

The Periphery of Architectural History

La periferia de la historia arquitectónica

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- 1 **The International Archive of Women in Architecture.**
Source: <https://iawacenter.caus.vt.edu>
(Accessed Junio, 2022)
- 2 **Milka T. Bliznakov. Papers and Architectural Drawings, Ms1991-025, Special Collections, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA.**
- 3 **Zellner, Paola, “Expanding the Legacy”, in *The Routledge Companion to Women in Architecture*, edited by Anna Sokolina (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 329-340.**
Source: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429278891-31>
(Accessed Junio, 2022)
- 4 **The International Archive of Women in Architecture (IAWA).**
Source: <https://spec.lib.vt.edu/iawa/index.html>
(Accessed Junio, 2022)
- 5 **Definition of periphery by Merriam-Webster**
Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/periphery>
(Accessed Junio, 2022)
- 6 **“periphery, n.”. OED Online. March 2022. Oxford University Press.**
Source: <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/view/Entry/141021?redirectedFrom=periphery>
(Accessed Junio, 2022)

The International Archive of Women in Architecture (IAWA)¹ was founded almost 40 years ago following the vision of Bulgarian-American architect, PhD. Milka T. Bliznakov (1927-2010).² Since its inception, the archive’s mission has been to rectify the exclusion of women from the written history of architecture; exclusion that had resulted from centuries of habitual omission or intentional erasure in support of the patriarchal ideal of the master creator. Bliznakov understood that not until women were recognized for their contributions to the design disciplines and the built environment could a more balanced history of architecture emerge. The archive was therefore a critical foundation of this enterprise, for in the absence of publications confirming women’s involvement in architecture around the world, their contributions could only be evidenced and verified through their professional and personal papers.³

Bliznakov became a member of the faculty of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Tech in 1974, and by 1985 —joined in her effort by the University Libraries— the archive was finally established. With almost 500 collections representing 47 countries, the IAWA remains the only archive of its kind in the world today.⁴

Finding and Preserving

Finding and gathering the work of “invisible” women to be preserved is evermore challenging. Although the IAWA collections span several centuries, they are focused on women born in the 19th and 20th centuries, whose work is mostly pre-digital —handmade— and, as one-of-a-kind artifacts, risk being easily lost to history leaving no trace. As work inevitably vanishes, the IAWA continues the urgent search for women whose names are known only to their families and personal circles; women that await in the periphery to be uncovered and included.

Given enough time to reflect, every reader will remember a woman that he/she knows —in their family, neighborhood, or context— that has practiced or contributed in some form to the built environment. Therefore, every reader, every individual can act as a bridge toward hidden figures —and is encouraged to do so— aiding in the construction of a more complete history.

The Fertile Periphery

While periphery may be commonly defined as “an area lying beyond the strict limits of a thing”,⁵ or “the region, space, or area surrounding something; a fringe, margin”,⁶ with exclusionary connotations, the origin of the word —from *peri-* ‘around’ + *pherein* “to bear”— also suggests actions: to carry around, to bring forth, to deliver, to mother, to produce.

These variants remind us that there is an unmeasurable wealth of knowledge in the periphery needing to be brought forth and confirmed as such, both in substance and kind. They also demand the expansion of the canons in order to include material that may have been deemed as subjective but which nevertheless holds truth and sheds light on history, especially in the absence of what is considered to be conventional material.

Beyond Individual Exceptionalism

It is not uncommon for the IAWA to be misjudged given how few 'starchitects' are present in the collections. This judgement stems from the archaic illusion of exceptionalism privileged by the patriarchal value system, one based on the ideal hero. The archive strives instead to illuminate the "lives of the obscure" and as a consequence to reveal the exceptionalism that lies in the aggregation of actions and contributions made by the global community of individuals toward a larger cause.

There are myriad examples in the IAWA collections of women that, while in the periphery, have expanded the boundary of what was admissible and allowed, or what was expected of the profession and of women. Every item in the collections is, in this regard, consequential.

One by One

Identifying individuals in the periphery does not require but one hint. A name, a letter, perhaps a sketch, a memory, a diploma, a journal entry, or a photograph, can confirm a presence and trigger the imagination of the researcher.

Based on this notion, the ongoing initiative "1x1"⁷ was launched by the IAWA Center in 2019 to collect a single two-dimensional piece authored by every woman in design and architecture around the world, past and present, an artifact that captures a "breakthrough" in her education or practice.

7 For the ongoing call visit "1x1 Collection".
Source: <https://iawacenter.caus.vt.edu/1x1-initiative/>
(Accessed Junio, 2022)



Figure 1. Fragment of collage in multiple media with fragment of accompanying handwritten text by American architect and professor Sameena Sitabkhan, donated to the "1x1 Collection".

THESE ARE REMNANTS (WALLPAPER, BACK ROOM OF A REMODEL PROJ I guess they document the mem hint at some of the stories that there. I started to make collag materials, as a way to think al they are messy, exploratory or nature ~~touch~~ of architecture.

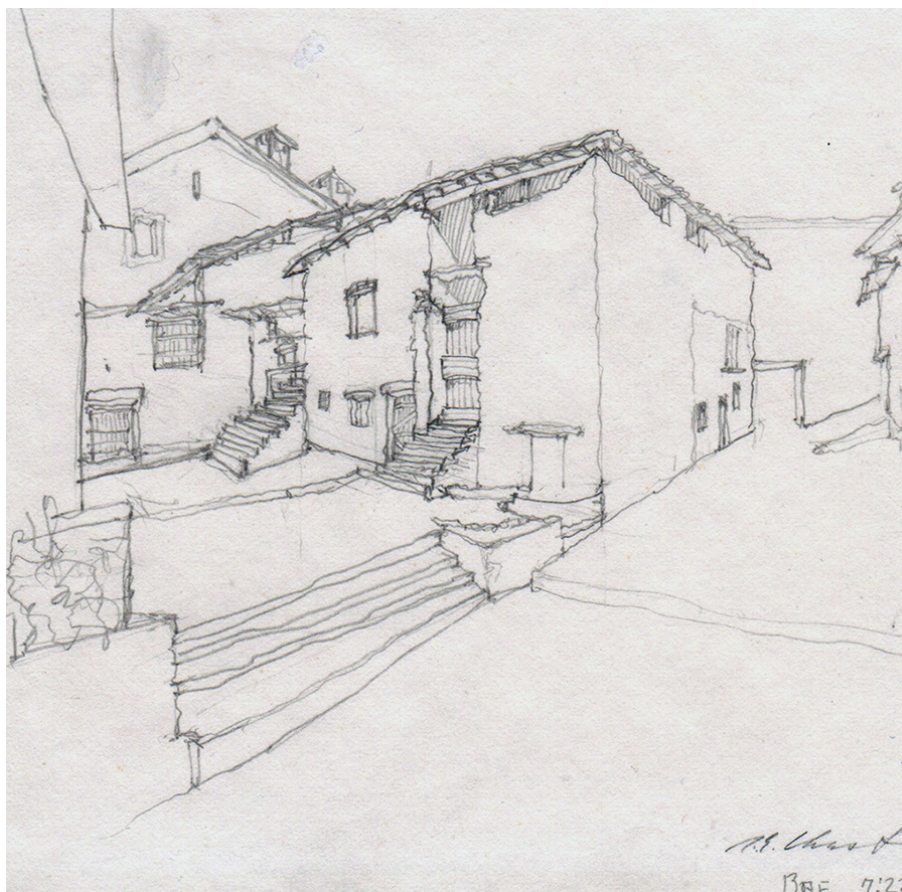
Sameena Sitabkhan
SJM

The work is accompanied by the CV of the author and a handwritten narrative explaining the relevance of the donated piece. The CV provides factual information and defines the scope of her practice, influences, impact, and associations.

The brief handwritten narrative, on the other hand, is an unquantifiable treasure that captures her voice and reunites the work with its author providing a more complete understanding of both. With these three items a personal collection can be established in the IAWA for every woman whose work is collected and, with it, ensure her place in history is recorded.

Figure 2. Graphite travel sketch and fragment of accompanying handwritten text by Rebecca Chestnutt, German architect and professor, donated to the “1x1 Collection”.

agriculture. The typology of
 or shed and its relationship
 will be found in many cultures.
 Also defines the specific form
 of the individual structure.
 sketch represents is the best
 understanding such distinctive
 my observations and their
 At the time, I thought it was
 and gave it to my father. Now
 it seems very appropriate to
 into my own possession.
 August 21, 2019, R.E. Chestnutt



The work is simultaneously entered into the “1x1 Collection”. This broad collection not only maps the “1x1” initiative but also materializes the developing network built by individual women —one by one— helping reveal the immense potential within the periphery of architectural history.