

Ingrid von Kruse, Photography  
Curator: Irina Ilieva

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Martha Thorne, May 2021

## Women and Architecture: A celebration

The path for women to become recognized as equal partners in all walks of life is long. The struggles and hopes seem to develop in waves that peak and subside over time. Early attempts were often efforts to gain **the right to vote**, this most basic human right and a direct expression of each individual's fundamental right in society. Throughout the 20th century, there have been writers who directly and indirectly gave voice to feminism. **Simone de Beauvoir** is often cited as an important beacon for women. The protests of the 1960s and 70 were particularly visible and widespread but still did not achieve all the desired and necessary goals. As we witness current 21st-century efforts, we realize that **equality, acceptance, appreciation, and recognition** form a complex issue. The **obstacles to equality** range from underlying beliefs to the structures that govern our society and everything in between. If we look at the **field of architecture**, it reflects the broader aspects of society but also has some unique characteristics. Women were allowed into this profession relatively late at the end of the 19th or sometimes not until well into the 20th century. This is not a justification for the slow progress of the profession to allow women their rightful place, but **one factor**. There are other reasons such as; the **often-difficult work environment** where unpredictable hours and late-night charrettes are in conflict with caring for family members, or male-dominated industries close to architecture such as **construction, real estate, or finance** that still obstruct the participation of women within their ranks. Discrimination is difficult to eradicate because **people, customs, and institutions are resistant to change**.

**Some of the most successful late 20th century architects are shown in this exhibition.** It is striking that they are so different. They come **from different countries**; Canada, Iraq with residence in London, Japan, and South Africa with a move to the US. And **the roles that have played in the field of architecture** are also varied. The work of practicing architects **Zaha Hadid, Kazuyo Sejima** show highly different approaches to their craft. **Phyllis Lambert**, who trained as an architect, developed her career supporting and encouraging architects through the commission for the Seagram's building that she was able to influence. She also created an exemplary center for architecture in Montreal to support, educate, and deepen understanding of the field. **Denise Scott Brown**, a key member of planning and architecture at the firm VSBA and a brilliant author and teacher, has left her mark on many places and people. Without a doubt, these four women are important in the recent history of architecture but perhaps even more than that; **they are symbols of the outstanding contributions of women to our field** - symbols of how broadening **the profession can create a more vibrant, relevant, and inclusive built environment**.

Women in architecture do not mean that buildings created by women are different from buildings created by men. Instead, they are **different due to the individual approach, input, ideas, and talent**. The women in this exhibition not only represent themselves but thousands more across the globe who contribute to our built environment in a myriad of ways day by day. They also symbolize more than 50% of those currently studying architecture today who are female students.

Now is the time to celebrate **women of the past, present, and future** for their contributions to the field. **This exhibition is a celebration of diversity**, realizing that we are stronger when we can learn and appreciate from multiple voices and multiple viewpoints. It is also a time to celebrate expanding roles in architecture to affirm that creating our built environment is **only possible through collective efforts** and different roles undertaken by different people. **Opening up the profession to embrace the many talents of women means opening it up to greater relevance for all.**

Martha Thorne  
*Dean IE School of Architecture and Design, Spain*