

The Bloomsbury Global Encyclopedia on Women in Architecture, 1960-2015

La enciclopedia mundial de las mujeres en la arquitectura de Bloomsbury, 1960-2015

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The Bloomsbury Global Encyclopedia of Women in Architecture, 1960-2015, is a ground-breaking documentary project that maps the diversity of women's practice in the built environments of the Global North and South during a key historical period from 1960 to 2015.¹ Over 360 scholars and architects from across the world are collaborating on this large-scale international survey of women's ideas, architecture, actions, and activism that includes over 1150 entries. (Fig.1)

- 1 This essay is adapted from our draft for the published essay, Karen Burns and Lori A. Brown, "Telling Transnational Histories of Women in Architecture, 1960-2015", in *EAHN European Architecture History Network, Special Issue Architectural Historiography and Fourth Wave Feminism*, Guest Editors Lucía C. Pérez-Moreno, Torsten Lange, and Claire Jamieson, 2020. Public talks about the project were also influential in our thinking for this essay. These include "Diversifying the architectural subject: women's spatial agency, 1960-2015", MoMoWo Conference Women's Creativity since the Modern Movement (1918-2018): Toward a New Perception and Reception (2018) and "Diversity & Difference: Writing Transnational Histories of Women and Architecture", AA XX 100, Architectural Association (2017).

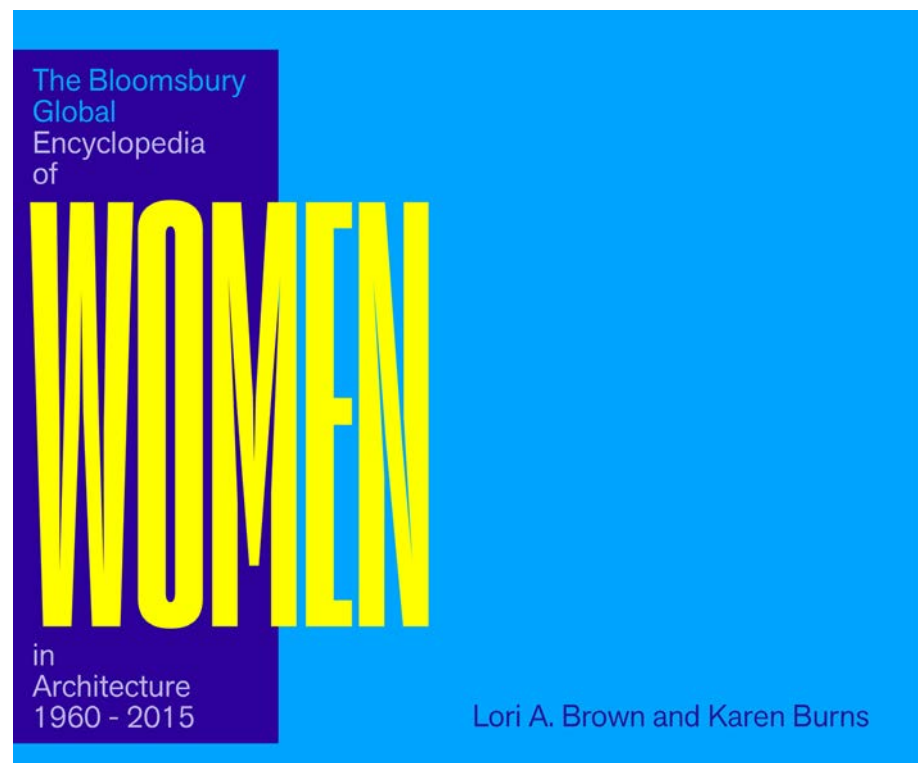


Figure 1. The Bloomsbury Global Encyclopedia of Women in Architecture, 1960-2015. Cover page.

The *Encyclopedia* challenges chronological histories of women and architecture by presenting a geographically organised history of women across nine different regions, in Africa, Asia, Caribbean/Central America/ South America, Europe, the Former Soviet Union/Russia, Middle East, Oceania, the United Kingdom, and United States/Canada. Our geographical lens places individual women within intimately local and national frames whilst uncovering mobilities, migrations and transnational lives.

- 2 Mary McLeod and Victoria Rosner, Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation, "Pioneering Women of American Architecture". <https://pioneeringwomen.bwaf.org/> (Accessed November 12, 2021)
- 3 "wikiD: Women, Wikipedia, Design, SubteXXt, ArchiteXX". <https://www.architexx.org/subtexxt/wikiD-women-wikipedia-design>. (Accessed November 12, 2021)
- 4 "Un dia, una arquitecta", <https://undiaunaarquitecta.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/arias-moisset-momowo-2018-english.pdf> (Accessed November 12, 2021)
- 5 Barbara Caine, "Feminist Biography and Feminist History", *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 247.
- 6 Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), ii.
- 7 Caine, *Feminist Biography*, 259.
- 8 Brittany Cooper, "Intersectionality", in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, edited by Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-2.



Figure 2. "España [f.] nosotras, las ciudades", Spain's contribution to Venice's 10th International Architecture Exhibition. Source: Ministerio de Transportes, Movilidad y Agenda Urbana, Madrid.

The Encyclopedia project responds to the urgency of fourth-wave feminist demands for globally connected histories, even as it reveals the divergences, differences and contests between conceptions of women, feminism, and women's rights in the decades when women's social and political roles changed dramatically.

Biographies are central to our project. The *Encyclopedia* comprises a large range of biographical entries and a much smaller range of thematic essays and Introductory Essays to each section, as well as a General Introduction from the project editors. Although the biographical approach to architectural history has become an increasingly difficult method, mired, as it can be, in author-driven narratives, biographies of subjects marginalised by history continue to retain significance. Today's feminist activism in architecture has produced a surging interest in biographies of women architects.

These portraits span a range of activity, from scholarly projects like the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation's "Pioneering Women of American Architecture" website² to activist projects such as WikD (writing women in architecture into Wikipedia)³ to the collective '*Arquitectos de Mujeres Invisibles*', 'One Day/One Architect' blog of 2015.⁴ These life histories bring to prominence the stories of neglected women in architecture, expose the discipline's mechanisms for marginalising women, and celebrate the contributions of the overlooked. Our *Encyclopaedia* project also participates in this biographical turn and extends biography to a large global scale. The biographical turn produces important new genealogies for contemporary feminism in architecture. It connects contemporary activism to the women who have practised in the past and in turn builds on decades of feminist history in architecture, scholarship which has always had a strong focus on biographical projects. Not all histories of women in architecture are feminist. Women can be written into the canon and the canon can expand to incorporate less visible practitioners without changing its terms and criteria of 'exceptionality'.

The *Encyclopaedia* rethinks the uses of women's life histories and their biographies by using feminist debates and methodologies developed outside architecture and within our discipline. Biography is a recovery project, but it can also use individual lives to provide greater insight into the larger social, political, and economic situations of women in a particular time and place.⁵ This can be done by first locating the producer in "social and historical practices".⁶

The Area Editor introductory essays to each region and the individual biographical entries stress the framing conditions of architectural production. In these introduction essays, biography can be used *as a study of subject formation* in order to provide a broader portrait of women as a social group. This approach mirrors the perspective of social feminist histories which aggregate women's life stories in order to illuminate the shared experiences of women rather than a focus on the exceptional life.⁷ Digging down into the commonalities of women's experiences highlights the everyday; how professional experiences are interwoven with other experiences of caring, financial struggle, political change, etc. Feminism is grounded in the everyday, and seeks to investigate the lived dimensions of identity.⁸

A feminist analysis examines how social subjectivities are constructed, how intersectionality is experienced, and theorizes the impact of feminism in everyday life.⁹ (Fig.2)

Like all feminist action, the *Encyclopaedia* aspires to be politically transformative. Writing feminist history is an activist project that weds aspirations for social transformation to a critical interrogation of agency and domination. Our project deliberately investigates a history of women in architecture. As Devaki Jain¹⁰ has argued in the context of a resurgent use of the term “women” at the UN, the revival of the word women as an analytic and organizing category has enabled women to “reclaim political identity, to affirm women’s collective will, the word ‘women’—as distinct from gender— has “returned as preferred currency”.¹¹

The *Encyclopedia* aims to highlight women in order to provide an identity category around which women in architecture can organise. It is not a history of all the groups marginalised by architecture’s power systems. Through the project we hope to build “alliances that might transform the discipline”, using the project to establish a network and then maintain and build upon this expanding network so that the project’s alliances persevere and develop beyond the initial publication.¹¹

By revealing interconnections between feminism and other social movements, we hope to expand architecture’s social justice framework. By bolstering transnational alliances, we aim to organize and act as activists beyond borders¹²—and through this methodological approach— allowing us to work across differences, races, countries, and class. (Fig. 3)

- 9 Chilla Bulbeck, *Living Feminism: The Impact of the Women’s Movement on Three Generations of Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
- 10 Devaki Jain, *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 5.
- 11 Rawwida Bakash and Wendy Harcourt, “Introduction: Rethinking Knowledge, Power, and Social Change”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements*, edited by Rawwida Bakash and Wendy Harcourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2.
- 12 Pascale Dufour, Dominique Masson, and Dominique Caouette (eds.), *Solidarities Beyond Borders: Transnationalizing Women’s Movements* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 2010); Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

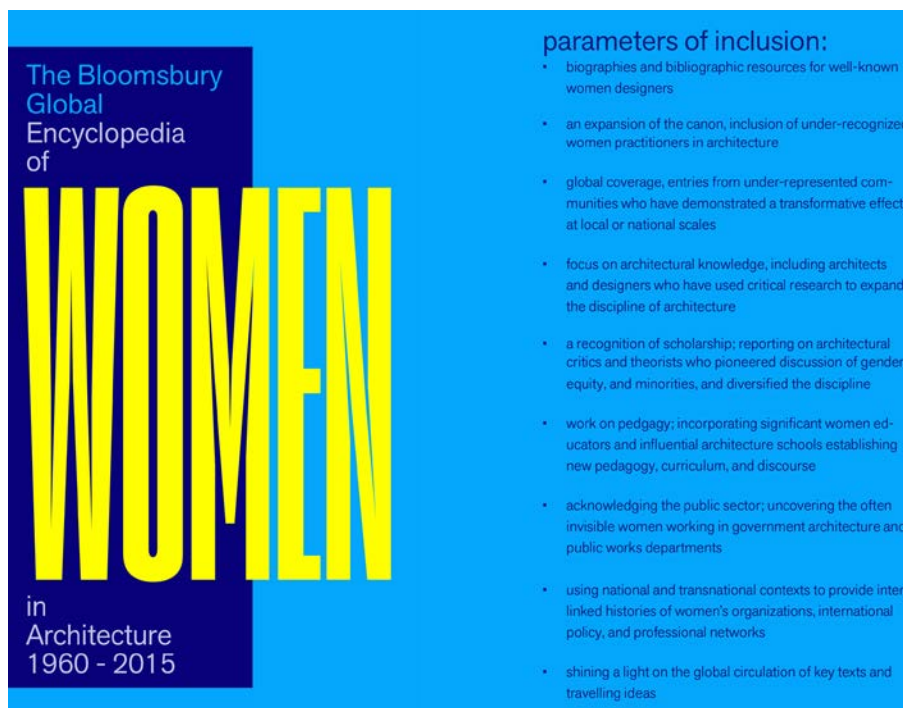


Figure 3. The Bloomsbury Global Encyclopedia of Women in Architecture, 1960-2015. Parameters of inclusion.

In its challenge to the pervasiveness of the canon—new practices will be made public and more expansive types of practices will be highlighted. We hope that the Encyclopedia will contribute to the growing concern with broadening the discipline of architecture and imagining other future trajectories for the spatial practitioner, both within, and beyond building production.