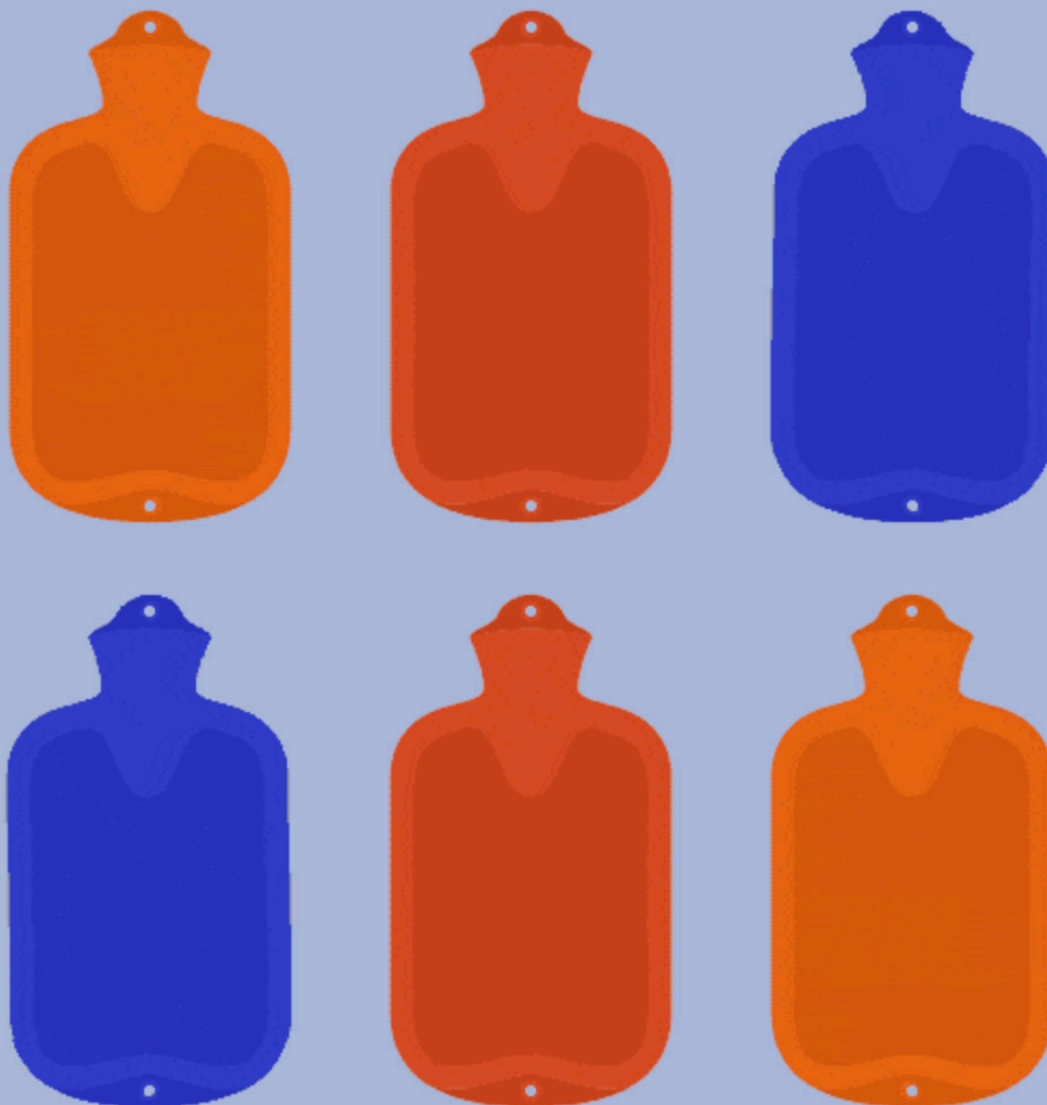

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MICROSTORIE

THE THREAD OF CORONA KRAUSE, BEYOND THE BAUHAUS

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PAROLE CHIAVE

Corona Krause, dress, Modern movement, Textile design

Tra le tessitrici del Laboratorio di Tessitura del Bauhaus, è comparsa un'artista tessile italiana: Corona Krause. Nella produzione di tessuti destinati all'abbigliamento e in quelli pensati per il rivestimento di elementi domestici, il contributo che la Krause ha dato al design moderno è ampio. Lei appartiene a quel gruppo di artisti che ha dato un impulso significativo alle tematiche innovative della scuola di Weimar, anche se il profilo di questi artisti resta ancora relativamente sconosciuto. Esaminando il contesto del lavoro della Krause e seguendo il filo che la porta dall'esperienza tedesca a quella italiana, questo articolo cerca di sciogliere il "nodo Krause".

In the reknown, untitled picture (1926) of the Bauhaus student Erich Consemüller, a woman[1] is sitting on the B3 club chair designed by Marcel Breur, looking at the camera through a painted metallic mask designed by Oskar Schlemmer.



Erich Consemüller, Untitled, c. 1926, Gelatin silver print, 12.7 x 17.145 cm, Private collection. © Estate of Erich Consemüller.

Consemüller's black and white composition testifies the characteristic collaborative practices between the Bauhaus Workshops, but it also depicts an element untypical of the School's curriculum: the garment donned by the woman. Approximately one-meter long[2], the dress was produced out of cotton and artificial silk (rayon) at the Weaving Workshop of the Bauhaus Dessau, based on a textile design by Lis Volger. In contrast to the ample number of remaining elements produced at the Workshop, namely tapestries, tablecloths and rugs, "Bauhaus-Dresses (*Bauhauskleider*)" are rare works of art, as only three pieces are currently included in the Sammlungsarchiv at the Bauhaus Foundation of Dessau. One of the dresses was produced by Corona (Korona) Krause (1906-1948): an Italian weaver and student of the Bauhaus, whose practice has been as obscure[3] as the artworks themselves.

The present article sheds light on the artist's little known biographic and artistic profile; it illustrates her involvement in the Bauhaus School in Weimar, and especially in the Weaving Workshop, while highlighting the techniques and materials employed, as well as the artworks produced by Krause. Particular emphasis is being placed on the textiles and garments attributed to the artist, in the course of, and after, her educational stay at the Bauhaus. In addition, correspondences to artistic and cultural practices in Italy during the same period are being sought. In the prism of the "total work of art

(*gesamtkunstwerk*)" concept - as defined anew[4] by Walter Gropius in the "Manifesto and Programme of the State Bauhaus (*Manifest und Programm des Staatlichen Bauhauses*)" of 1919 - textiles were considered integral parts of interior architecture, equally important to the rest of the domestic elements, such as pieces of furniture, ceramics and lighting. Corresponding to the rising changes in the interior environment -aftereffects of the Industrial Revolution -, the artworks produced by the Workshop served the interior spaces of contemporary buildings and their respective furniture more adequately than historicist fabrics, as one started noticing the cover and not solely the chair[5]. In this regard, this article also touches upon the association of textile design with both interior architecture and fashion; fields that Corona Krause had holistically explored.

Krause was born on August 16th 1906 - to a German consular, Friedrich Krause, and his wife, Isolde Morrison - in Coronata, a rural district of the Italian city of Genoa, which had arguably influenced her first name and determined her Italian nationality. To which extent the agricultural area of Italy in which she was born had an impact to her work is unknown, but her pencil sketches and abstract embroideries of animals and countryside frames, imply the essence of her birth town. Even though Krause was an expert in weaving, her creative experiments extended beyond the sphere of textiles and across painting, typography, and garment making. This fact can be partly attributed to the cross-disciplinary character of the preliminary course of the Bauhaus, directed at that time by L[ászl]o Moholy-Nagy. During this course, Krause would produce the artwork that has brought her the limited reputation to the day: the balance study entitled "Floating Plastic, Illusionistic (*Schwebende Plastik, Illusionistisch*)"[6]" (1924); a sculpture, which comprises rectangular parts of solid wood and plastic balancing on a delicate spiral body, seemingly challenging gravity.

Except for the balance study and a series of pencil sketches and drawings, the majority of Krause's surviving artworks belongs to the field of weaving, as she had been significantly influenced by the educational guidelines and ambience of the Bauhaus State School in Weimar, and precisely by the Weaving Workshop: the place where she received great part of her relevant training. "Miss Korona Krause, you have been preliminarily accepted in the Weaving (Workshop)," writes a letter addressed to the artist on July 4th 1924, signed by Martin Gropius, while indicating that "admission shall be made on August; until then, you are on leave of absence"[7]. Under the instructions of the Master of Form (Georg Muche[8]) and the Master of Craft (Helene Börner), the Bauhaus weavers skillfully produced an "amalgam of art, craft and new technologies"[9]. Influenced greatly also by the preliminary course curriculum, Krause and her co-students, namely Anni Albers, Benita Koch-Otte and Else Mögelin, approached weaving in a thoroughly experimental way, re-evaluating craftsmanship and technique[10], while embracing the emerging technologies of that time.

This experimentation was expressed in multiple ways. For instance, the collections of thread samples, collected and combined by Krause, is testament of a thorough research into innovative materials[11] that has been preeminent phenomenon during that era.



Corona Krause, Composition of thread and weave samples, o.D. © Bauhaus Sammlungsarchiv Dessau.

In her portfolio, textile creations made of plastic threads (*kunststoff*) woven together with cotton, while featuring a fancy weave (*phantasiebindung*), are also found. Significantly, artificial threads are often included in the privileged family of modern materials; they represent modern forms of corporeal embodiment[12] and new ways of perceiving weaving. As it has been expressed also through the writings of Gunta Stölzl -the artist who held a determining role for the Weaving Workshop's activities since 1920 -the Bauhaus weavers attempted to "re-establish full contact with the material"[13] on the verge of a coup d'état in the design and manufacture processes. Following Stölzl, "weaving is an ancient craft; mechanization has not changed it substantially, but it has produced a technical gap between weaver and the employed material"[14]. Indeed, during the Weimar years of the Weaving Workshop, which coincided with Krause's training, artistic expression and the introduction of new techniques were equally prominent; yet their visual impact often exceeded the technical.

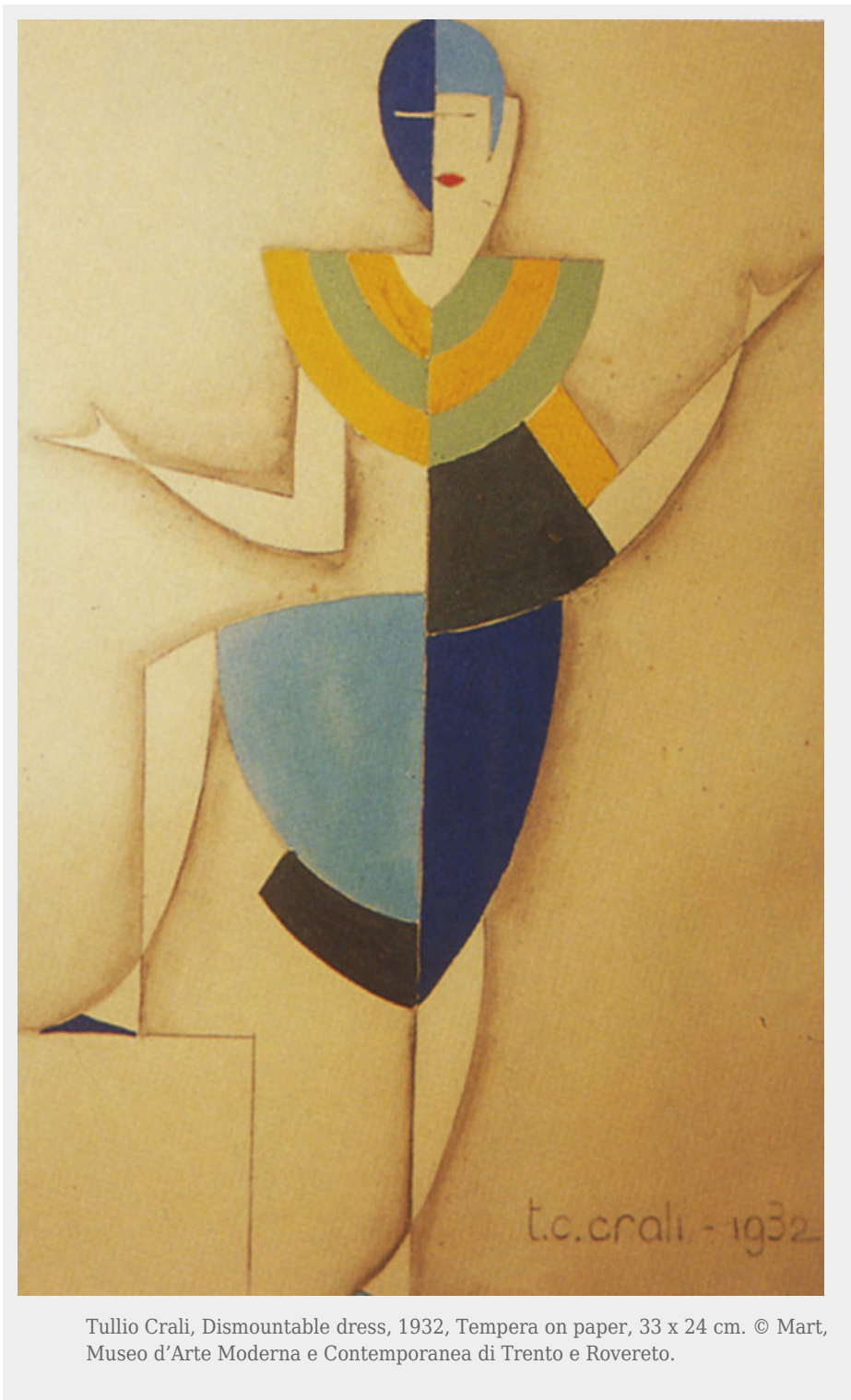
The aforementioned chasm between craftsmanship and mechanization - recurrent preoccupation of modernity - had also concerned Italian artists[15] and Krause's contemporaries, such as Fortunato Depero, who employed traditional organic materials and techniques such as weaving in order to establish "a novel synthesis of modernity and primitivism"[16]. Depero, from within the Italian Futurist movement[17], envisioned a total design universe in which textile, architecture, dress, and graphic design practices -to name but a few - equally articulated its character. Similarly to the cross-disciplinary performance of the Bauhaus school, the Italian Futurists, including Fortunato Depero, Giacomo Balla, and Tullio Crali, also worked towards the definition of a holistic environment, in which textiles - and in their case, dress - held a crucial role[18].



Fortunato Depero, Futurist vest (made by Umberto Notari), 1923/1924, Wool cloth patchwork stitch on cotton cloth, Riva del Garda (Trento). Private collection. © Location: Milan, private collection.



Giacomo Balla, Draft for a man's suit, 1914, Watercolour on paper, 29 x 21 cm.
Foundation Biagiotti Cigna Collection © Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna.



Tullio Crali, Dismountable dress, 1932, Tempera on paper, 33 x 24 cm. © Mart, Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto.

If the Bauhaus weavers blended natural with artificial threads – such as cotton with cellophane –, then the Futurists “suggested an unorthodox use of natural and industrial fabrics”[19] – namely paper with rubber. In addition, both artists drew significantly upon painting. Futurist artists, such as Balla and Cralli, were applying the painting philosophy of their canvases to the surface of their fabrics[20] that were destined for both architectural and personal space. On the other hand, the Bauhaus painters, in the role of Masters of Form at the various Workshops, served as vivid source of inspiration for the weavers, who also experimented with the application of their textile creations to a great variety of elements: from walls, to chairs, to bodies.

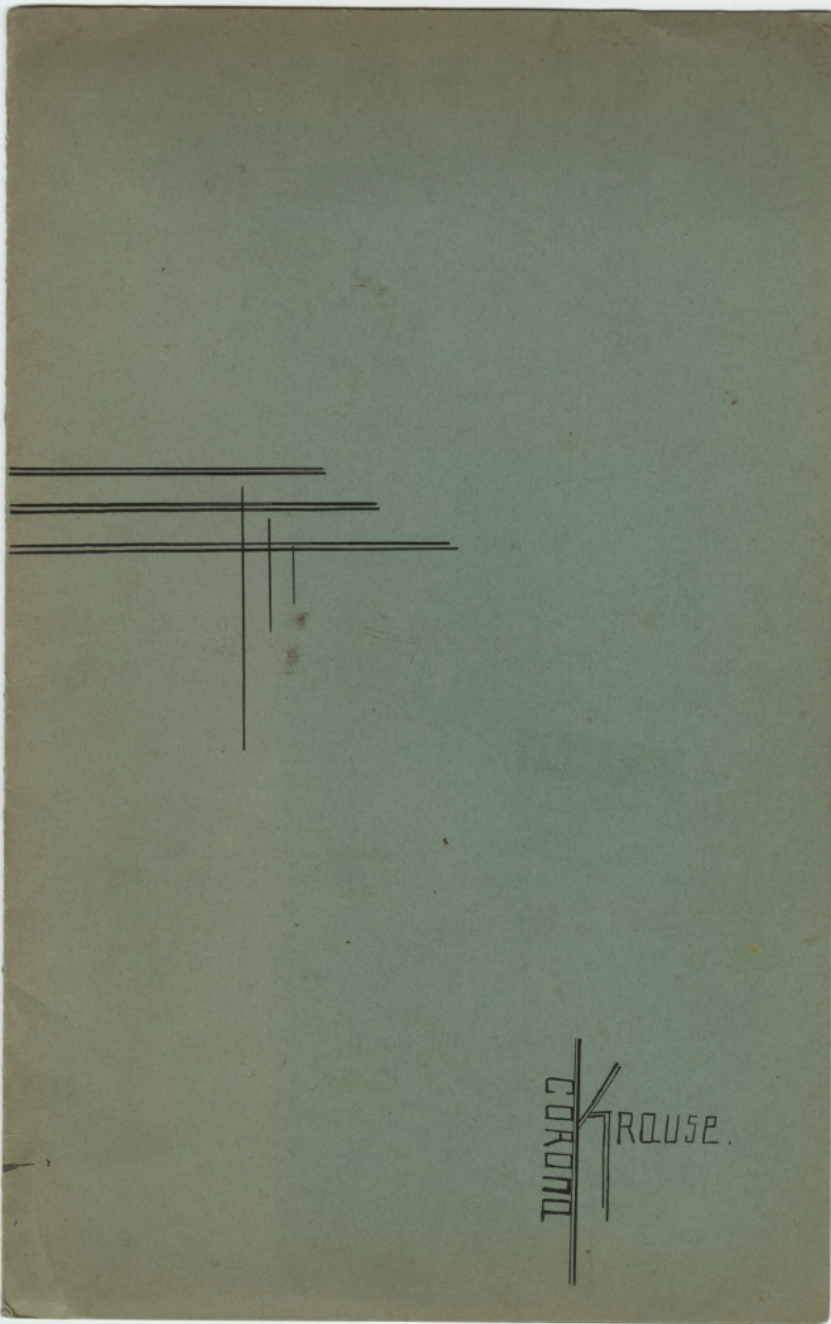
Following her official enrollment in the Bauhaus State School, and prior to her Weaving Workshop attendance – from April 1st 1923 until autumn of the same year –, Krause was part of the preliminary course of the Bauhaus, which consisted of studies on diverse topics, namely theory of form, nude painting, and typography. In that year, László Moholy-Nagy had succeeded Johannes Itten at the helm of the course and he would consequently have significant impact on Krause’s artistic formation. However, given that the succession of Johannes Itten was still fresh, traces of Itten’s influence on the weavers’ practice have also been evident. For instance, textile artworks of that period still drew upon the elementary forms, such as circles, squares and triangles, combined with primary colors, such as blue, yellow and red; elements that were representative of Itten’s theory. Another influential figure, who also belonged to the realm of the fine arts, was Paul Klee. Through his design theory courses, Klee prompted the weavers to experiment further with woven textiles, which featured geometrical patterns, such as layering and stripes[21].

Both the documentary pictures and the surviving artworks of that period bear evidence of the presence of pictorial textiles, as well as of striped or plaid fabrics[22], reinforcing the connection to the abstract artistic canvases of the Bauhaus painters. Indeed, during the Weimar era of the Weaving Workshop “the emphasis was on artistic expression, on individual pieces, reflecting the instruction and the design philosophies of the painters”[23]. Krause, as one of the representatives of that period, had been including in her weaving portfolio multifunctional textiles, destined for both upholstery and dress, in linear, multi-colored compositions, featuring a broad range of materials. Among them, a textile for a pillow, produced between 1923 and 1924, is found; it features a warp in various shades of red ending in fringe, and weft stripes in various colors, such as purple, orange, black and white, therewith their nuances[24]. Part of Krause’s portfolio, which also comprised textiles meant for interior architecture, is also a wide textile piece that serves both as bedcover and tablecloth.



Corona Krause, Bedcover, Table Cloth, o.D., 242 x 88 cm, Linen, Cotton, Silk, Metallic weave, Wool, Linen weave. © Bauhaus Sammlungsarchiv Dessau.

It measures 242 x 88 cm and although its date of production is unknown, the featured striped, abstract weaving style bears resemblance to her studies during the Bauhaus preliminary course, and more precisely, to the intersecting linear patterns illustrated in her experimentation with graphic forms and typography.



Corona Krause, Sketchbook Corona Krause, o.D. [1924/1925], 39,8 x 25,2 cm, Pen, Indian ink on cardboard, Lower right inscription: Corona Krause. © Bauhaus Sammlungsarchiv Dessau.

In addition to her designs for domestic textiles, Krause had also produced a series of designs for female and children garments; great part of them, such as the dress mentioned in the introduction, have been realized, complementing in this way the modern definition of the domestic environment.



Corona Krause, Children blouse, o.D., 48 x 80 cm, Linen, Linen weave, Fancy weave, metal. © Bauhaus Sammlungsarchiv Dessau.

The dress, dating back to the early twentieth century, is 1.06 long and follows a straight A-line, thus enclosing the female body in a comfortable way. If juxtaposed to key Italian sartorial creations of the wider chronological era, such as the “Delphos gown” of Mariano Fortuny (1907) and the “Tuta” of Ernesto Michahelles (1919), it equally promoted a sense of comfort and anatomical hygiene. Krause’s dress is respectively aligned with the changing, and valid at the time, needs of modern lifestyle. Although differing in execution, the garments introduced by the Italian Futurists, similarly featured “sleek lines and simple shapes (that) promoted the unencumbered movement of the human body”[25]. Stripped from any excessive element of ornamentation, the dress produced by Krause echoes the other two remaining dresses associated with the Bauhaus State School, as their compositional materials and minimal forms bear notable similarities. Addressing the body in a comparable way to the aforementioned Italian dresses, Krause’s garment draws equal attention to the new role and appreciation of the female anatomy during that period. Therefore, it can be equally regarded as a symbolic and tangible manifestation of the new ways of being within dress and by extension, society. From within a “female island” that was integral part of the Bauhaus State School, Krause corresponded to the rising needs of the female figure and recontextualized its respective attire.

Corona Krause's artworks comprise a thread, which associates the various means of envelopment for the human body - namely dress, fittings, and furniture - with modern ways of artistic and material expression. For the Italian artist - as for the rest of the Bauhaus weavers who designed textiles for both apparel and interiors - textiles were considered inextricable parts of the architectural scenography. For them, textiles were regarded as functional, timeless elements, rather than as changeable, ephemeral accessories. Framed by pieces destined for both interior and personal architecture, but also by additional elements, namely pencil sketches, paintings, colour and fabric studies, Krause's surviving artistic portfolio appears diversely rich. Meanwhile, its obscure reputation draws attention to the impact of gender issues within the School, but also to the need of revisiting existing historiographical studies on the respective Workshop and revising their synthesis. Most importantly, the present approach to Krause's practice aims to raise awareness on the demand for further research initiatives on the intrinsic quality of her work, its correspondence to the broader creative network of the Bauhaus State School, as well as its dialogue with concurrent Italian design practices and with the expressive, artistic and cultural, vernacular of her birth country.

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NOTE

1. The identity of the female figure depicted in Erich Consemüller's picture has not been officially traced; the woman in Lis Volger's dress is either the designer herself (originally Elisabeth Beyer) or Walter Gropius' wife, Ise Gropius (originally Ilse Frank).↵
2. "With its overall length of 101 cm, ending just above the knee, Lis Beyer's Bauhaus dress would probably have counted as a minidress at the time when it was made. (...) The plainness and simplicity of this nevertheless elegant-appearing dress are seen in its straight, tapering cut and the choice of material (cotton and artificial silk). The delicate, pale blue shades emphasize the coarseness of the firm material." Available online at: <http://bauhaus-online.de/en/atlas/werke/bauhaus-dress> (Accessed on 20.07.2014)↵
3. The reason that Krause's work has widely remained undiscovered, along with a greater group of unknown weavers, may lie in the fact that the Bauhaus Weaving Workshop activities and textile works were inventoried for the first time two and a half years after Stalin's death - therewith the decline of the Stalinist cultural doctrine - in the end of 1955, counting more than thirty years of losses. (Droste & Ludewig, 1998, p. 26)↵
4. "The ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building! To embellish buildings was once the noblest function of the fine arts; they were the indispensable components of great architecture. Today the arts exist in isolation, from which they can be rescued only through the conscious, cooperative effort of all craftsmen. Architects, painters, and sculptors must recognize anew and learn to grasp the composite character of a building both as an entity and in its separate parts. (...) Let us then create a new guild of craftsmen without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist!" Available online at: <http://www.thelearninglab.nl/resources/Bauhaus-manifesto.pdf> (Accessed on 23.07.2014)↵

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5. "Moreover, like women, textiles have traditionally been cast in the supportive role: one notices the chair, but not its cover." (Weltge, 1993, p. 9.) "The Bauhaus weavers did not invent new structures but rather expanded their application. Once allied with industry, they realized that modern consumer goods, steel furniture, radios, automobiles and the interiors of contemporary buildings were poorly served by historicist fabrics. The present, of which they were so much a part, provided a challenge to which they responded with enthusiasm." (Weltge, 1993, p. 44.) Indicatively, one of the first mentions to textiles, in the record of the Italian journal *Domus* (1928), published by editoriale *Domus*, dates back to 1937 and was part of the "News in the supplies for the home [Novità nelle forniture per la casa]" feature. Fabric samples were placed among an armchair bed and a copper vase, while the caption indicated that "fashion returns to printed, coloured textiles for upholstery, drapery, and blankets". (Fiell, 2006.)↵
 6. "Balance study [Gleichgewichtsstudie]" by Corona Krause, from Ldszló Moholy-Nagy's preliminary course 1924 - it must have been 1923 - printed 1950-51. Photograph, Gelatin silver print, 16 x 11.6 cm, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, Provenance: Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, gift from Lucia Moholy's bequest, 1993. From the: List of objects proposed for protection under Part 6 of the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 (protection of cultural objects on loan) for the "Bauhaus: Art as Life" exhibition, 3 May - 12 August 2012, Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK. Available online at:
<http://www.barbican.org.uk/media/upload/art/bauhauslistofloansforprotection.pdf>
(Accessed on: 20.07.2014)↵
 7. This document is the earliest form of correspondence with the School - directed at that time by Walter Gropius - and inaugurates her studentship at the Workshop. Certificate copy, part of the biographical supplements in the Corona Krause collection, at the "Bauhaus Dessau Foundation Archives [Sammlungsarchiv]".↵
 8. Georg Mueche (1895-1987) directed the Weaving Workshop, in the role of master of form, between the years 1919 and 1925, in collaboration with Helene Börner, who served as artisan master during the same period. The stay of Corona Krause at the preliminary course of the Bauhaus School coincided with the first "Bauhaus Exhibition [Bauhaus-Ausstellung]" (August 15th - September 30th 1923), for which the model house [Musterhaus] "Am Horn" was built. Mueche was responsible for the designs of the house, after having been based at a painting of Bauhaus student Molnár Farkas. The close connection of Mueche to architecture and painting was reflected upon the designs of the Bauhaus weavers. In addition, the house "Am Horn" provided the spatial platform for textile design to co-exist with architecture, interior and furniture design; textiles were elevated to artworks and were equally important to the spatial composition as pieces of furniture and domestic objects.↵
 9. (Jackson, 2002, p. 46)↵
 10. From "Junge Menschen", Year V, Number 8, November 1924, Hamburg, Special Issue, entitled "Bauhaus Weimar". (Panzini, 1985, p. 42)↵
 11. In this context, it would be Anni Albers - Krause's co-student - who would produce, for her diploma project, a silvery stage curtain for the auditorium of the "Federal Trade Union School [Bundeschule]" in Bernau, which featured a combination of cotton chenille and cellophane threads woven on cotton warp, on its side, so as to insulate sound and reflect light, respectively. Equally experimenting with innovative for weaving materials, she would unfurl, in an indicative way, the functional potential of the material bar their visual effect.↵
 12. (Schnapp, 1997, p. 191)↵
 13. From "Junge Menschen", Year V, Number 8, November 1924, Hamburg, Special Issue, entitled "Bauhaus Weimar". (Panzini, 1985, p. 42)↵

-
14. The work must now be carried out in an experimental way: we have for so long left out the knowledge of the material alive in the past. We must now recreate this knowledge. We must re-evaluate every possibility of craftsmanship and technique. And only the work by hand, with its slow process, allows any type of experiment allows a complete formal creation, technique and material. Only in this way can we understand the industry as 'mechanical craft'; we can work for the industry, because we have understood the substance." From "Junge Menschen", Year V, Number 8, November 1924, Hamburg, Special Issue, entitled "Bauhaus Weimar". (Panzini, 1985, p. 42)↵
 15. It is worth noting that the cross-disciplinary work of female Italian artists, mainly occupied in the field of the applied arts, has been featuring in the "Threads: Monthly magazine of needlework [Fili: Rivista mensile dei lavori d'ago]" magazine, which was also published by editoriale Domus since 1934. It hosted the collaboration of significant protagonists of the artistic scene of that time, such as Giò Ponti, Piero Fornasetti, Fausto Melotti, Giulia Veronesi, and Maria Morpurgo, and can be considered a privileged platform of the reflection on embroidery and textiles in Italy. (Lupano & Vaccari, 2009, p. 31)↵
 16. (Sabatino, 2011, p.112)↵
 17. On March 11, 1915, Fortunato Depero, together with Giacomo Balla, published their "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe [Ricostruzione Futurista dell'Universo]" in Milan, expressing their vision of a holistic rethinking of the universe.↵
 18. Textiles had already been characterized as integral parts of the Italian industry and material culture. The artistic practices of the Futurists succeeded temporally the dawn of the twentieth century, an era that saw the textile industry to hold one of the most preeminent positions in the productive sector of Italy; "the main processes related to silk and cotton, and, especially in the years before the First World War, even the wool". (Fortunati & Danese, 2005, p. 104, 105)↵
 19. (Braun, 1995, p. 34)↵
 20. Various Futurist artists of that period also established "art houses [case d'arte]," so as to promote their decorative designs and artworks. Similarly to the Weaving Workshop, which was considered a "female island" within the Bauhaus School, Fortunato Depero's workshop, entitled "Casa d'Arte Futurista" (Rovereto, 1919), employed mainly women who practiced sewing and weaving, and produced elements, such as textiles, fittings, and garments.↵
 21. (Jackson, 2002, p. 46)↵
 22. (Droste & Ludewig, 1998, p. 18)↵
 23. "Most of the latter remained hostile to the change of direction that occurred after the Bauhaus Exhibition of 1923: 'Art and Technology - A New Unity'. The weavers, too, were reluctant to leave art behind. But they did, and in doing so they moved into the forefront of the development of prototypes for industry. Indeed, they invented the concept of contemporary textile design." (Weltge, 1993, p. 10)↵
 24. (Panzini, 1985, p. 56)↵
 25. "Moreover, sleek lines and simple shapes promoted the unencumbered movement of the human body, and the fast-paced rhythm of modern life was evoked by dynamic textile designs and asymmetrical cuts. The Futurists suggested an unorthodox use of natural and industrial fabrics -paper, straw, burlap, rubber, metals, and plastics." (Braun, 1995, p. 34)↵

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