological museums in addition to the previous membership consisting only of art and cultural history institutions, it now had a much broader base and turned into a general association. At the same time, it opened up not only to museum staff below director level, but also to women employees.²

I am taking this historical reconfiguration of the professional association as an impetus to investigate the field of activity for academically trained women. Did they become active members of the DMB to take part in shaping museological reform? Did the DMB represent their interests, and if so, how?

I will try to answer these questions in three steps. First, I will present a joint biographical study of the women who joined the museum association. Who were they, what were their positions? How did they actually take part in the activities of the association? Second, I would like to expand the view to include women scholars in search of employment, for whom the DMB became a main port of call in the late 1920s. Third, I will briefly address the consequences of the National Socialist rise to power in 1933 – only a few years after the association's reconfiguration – on the careers of women in museums. I will argue that their membership up to this point was a manifestation of a more contemporary, diverse orientation of the DMB, contributing to a self-imposed objective to modernize museums and museum work.

¹ One of the first contributions on the history of the Deutscher Museumsbund is the monograph by Wolfgang Klausewitz, *66 Jahre Deutscher Museumsbund*, Bonn: Rheinland Verlag, 1984. On the occasion of the centennial of its founding several essays on various aspects of its history were published in the section '100 Jahre Deutscher Museumsbund', in: *Museumskunde*, 83:1, 2018, 64-98. For an analysis of its decline in the 1920s see Andrea Meyer, *Kämpfe um die Professionalisierung des Museums. Karl Koetschau, die Museumskunde und der Deutsche Museumsbund 1905-1939*, Bielefeld: transcript, 202, (175-132).

² Meyer, *Kämpfe um die Professionalisierung*, 129-131.

To date, neither the museum reform movement nor the DMB served as a starting point for a systematic analysis of women moving professionally in the museum world, even though research on female personalities in this field of activity can increasingly be found since the 1990s.³

Faced with an uneven research panorama characterized by a gender gap, my following investigation is mostly based on archival documents from the holdings of the DMB in the central archive of the Berlin State Museums, and on files on the municipal art museum (Städtisches Kunstmuseum) in the city archive in Düsseldorf whose director Karl Koetschau (1868-1949) from 1913 to 1933 was one of the founders of the museum association.⁴

An overview of women in the DMB

A total of fourteen female museum staff joined the DMB, respectively its department for art and cultural museums, from 1927 to 1934. The first accepted woman member, Hanna Kronberger-Frentzen (1887-1963) of the Kunsthalle in Mannheim, is easily overlooked, since only her last name is listed in the minutes of the annual meeting held in Hanover in October.⁵ Typically enough, she appears under a header reading as follows: “On the suggestion of the gentlemen Jacob-Friesen and Pauli, new joining members will be the gentlemen [...]”.⁶

When chairman Werner Noack (1888-1969) from Freiburg began to actively promote membership, a veritable surge in new members followed in 1930, including six women who joined the ranks of the department A for the arts and cultural

³ The section at the conference where this paper was first presented provided ample evidence of this fact (Große Kunsthistoriker_innen | 21te Tagung des VöKK, 4-7 November 2021). See also Barbara Paul, „Noch kein Brotstudium“ – Zur Ausbildungs- und Berufssituation der ersten Kunsthistorikerinnen in Deutschland Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts, *Kritische Berichte*, 21:4, 1993, 41-64; a short overview in K. Lee Chichester, Brigitte Sölch, ‚Einleitung und editorische Notiz‘, in K. Lee Chichester, Brigitte Sölch, *Kunsthistorikerinnen 1910-1980. Theorien, Methoden, Kritiken*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, (9-37) 21-22; on the museum reform movement cf. Susanne Köstering, *Die Museumsreformbewegung im frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, in Markus Walz, *Handbuch Museum. Geschichte – Aufgaben – Perspektiven*, Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 2016 (52-57); Alexis Joachimides, *Die Museumsreformbewegung in Deutschland und die Entstehung des modernen Museums 1880–1940*, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 2001.

⁴ Britta-R.Schwahn, ‚Koetschau, Karl‘ in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 12.1980, 410-411 [Online-Version]; URL: <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116301996.html#ndbcontent>; Urte Gärtner, ‚Kunst soll man nur so lange sehen, als man sie genießen kann“ – Zum Gedenken an den Kunsthistoriker und Museologen Karl Koetschau‘ in *Dresdener Kunstblätter*, 54, 2010, 41-52. The Städtische Kunstsammlungen were renamed Städtisches Kunstmuseum in the late 1920s.

⁵ Minutes of the members’ meeting, Hanover, 11./12.10.1927, (2-3), 3, Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (SMB-ZA), III DMB 249 – Teil 02.

⁶ In German: “Auf Vorschlag der Herren Jacob-Friesen und Pauli werden neu aufgenommen die Herren“. Minutes of the members’ meeting Hanover, 11./12.10.1927, 3. SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 02. The document refers to the chairman Gustav Pauli, director of the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, and Karl Herrmann Jacob-Friesen, director of the Provinzialmuseum Hanover hosting the meeting.

museums in one fell swoop.⁷ The proportion of women in this section which comprised nearly 180 members thus reached five percent.

How can these events in the context of the world of museums and research at the time be assessed? The reluctant expansion of the men's club to include a few woman members hardly surprises if one bears in mind that women had been precluded from enrolment as students in the universities of the German Empire until circa 1900.⁸ Even though 212 women graduates completed their doctorates in art history between 1910 and 1933,⁹ the percentage of actively working woman art historians remained marginal during the Weimar Republic, whose constitution accepted women as equal citizens. According to Heinrich Dilly's analysis of information given by the reference work *Dresslers Kunsthandbuch*, which lists artists, antiquarians, art scholars, and art writers of the time, the number of employed woman art historians in the German-speaking world barely reached sixty-one out of 1,552 in occupation in 1930.¹⁰ As far as I am aware, there are no statistics yet recording the share of women and men in universities, museums, and monument preservation, or of free-lance workers in these fields. Nevertheless, it is known that the group of museum employees formed the second most numerous faction with 345 individuals.¹¹ A source not previously consulted, Albert Schramm's *Jahrbuch der deutschen Museen*, also notes for 1930 that among 499 museum employees – a number considerably higher than the one Dilly extrapolated from *Dressler's Kunsthandbuch* – a mere fraction, that is 3,6 percent, were female (eighteen in absolute numbers).¹²

⁷ Noack's circular to members of section A, 27.3.1930, records of the Städtische Kunstmuseum, Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf, 0-1-4-3813-0000. On Noack see Meyer, *Kämpfe um die Professionalisierung*, 124-126; Kristina Kratz-Kessemeier, 'Für die „Erkämpfung einer neuen Museumskultur“'. Zur Rolle des Deutschen Museumsbundes im Nationalsozialismus' in Tanja Baensch, Kristina Kratz-Kessemeier, Dorothee Wimmer, *Museen im Nationalsozialismus. Akteure – Orte – Politik*, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2016, 23-43.

⁸ Ute Frevert, *Frauen-Geschichte zwischen bürgerlicher Verbesserung und neuer Weiblichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986, 120.

⁹ Cordula Bischoff, 'Arbeitsfeld Kunstgewerbe – typisch Kunsthistorikerin? Bemerkungen zur Berufssituation der Kunsthistorikerin in Deutschland von 1910 bis heute' in Cordula Bischoff, Christina Threuter, *Um-Ordnung. Angewandte Künste und Geschlecht in der Moderne*, Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1999, (16-26) 17, 21; cf. also Chichester/Sölch, 'Einleitung und editorische Notiz', 12, who record 382 doctoral dissertations in the German-speaking world in the period 1908-1933.

¹⁰ Heinrich Dilly, 'Kunstgeschichte, mal quantitativ. Zur sozialen Basis kunsthistorischer Theorie und Praxis' in Ruth Heftrig, Olaf Peters, Ulrich Rehm, *Alois J. Schardt. Ein Kunsthistoriker zwischen Weimarer Republik, „Drittem Reich“ und Exil in Amerika*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013, (1-18), 5. Dilly's statistics include archaeologists besides art historians and also consider data from Austria and the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

¹¹ Dilly, 'Kunstgeschichte, mal quantitativ', 6.

¹² Albert Schramm, *Jahrbuch der deutschen Museen*, Wolfenbüttel: Heckners Verlag, 3, 1930. Schramm's yearbook includes civil servants working in Austrian Museums. As the statistics were based on questionnaires which had to be returned by them, the real number of museum employees was probably higher. Though Schramm refers to museum civil servants,

These figures clarify that in spite of the upward trend of women taking up university studies and working in scholarly occupations, which does become noticeable from the German Empire towards the Weimar Republic, women were vastly outnumbered by men. Therefore, the DMB simply reflected these circumstances.

What can be concluded about the social environment and professional profile of the women pioneers in museum networking? I will begin with their fathers... they included industrialists, professors, civil servants, merchants, doctors, and teachers.¹³ Therefore, the women of the DMB grew up in a materially secure, educated middle class environment which allowed them to decide against a basic way of earning a living and in favour of a scholarly career. Studies were usually followed by a doctorate focusing on the stylistic or iconographical investigation of early modern artworks, conforming to the classical subject repertoire in academic research and teaching at the time.¹⁴ Two women lacked the relevant academic training. Frieda Fischer-Wieruszowski (1874-1945), formerly a teacher, gained her expertise through the private collecting of East Asian art, a pastime she shared with

the yearbook lists trainees, assistants or even lecturers, too. Of the 19 women recorded, the vast majority studied art history or archaeology.

¹³ Due to the inconsistent research situation, I had to draw on a wide variety of sources and was unable to gather the same data for all female members of the DMB. My conclusions are therefore not entirely representative. Biographical entries in Wikipedia are one telling indicator of the presence of female museum staff in the German research landscape: Four out of the 14 DMB women members lack an entry in Wikipedia. Most of the existing entries were created in 2018 and later. Beyond Wikipedia, there are helpful online sources of information for some biographies, e.g. Katja Förster, ‚Luise (Lilli) Fischel‘ in *Stadtlexikon Karlsruhe*, 2014, <https://stadtlexikon.karlsruhe.de/index.php/De:Lexikon:bio-0580>; Eva Maria Hoyer, ‚Marie Schuette, Dr. phil.‘, Stadt Leipzig, <https://www.leipzig.de/jugend-familie-und-soziales/frauen/1000-jahre-leipzig-100-frauenportraits/detailseite-frauenportraits/projekt/schuette-marie-dr-phil>, 2017; Manfred Leyh, ‚Dr. Heyne, Hildegard Pauline Sidonie‘, Stadt Leipzig, <https://www.leipzig.de/jugend-familie-und-soziales/frauen/1000-jahre-leipzig-100-frauenportraits/detailseite-frauenportraits/projekt/dr-heyne-hildegard-pauline-sidonie>, 2021; other important sources were Paul, ‚„Noch kein Brotstudium“‘; Ulrike Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch deutschsprachiger Kunsthistoriker im Exil. Leben und Werk der unter dem Nationalsozialismus verfolgten und vertriebenen Wissenschaftler*, Munich: K.G. Saur 1999, vol 1, 144-145; vol. 2, 446, 723-724; Bettina Mosler, ‚Elisabeth Moses, Kunsthistorikerin der Adenauerzeit in Köln. Auf der Suche nach einer verlorenen Biographie‘ in *Kölner Museums-Bulletin*, 1999, No. 4, 33-34; Marlene Angermeyer-Deubner, ‚Die Kunsthalle Karlsruhe – Der Beginn einer modernen Sammlung. Willy Stork (1920-1927) und Lilli Fischel (1927-1933)‘, part 2, in *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg*, 37, 2000, 100-136; Birgitt Hellmann, ‚Johanna-Hofmann-Stirnemann. Die erste Museumsdirektorin Deutschlands‘ in Gisela Horn, *Entwurf und Wirklichkeit. Frauen in Jena 1900 bis 1933*, Rudolstadt/Jena 2001, 325–338; Lisa Lang, *Frieda Fischer, Lilli Fischel und Hanna Stirnemann – Frauen in Führungspositionen an Museen zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Master thesis, Technische Universität 2022, DOI 10.14279/depositonnce-16770.

¹⁴ Cf. Elisabeth Boedeker, *25 Jahre Frauenstudium in Deutschland. Verzeichnis der Doktorarbeiten von Frauen 1908-1933*, Hanover 1939, 74-95; Chichester/ Sölch, ‚Einleitung und editorische Notiz‘, 19.

her first husband Adolf Fischer (1856-1914).¹⁵ Hanna Kronberger-Frentzen had established herself as a self-employed goldsmith before starting her employment at the Kunsthalle in Mannheim in 1921.¹⁶

At the time of joining the DMB, the women members were thirty or older, having been born between 1874 and 1900. Those over fifty were in executive positions – Fischer-Wieruszowski succeeded her husband, founder and director of the East Asian Museum in Cologne, after his death, Hildegard Heyne (1878-1964) was the director of the print department at the museum for fine arts in Leipzig, Marie Schuette (1878-1975) was a curator at the museum for applied arts in the same city, and Hanna Stirnemann (1899-1996) was even the director of the city museum in Jena at only thirty-one years of age.¹⁷

In the cohort between thirty and forty, there were however still assistants and auxiliary staff, like Margarete Lippe (1901-1996), Elisabeth Moses (1894-1957) or Agnes Waldstein (1900-1961).¹⁸ The majority of these careers therefore came to a standstill in middle age, in fixed term, low pay or unpaid employment positions, or did not even proceed beyond the practical training period in a museum. This impression is substantiated in comparison with the professional situation of the male DMB members. Based on the list of all 175 members from November 1930 minus the nine women in the association at the time, there were twenty assistants, trainees and auxiliary employees as opposed to 146 directors, curators, and directorial assistants.¹⁹ Among the men, eleven percent were in precarious positions respectively free-lance, among the women, forty-four percent.

The archival documents of the association do not offer indications that the women were actively engaged in the organisation. For Moses and Stirnemann I was able to confirm participation in annual meetings twice, according to the minutes, for Fischel, Lippe and Waldstein once, but the others did not attend the meetings.²⁰ The programme content was up to the men, papers were only presented by them, and

¹⁵ Lang, *Frieda Fischer, Lilli Fischel*, 21-28.

¹⁶ Philipp Breitenreicher, 'Die erste Goldschmiedemeisterin Deutschlands: Hanna Kronberger-Frentzen', *MARCHIVUM Blog Nachlasswelten*, <https://www.marchivum.de/de/blog/nachlasswelten-12>, 14.09.2020.

¹⁷ Lang, *Frieda Fischer, Lilli Fischel*, 21, 37, 56; Hoyer, 'Marie Schuette'; Leyh, 'Dr. Heyne', Hellmann, 'Johanna-Hofmann-Stirnemann', 327-330.

¹⁸ Mosler, 'Elisabeth Moses', 34; Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 723; correspondence between Gustav Pauli and Lippe, 27.4.1928, SMB-ZA, III DMB 252.

¹⁹ Membership list, 1.11.1930, SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 01. For some men, only their academic title and private address are listed, which suggests that they were temporarily not employed at a museum.

²⁰ Minutes of the members' meeting, Cologne/Düsseldorf, 15.-17.8.1928, 2, SMB-ZA, III DMB 262; minutes of the members' meeting of section A, DMB, 28./29.8.1931, n.pag., III DMB 249 – Teil 01; minutes of the members' meeting, Berlin, 25.5.34, n.pag., III DMB 285; minutes of the members' meeting, section A, DMB, Danzig, 9.10.1929, n.pag., Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf, records of the Städtische Kunstsammlungen, 0-1-4-3813-0000; minutes of the members' meeting, section A, DMB, Essen, 14./15.9.1930, n.pag., records of the Städtische Kunstsammlungen, 0-1-4-3814-0000.

minuted discussion record only their participation.²¹ It stands to reason that the women must have felt somewhat excluded by circulars addressed to the “gentlemen members of the German museum association”.²² Yet there is no sign of a reservation against or even rejection of women members in DMB correspondence. On the contrary, the chairmen promptly attended to membership applications and lent their support. When Lilli Martius (1885-1976) applied for membership in 1932, Noack assured her that all new entrants would be decided by written vote, should the annual meeting need to be cancelled due to the economic crisis.²³ The provision in the statutes (repealed in the meantime) that two members needed to support the new entry of an “academically or professionally formed civil servant” in writing, seemed to be no impediment.²⁴ In the event that there was no or only one recommendation, as for Agnes Waldstein (1930) and Johanna Uebe from Münster (1931), the requirement was waived without further ado.²⁵ And the DMB was not only ready to accept new women museum colleagues, but also women scholars looking for work.

The DMB as an “Employment Agency” for women in academia and the arts

In March 1928, Noack’s predecessor Gustav Pauli (1866-1938) had asked all colleagues to flag up any positions becoming available and also any need for trained staff, so that the DMB office could take up an active intermediary role.²⁶ From then on, employment requests were published in the chairmen’s circulars. From 1929 to 1934, ten women art historians, philologists, and restorers expressed their interest in entering or remaining in museum services, namely Rosemarie Binneboeßel (born 1901), Frieda Dettweiler (born 1900), Elfriede Ferber (1899-1991), Katharina Freise (born 1901, she applied as trained bookbinder), Anni (Annemarie) Henle (1910-2001), Eva Heye (1906-1979), Magdalene Rudolph (1901-1992), Elisabeth Schmidt (born 1903), Hildemarie Schwindrazheim (1902-1998), and Charlotte Steinbrucker (1886-1965).²⁷ Some of them actually made a career in museums and exhibitions,

²¹ See the minutes of the members’ meetings in Cologne/Düsseldorf 1928, Danzig 1929, Essen 1930, Berlin 1934, SMB-ZA, III DMB 262; III DMB 285; III DMB 249 – Teil 01; Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf, records of the Städtische Kunstsammlungen, 0-1-4-3813-0000; 0-1-4-3814-0000.

²² In German “Herren Mitglieder des Deutschen Museumsbundes”, circular Pauli to the members, 25.7.1929. SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 01. At this point, Kronberger-Frentzen and Moses were members, Fischel only joined after the circular at the meeting in Danzig. Cf. the letters from von Noack to Pauli, 5.9.1929 and Pauli to Noack, 7.9.1929, III DMB 257 – Teil 01.

²³ Noack to Lilli Martius on 14.6.1932, SMB-ZA, III DMB 257 – Teil 02.

²⁴ See the reprint of the statutes in Klausewitz, 66 Jahre, 48-50.

²⁵ Cf. Noack to Gosebruch, 10.2.1930; Gosebruch to Noack 11.2.1930; postcard to Noack from Münster dated 26.9.1930, SMB-ZA, III DMB 257 – Teil 02. Johanna Uebe was assistant worker at the Landesmuseum in Münster, postcard to Noack, 26.9.1931, SMB-ZA, III 258. Apart from her marriage with Rudolf Uebe who had been assistant director and curator in Münster until he died in 1927 nothing is known about her career. See *Sammlung Rudolf Uebe*, <https://www.ulb.uni-muenster.de/sammlungen/nachlaesse/sammlung-uebe.html>.

²⁶ Letter from Pauli dated 1.3.1928, SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 02.

²⁷ Circular Pauli, May 1928, 2, SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 02; minutes of the members’ meeting, Cologne/Düsseldorf, 15.-17.8.1928, 2; circular Pauli, 14.6.1929, n.pag.; circular Noack, 22.12.1930, n.pag.; minutes of the members’ meeting, Essen, 22.12.1930, n.pag.;

some worked in heritage conservation and at university, while others never gained a foothold as art historians. As a representative of the female job seekers, I would like to focus only on one example, the latter Steinbrucker. After completing her doctoral thesis at Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin in 1915, Steinbrucker never ceased to publish until the end of the 1950s, writing on the subjects of bookbinding and textile arts. Her articles appeared, among others, in the handbook *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*.²⁸ Her edition of the correspondence between Daniel Chodowiecki and Anton Graff from 1921 was recently published as a reprint.²⁹ Yet what else do we know about her? In June 1929 Pauli first published Steinbrucker's job request (in addition to those for assistant workers Ferber from the Provinzialmuseum Hanover and Curt Gravenkamp from the Gewerbemuseum in Flensburg).³⁰ She briefly summarizes her experience as a trainee and auxiliary employee in various Berlin institutions during the 1920s and provides references. In March 1932, this widow of the architect Franz Peter Steinbrucker (1874-1918) approached the museum association again, whereupon Noack reinserted her request once more in a circular.³¹ This time, it is more detailed, with precise dates and a list of publications. In addition, it becomes clear that her previous submission to the DMB had not produced the desired employment in a museum, since she worked as a school teacher from 1928 to 1931.³² Her extensive employment request includes copies of ten favourable references and recommendations she had received between 1921 and 1928. The CV she wrote in the third person is especially significant, as it reflects her unsuccessful attempt to find a suitable position in the museum world, even frustration about a lack of recognition for her achievements, and her fear of losing her livelihood:

[...] at the time of the highest unemployment, she was made redundant here [at the Staatliche Museen] without cause and without notice, against her will, without a salary, compensation, or pension, even though she had been led to assume on the basis of oral and written communication that she would

circular Noack, 25.1.1932, n.pag.; minutes of the members' meeting, Mainz, 20.8.1933, n.pag.; circular Noack, 15.8.1934, n.pag., SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 01; circular Noack, 14.8.1931, n.pag.; minutes of the members' meeting, Ulm, 28./29.8.1931, n.pag., SMB-ZA, III 285; correspondence between Noack and Dettweiler, 12.5.1931, 11.6.1931, 1.7.1931, 26.7.1931, 3.5.1933, SMB-ZA, III DMB 252.

²⁸ See for example Charlotte Steinbrucker, 'Bildteppich (Bildwirkerei, Gobelin)', in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. II, 1940, 707–740, RDK Labor, URL: <https://www.rdklabor.de/w/?oldid=107056> [04.04.2022]; 'Chippendale' in *Reallexikon*, vol. III, 1952, 482–488; in: RDK Labor, URL: <https://www.rdklabor.de/w/?oldid=89224> [05.04.2022]; 'Drechsler' in *Reallexikon*, vol. IV, 1955, 382–394; in: RDK Labor, URL: <https://www.rdklabor.de/w/?oldid=93042> [05.04.2022].

²⁹ Charlotte Steinbrucker, *Briefe Daniel Chodowieckis an Anton Graff*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1921, reprint 2020.

³⁰ Circular Noack, 14.6.1929, n.pag., SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 01.

³¹ Circular Noack, 28.7.1932 with minutes of the members' meeting, Ulm, 28./29.8.1931, n.pag., SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 01.

³² Letter Steinbrucker to Noack, 31.3.1932, with all of the documents attached to it mentioned in the text, SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 01.

continue to be remunerated beyond the completion of redundancies in the civil service, and even though she hoped and had reasonable expectations that no civil service would ever use the services of a widow without any pension for years without offering her the option of paid employment, instead making her redundant, above all in the thirty-ninth year and at a time of great economic depression, after she completed four and a half years of unpaid extensive work on behalf of the Staatliche Museen to the entire satisfaction of the director general, without ever taking leave and suffering considerable hardship.³³

The document is also unique in showing the editorial changes Noack made before publication, in an attempt to make the employment request as factual as possible. Among others, he deleted the passage quoted above completely.³⁴ On the one hand, his interventions concealed the grievances caused by patriarchal gender hierarchy in personnel policy which Steinbrucker had addressed emphatically. On the other hand he complied with the DMB's goal of being an umbrella organisation actively supporting the interests of museum employees, which in this case meant that Steinbrucker should be placed in employment without putting herself or colleagues in the dock.

Ruptures and continuities - spotlights on developments after 1933

The rise of the National Socialists to power barely a year after Steinbrucker's application neither led to enforced dismissal for the women organized in the DMB, nor were all of them driven to flight and exile. Certainly, many of these women shared such a destiny. At one go, Grete Barnass (1898-1987), Fischel, Moses, Schuette, and Waldstein left the association in 1934.³⁵

Notoriously, the Act for Restoration of the Professional Civil Service in April 1933 gave the new regime an instrument for dismissal of Jewish or politically undesirable employees as well as those who championed Modernism.³⁶ This

³³ Personal data on Ms. Dr. Steinbrucker, 1, SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 01.

³⁴ Circular Noack, 28.7.1932 with minutes of the members' meeting, Ulm, 28./29.8.1931, n.pag., DMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 01.

³⁵ Minutes of the members' meeting, Berlin, 25.5.1934, n.pag., SMB-ZA, III DMB 249 – Teil 01. On the DMB during National Socialism see Kratz-Kessemeier, 'Für die „Erkämpfung“; Meyer, *Kämpfe um die Professionalisierung*, 193-229. On women art historians in exile see Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch*; Karen Michels, 'Glück im Unglück' – Kunsthistorikerinnen im Exil' in Ursula Hudson-Wiedenmann, Beate Schmeichel-Falkenberg, *Grenzen Überschreiben. Frauen, Kunst und Exil*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005, 123-130.

³⁶ On National Socialist cultural politics cf. for example Anja Tiedemann, *Die Kammer schreibt schon wieder! Das Reglement für den Handel mit moderner Kunst im Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2016; Tanja Baensch, Kristina Kratz-Kessemeier, Dorothee Wimmer, *Museen im Nationalsozialismus. Akteure – Orte – Politik*, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2016; for a research overview see Wolfgang Hardtwig, 'Kunst im Nationalsozialismus. Ausgewählte Literatur aus historischer Sicht I und II' in *Kunstchronik*, 74: 3/4, 2021, 130-141, 177-193.

applied to Fischel, Moses, and Waldstein, while Stirnemann forestalled her dismissal by resigning in 1935.³⁷

Conversely, though she also left the museum association in 1934, Schuette remained as a curator at the Leipzig museum for applied arts until her retirement in 1943, heading the textile collection and the library. During National Socialism, the Kunstgewerbemuseum held propaganda-style special exhibitions and purchased objects from "Aryanized" companies as well as from collections sold by their Jewish owners due to being forced out of economic life and in preparation for emigration.³⁸ In 1936, Schuette successfully bid on artworks in Munich which had come from the estate of the Jewish collector Margarethe Oppenheim who had died in 1935.³⁹

Similarly, the Leipzig museum for applied arts benefited from the confiscation of Jewish property, whose print room was headed by the Klinger specialist Heyne.⁴⁰ Heyne remained a member of the DMB until late 1938 and also became acting director of the museum in 1940.⁴¹ She worked closely with the art dealer Wilhelm Gustav Werner (1859-1945), who was instrumental in selling paintings by Fritz von Uhde and Max Klinger from the former collection of the dispossessed music editor Henri Hinrichsen (1868-1942) to the museum.⁴²

Implicitly, the regime change in 1933 meant the end of their career in Germany for women who were deemed Jewish by Nazi propaganda, regardless of whether they were part of that religious community or had converted (Moses, Waldstein, Fischel), or for women who championed Modernism (Stirnemann). Others however succeeded in holding their ground in the museum world, even though the Nazi regime systematically attempted to channel gainful employment based on gender and preferred to see women occupied in housekeeping, agricultural, and social professions.⁴³ Scholars like Schuette and Heyne continued to serve the arts and their collections and even took an active role in the looting of cultural property by the National Socialists.

³⁷ Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 144, 446, 723; Hellmann, 'Johanna-Hofmann-Stirnemann', 335; Mosler, 'Elisabeth Moses', 37.

³⁸ Petra Knöller, 'Das Kunstgewerbemuseum zu Leipzig und die Kunsthandlung Gustav Werner – Beteiligte an der Aneignung von Kunsteigentum jüdischer Bürger' in Monika Gibas, Cornelia Briel, Petra Knöller, *„Arisierung“ in Leipzig. Annäherung an ein lange verdrängtes Kapitel der Stadtgeschichte der Jahre 1933-1945*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag 2007, (243-259) 244-248.

³⁹ Knöller, 'Das Kunstgewerbemuseum zu Leipzig', 248.

⁴⁰ Monika Gibas, '„Arisierte“ Kunstschatze: Kunstmuseen und privater Kunsthandel als Täter und Nutznießer der Enteignung jüdischer Kunstbesitzer in Leipzig' in Monika Gibas, Cornelia Briel, Petra Knöller, *„Arisierung“ in Leipzig. Annäherung an ein lange verdrängtes Kapitel der Stadtgeschichte der Jahre 1933-1945*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag 2007, (197-241). According to Leyh, 'Dr. Heyne', she became member of the NSDAP on 1.5.1933, like other leading museum officials.

⁴¹ Memorandum, 2.9.1938, SMB-ZA, III DMB 259.

⁴² Gibas, '„Arisierte“ Kunstschatze', 232-235.

⁴³ Cf. Frevert, *Frauen-Geschichte*, 210-211.

Conclusion

At the end of the period of the Weimar Republic, the DMB managed a restructuring in spite of the world economic crisis and political instability. Section A for the museums of arts and culture within the expanded umbrella organisation, formerly the heart of the association, now accepted assistants and auxiliary employees in precarious employment in addition to civil servants on permanent contracts or in executive positions. The transformation of the museum into a democratic educational establishment for the general public, more than ever desired under the Republic, is reflected precisely in this broader, socially more diverse appearance.

Independently of membership in the museum association, the organisation's newly assumed role of "employment agency" was important for women academics who were at a structural disadvantage in the job market. More research needs to be done to trace the professional paths of the women applicants, and it may well not be possible to close all gaps. But the archive of the DMB holds veritable treasures in CVs, letters of recommendation, and references submitted by women in the course of looking for work, and these are a source of immeasurable value for reconstructing their biographies at least in part, especially in the early stages of their careers.

Regarding the museum association as a port of call for those seeking employment means, for once, to rediscover barely known or forgotten women who enriched the field of art history within and outside the museum through their research and critique until far into the second half of the twentieth century. At the same time, the correspondence between the women and the association once again confronts us with the downside of a (woman) scholar's life, the networks, precarious employment situations and societal exclusion – aspects already lamented in the 1920s which have lost none of their topicality.

Nevertheless: the examination of the DMB from a critical historical perspective clearly finds that in Germany during the early twentieth century the museum did indeed become a sphere of professional activity for women and remained so beyond the rupture of 1933. Even the women who were members of the association before, circa 1930, represented almost twenty-three percent of all women art historians in employment in the German-speaking world. For the purposes of a gender-sensitive art history and museology, it must be remembered that it was not least the women who contributed to a renewal of the DMB after years of stagnation, and thus for a short time to a more modern and more diverse orientation for the organization.

Translated by Susanne Meyer-Abich

Andrea Meyer is an art historian working at Technische Universität Berlin. Her primary areas of research are museum studies and European visual arts of the 19th/early 20th century. Following a project on efforts to modernize museum practice in Germany around 1900, she currently conducts research into women's museum careers and the artistic reception of collections from colonial contexts.

andrea.meyer@tu-berlin.de



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