

# Maria Schwarz

## Architect, wife, widow

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Annette Krapp

Maria Schwarz, née Lang, was born in Aachen on October 3, 1921, to Josef and Else Lang, the second of their three children. Starting in 1946, she practiced architecture until shortly before her death on February 15, 2018.<sup>1</sup> In 1951, she married Rudolf Schwarz, the educator, theoretician and noted architect of Roman Catholic churches.<sup>2</sup> They embarked on an intense professional collaboration until his passing on April 3, 1961. Subsequently Maria Schwarz directed his office and, beginning in 1992, continued in partnership with Dagmar Drese and Jutta Stiens. (Figure 1)

During her more than seven decades in architecture, Maria Schwarz primarily carried out commissions for the Roman Catholic church, creating a significant and, for a woman in the post-war years in West Germany, highly unusual body of work. However, she chose not to draw attention to her contribution to the architecture that is attributed to Rudolf Schwarz, preferring a less prominent public role while remaining deeply convinced of the importance of her work.

Upon occasion, Maria Schwarz engaged in publicity, but only to protect the buildings by the office of Rudolf Schwarz when they were endangered. Prominent examples include St. Paul's Church, a 19<sup>th</sup> century edifice in Frankfurt-am-Main, and the *Gürzenich*, a medieval trade and festival hall in

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1 Unless otherwise specified, all biographical information about Maria Lang Schwarz and details about her architecture and collaboration with Rudolf Schwarz are taken from: Krapp (2015).

2 Rudolf Schwarz (1897-1961) was a German architect, theoretician and educator. His office completed a number of Roman Catholic churches, and he played an influential role in post-war architecture and urban planning in West Germany. See: Caruso/Thomas (2018) and Stegers (2020, orig. 2000).

Cologne, both of which were damaged during the Second World War. In the immediate post-war years, Rudolf Schwarz had overseen the reconstruction of the exteriors while introducing contemporary design to the interiors. In the 1980s, when plans were put forth to remove the post-war refurbishments, as was the situation in Frankfurt-am-Main, or heavily modify them, as in Cologne, she successfully fought to preserve the post-war architecture. Her greatest defeat was the demolition of the Church of St. Raphael in Berlin-Gatow at the beginning of July 2015, one day before it was to receive official protection as a historic monument.

In her struggle to preserve not only these projects but also the many churches by the office of Rudolf Schwarz, Maria Schwarz launched a contentious debate about the value of the architecture of the immediate post-war years. Such engagement shaped her public persona, and she became known as the *Witwe* (widow) of Rudolf Schwarz. Architectural circles considered her to be the *Mädchen* (little girl), who first worked in the master's office and then became the *Gralshüterin* (female guardian of the holy grail) who administered her husband's estate and maintained his legacy after his death. She was never taken seriously as a woman architect with her own, independent body of work.

When I began to research Maria Schwarz, I expected to write about her life and work just like that of a male architect. However, my firm resolve to discover her own oeuvre, and not see her merely as the wife and widow of Rudolf Schwarz, proved to be impossible. During their ten-year long collaboration from 1951 to 1961, their architecture was so closely interconnected and, for Maria Schwarz, the contact to Rudolf Schwarz and his body of thought was so intense, that her later endeavors cannot be separated from the creative and intellectual labor of her husband. Over the ensuing decades, Maria Schwarz also kept abreast of the condition of their buildings, all the while choosing to remain in the shadow of her husband. Shaped as I am by the self-understanding of the generation of the grandchildren, who were born during the last third of the 20th century and know a very different world from their grandparents, this was difficult for me to comprehend. It took a long time to realize that this apparent reticence was actually a very clever strategy. Whereas the *widow* of Rudolf Schwarz could receive commissions to complete the churches that had been planned before her husband's death as well as invitations to design church towers, community centers or



*Figure 1: Maria Schwarz, 2011. Source: © Elke Wetzig.*



*Figure 2: Lettner-Orgel (choir screen organ),  
St. Mary's in the Capitol, Cologne, 1991.  
Source: © Holger Klaes.*

ecclesiastic interiors, this would never have been possible for the *independent woman architect* named Maria Schwarz.

In the 1990s, following the completion of the organ cases for two Romanesque churches in Cologne, Maria Schwarz finally emerged from her husband's shadow. The *Lettnner-Orgel* (choir screen organ) in St. Mary's in the Capitol, the city's largest church from this period, along with the organ for St. Andreas church lead us to the question: Who in fact is this Maria Schwarz, the designer of such magnificent constructions which fit harmoniously into the naves of churches that were not originally planned to accommodate such a monumental instrument? (Figure 2)

## The female student

Maria Schwarz belonged to a generation where it was unusual for a woman to study architecture. Her father had completed a degree in this subject and, although he never practiced, he conveyed his enthusiasm for designing and building to his children. Even though her older brother Elmar was studying architecture at the *Technische Hochschule* (TH or technical university) in Aachen, the family's middle child had to fight hard to pursue her career choice. Her father's reaction to her decision—"This is not possible!"—is symptomatic for the period around 1940.

Between 1903 and 1909, the German states admitted women to their universities.<sup>3</sup> The first female student enrolled at the TH Aachen, where Maria Schwarz studied, in 1915.<sup>4</sup> Throughout Germany, their numbers rose conspicuously during the First World War, but beginning in 1919 new restrictions limited their enrollment. The demobilization law of March 28, 1919 aimed to free up places at universities for the returning soldiers.<sup>5</sup> Against the backdrop of inflation and rising unemployment, a law was passed in 1923 to restrict the "double earners," that is, a married couple where both partners are gainfully employed, which became even more prohibitive in 1933. An academic career was now out of reach for many women, and the

3 Maasberg/Prinz (2015), 31.

4 Mertens (1991), 119.

5 Maasberg/Prinz (2015), 20.

number of female students declined.<sup>6</sup> Some women did study architecture, yet their male classmates hardly viewed them as equals. In 1931 one young man attending the TH Berlin stated that the female students were awkward, unfeminine and extraordinarily hardworking. Although they “brilliantly master everything connected to technology,” they do this “in a formulaic manner” and “rarely grasp the essence of technical problems.” Nevertheless, they could become “the hardworking and conscientious employee of a man.”<sup>7</sup>

Starting in 1936, it became easier for women to attend universities. With the introduction of the first four-year plan and the preparations for war, the National Socialists encouraged women to pursue higher education, and the enrollment of female students increased.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Maria Schwarz’s desire to seek a career came at an auspicious time. In 1941, she enrolled in the Department of Architecture at the TH Aachen, alongside three female and 25 male students. Trained by a faculty that propagated *Heimatschutzarchitektur* (Homeland Conservation Architecture), a type of modern design that oriented new building on regional forms and materials, the instruction was demanding. Yet the war years could also be a time of opportunity. Maria Schwarz was employed as a student helper and, starting in 1945, as a teaching assistant. She was drawn to René von Schöfer, a professor of architectural design and an archeologist, under whom she completed her final diploma project,<sup>9</sup> and Hans Schwiippert, an adjunct instructor who became a prominent architect in the Federal Republic of Germany.

At the close of the war, the vast destruction and urgent need for rebuilding presented staggering challenges. Universities initially reduced their enrollments and returning soldiers were given priority. Sometimes female students had to wait for several semesters until they could continue their education.<sup>10</sup> For a short time, however, those women architects who had recently finished their education profited from a lack of male competition and gained valuable professional experience. As time went by, this genera-

6 Frauengruppe Faschismusforschung (ed.) (1981), 142.

7 Erich D. cand. Phys. Techn. (1931). Quoted in: Dörhöfer (2004), 176.

8 Kuhn/Mühlenbruch/Rothe (1996), 69.

9 The theme of the diploma project was a hotel in Gmünd. For the sake of brevity, I refer to the designs by Maria Schwarz without reference to primary sources. For a list of sources up to 2014, see: Krapp (2015).

10 Frauengruppe Faschismusforschung (1981), 162.

tion disappeared from public view because they, just as the Berlin student had predicted in 1931 and just like Maria Schwarz, went on to become the “hardworking and conscientious employees” of their husbands. Their own independent creativity was submerged in a spousal collaboration.

## The young woman architect and reconstruction after 1945

At the start of post-war reconstruction, the most pressing tasks concerned the need to develop long-term concepts to rebuild the destroyed cities and house the millions of homeless. Aachen was the first German city to be occupied by the Allies, who entered it on October 21, 1944. As a border city, it had been fiercely contested and lay in ruin. Maria Schwarz worked under Hans Schwippert and René von Schöfer in the initial efforts, and then followed René von Schöfer to Jülich, a small city roughly 30 kilometers northeast of Aachen, where she carried out similar tasks and planned shelters for the homeless.

In January 1949, on the basis of this experience, she was hired by the Reconstruction Limited Liability Company for the City of Cologne. Directed by Rudolf Schwarz, the staff included many male architects who would go on to play a leading role in West German architecture.<sup>11</sup> Here she worked on the preservation of several historical churches,<sup>12</sup> and joined the effort to reconstruct the *Gürzenich*. This monument had been extensively damaged during the Second World War, and the City of Cologne issued a competition to rebuild it as a venue for public events. A team consisting of Josef Bernhard with Rudolf Schwarz and Karl Band with Hans Schilling won the commission. They promptly established a planning consortium, inviting artists and craftspeople to rebuild the *Gürzenich* as a “dancing house [...] all the way down to the last doorknob.”<sup>13</sup> Here the notion of the *Werkhütte* (work cottage or work lodge), a holistic community where architects and members of

11 Among others: Josef Bernard, Gottfried Böhm, Kurt Jatho, Wilhelm Kleinertz, Hermann Pfeifer and Fritz Schaller.

12 *St. Mechtern* in Cologne-Ehrenfeld, *St. Marien* in Cologne-Kalk and the *Liebfrauenkirche* in Cologne-Mülheim.

13 Rudolf Schwarz speaking on the completion of the rebuilding of the *Gürzenich* before the Cologne City Council in October 1955. Manuscript, HAEK; Pfothenhauer (1993), 53–56.

diverse trades labor collectively, and which Rudolf Schwarz had propagated during his brief directorship of the Applied Arts School in Aachen in the late 1920s and early 1930s, came to fruition in an exemplary manner. This early experience with collective design remained important to Maria Schwarz for the rest of her life, as it reinforced her conviction that the identification of the different contributors to a project, that is so beloved in art history, does not make sense, because in the creative process one idea gives rise to the next and, in a best-case scenario, who suggested what idea is unimportant. Yet she remained deeply disappointed throughout her life that only the male architects were publicly acknowledged at the opening ceremony for the reconstructed *Gürzenich*.<sup>14</sup> Surviving drawings indicate that Maria Schwarz devised innovative details for the long, curved gallery in the foyer and, together with Marianne Hagen-Weyres, was largely responsible for the arrangement of the main stairway. And it is these two elements, when seen from the central foyer, that connect all the representative spaces and make the notion of a “dancing house” come alive. With this in mind, her struggle to preserve this interior remodeling in the 1980s takes on a whole other meaning.

## The wife and female colleague

Not only the architectural detailing of his young assistant, but also her personality deeply impressed Rudolf Schwarz. In June 1951, Maria and Rudolf Schwarz married, commencing a professional collaboration and private union that lasted almost ten years. They primarily built churches that today are associated with the name of Rudolf Schwarz, although Maria Schwarz's contribution to thirty of these buildings is clearly documented.

In the immediate post-war years, the need for new Protestant and Roman Catholic churches was a pressing task for architects in West Germany. During the 1920s and 1930s, Germans regularly attended houses of worship. After 1945, newly built churches lent physical orientation to the destroyed cities and towns while enabling their congregations to find spiritual direction and solace. Through participating in weekly services, celebrating holidays or taking part in rituals like baptisms, marriages or funerals, churchgoing enabled

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14 Maria Schwarz, quoted in: Kier (2000), Manuscript.

people to restore a sense of normalcy to their everyday lives and continue the cultural and religious practices of the interwar years.<sup>15</sup>

How the design process in Rudolf Schwarz's offices in Cologne and Frankfurt was structured; the nature of the collaboration between Maria and Rudolf Schwarz; and the manner in which Maria Schwarz assumed more authority in this practice can be gleaned from the archival documents.<sup>16</sup> As a rule, Rudolf Schwarz made a rough sketch of the concept for a building, and the architects in the office were free to develop it further. For example, for the renovation of the church of the Archabbey at Beuron, Rudolf and Maria Schwarz and their collaborators made hundreds of sketches until the final plans slowly emerged. Besides drawing, each project was the subject of intense discussions. In their house in Cologne-Müngersdorf, the living room and work area occupied the same space, seamlessly uniting professional tasks and private life. "Our buildings were our children," said Maria Schwarz.

Rudolf Schwarz's letters to his wife reveal the intimacy of their collaboration and what deep meaning it had for him.<sup>17</sup> Writing about the church of St. Michael in Frankfurt in a letter dated January 23, 1953, he expressed his profound happiness that they had created the church together, and observed that the interior resembled the *Aareschlucht*,<sup>18</sup> an idea that Maria Schwarz had put forth.<sup>19</sup> Describing the interior of this edifice for a public context in 1960, he explained the significance of this geological formation, noting, "We understood the passage through the gorge as a universal human condition that we then built in *St. Michael*."<sup>20</sup> The same confluence of sensibilities can be observed in the church of St. Anna in Düren where Maria Schwarz's contribution is even more pronounced. Writing to his wife, Rudolf Schwarz described his visit to the bishop in Aachen to present the new orientation of the plan of the church. He recalled that the bishop enthusiastic about the

15 James-Chakraborty (2018), 36–39, and the sources referenced there.

16 Since January 2019, the papers of Maria Schwarz are located in the Historisches Archiv des Erzbistum Köln (HAEK).

17 For excerpts from the letters by Rudolf Schwarz to Maria Schwarz concerning their collaboration, see: Krapp (2015), 39–54; 56–118.

18 The *Aareschlucht* is the limestone gorge along the river Aare, near Meiringen, Switzerland. It is a popular area for hiking.

19 Letter from Rudolf Schwarz to Maria Schwarz from January 23, 1953. In possession of the Lang family. See: Krapp (2015), 39–54; 56–118.

20 Rudolf Schwarz, quoted in: Schwarz/Gerhards/Rüenauer (2007), 221.



change and was delighted to learn that Maria Schwarz was responsible for the clever adjustment and the overall design.<sup>21</sup> In fact, not only this information but also the extant sketches and plans indicate that Maria Schwarz exerted considerable influence on the development of St. Anna in Düren. On one drawing, the signature “M. Schwarz” appears under the office stamp “The Architect Prof. Dr.-Ing. Rudolf Schwarz.”<sup>22</sup> This autograph is rare, because, as a rule, Maria Schwarz always signed the drawings with her last name.

In another letter to Maria Schwarz, Rudolf Schwarz expressed his great pleasure that the plan of St. Anna in Düren is from her, and that he would like this fact to be made known widely.<sup>23</sup> At this point one must ask the question why is only St. Anna in Düren considered to have joint authorship? Why not all the other churches that were produced by the office of Rudolf Schwarz from 1951 to 1961 as well? Indeed, in the 1950s in West Germany, women were appearing in greater numbers as partners of architectural offices, usually in collaboration with a husband.<sup>24</sup> After the death of her husband in 1961, Maria Schwarz could have changed the name of the office, but declined to do so. In the exhibition catalogues about the architecture of Rudolf Schwarz from 1963<sup>25</sup> and 1981<sup>26</sup> and which she co-edited, she always referred to herself as a *Mitarbeiterin* (female assistant), the same status as the other architects in their office.

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21 Letter from Rudolf Schwarz to Maria Schwarz, undated, on stationery from Josef Lang. In possession of the Lang family. See: Krapp (2015), 39–54; 56–118.

22 HAEK PK67/4 Bl. 10a.

23 Letter from Rudolf Schwarz to Maria Schwarz from October 2, 1952. In possession of the Lang family. See also: Krapp (2015), 39–54; 56–118.

24 “The fifties seemed to be the best time for married couples in architecture: they appeared in large numbers, became imprinted on people’s minds as couples, won competitions and built.” Schmidt-Thomsen (1986), 20. She lists a number of women architects in partnership with their husbands in various West German cities at that time.

25 Schwarz/Rosiny/Schürmann/Ungers (1963).

26 Sundermann/Lang/Schwarz (1981).

## The widow: The inheritor and the woman architect who completed her husband's final buildings

In the spring of 1961, Maria Schwarz took charge of the offices in Cologne and Frankfurt. She retained the name “Architecture Office Rudolf Schwarz” until 1992, when she established a partnership with Dagmar Drese and Jutta Stiens, her long-term employees, calling themselves “Architecture Office Schwarz & Partner.” She never used the name Maria Schwarz to designate her practice.

Until her death in 2018, Maria Schwarz was occupied with additions, changes, modernizations, repairs and measures to adapt and reuse the buildings that were executed under the name of Rudolf Schwarz. For more than half a century, she acted as a consultant to many of the churches that their office had built, striving to remain as loyal as possible to their ideas about religious architecture. Maria Schwarz deeply admired her husband and always emphasized that without him, she never would have become the architect that she became in later years. But without his wife, Rudolf Schwarz never would have occupied the place in architectural history that he enjoys today. Starting in the early 1960s, Maria Schwarz assumed another life-long task, namely the administration and the dissemination of the drawn and written legacy of her husband. She was extremely hospitable to students and researchers, staying in touch with them, advising them on their projects and explaining the ideas and buildings of their office. Through influential exhibitions<sup>27</sup> and the reissuance of seminal texts by Rudolf Schwarz, she introduced his work to a wide public.

Until 1967, the offices in Frankfurt and Cologne concentrated on completing the architectural legacy of Rudolf Schwarz. Upon his death, ten churches were in different stages of planning and construction. Even though Maria Schwarz was known as being an experienced architect who was extremely familiar with her husband's body of thought, during the early 1960s she had to fight hard to be given the responsibility to finish some of these buildings. This was not a problem for St. Theresia in Linz, Christ König

27 The exhibition, *Rudolf Schwarz - Architekt einer anderen Moderne* (Rudolf Schwarz – Architect of another Modernism), curated by Wolfgang Pehnt and Hilde Strohl, took place at the *Museum für Angewandte Kunst* in Cologne, from May 16 to August 3, 1997 and at the *Architekturzentrum Wien* from December 1, 1998 to January 10, 1999.

in Weinbach-Gräveneck, St. Pius in Hausen, St. Bonifatius in Aachen and St. Bonifatius in Wetzlar. From the very beginning, she was accepted as a competent assistant; in Linz and Aachen she was acknowledged as being the co-designer. It was also fairly uncomplicated to be given the responsibility to complete St. Florian in Vienna and St. Pius in Wuppertal. Yet even until today it is important to note that all these buildings are officially recognized as churches by Rudolf Schwarz. It goes without saying that when I began my research at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, my desire to research Maria Schwarz's contribution to this collective oeuvre was not always warmly received.

Returning to the early 1960s: When it came to the churches of St. Raphael in Berlin-Gatow and the Heilig Kreuz in Soest, however, Maria Schwarz encountered massive resistance. Hilde Strohl, an employee in their office, had been entrusted by Rudolf Schwarz before his death to plan both churches and she eventually finished them under Maria Schwarz's supervision. In Berlin-Gatow, various authorities had fundamental problems with the design. The local bishop found the church tower to be too small and the passage through the church confusing. Meanwhile the city building department felt the edifice was too big and did not suit the village-like context of Gatow. In the end, Hans Scharoun intervened in support of the project. In Soest, the leaders of the congregation expressly wanted one of the "stars" of ecclesiastical architecture, either Gottfried Böhm or Rudolf Schwarz. Upon the death of the latter, they began negotiations with Gottfried Böhm. The support of both the chief architect of the diocese of Paderborn, Josef Rünauver, as well as the Archbishop of Paderborn, Lorenz Jaeger, paved the way for the church "according to the plans of Rudolf Schwarz" to be realized by Maria Schwarz. Nevertheless, Maria Schwarz and Hilde Strohl had to submit new drawings at regular intervals over a four-year period until, in 1965, they received approval for a church that was slightly modified from the original scheme.

The circumstances surrounding two other projects, the Liebfrauen in Oberursel and St. Franziskus in Osnabrück, were equally absurd. Shortly before his death, Rudolf Schwarz had received commissions for both churches. Preliminary ideas existed, but there were no final schemes. Maria Schwarz was awarded the contracts under the condition that the designs were from Rudolf Schwarz. Thus, when the official drawings were finished, she signed them under the stamp "The Architect Rudolf Schwarz" using only her last name and listing herself as one of the collaborators on the project.

At the consecration of the Church of the Liebfrauen in Oberursel, the speakers even thanked him for his wonderful plans.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, in 1965, the Minister of Finance from the Federal State of Hesse and the Association of German Architects honored the Church of the Liebfrauen in Oberursel as an exemplary work of architecture. (Figure 3)

## The woman church builder?

In the 1960s and 1970s, Maria Schwarz submitted designs to seven competitions for churches; in some instances, her participation was explicitly requested. However, she was not able to realize any of these projects. It was not always a question of not wanting a woman architect, as the designs that were selected and built seemed to be better suited to their time than those offered by Maria Schwarz.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, if one reviews the church architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the present, women architects rarely make an appearance.

There are a few husband-wife architect pairs who built churches, and the authorship of both is acknowledged in the most recent literature. Concerning Roman Catholic churches of the 1960s and 1970s in West Germany, in addition to Maria and Rudolf Schwarz, these include: Elisabeth and Gottfried Böhm; Stephan Legge and Ursula Legge-Suwelack; Joachim and Margot Schürmann; as well as Anton and Marianne Weischer. The few independent women architects that are known to me and who built a church in the 1950s or 1960s are: Lucy Hillebrand, Hanna Kluth and Sigrid Kressmann-Zschach. Lucy Hillebrand, who studied under the church architect Dominikus Böhm in the 1920s and established an atelier in Göttingen in 1945, built the Roman Catholic Church of St. Nikolaus of the Dunes on the island of Langeoog in 1961 and the chapel of the dormitory complex for Catholic students in Göttingen in 1965. Hanna Kluth established her office in 1961 in Hamburg and, between 1962 and 1964, realized the Protestant Cornelius Church in Hamburg-Fischbeck. The West Berlin architect Sigrid Kressmann-Zschach was responsible for another Protestant church, the Jerusalem Church, in West Berlin, and completed in 1968. Only Hanna Kluth received additional commissions from

<sup>28</sup> Compare, the file on the Liebfrauen Church, HAEK.

<sup>29</sup> For Maria Schwarz's competition designs for churches, see Krapp (2015).

the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>30</sup> On an international level, Jeanne Bueche built eight Roman Catholic churches and was involved in approximately 30 church renovations in the 1950s and the early 1960s in the Swiss Jura, a region where she was born and raised. During the 1970s in Brazil, the Italian-Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi realized the small Franciscan cloister, the *Espirito Santo do Cerrado*, and the Chapel of *Santa Maria dos Anjos*. How these projects came about is the result of their specific circumstances, and these very few exceptions only prove the rule.

If it is possible to ascribe the small number of women architects who designed churches from the 1950s until the 1970s to their general scarcity at that time, then today this is no longer the case. At German universities women students are now in the majority and women architects have long proven their competence. In the line-up of the architectural stars, however, they are still an exception. They tend to work as partners in larger offices or in husband-and-wife teams, although today the contribution of both is clearly communicated. Yet I have found very few independent women architects who have built a Protestant or Catholic church under their own name. One notable recent project is the small St. Paulus Church of the German-speaking Roman Catholic congregation in Brussels, designed by Catherine de Bie and completed in 2001.<sup>31</sup> Hopefully, this small “rear courtyard church” points to

30 During the preparation of this chapter, more information about the architect Gerti Elliger-Gonser has come to light. She opened her own practice in the late 1940s and completed the Protestant Church of Reconciliation in Münster in 1963 with her brother, the architect Hans-Jörg Gonser, who worked for her. The church was demolished in 2018. See, Wolfgang Voigt's chapter in this volume.

31 The Protestant Church in Germany generally has been more willing to accept changing gender roles, and has allowed women to assume positions of authority, such as vicars, bishops and even the head of the church; this is perhaps one reason why there are more Protestant churches by women architects in Germany. The short list that follows can certainly be extended by one name or the other, but it is noteworthy that the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, which does not accept women in positions of authority, rarely commissions women architects. See Gerhards (2002), 30; also: *Das Münster 54* (2001), 297–299. Since the 1990s, women architects who have built Protestant churches in Germany include: Nike Fiedler (Chapel of the Evangelical Academy in Bad Boll, 1994); Ute Grindel (Evangelical Church of the Reconciliation in Moosburg an der Isar, 2000); Jutta Heinze (Protestant community house with a church room in Duisburg, 2005; the Protestant community house with childcare center in Dinslaken, 2010); and Gesine Weinmiller, Weinmiller Großmann Architects (Genezareth Church Aachen, 2018). Three notable recent churches by architect pairs are: Louisa Hutton and Matthias Sauerbruch (Immanuel



Figure 3: Liebfrauenkirche, Oberursel, 1961–1965. Source: © Foto Artur Pfau, Maria Schwarz Papers, HAEK.

future opportunities. But for Maria Schwarz's generation, women architects almost never had a chance to build for the Roman Catholic Church.

In the post-war years, this religion's stance towards women's role in the modern world closely aligned with the prevailing attitudes in West Germany, where traditional gender roles were deeply entrenched. In the early 1960's, the Second Vatican Council's attempts to reform the Roman Catholic Church resulted in the modernization of liturgical practices and greater ecumenism, but not a fundamental reconsideration of the role of women in secular or religious life. Indeed, the last books placed on the Vatican's List of Prohibited Books were *The Second Sex* (1949) and *The Mandarins* (1954), both by the French feminist, Simone de Beauvoir, due to their perceived threat to religious faith

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Church and community center, Cologne 2014); Gesche Grabenhorst and Roger Ahrens (Renovation of the Christus Church for use as a church and a choir center, Hannover 2015); and Julia Klumpp and Hermann Klumpp (Roman Catholic Church of St. Paulus in Balin-gen-Frommern, 2015).

and moral sensibilities. It may have been easier for women to skirt these constraints when practicing in remote places, such as Jeanne Buche in the Swiss Jura or Lina Bo Bardi in Brazil. But Maria Schwarz's architectural office was in Cologne, a city that was home to the wealthy and powerful Diocese of Cologne, which occupied a key place at the center of Roman Catholicism in Germany and was closely aligned with the Vatican in Rome. Considering this context, for the independent woman architect Maria Schwarz, it certainly was beneficial to affirm the image a selfless widow in service of her husband's legacy. As shifting attitudes towards sexuality and changing cultural mores began to upend everyday life in the 1960s, one wonders: Could her reluctance to assume a more pronounced public identity be seen as a bulwark against behavior that appeared to be threatening or disruptive to traditional notions about gender and society as well?<sup>32</sup>

### **And nonetheless: A woman architect in service of the Roman Catholic Church**

Maria Schwarz faced this situation in 1967, when she completed the final church that was begun while Rudolf Schwarz was still alive. The demand for new Roman Catholic churches in West Germany after the Second World War was largely fulfilled and few additional ones were needed. Nevertheless, Maria Schwarz continued building for the Roman Catholic Church for the next half century. Under her direction, the office of Rudolf Schwarz completed various additions, including rectories, parish halls, day care centers and church towers. Following the reforms set down by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Maria Schwarz also received commissions for the redesign of chancels, a task that included the repositioning of the altar and the ambo; the removal of the benches to receive communion; and, in most cases, changes to or the relocation of the baptismal font. When she approached these tasks, she acknowledged the existing architectural and liturgical requirements, while devising practical solutions that did not detract from the original spatial conception of a church. Maria Schwarz acquired a reputation for her sensitive remodeling projects and was awarded commissions for churches that were not connected to the name of Rudolf Schwarz. In her

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32 For the situation in divided Germany, see: Droste/Huning (2017).

final years, one especially disheartening task involved the decreasing role of religion in daily life, which led to the closing of many churches. Several buildings from the office of Rudolf Schwarz were impacted by this development, and Maria Schwarz strove to identify new, appropriate uses for them.

As an architect, Maria Schwarz was first and foremost concerned about the work at hand. For her, a church had profound meaning, being a point of orientation in a city and a place for solace, prayer and renewal.<sup>33</sup> This quality, to be able to comprehend a situation in its totality, was the precondition that allowed Maria Schwarz, as an independent woman architect in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to be able to work almost exclusively for the Roman Catholic Church. In this way she created an extensive body of work, that reflects, in an exemplary way, the transformation of ecclesiastical architecture since the 1950s.

*Translated by Mary Pepchinski*

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