GENDERING ARCHITECTURE, ARCHITECTING GENDER
INTRODUCTION

The Women in Architecture Student Organization (WIASO) presents: Gendering Architecture, Architecting Gender, a celebration of female architects throughout history as well as contemporary female architects often neglected or erased in mainstream media and architectural curricula. By showcasing works by female architects, WIASO hopes to counteract the dominant narrative of the architect as a male subject.

This exhibition works to rewrite architectural history by acknowledging the contributions of female architects who have been dismissed, belittled, or denied credit for their work. By looking at architectural movements from a critical, feminist perspective, one is able to recenter history around marginalized identities and redefine what it means to be an architect.

The exhibition is a glimpse at a shared history among female architects at the University of Minnesota, one that architecture students are learning about and contributing to daily.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

DESIGN & CURATION

Neva Hubbert
Dana Saari
Mary Begley
Erin Kindell
Brittany Pool
UMN Architecture Student
UMN Architecture Student
UMN Architecture Student
UMN Architecture Student
UMN Architecture Student

EDITING & ASSISTANCE

Daniela Sandler
Ashleigh Grizzell
UMN Architecture Faculty
UMN Architecture Student
As the first woman to be a licensed architect in the state of Minnesota, Elizabeth [Lisl] Close was considered a mid-century pioneer for women wishing to practice architecture in the male-dominated profession. In 2002, she was awarded the AIA Minnesota Gold Medal, which is considered one of the highest honors that an individual can receive. The award was created to recognize individuals for their distinguished achievements and significant contributions to architecture.¹

Born and raised in Vienna, Austria, Close moved to the US to study architecture at MIT. After her graduation in 1935, finding work became extremely difficult as several firms considered her “a distraction at the drawing table.” She then decided to move to Minneapolis in 1936 and, with her soon-to-be husband Winston Close, she opened Close and Scheu Architects in 1938. Since its founding, the firm has had a significant influence in the local architecture of the Twin Cities.²

As an architect, she became the lead designer of hundreds of residential and commercial projects around Minneapolis. She focused on the essence and purity of space and was known for her use of flat roofs, unpainted redwood or cedar siding, large windows, and her minimalist design approaches.³

Lisl Close has been a role model to many aspiring female architects in Minnesota as well as in the US. Her legacy of progressive designs all over the Twin Cities is why the architecture profession considers her a mid-century pioneer. She is an extraordinary example of a female master builder, a baumeisterin.

"It’s a wonderful profession for women."

¹ “AIA Minnesota Newsletter.” Sparks 15, #8 (September 8, 2002): 1.
Recognized for her poetic treatment of modern architectural materials and techniques, Kazuyo Sejima is one of the most influential architectural figures in the 21st century. Her projects feature fluid transitions between interior and exterior spaces; the playful use of glass, aluminum, sculptural surfaces; and “rigorously defined elementary spaces and volumes.”

In 1981, she graduated with a master’s degree from Japan Women’s University and began working as an apprentice at Toyo Ito & Associates. She became eager to start her own firm, so in 1987, she establish Kazuyo Sejima & Associates. After several years of running her own practice, Sejima asked her close acquaintance to form a partnership. Today, the firm is known as Sejima and Nishizawa and Associates (SANAA).

“For architecture that is simultaneously delicate and powerful, precise and fluid, ingenious but not overly or overtly clever” Sejima was awarded the Pritzker Prize in 2010 along with her partner Ryue Nishizawa. This made Sejima the second woman to date to win the world’s most prestigious architecture award. In that same year, she also became the first woman to be selected as the director of the architecture sector for the Venice Biennale.

Currently, she is a Visiting Professor at Tama Art University and Japan Women's University in Tokyo. At the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, she also leads an architectural design studio. Her influence on contemporary architecture and her mentorship within academia has made her one of the most distinguished female architects in the world making her fit for the title Baumeisterin: female building master.

“Our works of architecture are generally open in character. We make them open because we want to build relationships.”
Norma Merrick Sklarek is known for her many pioneering achievements as one of the first African American women architects in the United States, and has been referred to as the “Rosa Parks of architecture.” She was born in 1926 in Harlem, New York and studied at Barnard College and the School of Architecture at Columbia University. She said about her time there that “the competition was keen. But I had a stick-to-it attitude and never gave up.” She graduated in 1950 as the only African American in her class, and one of two women. She was then rejected by nineteen firms after graduating. “They weren’t hiring women or African Americans, and I didn’t know which it was [working against me].”¹

Throughout her career she was often given work below her skill level, treated with disrespect, and discredited because she was a young black woman. She describes her experience as “the highly visible employee,” who couldn’t afford to make the same mistakes as her white male counterparts because she was always under great scrutiny and held to higher standards. Nevertheless, her skill and rigor made her brilliance highly visible, and she ascended to the top position in the firm, Gruen Associates.²

She was praised for her attention to detail and practicality; “she considered the design of a building the easy part, she would make it real.” She believed that “architecture should be working on improving the environment of people in their homes, in their places of work, and their places of recreation. It should be functional and pleasant, not just in the image of the ego of the architect.”³

“In architecture, I had absolutely no role model. I’m happy today to be a role model for others that follow”

---


ARCHITECT OF [HER] DESTINY
Suchi Reddy is the founder of Reddymade, a design practice that focuses on the economic, environmental, and cultural impacts of architecture. Working from New York City, Reddy is known for her imaginative use of color, innovative form, and careful choice of materials. Born and raised in Chennai, India, she was influenced by her mother’s passion for textiles and her father’s philosophical nature.¹

Reddy describes an intimate relationship between the architect and the user: “you’re trying to establish a kind of communication between the space and the people in that space. And even though the people don’t speak the language, they immediately understand it and respond to it.” This language is made up of materials, connections, details, and light and sound conditions. These sensory experiences are the heart of Reddy’s architectural explorations.²

“It’s like fashion, which to me is no frivolous thing. What you wrap yourself in is your first home.” Reddy takes on the challenge of trying to quantify this aesthetic experience, for example, in the context of healing. “The idea is to create sensory experiences in the room that put patients’ bodies at ease — the opposite of disease.”³ Reddy is an architect that takes on complex problems and difficult questions, and matches them with an immense amount of passion and creativity.

“I’ve had to channel all the goddesses in my culture. I am going to wave my 100 arms and you’re going to listen to me!”

Frida Escobedo is principal and founder of an eponymous architecture and design studio in Mexico City. She seeks to “make social time evident: use and occupation, spontaneous appropriations, relations between users of a common space.”

Much of her work is influenced by knowledge of Mexican traditional architecture, incorporating courtyards and indoor/outdoor spaces. She is known for weaving simple materials into complex geometric patterns. Her work takes many forms, from gallery installations and exhibits to adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

In 2018, Escobedo became the youngest architect and second woman to be selected to design the Serpentine Pavilion. Her design for the pavilion takes inspiration from traditional Mexican celosia, or walls that allow light and wind to filter through, by using concrete roof tiles with a wave form threaded onto steel. A curved mirror hangs on the ceiling, adjacent to a wading pool. Two interlocking rectangles delineate interior courtyards; one rectangle is oriented parallel to the nearby Prime Meridian.

Escobedo’s pavilion will remain in London’s Kensington Gardens until the end of the year, then be moved to a yet-to-be-determined location. Of this temporally limited and site-specific nature she said, “We had to deal with this – knowing where the pavilion was going to be, but not knowing where it was going to go next. How to resolve this contradiction? Anchor it to space, but also make it spaceless.” The perforated walls, simple assembly process, dynamic conditions of light, and open program effectively creates an ephemeral public space that can be acted upon in spontaneous ways.
Jennifer Newsom is principal and co-founder of Dream the Combine, a studio based in Minneapolis, MN. With partner Tom Carruthers, Newsom explores "metaphor, imaginary environments, and perceptual uncertainties that aim to cast doubt on our known understanding of the world." Much of Dream the Combine's work uses industrial materials to partition or create place, and mirrors or images to collapse or "destabilize the fixity of space."

In 2018, Dream the Combine was awarded the Young Architects Program prize by the Museum of Modern Art and MoMA PS1 for their project *Hide & Seek*. The pavilion uses a palette of steel structure, gimbaled mirrors that move with wind or touch, clouds of mist, and netting to create a vibrant and dynamic space. Mirrors within the pavilion move, allowing for a wandering vanishing point and creating moments of spontaneous and unpredictable reflection. Newsom speaks of these mirrors within "the context of black spatial practice: a need for generosity, for expansion, for movement."

The piece is programmatically site-specific, suited well for PS1's Warm Up parties and performances, and architecturally participatory, as the viewers change the space with their own bodies as they move through it. Dream the Combine's *Hide & Seek* invites visitors into a dynamic public space and allows for interaction with the piece, with the community, and with the city.

Newsom is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Minnesota.
Julia Williams Robinson, PhD, FAIA, registered architect, and author is currently a Professor of Architecture at the University of Minnesota. Robinson has acquired a broad range of teaching and research interests including sociocultural factors in environmental design, affordable housing, community involvement, equitable high-density housing, and design for people with developmental disabilities, and those who are incarcerated.

Recently, Robinson published a book entitled Complex Housing: Designing for Density, which explores culturally rich and successful Dutch design strategies in high-density housing that could be adopted in projects elsewhere. Based on fifteen years of research, Robinson's book, Institution and Home: Architecture as a Cultural Medium, addresses architecture both as a medium for cultural change and continuity and as a driver for the empowerment of residents. At present, Robinson is a Senior Researcher on an NSF-funded interdisciplinary research project with colleagues from Computer Science, Psychiatry, and Interior Design investigating how the physical environment can be employed to diagnose and treat Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Robinson has written and co-authored several other timely articles, chapters, and reports, including: “Programming as Design;” “Women’s Advocates Shelter: An Evaluation;” “Incorporating Cultural Issues in Sustainable Housing Design: The Case of the Hmong;” and “People with Intellectual Disabilities: Observational Methods and Housing Policy.” This work reveals how Julia Robinson has become a positive force in the architecture profession, constructing and influencing cultural messages using the medium of architecture.
Lina Bo Bardi, an Italian born Brazilian architect, was an immensely talented, yet undersung, pioneer of modernism. Bo Bardi was a prolific architect, furniture designer, jewelry maker, art curator, set designer, teacher, and author. Her unique perspective on architecture led her to be one of the first woman architects to be published for her writing on architectural theory.

Bo Bardi spent her career promoting the socio-cultural potential of design and those values influenced her approach to modern architecture. She infused a humanist touch into her work which was often absent from architecture in the international style.

In Casa do Benin, Bo Bardi installed a permanent exhibit of Benin crafts showcasing the local culture and blending the old crafts with the new. In the Valeria P. Cirell House Bo Bardi used indigenous stones as building materials and brought back regional construction techniques to create a distinctly humanistic home. One of Bo Bardi’s largest and most comprehensive projects is the SESC Pompeia Factory Center, which is known for its welcoming free-flowing spaces and theatre, which is still heavily used today. Lina Bo Bardi devoted her life to elevating the social responsibility of the architect to reshape modern architecture.

“Social injustice exists, but we can’t ignore the problems and simply hope they disappear.”
Yolande Daniels is co-founder of studioSUMO in Long Island City, NY. As architect and academic, Daniels focuses on revealing connections between social systems and space. She seeks to understand how identities are produced as technologies of difference, or the ways in which race, gender, and affiliation may be reified separately through social and cultural production. This research manifests in non-traditional and interdisciplinary academic essays, as well as thematic overlays in built projects.

The iHouse dormitory in Togane-shi, Chiba-ken, Japan (completed 2016) uses a woven wall covering shading an exterior walkway connecting the rooms and looking onto a rice field. Looking onto fields through this complex texture links past to present by providing the students a framed view of the area’s history of production.

Earlier in her career, with the project Flip/flop (completed 1998), Daniels and studioSUMO co-founder Sunil Bald sought “to design without spatially compartmentalizing the complexities and ambiguities of daily life.” Furnishings and partitions are flipped up or down to change object use and space program, highlighting the overlapping spheres of public and private life.

In 2001, the project “Intimate Landscapes” examined a shotgun house in Houston, TX for its embedded layers of history. Daniels retraced the house’s history by outlining “ghostly boundaries of absent rooms and the mythic shotgun trajectory from front door to back” in white light and superimposing excerpts from oral slave narratives of the 1930s on the windows. This project, along with Daniels body of work, shows an innovative attention to the way space affects the interior lives of inhabitants.

Gail Dubrow is a social historian of the built environment. Dubrow participates in the preservation of places significant in the history of women, ethnic communities of color, and other underrepresented groups. Dubrow said “I’ve always had an inclination to study what’s not been covered - [no one] needs another Frank Lloyd Wright scholar. I identify with the phenomenon that buildings don’t always exist in the moment they’re designed, and not all their creators are architects.”1

Dubrow focuses on inquiries that highlight diversity and connect people and place. She recalls a childhood trip to the Civil War re-enactment towns, writing “the historic places we toured so closely fit our shared belief that men were the agents of historical change, that the absence of women’s history totally escaped notice.”2

From this initial spark, Dubrow published Sento at Sixth and Main (2002 with Donna Graves), a manifesto for preservation of Japanese-American sites threatened with erasure during the period of civil liberty violations against people of Japanese ancestry. Her current research, Japonisme Revisited, documents the careers of early architects of Japanese ancestry in the U.S. and analyzes the impact of the American Japanese Craze and the impact of racism on their careers.

Currently, Dubrow is a Progressive Preservationist and Professor of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Public Affairs & Planning and History at the University of Minnesota.
Maya Lin was born in Athens, Ohio in 1959. She studied architecture and sculpture at Yale University, where she graduated in 1981. During her senior year at Yale when she was 21 years old, she won first place in a design competition for the Vietnam War Memorial. It opened to the public on November 11, 1982. She then completed her Master of Architecture degree at Yale in 1986.1

Her next project was the Civil Rights Memorial for the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama, which opened to the public in 1989. Her design consists of a water feature, a curved granite wall, and a 12-foot disk inscribed with important names and dates relating to the Civil Rights Movement. Lin has also completed many landscape and sculptural pieces, returning to natural features like water and topography throughout her work.2

Additionally, she has completed many art installations, including Folding the Chesapeake at the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery in 2015, where she modeled an aerial view of the Chesapeake Bay using 54,000 marbles which spread across the floor and climbed up the walls of the gallery. The intention of the exhibit was to bring awareness to the ecosystems that exist in waterways.3

More recently, Lin has continued her environmental activism and created a multimedia project called What is Missing, which collects science-based art and information with the intention of bringing awareness to the mass extinction of species, habitat destruction, and carbon emissions, and asks viewers to re-imagine their relationship with nature.4

1) Left: Lin’s Groundswell installation at the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio in 1993 (image from the Wexner Center) 2) Upper Middle: Lin’s Folding the Chesapeake exhibit at the Renwick Gallery in the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C., completed in 2015 (image from the Smithsonian) 3) Lower Middle: The Storm King Wavefield at the Storm King Art Center in Cornwall, New York, designed in 2007 by Lin (image from the Storm King Art Center) 4) Upper Right: Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, designed by Lin in 1989 (image by Todd Gipstein in Harvard Design Magazine) 5) Lower Right: Aerial image of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C., designed by Maya Lin and built in 1982 (image from the National Parks Service)


INTERPRETER OF [HER] AGE
Marion Mahony was born in 1871 in Chicago, Illinois. In 1892, she began studying architecture at MIT and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture in 1894. After graduating, she became Frank Lloyd Wright’s first employee in Oak Park, Illinois. Mahony took the Illinois architecture licensing exam in 1898 and became one of the first women to be licensed in the United States.¹

At Wright’s office she was responsible for illustrating and rendering his designs, which she excelled at. The majority of her work has gone unattributed or has been attributed to Wright, including her drawings in his Wasmuth Portfolio, which was met with critical success when it was published in 1910 and made a considerable impact on the field of architecture.²

Mahony continued working at Wright’s office after he moved to Europe, and also began designing several of her own commissions. Mahony married Walter Burley Griffin in 1911 and they began a creative partnership. The two won first prize for a competition to design the city of Canberra, Australia, which was illustrated by Mahony Griffin. They moved to Australia in 1914 and began a practice in Sydney, where Mahony Griffin managed their firm and oversaw the designs. They continued to design many Prairie-style houses but also began working on public projects and more socially oriented work in Australia, India, and other parts of the world. After Walter’s death, Mahony Griffin returned to Chicago in 1939 and retired from architectural practice but continued to design, write, and lecture until her death in 1961.³
Zaha Hadid was born in Baghdad, Iraq, and studied mathematics at the American University of Beirut before studying at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London. Hadid was described by her professors as “a planet in her own orbit,” and the most outstanding pupil they had ever taught. “We called her the inventor of the 89 degrees. Nothing was ever at 90 degrees. She had a spectacular vision. All the buildings were exploding into tiny little pieces,” said her professor, Elia Zenghelis.¹

Hadid graduated in 1977, and started out working for her former professors, Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis, at the Office for Metropolitan Architecture in Rotterdam. In 1980 Hadid opened her own firm, in London, and quickly became known for her radical, colorful, imaginative and ambitious designs. In 1988 Hadid was one of seven architects chosen to participate in the exhibition “Deconstructivism in Architecture” at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, alongside six men, which launched her international reputation. In 2004, she became the first woman to win the Pritzker Prize.²

Referred to as the “Queen of the curve,” Hadid’s boldness and creativity is most uniquely displayed in her expressive drawings and paintings. These abstractions, as well as her intense research, her ability to transcend spatial limitations, and her use of advanced technologies make her work representative of modern deconstructivism in architecture. The lightness, fluidity, and transparency of her work, as well as her ability to move into different realms of scale, working on interiors and fashion, make her an outstanding artist.³

“When I taught, all my best students were women.”

---

Kris Mun received her BS from Arizona State, her Master of Architecture from the Cranbrook Academy of Art, and her PhD from the Architectural Association in London. She has taught at a variety of schools across the United States and around the world, as well as been exhibited internationally in Beijing, Tokyo, Shanghai, and more. She is a registered architect and has experience working at many avant-garde firms including NOX, 1100, SOM, and poly.m.ur.

Mun explores the limits of advanced technologies to push the current confines of architecture, both physically and conceptually. Her research delves into the realm of relations between the machine, the body, and the environment, as well as Empathic Architecture. Her focus on sensory and aesthetic experience creates interactive, immersive, and dynamic spaces. Her deep interrogation of form through digital fabrication, or “hand-crafted, machine-assisted” architecture, stretches the user’s orientation to the built environment.

Her practice ranges in size, working in furniture, installation, small and large pavilions, and even a 600,000 square foot hospital in Sassari, Italy. With an immense amount of experience in a breadth of different construction methods and philosophical architectural studies, Mun has inspired many students across the country to rethink their understandings of structure, challenge normative architectural practices, and dig deep to explore their own architectural designs.

“Architecture that feels"
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE
CONCLUSION

WIASO’s *Gendering Architecture, Architecting Gender* is a collaborative effort that began as a way to showcase and publicize architectural works by female professionals in the past and present.

The titles on each panel were derived from a quote or phrase often attributed to a male architect. These were co-opted and edited to include the female pronouns, “her” or “she”, to create a scenario where female identities are infiltrating a world so often associated with men. It also speaks to the countless women whose work has been misattributed to a male architect or gone uncredited entirely. As female and nonbinary students of architecture, we are often presented with standards and precedents established and created by men. We hope this exhibition highlights some of the many women who should be studied and represented more fully in academia and the profession.

We look forward to being a part of a more diverse profession with more female leaders, which we believe will create a more beautiful, functional, and equitable built environment.

ABOUT WIASO

The Women in Architecture Student Organization (WIASO) is a recently formed group of both undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Minnesota. It was created to help female students bridge the gap between academia and the profession, combat implicit gender bias, work towards a more equitable profession, and highlight diverse voices.

Our mission statement: The Women in Architecture Student Organization will identify and engage issues within the field of architecture related to diversity and the advancement of gender equity, both in academia and in the profession. We work to counteract unconscious cultural bias that permeates through academia and the profession. We support those that have faced discrimination by gender. Meetings and public events will seek to amplify voices, empower action, strengthen connections, and conviction. All are welcome to support our goal of spreading greater understanding of the contributions and achievements of women in the field.

If you are interested in contacting WIASO or getting involved, please email wiaso.umn@gmail.com.