

Why are women absent in design history? Why have women who were notable during their careers been forgotten? What mechanisms have permitted this omission? Some of these questions were asked in 1986 by British design historian Cheryl Buckley¹, and though it may seem that we are walking a road towards equality—that these historiographical problems no longer exist—in the 35 years since then, how much has changed?

Over half the designers working today are women, yet women account for fewer than a third of creative directors. Women continue to be underrepresented at industry events; and where there are women speakers, they are consistently given less stage time than their male counterparts². These statistics in an industry which prides itself on creativity and innovation are damning. Though these numbers are improving, should the presence of women in these positions of 'success' be celebrated as a victory for equality? Where success is defined as progression and conformity within the same structures which so recently propagated such inequality?

While it is necessary to redress the balance of the canon through the identification and study of the work of female designers, that alone is not enough. It is critical to understand how, and by whom, history is made—to interrupt history³, so we can begin the process of unlearning, reconstructing and relearning it. The canon is not simply overpopulated by men, it is also overwhelmingly propagated by men. They are the educators, the bosses, the clients. They are the editors, publishers, curators and the speakers. It's time to give space to women, and propose these errata to graphic design history. As bell hooks noted 'Attempts to improve the representation of women cannot only append women to existing histories—these methods of history must themselves be transformed'⁴.

To truly acknowledge women in design, we must also acknowledge that design is not a solitary practice but rather a collective process, far away from the simple and linear story that design history—with its focus on clear narratives and overwhelmingly white,

western, cisgendered, able-bodied male design stars—teaches us. It is the work of many minds, many hands, many disciplines, and the messy histories⁵ which this plurality creates makes it easy to obscure, to cherry-pick a simple, single story, and ignore the contributions of women who have worked in design since before design was work.

The visibility of women in graphic design is greater today than it has ever been, but in truth for as long as there have been designers, there have been women designers. Their absence in design history is a failure of memory as much as it is a failure of industry. The methods by which we choose to record and recount history, the stories we tell to make sense or make sensational, are in need of deconstruction.

Errata aims to present women's contributions that have been overlooked, ignored and forgotten by Portuguese design history and in doing so to reveal those mechanisms still present that consent to these omissions. The landscape and socio-political history of Portugal is particular, but the systems which devalue, omit and ignore the work of women are universal, and in sharing this research as widely as possible we hope to contribute to this necessary discussion.

History is an entangled, messy thing. To start pulling at any one thread, as we do here with women, is to see how many other threads are bound up in the same knotted mess. To see how many other stories are missing from The Story. Where, then, are the women designers? Where, then, the BIPOC; the queer; the collective; the reclusive; the untrained and the unnamed? We can only hope that soon the pages of errata will outnumber the pages of the Story, and through critical engagement in rewriting, relearning and reclaiming these many histories, we can make that happen.

Errata, 2021

1 Cheryl Buckley, *Made in Patriarchy: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design*

2 Design Census

3 Ece Canli, *Design History Interrupted: A Queer-Feminist Perspective*

4 bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*

5 Martha Scotford, *Messy History vs. Neat History: Towards an Expanded View of Women in Graphic Design*