

Wiki Women Design: Unlocking the Contributions of Belgian Female Designers on Wikipedia

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By Christele Harrouk

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A class photograph with a.o. Martha van Coppenolle at the Technisch Instituut van Sint-Maria in Antwerp, ca. 1930. Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuis.. Image Courtesy of Wiki Women Design

The [Flanders Architecture Institute](#) has been working to bring “*women who have left their mark on Belgium's design heritage out of the shadows*”, through [Wiki Women Design](#). Using [Wikipedia](#) as a platform, the initiative aims to organize *edit-a-thons* or writing sessions, to make up for this backlog.

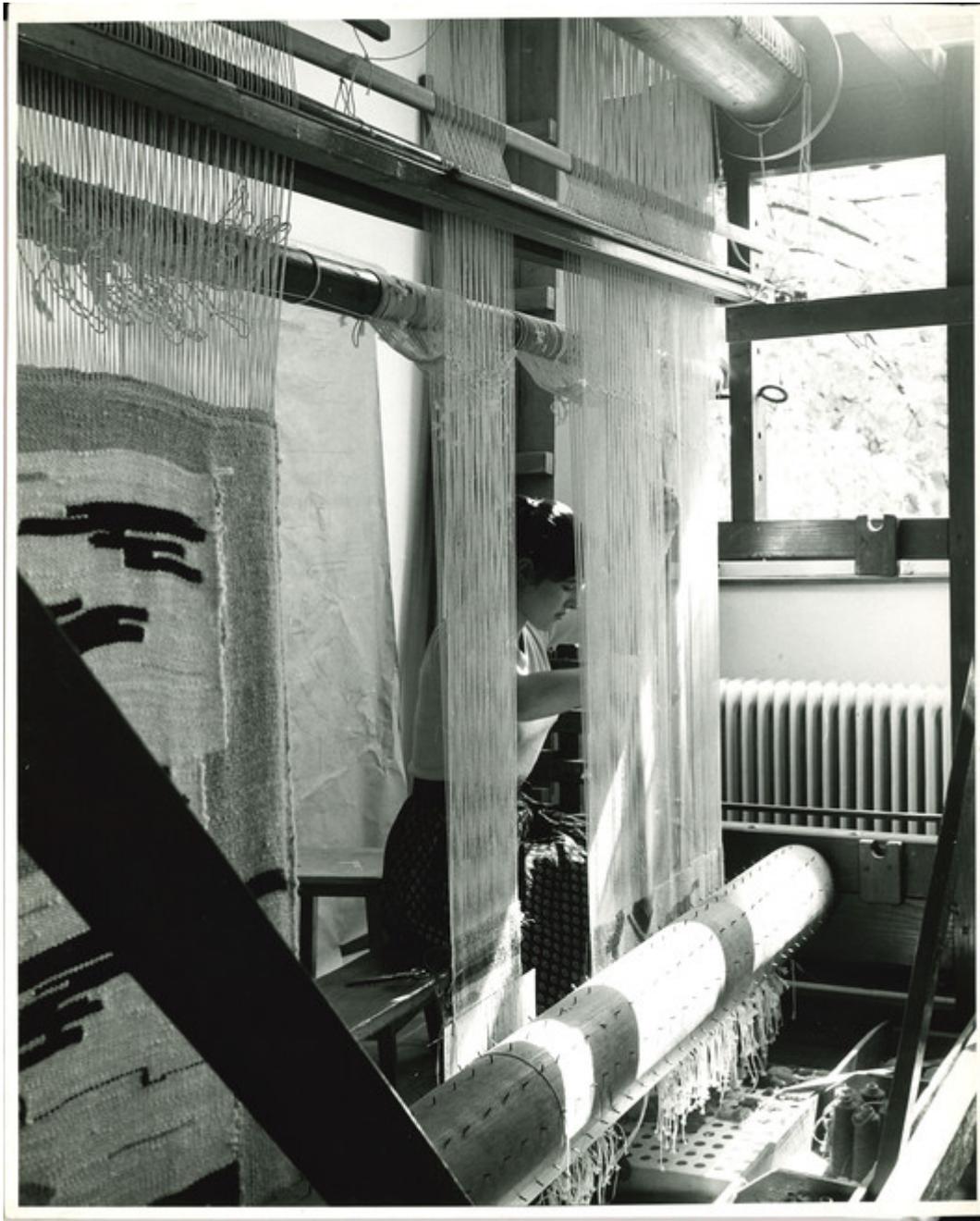
From architecture and graphic design to fashion and product design, many women contributed to the designed environment, many of which remained under the radar of heritage institutions, researchers, and collectors. In [Belgium](#), to date, there are hardly any studies on female designers. In fact, “*the absence of female designers in the collective memory is largely due to their relative absence from history books, which in turn has to do with their under-representation in design archives and collections*”. In order to contribute to a more inclusive history, the [Flanders Architecture Institute](#) through its [Wiki Women Design initiative](#) wants to break this circle, by unlocking the contributions of female designers on Wikipedia.

Invisibility is a sign that there is still much more work to do. -- Jane Hall (architect, author of *Breaking Ground. Architecture by Women* (2019))



Martha Van Coppenolle in an atelier with a friend, 1931. Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuis..
Image Courtesy of Wiki Women Design

Women have always been there, but we have overlooked their contributions. -- Alexandra Lange (architecture and design critic)



Weaving student, class of Marie-Louise Overloop-Zimmer at La Cambre, ca. 1960. École nationale supérieure des arts visuels - La Cambre, Brussels.. Image Courtesy of Wiki Women Design

Contributing to gender equality in the field, Wiki Women Design also aims to establish female role models for future designers. [Wikipedia](#), one of the [most visited websites](#) in the world, has a huge impact on knowledge acquisition and historiography. Through close collaboration with numerous partners, Wiki Women Design aims to complete the online encyclopedia and give more visibility to the women who have left their mark on the design heritage in Belgium.

It seems obvious to me that the role of women in architecture—now and over the years—deserves much more structural attention. The oeuvre of these female architects should, much more than is the case now, be part of our collective memory. -- Oana Bogdan, Architect, founding & managing partner BOGDAN & VAN BROECK.



Lutgart De Meyer at work in her studio in the Hoogstraat in Antwerp, 1955 © Paul Ausloos . Image Courtesy of Wiki Women Design

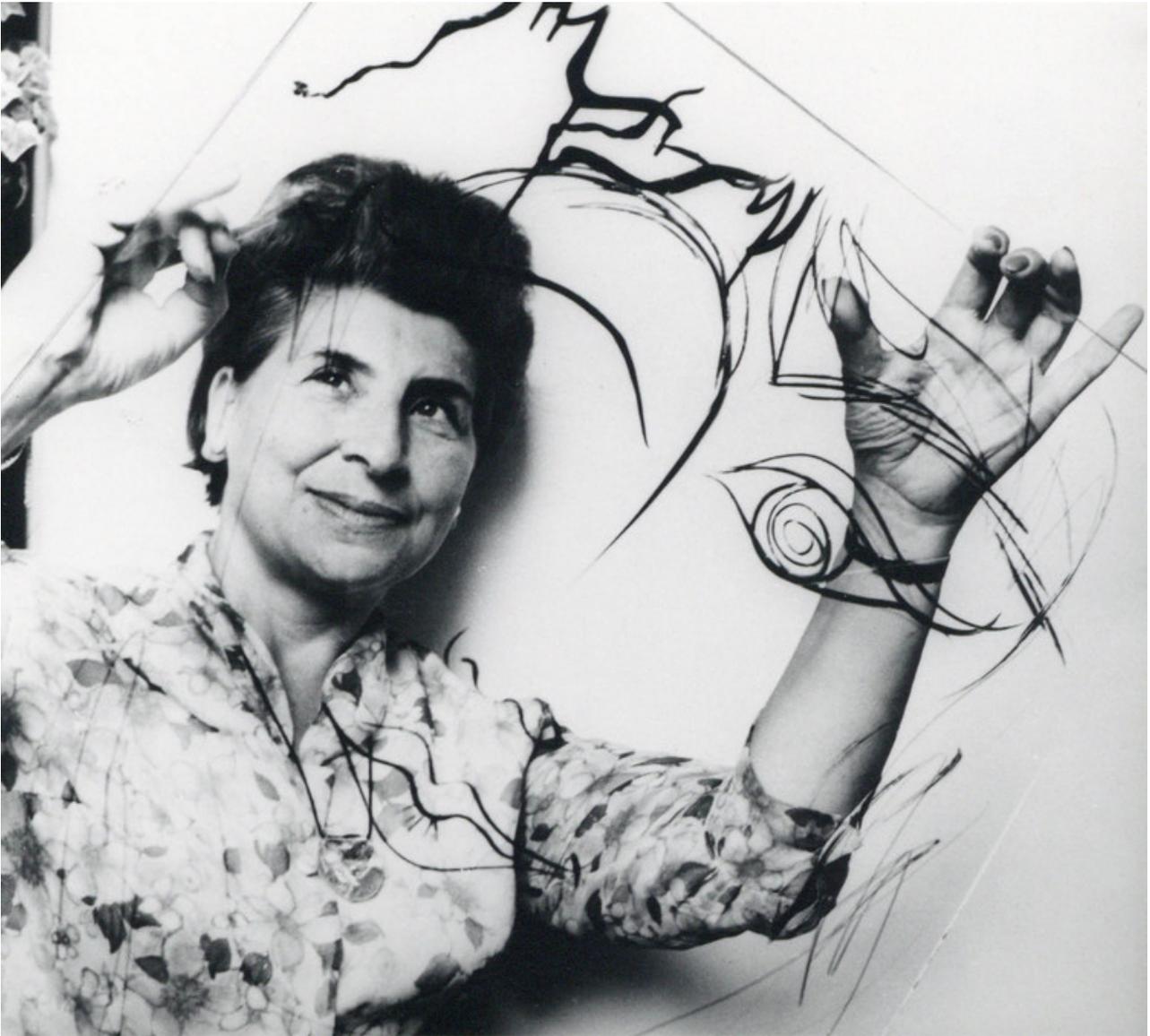
By paying more attention to equal representation of male and female designers in such [architectural] projects, more women could help shape the architecture, urbanism, and designed environment of the future. -- Linde Freya Tangelder-- Designer, founder Destroyers/Builders, and member of BRUT Collective



Martha van Coppenolle in her atelier at the end of her studies, ca. 1930. Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuis. Image Courtesy of Wiki Women Design

Aiming to train editors and improve the quality of articles, the Flanders Architecture Institute in collaboration with the project partners will organize writing sessions where communities come together to write and publish on a particular topic. In fact, anyone who wants to contribute can participate in one of the Wikipedia writing sessions. On September 23, 2021, an international symposium will be held, as the final part of the project, with presentations by project participants, researchers, professionals, and international experts.

Wikipedia will only contain ‘the sum of all human knowledge’ if its editors are as diverse as the population itself: you can help make that happen. And I can’t think of anything more important to do, than that. -- Sue Gardner, former director Wikimedia Foundation



May Néama with her work for the provincial prize for graphic arts, 1965. Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuis. Image Courtesy of Wiki Women Design

Wikipedia plays an important role for students and researchers. It is often a starting point for research, and for young designers looking for examples to identify with, representation can be crucial. -- Sara De Bondt, Graphic designer, a lecturer at KASK Gent



Courtesy of Wiki Women Design

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