

Otti Berger. Weaving for Modernist Architecture

An installation by Judith Raum

15 March – 24 August 2024

the temporary bauhaus-archiv
Knesebeckstraße 1
10623 Berlin-Charlottenburg

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Press release

14 February 2024



Otti Berger at her work table. ca. 1931,
photographer: unknown, © Bauhaus-
Archiv Berlin

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An installation by Judith Raum at the temporary bauhaus-archiv

15 March – 24 August 2024

In the 1930s, the textile designer Ottilie Berger (1898–1944) created fabrics for modernist architecture which continue to fascinate us today. Her designs are characterised by an impressive interplay of aesthetics, function and technical innovation which have fundamentally changed our notion of what textiles can be and do. As of 1927, Ottilie Berger studied and taught at the Bauhaus, and after 1932, began working freelance. She worked for customers across the European continent and secured numerous patents.

In cooperation with the Bauhaus-Archiv, the visual artist Judith Raum teamed up with weaver and textile designer Katja Stelz to analyse Ottilie Berger's fabrics as part of a multiyear research project. The interdisciplinary research process has now culminated in a richly illustrated publication entitled "Ottilie Berger – Weaving for Modernist Architecture", which presents a broad overview of Berger's works to the public for the first time. Judith Raum approaches Berger's work by classifying the fabrics according to their function and relationship to architectural elements, such as furniture, windows, walls and floors. In collaboration with photographer Uta Neumann, new colour photos were produced for the book which capture the beauty and sophistication of Berger's fabrics as never before.

Judith Raum's installation at the temporary bauhaus-archiv allows visitors to sensually experience Ottilie Berger's works. The installation features a new video piece alongside two large-scale, tapestries which have been fastidiously reconstructed for the exhibition. The tapestries highlight central aspects in Ottilie Berger's life, for example, her efforts to protect her technically exquisite fabrics with patents and her private fate as a Jew living in the National Socialist dictatorship.

Installation

the temporary bauhaus-archiv
Knesebeckstraße 1
Berlin-Charlottenburg

Mon–Sat, 10am – 6pm
Free admission

Events

Opening

Speakers: Annemarie Jaeggi, director; Esther Cleven, curator; Judith Raum, visual artist
14 March 2024, 6:30pm

Book presentation “Otti Berger. Weaving for Modernist Architecture”

With editor Judith Raum and authors Esther Cleven, Tanya Harrod, Juliet Kinchin and Corinna Rader
Event language: English
11 April 2024, 6:30pm

Lunch tours (30 min.)

16 May 2024, 1pm, curator tour
13 June 2024, 1pm, tour with handweaver and textile designer Katja Stelz
11 July 2024, 1pm, curator tour

Long Night of Museums with short tours and neighbourhood walks

24 August 2024, 6 pm – 2am

Publication

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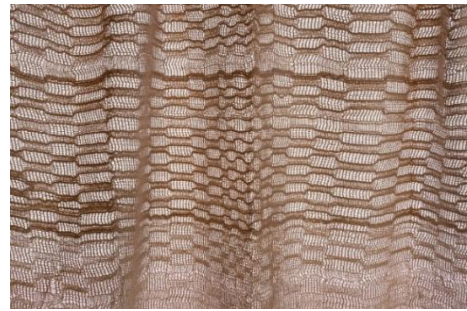
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Press images



Otti Berger at her work table, photographer unknown, around 1931, © Bauhaus Archiv-Berlin



Otti Berger, Sample for sheer, ca. 1932/33,
© Uta Neumann, Berlin/Amsterdam



Otti Berger, Colorways for o.b.-Doppelgewebe Nr. 37,
designed for Sachsische Rosshaarweberei Schriever &
Co., 1937, © Uta Neumann, Berlin/Amsterdam



Portrait of Otti Berger, photo: Lucia Moholy,
ca. 1927, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, © VG Bild-Kunst
Bonn, 2024



Judith Raum © Samira Mosca

Biography Otti Berger

Otti Berger (1898–1944) was one of the most important textile designers of the 20th century. Born in Zmajevac, in the Austro- Hungarian Empire, present-day Croatia, she studied in Zagreb and from 1927 at the Bauhaus in Dessau. Leaving her teaching post at the Bauhaus, she set up her own business in Berlin in 1932 to design fabrics for modern interiors, but was banned from working due to her Jewish heritage in 1936. Attempts to escape to England and the USA failed. She was deported from Croatia to Auschwitz and was murdered there in 1944.

October 4, 1898

Ottilie “Otti” Esther Berger is born in Vorosmart, Austria-Hungary (renamed Zmajevac as part of Yugoslavia in 1919, now Croatia), to Ida (nee Krausz) and Lajos Berger. Her hearing is impaired beginning in adolescence.

Before 1920

Attends middle school in Pecs, Austria-Hungary, and a General Art School in Vienna.

1921 – 1926

Attends the Royal College of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb.

1926

Travels to Berlin and Jena for medical treatment of her hearing loss.

1927

January: enrolls at the Bauhaus Dessau, matriculation no. 131.

April – September: attends the Bauhaus preliminary course taught by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers.

October: is admitted to the Bauhaus weaving workshop under Gunta Stolzl.

1929

April – June: takes a semester abroad at Johanna Brunsson’s Practical Weaving School, Stockholm.

October – December: teaches part time at the Bauhaus weaving workshop alongside Anni Albers, who is temporarily filling in for Gunta Stolzl as head of the workshop.

1930

January – March: teaches part time at the Bauhaus weaving workshop.

February: “stoffe im raum” (fabrics in space) is published in German in the special Bauhaus edition of the Prague magazine *ReD*.

July – August: supervises the Bauhaus weaving workshop in Gunta Stolzl’s absence, including production of fabrics for Polytex.

October: final examination at the Handwerkskammer (Chamber of crafts) in Glauchau.

November: receives Bauhaus diploma no. 31 from the weaving workshop.

Autumn: begins employment at the Gardinenweberei Hofmann, Fischer & Co., Zwickau (subsidiary of C. E. Baumgarte & Sohn, Lengenfeld/Vogtland).

1931

January – May: works at the Gardinenweberei Hofmann, Fischer & Co., Zwickau.

May – September: works at the tablecloth and linen weaving mill Websky, Hartmann & Wiesen, Wustewaltersdorf (now Valim) near Breslau (now Wrocław).

October – December: works part time at Hofmann, Fischer & Co., Zwickau.

October: teaches at the Bauhaus weaving workshop; is involved in conception of woven curtain fabrics designed to match the Bauhaus wallpaper collection.

November – December: directs the Bauhaus weaving workshop part time; teaches fabric theory, design, and material theory; supervises fabric production and sales.

1932

Begins relationship with Ludwig Hilberseimer (as can be inferred).

January: directs the Bauhaus weaving workshop part time.

February – July: teaches at the Bauhaus weaving workshop under Lilly Reich; supervises production of the *bauhaus vorhangstoffe gewebt, gittertulle* collection for C. E. Baumgartel & Sohn, Lengenfeld/Vogtland, for which she contributes original designs.

Simultaneously, works on her own collection; is given use of a loom and an atelier at the Bauhaus free of charge.

June: initiates correspondence with patent attorney Hans Heimann in Berlin; applies for patent and utility-model protection for “double weave upholstery fabric” made from artificial horsehair.

August: moves to Berlin.

November: Atelier für Textilien Ottilie Berger opens in Berlin.

1933

January: “die neue funktion der hand-weberei innerhalb der textilindustrie” (the new function of hand weaving within the textile industry) is published in *Der Konfektionär*.

April: begins collaboration with architect Hans Scharoun on Haus Schminke, Lobau.

May: applies for German patent and utility-model protection for “fabric for upholstery, wall coverings, etc.” made from cellophane and other cellulose-based ribbon material.

September – November: negotiates with Wohnbedarf AG and meets with Sigfried Giedion in Zurich to discuss the furnishing of the Corso theater.

November: applies for Swiss patent protection for “double weave for upholstery, wall coverings, etc.” made from artificial horsehair.

December: applies for admission to the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste (Reich chamber of fine arts).

1934

May: completes the *ottilie-berger-stoffe* collection for Wohnbedarf AG.

October: applies for German patent and utility-model protection for “woven fabric (Lame-Plume)” made from ramie fiber ribbons.

November: receives German patent for “double weave upholstery fabric” made from artificial horsehair.

1935

Develops textile furnishings for Haus Horner, Berlin, in collaboration with Hilberseimer.

April: files request that the Yugoslavian Embassy in Berlin intervene with the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste to expedite Berger’s admission.

July: changes official business description to “pattern designer” to circumvent work prohibition for Jewish artisans.

September: is informed by the Yugoslavian Embassy of imminent denial of her application to the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste.

October: shares news of her pregnancy with Hilberseimer.

1936

March: starts collaboration with Sachsische Rosshaarweberei Schriever & Co., Dresden, on the *o.b.-Doppelgewebe* made from artificial horsehair; applies for an additional patent for “double weave upholstery fabric” made from artificial horsehair.

May: application to the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste is officially rejected, work prohibition issued.

June: applies for British patent protection for “woven fabric (Lame-Plume)” made from ramie fiber ribbons.

1937

January – March: develops daybed covering for Ise and Walter Gropius.

February: completes the *o.b.-Doppelgewebe* collection of artificial horsehair fabrics for Sachsische Rosshaarweberei Schriever & Co.; signs royalty contract with Schriever; stays briefly with Marcel Breuer and Ise and Walter Gropius in London; negotiates with British patent attorneys regarding a British patent for “woven fabric (Lame-Plume).”

Late May – early June: stays with Mart Stam in the Netherlands while negotiating with the Weverij De Ploeg, Bergeijk.

June – July: makes short trips to London and Paris.

July: meets with Hilberseimer in London.

July – August: works at Weverij De Ploeg, Bergeijk.

September: moves to London.

1938

January: Moholy-Nagy requests from her a sample curriculum for the textile workshop at the New Bauhaus, Chicago.

March: Berger receives British patent for “woven fabric (Lame-Plume)” made from ramie fiber ribbons.

April: sends several original designs to MoMA, New York, for the exhibition *Bauhaus 1919 – 1928*.

May – July: temporarily replaces Marianne Straub at Helios in Bolton, near Manchester, for ten weeks; produces several curtain and upholstery fabric designs.

Late July – late August: is visited in London by Hilberseimer.

Late August: they say goodbye at the Port of Southampton; Berger subsequently travels to Zmajevac, Yugoslavia, to care for her sick mother.

September/October: the offer of a teaching position at the New Bauhaus, Chicago is withdrawn because the textile workshop cannot be founded; Berger purchases a spinning wheel.

November: travels to Vienna and Prague with her mother for fourteen days; Berger considers being baptized.

1939

February: develops a few designs for an interior design shop in Zagreb.

July: receives official invitation from Moholy-Nagy to teach at the textile workshop of the School of Design, Chicago.

July – November: Hilberseimer and Moholy-Nagy try to help Berger obtain a visa to enter the US.

1940

Hilberseimer, along with Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, continues to make efforts to facilitate her entry.

1941

February: Berger begins last rug design.

June: her father dies.

September: Berger travels to Budapest for her mother's medical treatment, appeals in person to the American consulate.

September 29: mails her last (surviving) letter to Hilberseimer.

1944

March: her mother dies.

Late April or May 1944: Berger is deported to the Hungarian ghetto of Mohacs along with her brothers Oskar and Otto, as well as her sister-in-law Elsa.

1944

July: Berger is murdered at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in Poland.

Biography Judith Raum

Judith Raum (*1977) is a Berlin-based artist and author who holds a degree in Fine Art from Staedelschule, Frankfurt/M, Germany, as well as a master in philosophy, psychoanalysis and art history from the University of Frankfurt/M, Germany. She mostly works in installation and performance, building detailed, poetic narratives that reference economic and social history, postcolonial critique, medium specificity and conditions of artistic production.

After extended artistic research into German economic colonialism in the Ottoman Empire with productions for SALT Istanbul and the House of World Cultures, Berlin, among others, she lately concentrated on the textile workshop at the Bauhaus. Her installation *Bauhaus Space* is part of the ifa touring exhibition *The Event of a Threa. Global Narratives in Textiles*, its current venue the National Gallery of Kosova, Prishtina. In 2019, her performances and video works on Bauhaus textiles were presented at The Museum of Modern Art, New York as part of the show *To walk a thread like a story*, Yale University as part of the symposium *Bauhaus@Yale*, UCL London as part of the symposium *Anni Albers and the Modernist Textile*, The Harvard Art Museums as part of the exhibition *The Bauhaus and Harvard*, and the TextielMuseum Tilburg, Netherlands as part of the symposium *Women(s) work at the Bauhaus*, among other locations.

For Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, Judith Raum recently edited an extensive publication on Otti Berger's textile work, titled *Otti Berger: Weaving for Modernist Architecture*.

see www.judithraum.net

Exhibition texts

Introduction

Otti Berger. Weaving for Modernist Architecture

An installation by Judith Raum

Otti Berger (1898–1944) designed functional fabrics in the 1930s which ingeniously combined aesthetics, functionality and technical innovation. The designs by the Bauhaus graduate fundamentally changed what fabrics could be and do in the interior design of modernist architecture. In 1944 Berger, who was Jewish, was murdered in Auschwitz. For many years, her works remained dispersed and inaccessible.

Judith Raum and textile designer and weaver Katja Stelz embarked on a multiyear research project to study Berger's fabrics. For the first time and with the support of the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung, they reconstructed the functions and artistic qualities of the historic textiles and endeavoured to reweave two of Berger's designs.

The centrepiece of the installation are two newly woven, large-scale wall fabrics by Otti Berger: a plain but elegant fabric made of ramie ribbon, which can be mounted directly against the wall or set apart from the wall to allow for illumination from behind, and a dense, technically exquisite fabric made of cellulose-based ribbon. Berger created these to enhance the acoustics and reduce noise in movie theatres and airplane cabins. She tried in vain to secure German patents for both of these weaves between 1933 and 1937. The textiles, photos and archive materials, as well as three video pieces in the exhibition shed light on the industrial and design-historical context of Berger's work. Moreover, they provide insights into the professional and private fate of a designer living under Nazi dictatorship.

Showcase labels

1)

In 1932 Otti Berger oversaw the development of the collection bauhaus curtain fabrics, woven, lattice tulle, which was produced for the Bauhaus by a manufacturer in Saxony. At the same time, she and architect Lilly Reich managed the textile workshop at the Bauhaus Dessau. The collection consisted of different types of curtain fabrics – from heavy room dividers to airy shades. The collection came onto the market in spring 1933, shortly before the school was forced to close for political reasons.

Lattice tulle was often used for delicate, highly translucent curtains which were ideal for diffusing direct sunlight and providing a degree of privacy at windows. The video Textile Territories – Otti Berger begins with lattice tulle as the starting point to explore Otti Berger's and Lilly Reich's political and artistic focuses. In depicting both women and their viewpoints, Judith Raum offers her thoughts on the continuity of modern interior design under National Socialism. This type of curtain was produced in Saxony up until World War II. Today, there isn't one German company left which produces lattice tulle.

2)

It is a challenge to make fabrics truly palpable in photography. In museums, fabrics are stitched into pattern books, rolled up or stored flat. A lot of imagination and basic fabric analyses were necessary to present the fabrics in the publication *Otti Berger. Weaving for Modernist Architecture* as they would have actually been used or as they were meant to appear.

The designs were arranged in consultation with the conservators of the participating museums and photographed by Uta Neumann and Florian de Brun under precise lighting conditions to conceal the fact that they are collection pieces. A bedspread is draped over a replica of the piece of furniture, for which it was originally designed. A delicate wall fabric reveals its translucence when illuminated from behind. The textiles maintain their specific characteristics, their flexibility and translucent quality, their shine and texture.

3)

Detailed fabric analyses formed the basis of the research project *Otti Berger. Weaving for Modernist Architecture* and facilitated the creation of numerous newly woven fabrics.

With the aid of a magnifying glass, the textile designer and weaver Katja Stelz deciphered the yarn connections. Fibres were sent in for lab analysis when necessary. Only after determining which types of weave and yarn were used, was it possible to understand the concrete function of the fabrics. In this way, the researchers were able to precisely compare patterns from different collections and to ensure that fabric material with similar yarns was indeed the same. The analyses also revealed that Berger often used new yarns of the 1930s.

4)

Otti Berger worked with natural materials like cotton, linen and wool, as well as synthetic yarns.

Advances in the chemical industry resulted in numerous innovations in the 1930s. For example, cellulose-based thread was ideally suited as an inexpensive substitute for real silk. A broad array of fashion and consumer goods were developed using artificial silks, cellophane ribbon and related products.

Established in Berlin in 1931, the “Artificial Silk Sales Office” was responsible for regulating domestic trade in German artificial silks and imports of foreign-made products. Even during National Socialism, synthetic fibres played an important role in economic policy, namely, to reduce the country’s dependence on raw textile materials from abroad.

5)

The First German Ramie Association had been producing highly durable ramie yarn for incandescent mantles in gas-fuelled lamps since 1887. In later years, it also produced yarn for Zeppelin tethers. Ramie is a fibrous plant belonging to the nettle family and is largely native to Asia. In the late 1930s, heeding the call for greater autonomy under the National Socialist regime, the company attempted to plant ramie plants on their premises in Emmendingen.

Otti Berger purchased ramie raffia called “Lamé-Plume” from the First German Ramie Association for her wall fabrics, as well as her furniture upholstery and textile floor coverings. Otti Berger tried to patent her innovative weave using Lamé-Plume, but the German Empire rejected her application. Berger spent 1937/38 in English exile, during which time she was able to secure a patent.

6)

For Otti Berger, writing about fabrics was extremely important. She would expound on her own objectives in textile design and hoped to redefine the relationship between manual and mechanical processes for developing fabrics.

Berger's programmatic text *stoffe im raum (fabrics in space)* was published in the Czech magazine RED in 1930. The text was one of the early attempts to explore textiles in connection to Neues Bauen. Berger's modern self-image as a designer was also evident in her numerous letters; she corresponded with innovators in the textile scene, such as the Czech textile designer Jaroslava Vondrackova.

The video *Stoffbesprechung (Textile Talk, 2017)* juxtaposes Berger's texts with her fabrics. However, it also reveals her struggles in English exile. Berger, who enjoyed discussing her work with others and was always well connected, had trouble adjusting to her new surroundings and felt isolated.