History does not stand in a single file. 100 works, 100 years, 100 creative women in Europe

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MoMoWo · 100 WORKS IN 100 YEARS
EUROPEAN WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN · 1918-2018
MoMoWo · 100 Works in 100 Years
European Women in Architecture and Design · 1918–2018

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http://www.momowo.eu
MoMoWo · 100 WORKS IN 100 YEARS

EUROPEAN WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN · 1918–2018
# Summary

*History Does not Stand in a Single File. 100 Works, 100 Years, 100 Creative Women in Europe*

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Historically, the contributions of women architects and designers to their profession have been minimised or overlooked. Women in Europe have reacted with inventiveness to the architectural and design profession’s restrictive and sometimes discriminatory practices engendering innovations to the fields.

Thanks to its exhibition “100 Works in 100 Years. European Women in Architecture and Design. 1918–2018” the MoMoWo project lines up women professional’s works in order to make women architects and designers’ contribution to both disciplines visible and clear, thus reshaping the complexity of contemporary history.

The MoMoWo travelling exhibition brings together a selection of some of the most significant and representative examples of European architecture and design created by 100 women from the end of the First World War up until today.

One hundred works are displayed as clear testimonies to the outstanding quality research and experimentation that has distinguished women’s creativity in Europe. The number of works is symbolic, as ‘one hundred’ could also mean ‘countless’ as in the Latin word centum. While, the number of authors—each work has a different author—derives from MoMoWo’s choice to represent many different creators, consequently popularising lesser known figures, too.

The works belong to the most varied branches of architecture and design including interior design, furniture and furnishing accessorises, homeware, lighting, refurbishment, museum and exhibit design, garden design, landscape architecture and urban planning.

The decision to place different kinds of works side by side was taken as a reminder that architecture and design are project practices that are increasingly intolerant about being confined to exclusive disciplines and which have consequently craved interaction. This interaction has already occurred before in ‘seminal histories’ such as those by Nikolaus Pevsner (Pioneers of the Modern Movement, 1936) and Sigfried Giedion (Mechanization takes command, 1948). Moreover, as revealed by the history of professions and clearly exemplified in some articles of this book, architecture and design have had lasting contact in both the educational and professional practices.

Selecting the works was aimed at providing a concise but composite picture of the main paths women professionals took in expressing their creativity in fields and practices that were—at least initially—dominated by men.

Most of the selected works are the results of fruitful collaboration between the professional tenacity of creative women and intuition of mentors and professors, patrons and commissioners, or manufacturers and companies that have been forward-thinking in investing in research and innovation, without gender prejudice. Thus, sometimes a work also epitomises an achievement in the history of professions and consequently in the author’s life. This is why each entry is in two parts, the first one devoted to the description of the work, the second one to the author’s biography.

The 100 works, exhibited and published in this catalogue, are not related to each other by a straightforward, simple or rational discourse without contradiction or contrast. The MoMoWo discourse deliberately singles out these fragments of experiences by focusing on aesthetics and design processes in relation to the history of both disciplines, architecture and design, and history of women’s emancipation in the design professions, education and lifestyle.
The works are ordered in a chronological sequence. As stated once by one of the great masters of the Modern Movement, Walter Gropius, ‘order’ means more than organisation. Organisation implies the identification of the function, while, ‘order’ implies the assignment of meaning.

The historical sequence is one of the most effective means of communication and knowledge dissemination. Its application in the fields of art has its theoretical and critical basis in the revolutionary essay by Georg Kubler, *The shape of time: Remarks on the history of things* (1962).

The choice of a historical sequence was the result of the desire to encourage visitors and readers to feel free to interpret the images and data on display. In fact, in this collection of works, each work has a value not only for itself, but also to the extent that it can be related to a wider context. Each work is able to reveal traces of the historical period, culture and society that designed, produced and used it. It is directly or indirectly able to underline a system of historical, cultural and social relationships, but also to underline building and production practices and technologies which this exhibition can only allude to.

Like all other collections, the meaning of MoMoWo's collection cannot be completely defined in the intrinsic values of its collected works, nor in the value assigned it by those who curated the collection. However, the meaning of MoMoWo’s collection also derives from its ability to provoke a conscious process of attributing meaning to its public.

To support this dialectical process and to avoid the risk of treating “history as a series of sequential Fixa or even closed ‘totalities’” –as pointed out by Ernst Bloch— a series of essays provides the reader with arguments that cross and break the linear sequence, sometimes by-passing the geographical confines of Europe and offering examples and comparisons world-wide. A timeline about women’s achievements in winning greater civil rights, higher education, public recognition of their work or career, goes alongside the interpretation of the 100 selected works.

By seeking to identify women who worked in Europe as well as European women who worked outside Europe over the last 100 years, the main aim of this catalogue is to increase the awareness of historians and the general public about their enormous contribution to architecture and design, and indirectly providing accessibility to their works.

This catalogue reflects the concept of the exhibition by designating a part of the world created by women far away from the chaos of ‘things’, giving life to a place for encounter, exchange and debate. It aims to be a repertory of tangible and intangible cultural ‘signs’ capable of fostering comparisons and connections between memory and future, encouraging new mappings of women’s creativity in Europe.

Hopefully, this book will suggest new historical visions able to include the greatest works by women architects and designers in mainstream history of architecture and design, thus enriching the discipline.

The selection criteria singled out emblematic and representative works, chosen for their originality in the design process, innovation in the use of materials or building technologies and the ability to identify and represent various interpretations of modernity over time.

Taking into account a balanced European geographic distribution wherever possible, the selection of works was also aimed at questioning the cliché that women have dealt more with projects related to domestic spaces or ‘feminine lifestyle’. For this purpose, the selection picked out a wide variety of building and object types. MoMoWo’s research team used bibliographic and archival sources in order to find the numerous and various data necessary for the selection.

Selecting works included researching the origin of design, with the crucial transition from applied arts to product design—labelled as protodesign— involving studies about women pioneers between the wars. This research and selection also embraced the second half of the twentieth century that saw the emergence of women’s works for mass production, including building industrialisation and prefabrication. The study then concluded with the complex “liquid modernity” of the current century, as brilliantly defined by Zygmunt Bauman (*Modernità liquida*, 2002).

Going over the works, one understands better the changes in building and object typologies over the course of time. It is also possible to compare the iconic production of pioneers to contemporary professionals by recognising the relationship that has
always linked the various works to the social and cultural context of the time in which they were designed, built or produced.

The selected works are the product of ideas and technologies, dreams and needs, aesthetics and design processes. In other words, they are some of the ‘things’ that in 100 years have tangibly contributed to change our relationship with space and time, body and dwelling, material and light. They are also tangible testimonies of women's recent achievements in architecture and design that in their ensemble may be able to change the perception of women's involvement in the design professions.

MoMoWo's historical sequence maps out a fascinating and evocative history of tangible European cultural heritage created by women and always considering History as a ‘living matter’.

Being a ‘sampling’ MoMoWo's collection is a slice of history, telling us something that transcends specific values, becoming not only a bridge between creator and user, but also between the authors and future creators.

Notes:
2 In his legendary book, Kuber replaced the notion of style as the basis for histories of art with the concept of historical sequence and continuous change across time.
5 The term protodesign was coined to identify the design of transition between craft and industry on the occasion of the great exhibition held in Milan in 1982 (Palazzo Reale, Arengario and Galleria del Sagrato) entitled Anni Trenta. Arte e Cultura in Italia.
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