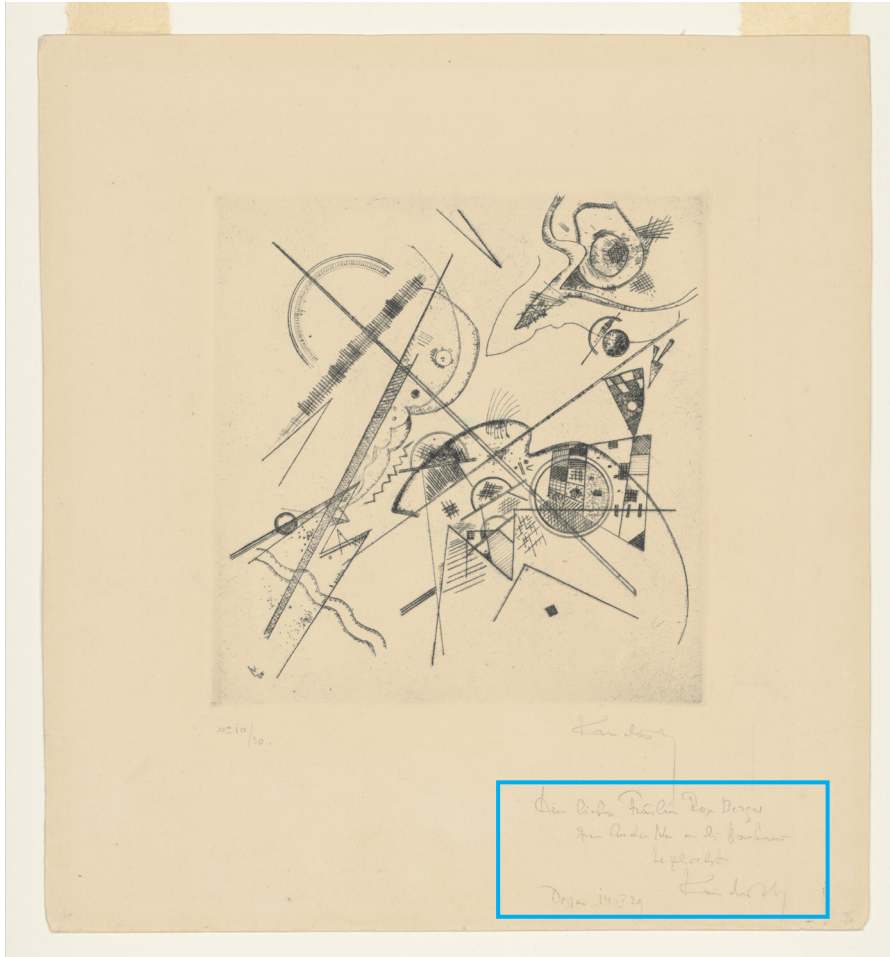
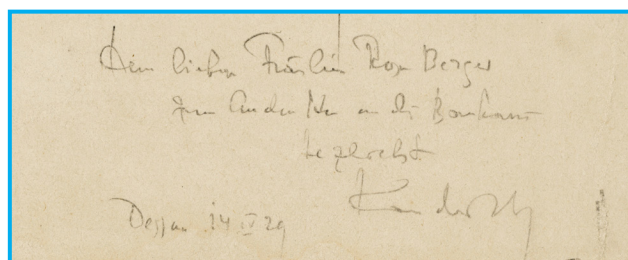


p r o v e n a n c e
r e s e a r c h
case 3

A Kandinsky for Rosa Berger
(inv. no. 263)



Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944),
Untitled, 1924, drypoint,
Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, inv. no. 263

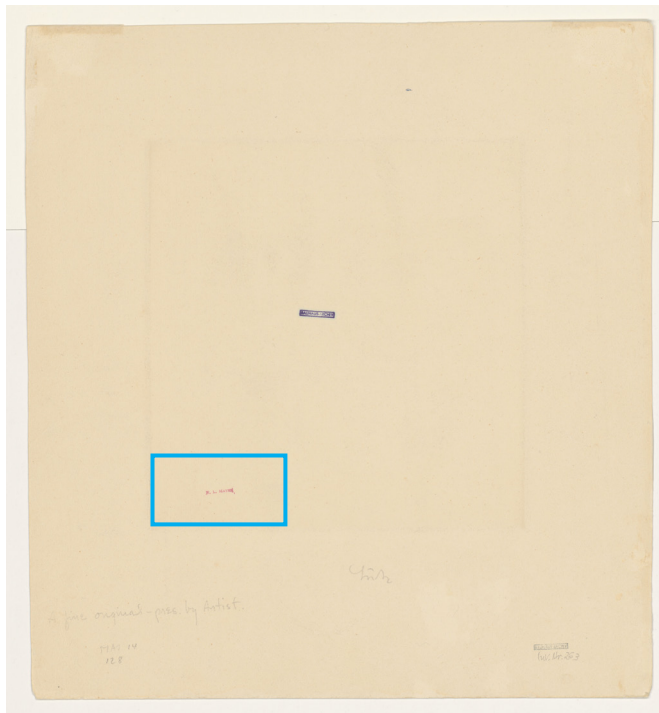


Dedication to Rosa Berger,
inv. no. 263, recto, bottom right

The collection of the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung contains a drypoint by Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) from 1924. The artist provided the abstract composition with a handwritten dedication in 1929. It reads: »For dear Ms Rosa Berger / to remember the Bauhaus / cordially, Kandinsky / Dessau 14 Apr 29«. There are numerous impressions of this print – it was the 10th among a total of 30 – but this dedication makes it unique.

On 10 May 1963 the Bauhaus-Archiv purchased Kandinsky's etching as lot number 452 at the 110th auction of the Klipstein und Kornfeld auction house in Bern. The catalogue identifies the sheet's provenance as: »From the collection of R. L. Mayer«. The fact that it came from this collection is also attested by a red stamp on the reverse side, which is included in the list of collectors' marks as number L.4534.¹

¹Frits Lugt, Les Marques des Collections de Dessins & d'Estampes, available online: <<https://www.marques-decollections.fr/detail.cfm/marque/12049/total/1>> [accessed 30 June 2022].



Reverse side of the drypoint featuring the stamp of the R. L. Mayer collection, among other things



Stamp of the R. L. Mayer collection (Lugt no. L.4534)

In terms of evaluating the legitimacy of the purchase made by the Bauhaus-Archiv, two questions initially arise after viewing these indicators of the work's provenance: 1. Who was Rosa Berger? and 2. Who was R. L. Mayer?

Who was R. L. Mayer?

Rudolf L. Mayer was born in Colmar in 1895 and studied medicine in Freiburg im Breisgau among other places; in 1925 he moved to Wrocław (then known as Breslau), where he completed his habilitation to become a »Privatdozent«, a lecturer, in the department of dermatology.² He left Wrocław after the Nazis gained power in 1933. He initially returned to his native France before leaving Europe in 1942 and immigrating to the US. His last place of residence was Washington DC, where he died in June 1962.³ Shortly after his death, his widow began selling his collection of prints through the Swiss auction house Klipstein und Kornfeld. It is not known where and when Mayer gathered his collection. All research carried out in relevant databases as well as a search request made to the Frick Art Research Library in New York produced no results. It is entirely unclear when and by what route the dedicated etching entered into the collector's possession.

² Kalender der Deutschen Universitäten und Hochschulen, issue no. 111 (summer semester 1932) and no. 113 (summer semester 1933) (Leipzig, 1932), p. 45.

³ In Washington Mayer worked as an expert witness, among other things, and in 1952 he testified before the US Congress on »Chemicals in Foods and Cosmetics«. Most of the biographical information known about him comes from the transcripts of these hearings, where he was required to substantiate his expertise:

<https://books.google.de/books?id=3ZpAAAAAAAJ&pg=PA1337&lpg=PA1337&dq=R.+L.+Mayer+Microbiology&source=bl&ots=wjXVncPRcF&sig=ACfU3U28rCfZJ2xKYJ4c2oQmMn8wymQOpQ&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwJD3cb6gKbqAhXZwsQBHollBRoQ6AEwAHoECAUQAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false>, p. 1337.

Leistung Nummer	Designat	Vor- und Nachnamen	Religion	Ort (Verwaltungs- bezirk, Bundesstaat) der Geburt	Lebensstellung (Stand, Gewerbe)	Vor- und Familien- namen der Ehegattin, Zahl der Kinder	Vor- und Familien- namen, Stand oder Gewerbe und Wohnort der Eltern	Prüfungsort
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
330. 77		Reiger, Hermann	isr.	Colmar, Elsaß	Reiger, Hermann	lobig	Breslau, Elsaß	
Am 10. 11. 19. j. 1895. 5. jünger, Hirschberg.								
330. 78		Fellner, Adolf	kath.	Leib, Elsaß	Fellner, Adolf	lobig	Leib, Elsaß	
Am 10. 11. 19. j. 1895. 5. jünger, Hirschberg.								
330. 79		Reiger, Hermann	isr.	Colmar, Elsaß	Reiger, Hermann	lobig	Breslau, Elsaß	
Am 10. 11. 19. j. 1895. 5. jünger, Hirschberg.								
330. 80		Reiger, Hermann	isr.	Colmar, Elsaß	Reiger, Hermann	lobig	Breslau, Elsaß	
Am 10. 11. 19. j. 1895. 5. jünger, Hirschberg.								

During the First World War Rudolf L. Mayer served in the Alpine Infantry Reserve Battalion of the Kingdom of Bavaria. He is listed under no. 371 on the Bavarian muster roll, which also indicates that he was Jewish. The abbreviation »isr.« in the religion column stands for »Israelite«.

He presumably lost his position in Wrocław as a victim of the »Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service« from 7 April 1933, which enabled the German state to immediately remove Jewish civil servants from office (Source: Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich, Abteilung IV, Kriegsarchiv, Kriegsstammrollen, 1914–1918).

Who was Rosa Berger?

⁴ See Gunta Stölzl: *Weberei am Bauhaus und aus eigener Werkstatt*, ed. by Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin (Berlin, 1987); *Das Bauhaus webt: Die Textilverkstatt am Bauhaus*, ed. by Bauhaus-Sammlungen in Weimar, Dessau und Berlin (Berlin, 1998).

Until now, Rosa Berger has been looked at as one of the forgotten Jewish female students at the Bauhaus.⁴ Only in the course of the provenance research done here did it become possible to trace the broad outlines of her biography. The relevant information was provided by the reparation files of her mother and siblings as well as by her descendants, who now live in Israel.

Berger was born in the Austrian Kingdom of Galicia in 1907 and then moved to Germany with her family in 1914. From 1916 she lived in the Scheunenviertel neighbourhood of Berlin, where her mother ran Berger's Viennese restaurant – one of the capital's best-known kosher restaurants. In 1925, after training at Berlin's weaving school, Berger arrived at the Bauhaus, where she also worked in the weaving workshop. She exhibited her work together with Max Krajewski (1901–1971) and Otti Berger (1898–1944), and the purchasers of her tapestries included Chemnitz's museum of applied art. She was also involved in decorating the interior of the ADGB Trade Union School designed by Bauhaus director Hannes Mayer in Bernau.

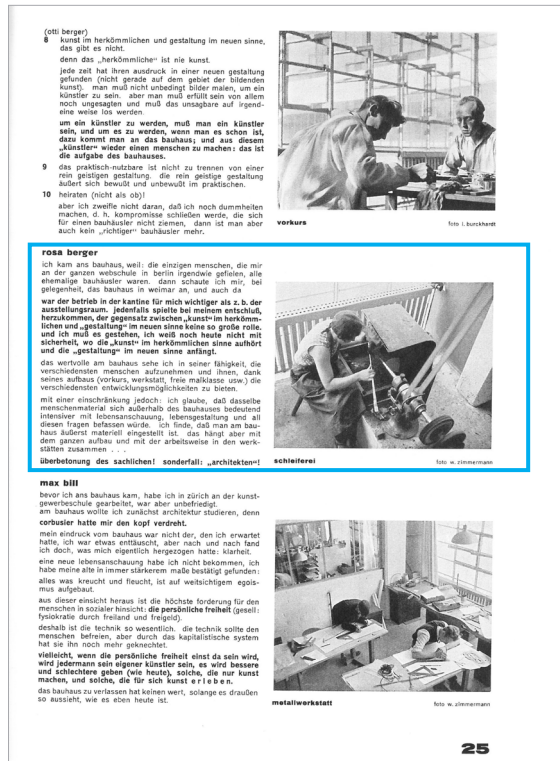


T. Lux Feininger (1910–2011), *Weavers on the Bauhaus Stairs*, 1927, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, inv. no. F2619 (Rosa Berger marked)

© Estate of T. Lux Feininger



source: bauhaus journal 1926–1931. Facsimile edition. Commentary and English translation, Zurich 2019.



Rosa Berger

I came to bauhaus because: the only people that I seemed to actually like in my weaving school in Berlin were from bauhaus. I seized a chance to take a closer look at bauhaus in Weimar, and again **I felt more drawn to the canteen than for instance the exhibition room. At any rate, "difference between art in general and design in the new sense" didn't really play into my decision of coming here. And to make a confession, I'm still not entirely sure where art in the traditional sense ends and design in the new sense begins.** The most valuable thing about bauhaus I believe, lies in its ability to bring together all different kinds of people and, thanks to its curriculum (preparatory classes, workshops, free painting etc.), offer them various opportunities for development. However, with one limitation: It is my belief that the same student body would be more intensively involved with philosophy of life, living and all related issues were it outside of bauhaus. I often find people at bauhaus too fixated on material things. Although this is due to the whole set up and methods of the workshops ... **Overemphasis of the functional! Particular case: architects!**

In 1929 Berger left the Bauhaus and briefly returned back to Berlin before going to Karlsruhe, where she seems to have found work. However, she fell ill with tuberculosis soon after her arrival. After stays at several sanatoriums, Rosa Berger died at the Sommerfeld tuberculosis sanatorium outside Berlin on 28 January 1932, at the age of 24. She was laid to rest next to her father, in the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weißensee (field A, sect. VI, row 19, grave no. 84334).⁵

⁵ Weißensee Jewish cemetery, Berlin, registry of burials, Centrum Judaicum, no archival call number.

It is not known whether Berger sold the dedicated print prior to her death. The high costs linked to her stays at sanatoriums make this seem entirely possible. However, the fact that there is no evidence of any sale shifts attention to her mother Gitla Berger (née Friedlich, 1879–1951) and her eight siblings as her lawful heirs: Herz or Herzig (1898–1942), Sabina (1899–1941), Leo (1901–1959), David (1903–1947), Martha (1904–1990), Mendel (born 1906, missing), Aron (1911–1941/2) and Chaim (1915–2008).⁶

⁶ Affidavit by Leo Berger (15 April 1958), in: Reparation file of Gitla Berger, reg. no. 322.918, Landesamt für Bürger und Ordnungsangelegenheiten, Berlin.



Rosa Berger at the Charlottenhöhe sanatorium, 1931 (source: family archive of Rosa Berger's descendants)

The Berger Family

Gitla Berger was not the only one who occupied a prominent position in the urban life of Berlin in the 1920s and early 1930s: four of her sons also ran businesses in Leipzig and Berlin. They had already experienced antisemitic abuse before the Nazi's gained power. Chaim, the youngest son, explained: »[...] Nazi gangs often rushed into our business, running wild and harassing the guests, so that – as I already mentioned – many people were afraid to go to the restaurant at all.«⁷ The fates of this family's members are defined by flight, forced migration and murder. Gitla Berger experienced the death of six of her nine children, two daughters-in-law and five grandchildren.

⁷ Affidavit by Chaim Berger (11 September 1958), in: Reparation file of Gitla Berger, reg. no. 322.918, Landesamt für Bürger und Ordnungsangelegenheiten, Berlin



»Berger's Viennese Restaurant«, Münzstraße 8, 1929 (source: German Federal Archives, photo 183-R96433, photo: anonymous)

Today the descendants of Sabina, Leo, Martha and Chaim Berger live in Israel. The family gave digitised versions of eight letters written by Rosa Berger during the final months of her life to the Bauhaus-Archiv's public collection of documents. In spite of repeated inquiries, the family has been unable to provide any information about the print with the dedication by Kandinsky and had been unaware of its existence.

Summary

While it has been possible to trace the fates of the people connected with the print, there is absolutely no trace of the work itself between 1929 and 1963. The available sources do not permit any secure conclusion as to whether this work was or was not lost as a result of Nazi persecution.