

## DWELLING, PLACE AND ARCHITECTURE

### AN EXHIBITION OF SPACES, PROJECTS AND BUILDINGS DESIGNED BY WOMEN

This is a project sponsored by The Architectural League of New York,  
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on the Arts.

## BACKGROUND

In September, 1973, an archive of work by women in architecture was established at The Architectural League of New York for the purpose of assembling a comprehensive body of documentation on women's contribution to Architecture and its related professional activities. Since its foundation, The Archive has gathered documentation on more than 600 projects as well as significant biographical information on women architects. The projects encompass a range of categories including urban design, landscape architecture, buildings, proposals, applied research, architectural journalism and theoretical work and were realized by women as individuals and in collaboration with other professionals and public institutions. The Archive's collection was assembled on a national basis, after contacting more than 2500 women architects individually with an invitation to submit work. Historical documentation has been a main research concern and the present historical holdings of the Archive are the result of more than one year of research accomplished at libraries and specific project or resource locations throughout the country. The Archive of Women in Architecture operates as a public research center which has been utilized by journalists, writers, students and architects. The Archive Committee members have made presentations on behalf of the Archive at all major conferences on women in architecture and AIA conventions to date. References to the Archive have been published in most major architectural and design magazines and in newspapers.

## THE EXHIBITION

The Archive collection constitutes the basic resource for the assemblage of a major exhibition on women's contributions to the built environment in the U.S. The purpose of the exhibition is to expose in a coherent visual sequence, and for the first time, virtually unknown projects of great historical interest and to celebrate the aesthetic and social importance of women's architectural accomplishments.

Although women's designs have shaped and determined the built environment since the earliest stages of American civilization, most efforts made in the past to acknowledge and document their contributions have remained isolated fragments of scholarship with no considerable cultural impact. One reason is that until World War II, American women's design endeavors were confined (with few exceptions) to the private and domestic environments and to the process of dwelling, rather than the most public and institutional aspects of architectural design. It is only in the present that women are beginning to be included in the ranks of the professionals, intellectuals and decision-makers who will create or promote the emergence of cultural symbols and the physical forms of our social environment.

The exhibition will comprise three interdependent parts. Each will focus on separate and yet related conceptual aspects of space and built form. This three-part structure defines the vantage points from which it is possible to fully perceive and comprehend the American woman's role in the process of designing and

building. The first part corresponds to Dwelling, seen as a relatively unself-conscious design process and as the preservation of traditional forms and patterns of space organization. Place, corresponding to the third section is understood as the spatial result of a design intervention by an individual seeking to redefine the symbolic and social components embodied by actual space. Between the space of tradition and the space of change formalized by non-professional women of different races and cultural groups, the work of professionally educated women architects has transcended the domestic and personal domains. The second part, corresponding to this category, will be a timely and qualitative evaluation of projects and buildings spanning almost a century.

The following is a description of each segment.

### 1. The American Woman's Home

The title of this section is borrowed from Catherine Beecher's study of the house as a total environmental system realized in 1869. Reyner Banham has noted in "The Architecture of the Well Tempered Environment" that her house introduces "for the first time the conception of an unified central core of services around which the floors of the house are deployed, less as agglomerations of rooms, than as free space... thus anticipating the basic function organization of Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion house of 1927". These innovations were considered "radical and so original" by James Marston Fitch, that he finds no compunction (in spite of the house's gothic appearance) in drawing parallels between the American Woman's Home and the European Modern Architecture of the 1920's. This section will be devoted to a pictorial typology of domestic spaces as embodiments of social relationships, including the early traveling environments such as tepees and covered wagons, late 19th Century traditional interiors, their utopian communal counterparts, including those of Shakers, Mormons, Perfectionists, and modern offsprings of these attitudes towards space. A main feature of this section will be a model of Catherine Beecher's house showing the complex structure of the service core and the use of storage walls as flexible space dividers.

### 2. A Century of Women in Architecture

Starting with the Woman's Building at Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893, this section is intended as a visual survey of projects and buildings. These projects and buildings have been selected according to one or a combination of the following criteria: historical relevance; introduction of a new building or spatial type; excellence of design and/or execution of a conventional program; proposals for new ways of perceiving or organizing buildings as part of an extended or circumscribed urban context; projects dealing with architecture as a system of cultural symbols.

This section will include: the winning projects for the Women's Building of 1893 designed by Sophie Hayden, Lois Howe and Laura Hayes. The work of pioneer women architects, including Minerva Parker Nichol's Woman's Clubs and schools, Julia Morgan's mansions, Harriet Irwin's patented design for a hexagonal house, and Theodate Pope Riddle's schools. The work of Marion Mahony Griffin, including her designs for the David Amberg House in Grand Rapids, Michigan and her drawings for

the Wasmuth Publication of Frank Lloyd Wright's early work; the work of Midwestern women architects, including members of the Women's Architectural Club in Chicago, as exhibited at the Chicago Century of Progress Fair of 1933, organized and designed by Bertha Whitman.

The work of women architects who studied at the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture founded by Henry Frost in 1915, such as Eleanor Raymond's solar house, all plywood house, all masonite house and Sarah Pillsbury Harkness's Pillsbury residence and competition for Smith College's dormitories. The work of women architects during the war years, including Elizabeth Coit's well-known low income housing studies. The work of women architects during the decade of the fifties under the persuasion of the International style in corporate and public architecture and the influence of these works in the next decade as reflected in projects by Gertrude Kerbis, Cloethiel Smith, Natalie de Blois. The theoretical and built structural work of Ann Griswold Tyng, including projects in collaboration with Louis Kahn.

The work of women architects whose projects are based in the cultural exaltation of the American vernacular idiom exemplified by Denise Scott Brown's work. The work of women of a younger generation who have explored alternative means of practising architecture, redefining the traditional relationship between architect and client, including Merle Easton's street school, Sandra Moore's Trenton Design Workshop, projects by The Open Design Office, Sarah Ishikawa's contributions to spatial pattern language, the Woman's building in Los Angeles as a successful example of adaptive re-use.

The projects will be shown by means of photographic panels, back-lit transparencies and models. The installation will be realized to render the material visually accessible to the general public.

### 3. Changing Spaces

The last section of the exhibit is envisioned as a continuous slide projection taking place inside an actual stretch fabric environment designed by Aleksandra Kasuba. This collection of images will be a kaleidoscope of the visually fantastic, whimsical, humorous, poetic and critical ways in which space can exist as an art metaphor or a cultural symbol of individual and collective changing aspirations.

Projects shown will include the rooms of Womanhouse (an exhibition of a transformed domestic environment) Grandma Prisbey's bottle village; Christine Oatman's Child's Garden of Versus; Lynn Hershman's hotel rooms; Jackie Windsor's Platform House; Mary Miss's Tower Well; Audrey Hemenway's Ecological tents; Colette's cloth environments; Alice Aycock's shelters and labrynth and Pat Johanssen's Path/Links.