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THE WOMEN'S MAKING



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FORERUNNERS

Design and Science, from the Bauhaus to Neotropical Research at USP

The Trajectory of Marta Erps-Breuer

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Keywords

History of design, Gender Studies, Marta Erps-Breuer, Bauhaus, University of São Paulo.

Abstract

This article analyzes the trajectory of designer and scientist Marta Erps-Breuer (Frankfurt, Germany, 1902 - São Paulo, Brazil, 1977) from her training at the Bauhaus to the work she performed at the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology at the University of São Paulo where she contributed to pioneering research from the 1930s to the 1970s. We have mapped three axes that lead us to understand her trajectory: the training and workspaces she occupied; the migration from Germany to Brazil; and the social relations she established. Gender studies, which permeate our theoretical and methodological approach, provided us with fundamental contributions in the search for available sources and in the interpretation of the materials found. From this perspective, we seek through Marta's journey to make explicit the challenges present in the documentation of women's work in the field of design.

1. Introduction

Through the journey of designer Marta Erps-Breuer's¹, we will begin to analyze the social place that women occupied at the Bauhaus, their professional opportunities and the spaces they circulated in. This inquiry will be extended to the work that she developed at the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology at the USP (University of São Paulo (USP)) in Brazil where she worked as a laboratory technician and scientist for four decades. During this period, Marta participated in important research on genetics and published more than 20 articles in the field, which are still noteworthy today.

From the beginning of this investigation, gender studies have been necessary in order to trace the various paths in the documentation that reveal the trajectory of women in historical processes. Authors Joan Scott (1986), Michelle Perrot (1998) and Françoise Thébaud (2007) highlighted the power relations in the arranging of workspaces and in the professions configured as *for women* in a historiographical approach. In this way, they proved to be essential in problematizing the silences surrounding the contributions of women to the production of knowledge, as well as in considering gender as a category of historical analysis (Joan Scott, 1986, 2010). Through the life of Marta Erps-Breuer we will reflect on gender relations in workspaces in the design field from this theoretical and methodological perspective, and also on the hierarchies that configure the production, circulation and documentation of its artifacts.

1. In the documents we found in Germany, Marta's name is written in different ways. At the Bauhaus, some use her birth name, abbreviated to Martha Erps, and others use Martha Erps-Breuer after her marriage to Marcel Breuer. Alternatively, the letters she wrote in Brazil were signed using her name without the letter "h" (Marta Erps-Breuer). We chose to use this final version.

We also found that the research of Cheryl Buckley (1986), Beatriz Colomina (1998), Isabel Campi (2011), and Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (2013) have been important to the preparation of this article. These works have been initiated with the invisibility of women and the gaps in the documentation of their work in thinking about how they contributed significantly to the history of design, architecture and art. The authors highlighted the importance of reflecting on creative and design activities in relation to the places, spaces and social contexts where artifacts are produced, in addition to exploring the ways of producing hierarchies in these fields. These studies led us to consider Marta Erps-Breuer's trajectory along three axes: first, the places she passed through and the artifacts she produced; second, her migration from Germany to Brazil; and, finally, the social relations she established. The articulation of these axes was fundamental for mapping the relevant archives² and for documenting the life and work of the designer.

We will start with the designer's association with the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1928³, during which the school moved from Weimar to Dessau. She trained as a regular student between 1922 and 1924. Her older brother, Ludwig Erps, had immigrated to Brazil and Marta began her association with that

2. To document the course of Marta Erps-Breuer's work, we consulted several collections from different institutions: the Berlin Bauhaus-Archiv, the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, the Walter Gropius Open Archive, the Marcel Breuer Digital Archive, SLUB Dresden and the Institute of Biosciences-USP.

3. Her time at the institution can be understood from several records: the first, from 1921, is an engraving of the designer's profile. Between 1922 and 1924, Marta was part of the group of regular Bauhaus students according to a document in the Walter Gropius Open Archive. From 1926 to 1928, she participated informally in the school according to photographic records and her own reports found in letters exchanged with colleagues Ise Gropius and Kurt Schmidt in this period.

country when she visited him in 1925. Shortly after returning to Europe, in 1926, she married architect and designer Marcel Breuer⁴, the recently installed master of the Bauhaus furniture workshop. In the part of the article covering this period, we seek to highlight opportunities for women to participate in the school, the relationships Marta developed with her colleagues, and the way she used the knowledge acquired there in her professional career.

In 1931, the designer returned to Brazil and decided to settle in São Paulo where she began her career as an illustrator of scientific works. Her artistic, technical and observational skills in microscopic analysis led to an invitation for her to join a team of researchers at the newly created USP. In 1935, she was hired as a laboratory technician in the Biology department. At USP, Marta developed a pioneering role in the research of biology and genetics, and went on to publish a series of articles over her career of nearly forty years. Her work focused mainly on the study of two types of flies: *Drosophila* and *Rhynchosciara*. In addition to her scientific work, Marta also dedicated herself to the artistic work she had started at the Bauhaus. Even though she had settled in South America, she exchanged correspondence with her classmates and met with them on several occasions. We also took note of her effort to chronicle her professional trajectory in Brazil and to send her works to Germany at the end of the 1960s.

4. Marcel Breuer (1902-1981) was a student at the Bauhaus between the years 1920 and 1924. In 1925, he became a young master at the joinery workshop where he remained until 1928. For more on the path of the designer and architect at the Bauhaus, see: Droste (2019).

Through Marta Erps-Breuer's journey, we intend to reflect on challenges to the documentation of women's work in the design field. We also seek to contextualize aspects of the designer's career in order to recount her work in design as much as in science.

2. Methods: Marta Erps-Breuer's Trajectory as Traced through Interviews and Archives

This article is a preliminary part of an ongoing doctoral research study investigating the trajectory of women in modern Brazilian design, including Marta Erps-Breuer. This began with an interview conducted in early 2018 with Brazilian art researcher Ana Mae Barbosa. Soon after, we started researching at the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology at USP. We interviewed three researchers, Carlos Ribeiro Vilela, João Stenghel Morgante and Nícia Wendel de Magalhães, who worked with Marta in the Biosciences Institute at the same institution.

We started archival research with the collection of the Institute of Biosciences-USP in Brazil, which has gathered documents, objects and images of the work done by Erps-Breuer's, who was both a designer and scientist. In addition, with the aim of documenting her career at the Bauhaus, we turned first to online archives with the Walter Gropius Open Archive and the Marcel Breuer Digital Archive, and later to the physical archives in Germany with the Berlin Bauhaus-Archiv, the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau and The Saxon State and University Library of Dresden (SLUB) at the end of 2019.

In addition to photographs and images of the artworks produced by Marta during her time at the Bauhaus, we also analyzed a set of correspondences that the designer exchanged with

former colleagues at the school, including Ise Gropius and Kurt Schmidt. These letters were instrumental for us in tracing a network of relations maintained by Marta Erps-Breuer throughout her life and mainly in the late 1960s when she showed interest in sending her works to Germany for documentation.

3. From the Bauhaus to USP

3.1. Weimar Period (1921-1924)

Marta Erps-Breuer's path in Weimar followed that of many designers who attended the German school. Therefore, before we document her work from this period, it is important to contextualize the professional opportunities and the spaces that were open to women at the Bauhaus. The research of Magdalena Droste (2019)⁵ and Sigrid Weltge (1993) are fundamental to this understanding. In their work, they analyzed everything from barriers to entry – institutional impediments and places where women were more readily accepted – to how these aspects affected the production of artifacts and the hierarchies attributed to them.

According to Droste (2019, p. 84), the first speech given by director Walter Gropius to Bauhaus students was meant to guarantee “absolute equality of rights, but also absolute equality of obligations” for all students. Gropius mentioned that there would be “no special treatment for women, at work everyone is an artisan”. The Weimar Constitution of 1919 guaranteed unlimited freedom of education for women.

5. The first edition of the work “Bauhaus: 1919-1933” was in 1990. After that, the book had later publications and the most recent version was updated in 2019, which we used in this research.

However, due to the excessive number of women applicants to the school in 1920, Gropius suggested to the Master's Council that the selection process should be more rigorous, particularly in the case of future designers. At that time, the school already had a large number of women, which, to his way of thinking, could lower the institution's prestige. His advice was that, after the first year of basic studies, women should be sent to the weaving workshop.

In addition to textiles, ceramics and bookbinding were offered, but this last course was discontinued in 1922. In October of the following year, the school recommended that no women students should be admitted to the ceramics studio, but this would be revoked shortly afterwards due to the lack of staff and the eventual closing of the studio. Droste (2019, p. 87) summarizes the Bauhaus era in Weimar as a period that made it difficult for women to gain access. Even confronted with this scenario, it is important to point out that women designers participated, produced and distinguished themselves in several workshops at the school, as was the case of Marianne Brandt (1893-1983) in the metal workshop, Marguerite Friedlaender (1896-1985) in the ceramic workshop, and Alma Buscher (1899-1944) in the furniture workshop, as noted by the author.

The institutional decisions made in the early years of the school show that the revolutionary ideals of the Bauhaus were based on perceptions of the traditional society of the time, with its clear division between gender roles which defined different spaces and rights for women and men. The “absolute equality of rights”, supported by Gropius in the school's opening address, was not absolute for all, and had separate definitions of equality and rights for each gender.

For researchers Sandra Kemker, Ulrike Müller and Ingrid Radewaldt (2009), this was reflected in the fact that, over the years, the enrollment of women decreased dramatically. In 1919, there were 84 women students and 79 men, but in the last year (1932-1933), that number fell to 25 women and 90 men. In 1922, the year that Marta Erps-Breuer – then 20 years old – enrolled as a student at the Bauhaus, there were 52 women students and 95 men students.

Marta's trajectory at the school followed a common scenario for women there. In the first cycle, she attended the basic program; in the second, her studies were focused on workshops and materials, which in her case applied mainly to the weaving workshop. According to the 1922 Bauhaus program, this training consisted of a preliminary six-month form theory course (*Vorlehre*), and then a three-year training period in the workshops (*Werklehre*). This academic period included a course intended to deepen considerations of form, which was accompanied by color, composition and construction studies (Droste, 2019, p. 73).

As a student at the weaving workshop in 1923, Marta participated in the school's first exhibition with a rug composed of geometric elements. The production of textile objects at the Weimar school was marked by a strong relationship between utility and experimentation. During this period, the weaving studio was under the supervision of painter Georg Muche⁶. Items that integrated furniture were produced here, as well as

6. It is important to mention that the design of the experimental house 'Am Horn' is by Georg Muche, who also took over the direction and organization of the 1923 exhibition. Muche replaced Johannes Itten in 1921, who until then was the master of form in the weaving workshop. See more: Weltge (1993, p. 59).

carpets and murals for that year Bauhaus Exhibition and also for the experimental house 'Am Horn'. This was the case with Marta Erps-Breuer's work, which was exhibited with Marcel Breuer's furniture in the living room. At the time, Marcel was a student at the school and participated in the furniture workshop run by Walter Gropius. One of the objectives of the exhibition was to build a model house fully furnished with the school's designs in order to demonstrate the close collaboration between the workshops.

Regarding the carpet created by Marta (Fig. 1), researcher Sigrig Weltge (1993, p. 60) highlights the arrangement of geometric elements that unifies the other objects in the room and leads the viewer's gaze from one point in space to another. While Marcel Breuer's furniture looks heavy, unlike the examples he would develop later in the Dessau period, Marta's woolen textile piece already seemed to demonstrate a balance between form and space while also containing an asymmetrical character using squares, rectangles, and straight and crooked lines. In her later work (from 1924), Marta continued to explore the composition of geometric shapes. In this piece (Fig. 2), her concern with utility is more evident: it is designed to serve both as a blanket and as a piano cover, making use of lighter material in a mixture of wool and cotton. In this case, we can perceive the juxtaposition of the strata through the use of colors and textures. Researcher T'ai Smith (2014) cites this work by Marta as part of a transition period between Weimar and Dessau. For the author, the elaboration of Marta's work in large format and the use of materials such as cotton and wool are characteristic of the weaving practiced at the Weimar school.



Figure 1. In the foreground, a carpet by Marta Erps-Breuer at the Bauhaus Exhibition in Weimar in 1923. Source: Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

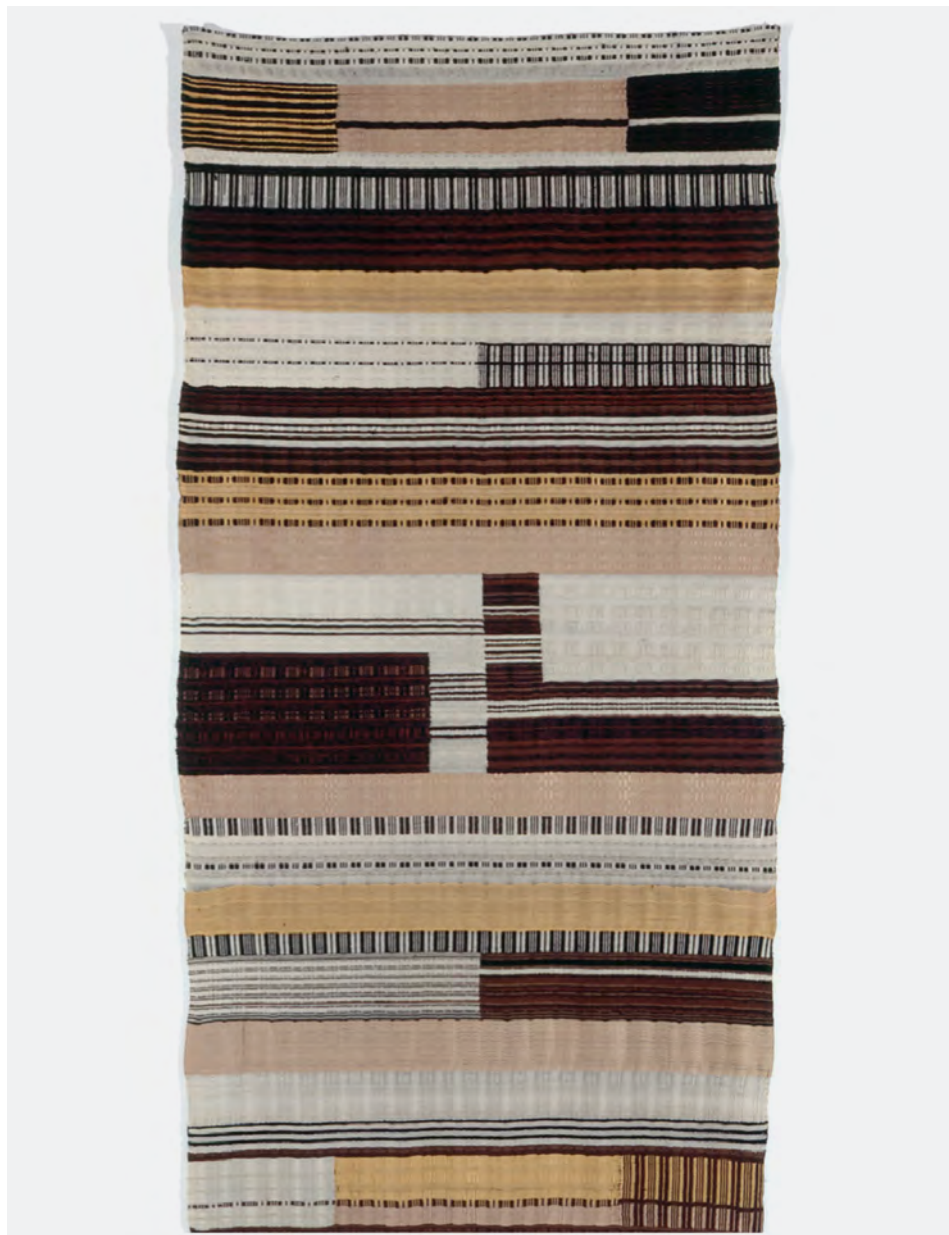


Figure 2. Work by Marta Erps-Breuer: blanket / wall hanging / piano cover (1924). Source: Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

However, the designer anticipated this experimentation using strata with these same materials, which would occur later at smaller scales and with other materials, such as with the addition of synthetic threads.

By this time she was already working under the supervision of Gunta Stölzl⁷ in Dessau. Upon coming into contact with the school's documented history and the connection of women with the weaving workshop, we can perceive a series of institutional impediments to women's access to training spaces. There is a path in the history of the Bauhaus that takes women to certain places and types of artifacts. What we find in the trajectories of many women students along with Marta is that, despite the restrictions and that women were directed to the weaving workshop, they in fact circulated more broadly, acquired additional skills and used these in their career paths.

Therefore, we realized that the course of our analysis would not lead us to understanding textiles as an essentially feminine territory, but instead to observing the ways it was used by women as a space for work and artistic experimentation. From this perspective, Marta's trajectory provides us with important elements that help us understand the possibilities for women's professional growth and activity in the design field.

7. Gunta Stölzl (1897-1983) was a student at the Bauhaus between the years 1919 and 1925. In Dessau, the designer took charge the weaving workshop as a young master of form in 1925. Despite the appointment, it was not until 1927 that the organization and content of the course came under her direction. Gunta Stölzl remained at the school until 1931, two years before it was closed. For more on her career at the Bauhaus, see: Droste (2019), Weltge (1993) and Smith (2014).

3.2. Dessau Period (1926-1928)

We did not find any records of Marta's schoolwork during the Dessau period, though we believe she had informally attended various workshops. This hypothesis comes from the statements⁸ of professors Carlos Vilela and João Morgante, members of the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology-USP. Both reported that the studies the designer developed at this institution were interspersed with drawings, photography, collages, wood figures and ceramics, which were probably the result of her exercises at the German school. It is possible that Marta had participated in workshops outside of her weaving curriculum starting with her time at Weimar where the ceramics program had been discontinued before the school's move to Dessau.

In the collection of the department where Marta worked at USP, we consulted several of her study notebooks with drawings and a series of photographs, which she used to systematize and document her research in the field of biological sciences. In addition, Marta also developed models in wood and ceramics of the insects that she analyzed. Observing the technical skills demonstrated by these studies conducted in Brazil, it is possible to find practical knowledge that could have derived from her multidisciplinary training during her years of association with the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1928.

8. These statements were obtained in interviews at the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology-USP, conducted between March and June 2019.



Figure 3. Selection of works by Marta Erps-Breuer accomplished at USP. Source: Archives of the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology (USP).

In relation to the above works⁹ (Fig. 3), we saw the possibility that Marta had participated in two Dessau Bauhaus workshops: typography, under the direction of Herbert Bayer¹⁰, and sculpture studio, under the direction of Joost Schmidt¹¹.

9. Image 1 (top left): photograph “Water bug with eggs”, 1940; image 2 (top right): notebook with drawings made from enlarged photographs (1930s); image 3 (bottom left): 1930s study notebook, with drawings of cells and biological tissues, entitled “Marta Breuer Technical Notebook”; image 4 (bottom right): wooden sculpture of the species *Drosophila melanogaster* (1959).

10. Herbert Bayer (1900-1985) was a student at the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1925. In 1925, he became a young master responsible for the typography and advertising workshop where remained until 1928.

11. Joost Schmidt (1893-1948) was a student at the Bauhaus from 1919 to 1925. At the Dessau Bauhaus, Schmidt became a young master responsible for the sculpture workshop (1928-1930), in addition to the advertising, typography and printing workshop (1928-1932) from which the school's photography department emerged.

In both workshops, photography was used as a support for exercises. In sculpture, Schmidt used it as a way of exploring three-dimensional objects and their distortion, rotation and reflection. In typography, Bayer worked with Moholy-Nagy¹² using photography for the elaboration of typographic compositions (Droste, 2019).

Walter Gropius's resignation from the school board in 1928 was accompanied by the departure of three masters from Dessau's workshops: Herbert Bayer, László Moholy-Nagy and Marcel Breuer. When he left the institution, Marcel and Marta moved to Berlin where he opened an architecture office and worked on interior and furniture design. Regarding Marta's professional life in Berlin, we found no record. In the early 1930s, Marta decided to travel again to Brazil and settled in the city of São Paulo where she began to work in 1932 as a science illustrator. With her choice to emigrate permanently, she separated from Marcel Breuer and formalized the arrangement in 1936¹³.

3.3. University of São Paulo, Brazil

In São Paulo in 1935, Marta Erps-Breuer was hired by the recently founded University of São Paulo to participate in pioneering research in the biological sciences as a laboratory technician. In a period when the Department of General Biology was located at the USP School of Medicine, she initially

12. László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) worked at the Bauhaus from 1923 to 1928 as a master of form. As head of the metal workshop, he promoted modern lighting design and prototype development and, therefore, the transition from handicrafts to industrial technologies.

13. This information is mentioned by Marta Erps-Breuer in correspondence exchanged with Kurt Schmidt. The letter was written in São Paulo in August 1967.



Figure 4. Marta Erps-Breuer, in the center with a dark jersey, with colleagues from USP. Source: Archives of the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology (USP).

focused on the study and preparation of biological tissues alongside André Dreyfus¹⁴. During this period, Marta took part in numerous expeditions on the coast of São Paulo for scientific observation and insect collecting which contributed to the research conducted at the university. After the death of André Dreyfus in 1952, she started to work with Crodowaldo Pavan¹⁵. Excursions with the group of fellow lab researchers became frequent and were mainly for the collection of *drosophilae*.

14. André Dreyfus (1897-1952) was a Brazilian doctor and biologist. Dreyfus helped establish of the University of São Paulo (USP) when he was invited to direct the Department of General Biology in the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters. He is regarded as a founder of genetic studies in Brazil.

15. Crodowaldo Pavan (1919-2009) was a student of natural history at the USP Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters where he worked under the guidance of André Dreyfus. In 1942, he assumed the position of assistant professor there. After Dreyfus's death, Pavan took over as professor at the institution, where he remained until 1978.



Figure 5. Marta collecting samples during a research trip to the coast of São Paulo. Source: Archives of the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology (USP).

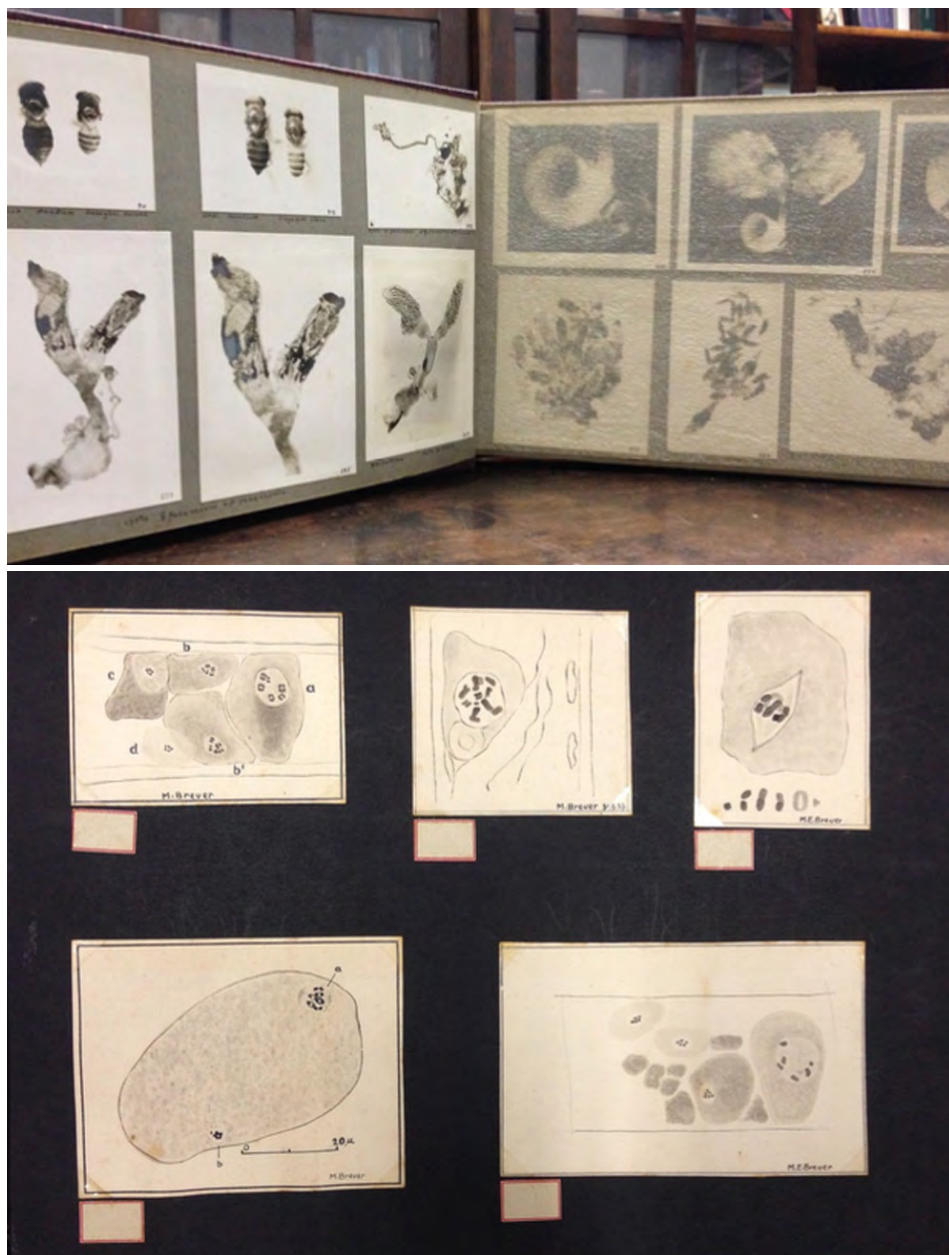


Figure 6. Notebooks by Marta Erps-Breuer for research developed at USP in the 1930s. Source: Archives of the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology (USP).



Figure 7. Wood carving of the species *Drosophila melanogaster* (1959). Source: Archives of the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology (USP).

During her time at the department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology, Marta was the author and co-author of numerous scientific articles that were responsible for Brazil's prominence in genetic research. In addition to research, she also worked on the documentation and detailing of studies with her drawings, diagrams, sculptures and photographs.

The designer's notebooks located in the department's collection are full of drawings, diagrams and notes. The photographs are organized according to field trips undertaken mainly during the 1940s and 1950s. The first studies in which Marta participated were published in the 1940s on the species *Telenomus fariai* (wasp) together with the institute's director at that time, André Dreyfus. In the decade that followed, Marta dedicated herself to the study of two flies: *Drosophila* and *Rhynchosciara*.

One of the projects that marked the designer's trajectory was research into the species *Drosophila melanogaster*, which con-

tributed to significant advances in genetic studies in the country and was part of the main branches of research undertaken by the department at that time. To view the insect in more detail, Marta created a wooden sculpture that reproduced the species at an enlarged scale.

Between 1967 and 1971, Marta published four articles alone (Polythene chromosomes of the salivary glands of *Rhynchosciara angelae* (1967a); *Rhynchosciara baschanti*, a new Brazilian species (1967b); Revision of the genus *Rhynchosciara Rübbsaamen* in the Neotropical region (1969); and *Rhynchosciara papaveroi*: a new Brazilian species (1971).

In research developed by Marta in 1967, she paid tribute to Rudolf Baschant by naming one of her discoveries after him (*Rhynchosciara baschanti*). His work is intertwined with Marta's and they were very close friends at school. In 1921, Baschant produced an engraving entitled 'Marta with flowers' (Fig. 8). One can see a similarity of interests in the career paths and the activities of Marta and Rudolf. Before attending the Bauhaus, Marta had contact with insect and plant studies, and these would go on to have an impact on her work in the 1930s and 1940s when she worked as a science illustrator. Rudolf Baschant worked from 1934 to 1949 at the Institute of Botany at the universities of Halle, Germany, and in Innsbruck, Austria. He also participated in botanical expedition studies in Europe, Africa and Latin America. In the 1950s, Baschant worked in the botanical garden in Linz, Austria¹⁶.

16. Information on Rudolf Baschant's career path (1897-1955) was found on the websites Kauperts straßenführer Berlin and Nordico Stadtmuseum Linz.



Figure 8. Engraving ‘Marta with Flowers’ by Rudolf Baschant, 1921. Source: Droste (2019, p. 86).

His death in 1955 came as a blow to Marta. In one of her letters to Kurt Schmidt¹⁷, Marta writes of her last meeting with Baschant:

I saw Rudi [Rudolf Baschant] in 1955 for the last time three days before his death. He was very ill, he was almost in agony. When his lips expressed a faint smile, I realized that he had recognized me. We were unable to exchange a single word. He had asked so much for a visit from me and I rushed there as quickly as I could, even so, I almost arrived too late. I had selected some plants that he had asked for, but he was unable to show any further interest. The older and more alone we become, the more we lack our good old comrades (...) By the way, Rudi was here once. He was a passionate botanist and had a huge collection. He didn't want to see anything but nature. (Erps-Breuer, 1967c, p. 1)

The 1955 trip on which Marta met Rudolf Baschant was part of a grant that she had received that year to travel through Europe, the United States, Cuba, Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. Marta corresponded with Kurt Schmidt between 1967 and 1970, and in their letters they express concern with sending their work to Germany as a way of documenting it.

17. Kurt Schmidt (1901-1991) was a student at the Bauhaus from 1920 to 1924. At the Weimar Bauhaus, Kurt acted alongside Georg Teeltscher and FW Bogler on the design of The Mechanical Ballet. This work was projected onto a curtain wall at the school's first exhibition in 1923. The following year, the piece was shown at the Berlin Philharmonic. In addition, he designed and choreographed the dance game "The Man at the Switchboard", held on the fifth anniversary of the Weimar Bauhaus in 1924.

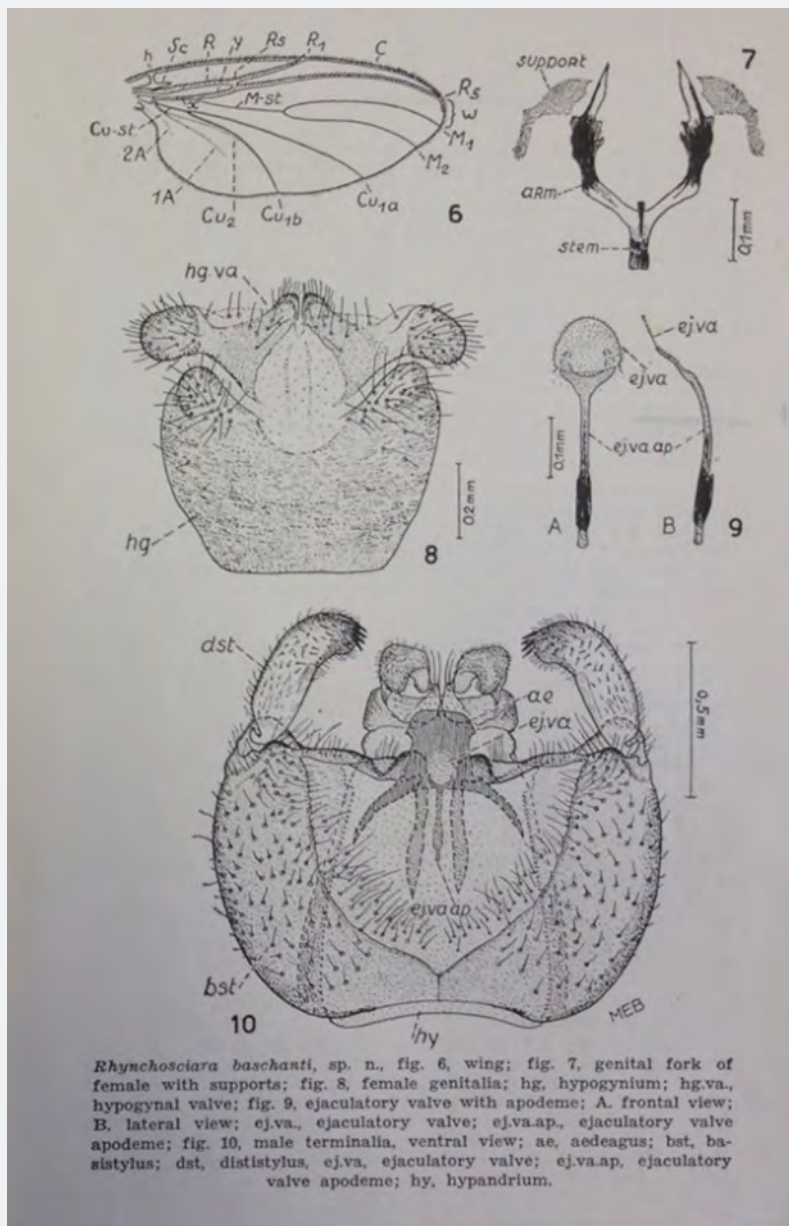


Figure 9. Illustration of the species *Rhynchosciara Baschanti*. Source: Erps-Breuer, 1967b.

This concern is also present in the correspondence that Marta exchanged with Ise Gropius¹⁸ throughout the 1960s. Marta described her research to both of them and forwarded copies of published articles, in particular, the one related to the new species *Rhynchosciara baschanti*. (Fig.9)

This species is connected to a line of research that Marta developed at USP beginning in 1950. In 1967, she published two articles: a review on the species *Rhynchosciara angelae*, discovered by Nonato and Pavan (1951), and another on *Rhynchosciara baschanti*. The first species was the starting point for the study in which she elaborated, together with Pavan, the analysis of the polythene chromosomes present in the genetic material of these flies.

According to biologist Carlos Ribeiro Vilela¹⁹, who worked alongside Marta for several years, technical detailing was one of her hallmarks among the department staff. He told us about her significance to the research developed at USP thanks to the systematization and scientific rigor of her documentation materials.

4. Final Discussions: Challenges to Documenting the Trajectory of Women in the Design Field

Throughout this study, one of the main challenges was gathering materials spread throughout various archives and connecting two different moments in the work of Marta Erps-Breuer.

18. Ise Gropius (1897-1983) worked professionally as a writer and editor. At the Bauhaus, she was central to the documentation and dissemination of the school's works and ideals. After immigrating to the United States with Walter Gropius in 1937 when he became Chair of the Department of Architecture at Harvard University, she continued to write about the German institution. In 1938, she helped create the catalog for the exhibition *Bauhaus 1919-1928* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which was published in partnership with Walter Gropius and Herbert Bayer. See: Rössler, 2019.

19. From an interview conducted in March 2019.

However, when exploring her career as a biologist at USP, we found parallels between the work developed there and the skills she learned at the Bauhaus, such as illustration, photography, collage and sculpture, even though it was thought that the designer had interrupted her artistic work and even severed contact with members of the German school.

The letters in these archives led us to discover a constant dialogue between the works carried out at the two institutions, the Bauhaus and USP. Through the exchange of correspondence in the period Marta lived in Brazil, we found reports of meetings with colleagues from the German school in São Paulo, and also of the trips she made through the United States and Europe at different times in her life. Additionally, in the writings of her final decade there is a more explicit concern in sending her Brazilian scientific and artistic works to Germany so that they could be documented and included in the history of the Bauhaus that was being recounted. This article is a preliminary part of a broader research, which investigates the trajectory of women in modern Brazilian design and includes Marta Erps-Breuer.

Thinking about the constitution of memories and reflecting on the participation of women in historical and social processes, as highlighted by researcher Françoise Thébaud (2011, p. 62), allowed us to consider a future in which, “the voices of the past find an echo in contemporary concerns”.

Our intention, when conducting a documentation search into the work of women, is to expand the narratives that permeate the history of design, and also to explore the challenges that are part of this elaboration.

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V

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