

Dorothea Karoline Fuhrmann was born in 1917 in Brno, Czechia, into a wealthy Jewish family of textile manufacturers.

When her parents divorced in mid-1920s, Dorothea and her brother Robert relocated with their mother to Vienna, where she began training as a theatre designer at Kunstgewerbeschule. Their father was the only member of the family to remain in Brno, and later died in Auschwitz.



*Dorothea and Robert in 1933*

In 1938, Germany annexed Austria. At that time, Dorothea designed stage decorations for the production of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, but when she arrived in the theatre for the opening night, the notice on the entrance door said: No Jews. She never saw her work on the stage.

Dorothea fled to London, which was only possible because she had a Czech passport thus did not need the permission from the Nazi regime to travel. She continued her studies at the Reimann School in London, but then the WWII intervened.

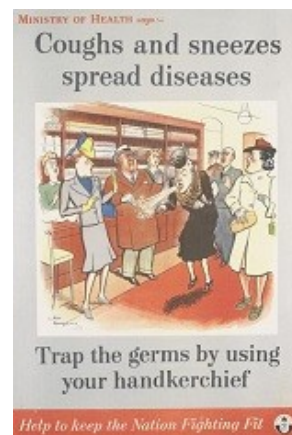
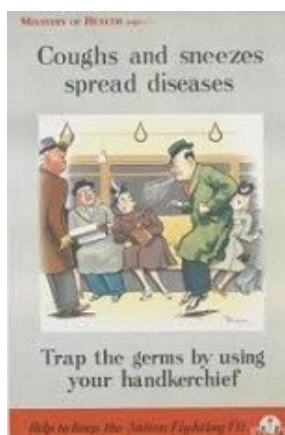
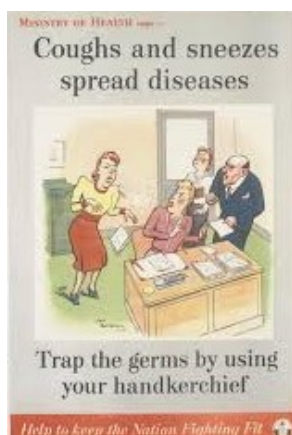
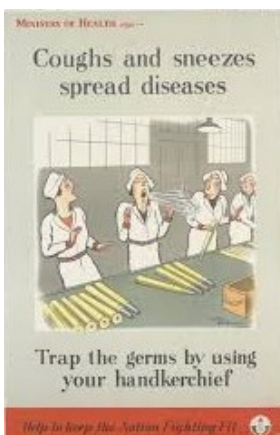
Dorothea joined the Women's Royal Naval Service, known as the Wrens, and because she spoke foreign languages, she became a radio intelligence officer ('the listener'). She intercepted coded messages from the German naval forces, thus becoming a key part of the broader Bletchley Park operation.



*Dorothea during WWII*

In 1940 she married Leonard Klatzow, a South African physicist, who tragically died in 1942 in a plane crash.

After WWII, Dorothea pursued her career as a designer and worked at the design studio of the Central Office for Information, producing government campaign posters, amongst other the famous 'Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases':



This is when she created her professional name: once asked to sign her artwork, she realised that both her maiden and married names were too difficult to recognise in the UK, decided to use her initials D.K.K. instead and created herself a professional name – Dorrit Dekk. Her mother, a Dickens enthusiast, has always called her Dorrit.

After a brief interlude in Cape Town, she returned to London in 1950 and established herself as a freelance designer, printmaker, and painter.

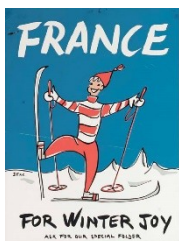
The milestone commission was a design for the Travelling Section of the Festival of Britain in 1951, a national exhibition and fair that attracted millions of visitors across the UK. Dorrit created a mural representing popular British sports, games and pastimes called People at Play.



*Drawing for the People at Play mural; a stage designer at work...*

With this piece of work, Dorrit entered the British design world. She has always been proud to be part of the 1951 festival.

She gradually built her own successful design practice and in 1956, she became a fellow of the Society of Industrial Artists (today Chartered Society of Designers).



Dorrit became known as the 'travel queen' through her work for Air France and P&O. However, her work spanned from book covers and illustrations (Penguin and The Tatler were her clients) to advertising for London Transport, British Rail and Post Office savings bank. She considered herself art designer rather than fine artist.

Dorrit Dekk became one of the most influential and successful commercial graphic designers in the post-war UK. Her main medium was collage which she used in her posters as well as paintings. For her quirky landscapes and urban scenes, she used gouache.



She continued to create pieces of abstract and figurative art as well as her favourite collages even after a stroke she suffered in 2001. Housebound and in a wheelchair, she enjoyed receiving young students of art in her studio, for whom she was an admired role model. Famous for her eccentric stripy socks, and loved for her

infectious spirit, her passion for all things art and architecture, and for her sharp wit, Dorrit Dekk was one of a kind. She died in London in 2014 at the age of 97.



*Pavla Hind, 2020*