

Role of Women in The Profession of Architecture

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Abstract: Architecture is the art or practice of designing and constructing buildings. This study has urgency of alerting people to the great contributions made by women architects to architecture, architects whose exceptional vision and design expertise have provided landmark expressions of modern culture.

Keywords: Women, Architecture, Practice, Tradition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture is the art or practice of designing and constructing buildings. It is the process and product of planning, designing and construction. (Source Wikipedia) This study has urgency of alerting people to the great contributions made by women architects to architecture, architects whose exceptional vision and design expertise have provided landmark expressions of modern culture. Underlying this celebration of their achievements is the ongoing struggle of these women to achieve professional parity with men in a field long dominated by males. Ideally architecture should embody the rich diversity that globalization has brought to all our urban environments. Architecture informed by the collective life experience of women, men, people of all ages, and people of all minority groups would be immeasurably enriched.(Source: The Architect, Women in Contemporary Architecture)

Architecture became organised as a profession in 1857. They started joining in the schools of architecture at the end of 19th century. Female students being part of education was very less in the initial days. Only in the recent years women begun to achieve wider recognition with several outstanding participants, including two Pritzker Prize winners since the turn of the millennium. However despite the fact that 40% of the architecture graduates in the Western world are now women not more than 12% are estimated to be practising as licensed or registered architects (Source: Wikipedia) The gap between training and opportunity has been noted in Britain and Australia. Data collected by Paula Whitman in 2002 indicated that women comprised 43% of architecture students in Australia. Their representation in the profession varied from state to state: 11.6% of registered architects in Queensland, 15% in New South Wales. Victoria has the highest proportion of women registered at 18.2%. In a UK survey from 2000, 13% of practising architects were women. Women comprised 38% of students and 22% of teaching staff (RIBA report, 2003).

In 2010, a survey conducted by the Architects' Council of Europe in 33 countries, found that there were 524,000 architects of whom 31% were women. However the proportions differed widely from country to country. The countries with the highest proportion of

female architects were Greece (57%), Croatia (56%), Bulgaria (50%), Slovenia (50%) and Sweden (49%) while those with the lowest were Slovakia (15%), Austria (16%), the Netherlands (19%), Germany (21%) and Belgium (24%). Over 200,000 of Europe's architects are in Italy or Germany where the proportions of women are 30% and 21% respectively. (Source: Wikipedia)

2. OBSTACLES AGAINST WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSION

Male domination in the society has been deep rooted in the society. This is prevalent in all parts of the world and in all professions. Rules and regulations, which are framed for the purpose of equality of gender in profession and professional bodies lie papers itself. We need to achieve a lot in practice and reality. There are various causes or reasons or observations for this to happen. Some of the reasons are as follows

- Socio-cultural and religious restrictions on women.
- Male is always preferred and privileged when compared to female.
- Low pay or unequal pay.
- Most of the household work or job is unpaid and unrecognized.
- The role and number of women in governing bodies is less in most of the countries.
- Unforeseen breaks or disturbances in the life style.
- Age discrimination in women. Younger women are strongly recommended for jobs, when compared to older ones.
- Marriage and kids as binding factor and dependency of kids on mother. The role of women in raising the kids is more when compared to men.

3. WHY DO WOMEN LEAVE ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSION?

Most of the women leave profession due to lengthy working hours, slow career progression and low pay. Most of the women started choosing alternate careers which are related or not related to the architectural profession of building industry. A list of reasons is given by RIBA 2003 report "why do women leave architecture?" It lists fifteen following factors.

- Low pay
- Unequal pay
- Long working hours
- Inflexible/un-family-friendly work hours
- Sidelining
- Stressful working conditions
- Protective paternalism preventing development of experience
- Limited area of work

- Glass ceiling
- Macho culture
- Sexism
- Redundancy and/or dismissal
- High litigation risk and high insurance costs
- Lack of returnee training
- More job satisfaction elsewhere

Of these fifteen reasons, seven deal with forms of gender discrimination that limit work experience and advancement opportunities. A further three reasons deal with the family/work balance, which includes the issue of long hours and lack of returnee training. Thus ten out of fifteen reasons given for women's exit from the profession are gender-based.

4. TEN TALENTED WOMEN ARCHITECTS

A 2009 AIA survey showed that women make up about a quarter of the architecture profession, but over 30 percent of that quarter are unlicensed. In the world of "starchitects," the numbers shrink significantly — only 2 women have ever received the Pritzker Prize in its 31-year history: Zaha Hadid in 2004 and Kazuyo Sejima, who shared the prize with her male partner Ryue Nishizawa in 2010.

So, to give female architects a long overdue shout-out, here's a starter list of 10 that deserve recognition.

- a. **Zaha Hadid:** This British-Iraqi architect is probably the most famous female working in her field today. She's known for using complex technologies to create fluid, curvilinear forms. Well-known projects include the MAXXI: National Museum of 21st Century Art in Rome, BMW Central Building in Leipzig, and Phaeno Science Center in Wolfsburg.
- b. **Kazuyo Sejima:** This year's Pritzker Prize winner, Kazuyo Sejima, is one half of Japanese firm Sanaa architecture. She creates subtle, minimal buildings with a strong focus on museums and educational centers.
- c. **Eileen Gray:** Irish architect and designer Eileen Gray was a key contributor to the modernist movement. Her adjustable height side table is an icon of 1920s design, and her later career produced a small but beautiful collection of homes. She was overshadowed by Le Corbusier and her male counterparts during her career, but she re-emerged in the 1970s when *Domus* magazine published a retrospective of her career and *Aram* put some of her best furniture designs back into production.
- d. **Maya Lin:** Best known as the designer of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, DC, Maya Lin is an American architect and artist whose work is minimal, but engages the user (or viewer) in quiet ways. For instance, the names of fallen soldiers are inscribed on the DC memorial in small type, so that viewers are encouraged to get up close and experience the monument in an intimate, personal way.

- e. **Jeanne Gang:** This Chicago-based architect has produced a number of critically acclaimed small projects (many of which Apartment Therapy has profiled) but it's her recent green skyscraper, Aqua, that's earned her international attention.
- f. **Michelle Kaufmann:** This California-based green prefab home designer started out working for Frank Gehry, then set out on her own. Unfortunately, she closed up shop last year, but maintains an active sitewhere you can read her blog posts and commentaries.
- g. **Rocio Romero:** This Missouri-based designer is well known for her minimalist prefab homes, which arrive flat-packed and can go up in a few months' time. Apartment Therapy toured one of her LVL homes.
- h. **Zoka Zola:** This Chicago-based architect owns her own firm and has created a number of award-winning homes, including a zero-energy house. Apartment Therapy toured her personal home studio way back in 2006.
- i. **Winka Dubbeldam:** She's the principal of New York-based Archi-Tectonics, she's been designing commercial and residential projects since 1994. Dubbeldam is well-known for her contemporary loft renovations, and her work has been exhibited at MOMA and the Venice Biennale.
- j. **Yen Ha and Michi Yanagishita:** Yen and Michi are the principals behind Front Studio, one of the only Asian-women owned architectural partnerships in New York City. Fun fact — Michi served as a judge for Apartment Therapy's Small Cool Home Contest in 2008.

Indian Context

Ranjini Kalappa, architecture firm together with her sister Brinda Somaya.

Perin Jamsetjee Mistri (1913–1989), believed to be the first woman to graduate in architecture in India

Sheila Sri Prakash (b. 1955) the first woman in India to have started her own architectural firm.

Brinda Somaya, UNESCO prize for restoring St Thomas Cathedral in Mumbai.

Revathi Kamath(b. 1955), a pioneer of mud architecture in India

5. CONCLUSION

All occupations, of course, should be gender-neutral. Much as we hate to say it, we are led to conclude that women often get a raw deal in their education in architecture school, and in their careers in architectural practice.

In a 2007 article for the *New York Times*, Nicolai Ouroussoff wrote:

A young architect with serious creative ambition is routinely expected to work endless hours for little pay. Recognition and high-profile commissions, if they materialize at all, typically arrive in an architect's 50s — well past the typical age for starting a family. Not surprisingly, many of the most famous men in architecture today — now in their 60s and

70s — depended heavily on the support of their wives as they rose through the ranks. The wives ran their offices, raised their children and loyally bolstered their egos. But you won't find their names on the front door.

The beautiful and essential differences between women and men should be respected and celebrated, and at the same time their contributions to the society shall be valued equally. Women and men, as individuals and designers, are equals and must be regarded as such in every important aspect of what it means to be human. Such human attributes as intellect, character, courage, leadership, imagination and creativity are not related to gender any way. Architects – indeed all creative artists, who are by natural innovators in society – have a responsibility to point the way for other professions.

In order to eventually realize the possibilities for women architects worldwide, it is important to make an assessment of what kind of changes can realistically be made. Large human rights and women's organizations will play a crucial role, but actions taken by smaller groups and by individuals are equally important.

6. REFERENCES

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