

## From Star System to Critical Care in Architecture

This prize: Another VIEWture AWARD, great name, for the first time a female architect award in Austria - wow!!! Recognition, congratulations to those who are responsible!!!

The Benchmark is the female architect award in France "LE PRIX FRANÇAIS DES FEMMES ARCHITECTES", which will be awarded for the 10th time in 2022.

Result of: "Yes We Plan!" This EU European Union project subtitled "Promoting Women in Architecture and Civil Engineering" (Nov. 2019 to April 2022) which involved 5 countries: Austria, France, Germany, Slovenia and Spain.

And now: this prize, offered by the Austrian Federal Chamber of Civil Engineers for the first time this year - a success? For architecture? For women? The professional association?

What I want to do with this lecture is to think about the price, to think about the necessity of prices, of separate prices for women architects - and women engineers ...? Sorry, there is less room for the latter in this lecture, firstly because I am less at home in this profession, and secondly because what is counted as an engineering profession varies greatly from country to country ... But architecture, quasi the primal discipline of all shaping, designing and constructing physical-spatial disciplines, is ingenious, and in this respect, it is permissible for me to exemplify this discipline, which produces the structural shells for our coexistence, and to illustrate the title of the lecture "From Star System to Critical Care" in a vivid way.

### 1 Prizes in architecture - since when, for what and to whom?

Worldwide, there are a multitude of architectural prizes that are regularly awarded by cultural institutions, professional associations or companies to individual personalities, for specific buildings or an entire life's work. The most prestigious of all these prizes – along with the Aga Khan Award – is the Pritzker Prize, THE international award of the Western world for an architect or an architectural practice. 2022 awarded to a man of black skin colour for the first time. The prize is endowed with 100,000 US dollars and was founded in 1979 by the US entrepreneur and patron Jay A. Pritzker and his wife Cindy. It has been awarded annually since then, and is regarded in professional circles "*as a special appreciation of the award winner's achievement and life's work, as well as his significant contribution to the world of architecture*", according to German professional journal *Bauwelt* on its website<sup>1</sup>. It says "of the prize winner and HIS contribution" - the female form does not appear. A female prize winner and HER significant contribution to the architectural world is obviously not in the author's consciousness, at least not at this significant point in the article.

The first woman among the Pritzker Prize winners was, 25 years after the prize was founded in 2004 and 25 years after it was awarded to such renowned architects as: Philip Johnson and Richard Meier (USA), Kenzo Tange and Tadao Ando (JPN), Aldo Rossi and Renzo Piano (ITA) – or even Hans Hollein (AT) and Gottfried Böhm (DE) – Zaha Hadid, an Iraqi-British architect who has made it. She had arrived – nota bene: after a long dry spell in which she had participated in numerous competitions and designed many projects in vain – in the star system of architecture.

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<sup>1</sup> The Pritzker Prize and the Laureates. In: [www.bauwelt.de/rubriken/dossier/Der-Pritzker-Preis-und-die-Preistraeger-3820072.html](http://www.bauwelt.de/rubriken/dossier/Der-Pritzker-Preis-und-die-Preistraeger-3820072.html) (accessed: 05.10.2022).

In 1991 – 13 years earlier – Robert Venturi had been awarded this prize. However, without his female partner, Denise Scott Brown, with whom he had demonstrably worked on his life's work. In 2016, 25 years later, a much-noticed petition by two Harvard students demanded retroactive recognition of Denise Scott Brown for their joint life's work. However, this was rejected. Completely incomprehensible. Or not? Was her work, not spectacular enough? Too scientific or theoretical? Or was it enough that she worked alongside her husband and office partner and that her own contribution was hardly recognizable? And if that were so - why then is the man, alone, without her, awarded?

Denise Scott Brown studied Las Vegas when no other architects went there, she protested sexism and focused her gaze as an urban planner on wayfinding and social activity<sup>2</sup>. In 1989, she had written an essay on "*Sexism and the Star System in Architecture*" which was first published in 2002 and again in 2009 by the AA Architectural Association<sup>3</sup>. In this essay she describes the trauma of her professional development, which – among other things with teaching activities at Berkeley, where she had developed the first architecture education program for the new UCLA – had begun extremely successfully, but after her marriage to her colleague Robert Venturi was increasingly suppressed, concealed and ignored by the professional world. She was nothing more than the wife at his side, regularly mistaken for his secretary on the office phone, even though her work was independent alongside his and they also wrote many works as a team. Finally, the pinnacle was the awarding of the Pritzker Prize only to him, although they both deserved it together. Just like Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal 30 years later.

The story of Zaha Hadid is different, but infinitely more arduous. She first attracted international attention in 1982/83 with her design for The Peak Leisure Club, a leisure and recreation park on a hillside in Hong Kong. She won the first place out of 600 competitors for her concept of terraced horizontals crossing each other diagonally and founded her first office with the prize money. Since this design, she has been regarded as a theoretical pioneer of deconstructivism. Nevertheless, she was not committed to this, but always in search of a modernist formal language that had yet to be found. Always special, always particular, always spectacular. And therefore, almost impossible to build? For a long time, her projects were apparently far too daring, at least for the clients. But Zaha Hadid was alone, not at the side of a famous architect with whom she had to share fame or to whom she had to cede her fame. She stood for herself.

And she succeeded. In 1993 she made a breakthrough and was able to realise a design for the first time (not really the first), albeit for a very small building task: the Vitra fire station in Weil am Rhein in Germany, South Baden, in the Basel area. She owed this to the innovative spirit of Rolf Fehlbaum, the managing owner of Vitra<sup>4</sup>, who had already engaged a number of distinguished architects (such as Tadao Ando or Frank Gehry) for the construction of other buildings on the company premises. Although Zaha Hadid, as Wikipedia puts it, "*had already begun building a comparatively inconspicuous house with a residential courtyard for the IBA in Berlin-Kreuzberg in 1987, it was not completed until 1993*". However, the fact that this was THE only contribution at the time, especially by (three !) female

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<sup>2</sup> Sabine von Fischer: Denise Scott Brown is a multiple enigma. In: NZZ 01.10.2021.

<https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/denise-scott-brown-ist-ein-vielfaches-raetsel-ld.1468182?reduced=true>

<sup>3</sup> Denise Scott Brown: *Sexism and The Star System in Architecture*. Essay republished with permission from the Architectural Association from Denise Scott Brown's *AA Words Four: Having Words* (London: Architectural Association Publications, 2009), 79–89. Originally published as "Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture," in *Architecture: A Place for Women*, ed. Ellen Perry Berkeley and Matilda McQuaid (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 237–46.

<sup>4</sup> Vitra AG is a Swiss company specialising in the manufacture and sale of home and office furniture with headquarters in Birsfelden near Basel.

architects that was realised by women on the occasion of the IBA International Building Exhibition 1984/87 in Berlin – apart from Zaha Hadid the architects Myra Warhaftig and Christine Jachmann were also involved, and on an equal footing – and that this only contribution by female architects was allowed to be realised on a site in an absolutely peripheral location, on the Berlin Wall, which at the time still divided the city into an eastern and a western half, and that this contribution had to be fought for politically with a go-in from feminist-minded architects to the then Senator for Building. Wikipedia probably doesn't know that either. It is well known that only 15% of Wikipedia's contributors are women ... Tant pis!

However, in a 2017 exhibition at MAXXI, the National Museum of the Arts of the XXI Century in Rome, her work was explicitly acknowledged posthumously – as is well known, she sadly died far too early in 2016. The MAXXI itself, an early work designed by Zaha Hadid with her own innovative and spectacular forms for the Flaminio district in Rome, integrates with its volume of approximately 27,000 sqm into the moving cityscape and forms a new, openly articulated and permeable urban space. As a prototype for the MAXXI (opened in 2010), this aforementioned, small structure of the fire station in Weil am Rhein is considered and was created as one of their "*new concepts of field and flux (which) were developed by means of new parametric control techniques*", for example, also for the Phaeno Science Centre, which had opened a few years earlier in Wolfsburg (D).

In the programme of the 2017 Rome exhibition, Zaha Hadid was praised as "*one of the most influential and visionary architects of our times, (who) has redefined the architecture of the twenty-first century and captured the imagination of the whole world*". The quality of their design objects is also highlighted because they "*lack a single point of observation, a fixed position or a main facade: they live of and with the movement of the person using them.*" And that is perhaps also very specific to the female gaze?! For her, spaces were always complex and dynamic, and her method of parametric design subsequently became interesting for other offices as well.

Apparently, that was just too much!!! Even the fact that she was a woman could hardly hide the fact that she had to be awarded the highest international architectural distinction.

After Zaha Hadid became the first woman ever to win the Pritzker Prize, it took another six years before another female architect was honored: the Japanese Kazuyo Sejima, in 2010, but together with her office partner. In 2001, Herzog & de Meuron in Basel was the first office – and not an individual architect – to receive an award. With the increasing consideration of female architects, this habit now seems to be gaining ground. But architects', not only female architects', work is rarely a solo piece!

In the last five years, the proportion of women among the Pritzker Prize winners has increased rapidly. Since then, a total of 10 people, including four other female architects, have been awarded the prize: first, in 2017, the Spanish architect Carme Pigem Barcelo, together with her two male partners from the office RCR Arquitectes in the Catalan artist city of Olot. In 2020, the office Grafton Architects of the two Irish architects Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara was the first and so far only all-women office. And last year, in 2021, the French architect Anne Lacaton – together with her office partner – Jean-Philippe Vassal jointly received the coveted prize. Women are on the rise!!! But since Zaha Hadid, no one has been awarded this prize alone again – that has to change!!!

## **2 Prizes for women architects?**

There are numerous other architecture and architectural prizes that are announced internationally and nationally, locally and regionally.

In the list of renowned architecture prizes in Wikipedia, however, one searches in vain for the Lilly Reich Grant for equality in architecture, which has been awarded by the fundacio mies van der rohe barcelona since 2018. Nor does LE PRIX FRANÇAIS DES FEMMES ARCHITECTES (since 2013) appear, nor do any of the British Women in Architecture Awards (W Awards), four individual prizes that have been awarded since 2012 and are intended to "*raise the profile of women (and non-binary people) in architecture worldwide*", while at the same time "*inspiring as a united voice this global call for respect, diversity and equality*"<sup>5</sup>.

Awards that have been launched for several years to compensate for the lack of recognition of women in the architectural profession still seem to be under-appreciated. That is why it is so important to take the explicit awarding of women architects and their works in hand, as the Another VIEWture AWARD and before it LE PRIX FRANÇAIS DES FEMMES ARCHITECTES and the Women in Architecture Awards already practice. The result is that women in the architecture profession are more strongly perceived, that their names are known and mentioned at all. At least this is the experience of Catherine Guyot, who founded the award in France.

But what is the advantage if we now also explicitly put women in the architecture profession on the podium and give them the respect they deserve? A continuation of the Star System in the extended circle of competitors? Or a contribution to a broadening of perspectives in architecture? How does the EU project "Yes We Plan!" and the teaching and student research project "On Stage!"<sup>6</sup> touring exhibition in recent years work?

Prizes and awards are only an expression of what the experts and the interested public value and consider worthwhile. If women are not seen, if their work is not raised, preserved and handed down, then their history also remains unwritten, their work is possibly lost forever, cannot be included in the body of knowledge from which, for example, the teaching of architecture also draws. This means that not only is an important part of knowledge about built history missing, for the purpose of handing it down, but also the self-respect of its creators, contents, concepts and programmes are lost.

For example, it is thanks to the work of the US architectural historian Dolores Hayden (1981) that we have any knowledge at all of the utopian feminists of the late 19th century:

The so-called "utopian feminists" in America dared to define and conceive the Great Revolution of the domestic, and even to try it out in part. This was also done with a view to the social utopian movement that emerged in Europe towards the end of the 18th century, which countered the sweeping social changes in the early phase of industrialisation with new collective models of life and gave them an architectural form.

In addition to demanding wages for the domestic work done by women, utopian feminists advocated for a complete structural-spatial transformation of homes, neighbourhoods and cities. While others fought for political and social change, they focused on the material, economic and spatial foundations of life.

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<sup>5</sup> The so-called "W-Awards" (Women in Architecture Awards) comprise 4 prizes: the Jane Drew Prize for Architecture, the Ada Louise Huxtable Prize for Contribution to Architecture, the Moira Gemmill Prize for Emerging Architecture and the MJ Long Prize for Excellence in Practice.

<sup>6</sup> On Stage! was a teaching and research project with students from Leibniz Universität Hannover (DE), the Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura ETSA at the UPV in Valencia (ES) and the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna (AT). See the publication: Zibell, Barbara; Damyanovic, Doris; Alvarez, Eva (ed.) (2016): On Stage! Women in Landscape\_Architecture and Planning. Forum für Genderkompetenz in Architektur Landschaft Planung (gender\_archland) weiter\_denken 5. Hannover / Berlin: jovis.

In the 21st century, German scholars such as the architectural theorist Kerstin Dörhöfer or the art historian Ute Maasberg have also begun to reappraise the history and work of individual women architects. In order to preserve them for posterity and make them accessible. There is, for example, a portrait of Emilie Winkelmann, the first woman to open an architectural office in Germany. Although she did not have a degree in architecture because women were not yet allowed to study architecture in her time, she was able to build up her own existence with her commissions. The Swiss architect Lux Guyer, for example, who was born into a middle-class family and to whom the renowned Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture gta at Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich ETH-Z dedicated a publication years ago (2009), was quite different.

With the exhibition "Frau Architekt" (Mrs Architect), architecture professor Mary Pepchinski caused quite a stir among the professional public in 2017<sup>7</sup>. Yet the exhibition at the Frankfurt German Museum of Architecture DAM took up only a modest space next to the much larger and more centrally located exhibition on Brutalism, which was shown in parallel at the time<sup>8</sup>.

Some knowledge has already been gained, but the history(s) of women architects is (and are) still not a self-evident and integral part of architectural teaching. Be it in the context of building and urban planning history or in the context of design seminars. Here, women are still the other, the special, who must distinguish themselves through extraordinary creative power (e.g. Zaha Hadid) in order to be visible and recorded in the annals of architectural history.

Exemplary of the fact that women are also quite actively overlooked in the architectural profession is the experience of the German sculptor and architect Marlene Moeschke-Poelzig, who was married to the famous architect Hans Poelzig.

The design for the family's residential and studio house in Berlin's Westend, which was realised in 1930, came from her. But as late as 1984, the renowned German architecture magazine BAUWELT published a photo taken at the topping-out ceremony of the house showing the architect at the table together with her husband and three other colleagues, only as a detail: the four men were shown, but only the arm of the woman is visible, the person is cut off!!! It was not assumed that she could have been the architect in charge. The woman couldn't be that important – maybe the picture just didn't fit into the layout of the magazine's column format ...

Today, the villa no longer stands; it has since been demolished – despite all resistance and initiatives – to "*make room for new, lucrative investment*", according to architecture critic and historian Falk Jaeger<sup>9</sup>. This not only erased "*an architectural contemporary witness of Berlin's building history*", as the author goes on to write, but also "*an object of identification for the growing movement of women architects who no longer want to accept male dominance in the professional field*". The plan would have been to set up a museum and documentation centre for women architects as well as a residency for female scholarship holders in the villa in the spirit of Marlene Moeschke-Poelzig. To show "*how such a house, which served as a place of work and a private home, as a shared office, but also as a home for the family of five, should be organised from a woman's perspective: The area for the three children was thus on an equal footing with the studio, and instead of the 8-square-metre children's sleeping cells that were common at the time, the generous space for playing was more important than*

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<sup>7</sup> FRAU ARCHITEKT – For more than 100 years: Women in the architectural profession. Exhibition at the DAM from 30 September 2017 to 8 March 2018.

<sup>8</sup> SOS BRUTALISMUS – Rettet die Betonmonster! Vom 9. November 2017 bis 2. April 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Falk Jaeger: Focus: Women Architects - Marlene Moeschke-Poelzig. In: Stylepark Magazin from 10.03.2022. <https://www.stylepark.com/de/news/blickpunkt-architektinnen-marlene-poelzig> - Accessed: 06.10.2022.

*a prestigious office. It is not known whether other buildings can be traced back to her designs.*" (all citation Falk Jaeger)

Forgotten concepts, marginalized personalities, lost works – can we afford this and should we do this to ourselves? In a knowledge society, a democratically constituted state, in the age of equality and gender justice? Hard to believe ...

This is not least also in view of the increasing number of women graduating from architecture faculties. For example, at Leibniz Universität Hannover, where I myself taught until 2019 and where the proportion of women among students had already reached more than 60% in 2013/14. There, the then acting dean and design colleague at the faculty once approached me in my function as Equal Opportunities Officer: *"What's actually going on with our profession! Is it a bad omen that young men are increasingly turning their backs on studying architecture? A sign of the crisis in architecture?"*

Yes, maybe that too, but what is interesting is that this crisis was thought of in the same gendered way by the colleague:

- more men studying or being in a profession apparently indicates that it is of great public interest, important for politics, economy and society;
- more women studying or being in a profession indicates that it is less interesting for public perception, apparently not as important.

But even if women today make up the majority among students at architecture faculties - the knowledge of their predecessors, the knowledge of their part in the history of the discipline, as builders, as designers, even if not with academic degrees until the 20th century, is still inadequately secured.

Women need role models, but also the architectural guild, in order to be able to jump over the shadow of the unimaginable again and again. Women architects, the visibility of women with their different approaches and perspectives on the reality of life, contribute to this. They have a different view of the obvious, a different approach to the conditions of life, to the survival of people and the planet, to questions of sustainability. It is no coincidence that it is young women who are the spokespersons for the climate movement ...

When I first heard about the exhibition "Critical Care", which was created under the female director of the Vienna Architecture Centre, Angelika Fitz, I was not surprised: women raise different issues, they have different approaches to the important things in life, they have their own value standards and they cast their own perspectives on the world, the environment, the built spaces. Because they usually also think about the social spaces that structure what is and what may become.

Apparently, women have to take it into their own hands and draw attention to themselves. By doing their part:

- to preserve existing knowledge – in archives and museums, also living museums such as houses of women architects as witnesses of history,
- to process knowledge – to expand the history of the profession, as reading material and to generate role models, especially for the growing number of (female) students at architecture faculties, and
- actively impart knowledge – and as university lecturers ensure that knowledge becomes and remains an integral part of curricula.

Documentaries, such as this one made a few years ago about the Indian female architect Didi Contractor<sup>10</sup>, can also generate greater publicity. Shortly before the Indian male architect, Balkrishna Doshi, had received the Pritzker Prize for Architecture in 2018 with his "Architecture for the People".

In this impressive film document of Didi Contractor, we learn from the Indian architect that she has been working for many decades on and with a new model of architecture in which landscape and house are connected in a natural way. The houses she designs and their inhabitants take centre stage, the natural materials such as clay, bamboo, slate and river stone with which she builds exclusively, materials that are used but can also become earth again, completely natural. And, almost as a matter of course, the open laboratory that she cultivates in the landscape of northern India with students from all over the world, who make a pilgrimage to her for weeks or months to learn from her, and during which she teaches how to treat Mother Earth with care in a completely unagitated, natural way.

So, let's also look at the content, the values and concepts of the award winners ... That would be a valuable contribution of an award for women architects: awards for architects who work for good everyday architecture – for housing, care, shopping, buildings for health, hospitals, homes for the dying and palliative centres – space for community and for living well as for dying well ...

### **3 Response and outlook**

Prizes for women architects are important and necessary - for the visibility of women in a profession that is still male-dominated and shaped by the male habitus, but also as an indication of the tip of the iceberg of a great treasure in the world of architecture that has yet to be unearthed ... Prizes inspire to raise questions and promote research, to give courage for other ideas and projects, provided that the other is also honoured with the prizes, that which makes the world richer and more sustainable.

There is also a need for prizes for women engineers – this is of course an even greater challenge, because here it is likely to be even more difficult to prove the authorship of the sparking idea. But it would be worthwhile – to look for teams in which women play the key role. And to look for engineering projects in which construction and aesthetics go hand in hand, advantageously resulting from the cooperation of engineers and architects.

As with the sculptural viewing platform "Il Spir" (Rhaeto-Romanic for: the swift) above the mighty Rhine Gorge in Flims, in the Grisons Oberland, which emerged from an invited competition in which the female architect Corinna Menn also took part, together with her uncle, the civil engineer Christian Menn. And where a high aesthetic value and, last but not least, utility value were integral parts of the conception.

After all, the touring exhibition "Queens of structure" with projects and positions of female civil engineers has been touring the country for some time. A promising start. Starting point: the Women in Architecture Festival WiA 2021 in Berlin. One of the initiators: Nicole Zahner, also a member of the jury of the another VIEWture Award. The exhibition was then shown in Dresden, and is now on show in Basel. Vernissage today: 20.10.2022. So, things are happening, also among women engineers.

Prizes can also be awarded posthumously ... The German architect and university lecturer Frei Otto, for example, was awarded the Pritzker Prize in 2015 POSTUM – for his work as a pioneer of ecological building and for his light, flexible buildings for an open society.

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<sup>10</sup> Didi Contractor is a film by Steffi Giaraconi (2016). More information about the film: [didi-contractor-documentary.com/](http://didi-contractor-documentary.com/)

To be honest, I would wish the same for the outstanding Austrian architect Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, for her work as a pioneer in terms of focusing on care work in architecture, for her many life-oriented buildings and designs and, last but not least, for her courageous life and actions as a resistance fighter.

Unfortunately, she became famous above all for the Frankfurt kitchen, which was later heavily criticised by feminists in particular, but the architect was committed to it!!! According to her idea, the kitchen was intended to relieve the burden on women. According to German historian Marcel Bois, who has been researching Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky for years, this is what made the Frankfurt model so progressive in the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> She herself said in an interview in 1999 that she had planned the kitchen for working women.<sup>12</sup>

Grete Schütte-Lihotzky was not a kitchen, and she had nothing to do with kitchens and cooking, as she herself once said, she was a resistance fighter and her work as an architect was inspired by visions for a different society worth living in and by the buildings that are needed for this.

I hope that this great, internationally renowned and recognised architect will one day be awarded the Pritzker Prize or another major international award ... She really deserves it – at least as much as the only Austrian Pritzker Prize winner to date!!! But that's another story.

I sincerely wish this award, for which we are gathered here today, the Another VIEWture Award – and following in the footsteps of this outstanding Viennese personality – every success and a good hand to all subsequent juries for courageous and meaningful decisions!!!

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<sup>11</sup> According to Marcel Bois, who has been researching Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky for years. Quoted from: Inga Kemper, Spiegel story "I am not a kitchen" on Grete Schütte-Lihotzky from 23.01.2022

<sup>12</sup> See also Spiegel online: I am not a kitchen. By Inga Kemper on 23 January 2022.

<https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/architektin-margarete-schuette-lihotzky-ich-bin-keine-kueche-a-cfcc84a5-5846-491c-9b2f-f345cfd1732d>