

**WOMEN'S DISPLAY: FEMALE ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS PLANNING EXHIBITIONS**  
**WORKSHOP, WEDNESDAY JUNE 15TH 2022, 15.30–18.00**



The workshop intends to examine the conceptual work, as well as the design and plans of women in the production of exhibitions on various scales. The examined examples will range from the master plans of the exhibition area to the architecture of the exhibition buildings and the scenography of the display.

The topicality of women's exhibition design offers many different perspectives to approach the issue, combining architecture with scenographic display of internal and external space, which requests a comprehensive and creative disciplinary analysis mode. The focus on exhibitions dedicated to women's work, as well as on women-made exhibitions on housing, interior design, crafts and industrial products, handicrafts etc. – matters traditionally considered to be "feminine" – will give the opportunity to explore new aspects of the employment of materials, such as fabric or paper, or to reflect about the construction of a gendered iconography between ideology and commerce, or to verify the connection between the public display of an exhibition and the private one of a domestic interior. Another topic examines how exhibition designs were intended to support performative acts (from planned events to spontaneous informal activities) as a way of inscribing meaning or producing a particular space. Displaying feminine and sometimes feminist concerns thus made the exhibition a real laboratory for diverse theoretical approaches to architecture inside the "protected" and simultaneously highly visible environment of the exhibition. The workshop will address established historiographical and methodological issues as the concept of authorship, biographical narratives, and so on.

**The workshop is curated and moderated by:**

**Katia Frey, Senior Researcher at the Swiss National Science Foundation project SAFFA 1958, ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences Winterthur ([katia.frey@bluewin.ch](mailto:katia.frey@bluewin.ch))**

**Eliana Perotti, Principal Investigator of the Swiss National Science Foundation project SAFFA 1958, ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences Winterthur ([e.perotti@bluewin.ch](mailto:e.perotti@bluewin.ch))**

## PROGRAM

**15:30**

Eliana Perotti  
*Greeting and introduction*

**15:40**

Kathleen James-Chakraborty, University College Dublin  
*Chloethiel Woodard Smith: Exhibiting Architecture at Home and Abroad*

**15:55**

María Novas Ferradás, Universidad de Sevilla and Delft University of Technology  
*Pioneers in Model Home Exhibitions. The Women Advisory Committee in Rotterdam in the 1950s*

**16:10**

Inge Beckel, Zurich University of Applied Sciences  
*Martha Huber-Villiger's Furnishings: Shifting from 'Set' to 'Outfit'*

**16:25**

Eliana Perotti, Zurich University of Applied Sciences  
*Close to the Body - From Underwear to Space. On the Exhibition Design by Lilly Reich*

**16:40**

Laura Martínez de Guereñu, IE University  
*The Exhibition Project as Testing Ground: Barcelona 1929*

**16:55**

Ana Tostoes, Técnico Lisboa  
*Display as a Manifesto*

**17:10**

Svava Riesto, University of Copenhagen  
*Gendered Norms and Alternatives. The Exhibition "Alternative Architecture", Copenhagen 1977*

**17:25**

Katia Frey, Zurich University of Applied Sciences  
*The Exhibition «Saffa 1928, 1958 ... 1988? Und heute». Architectural Reflections on Women's Identity and Work*

**17:40**

*Discussion*

**18:00**

*End*

## ABSTRACTS

### **Chloethiel Woodard Smith: Exhibiting Architecture at Home and Abroad**

Kathleen James-Chakraborty, University College Dublin

Chloethiel Woodard Smith (1910-1992) was the most prominent female architect in the United States for much of the third quarter of the last century. Until she reached her fifties Smith struggled to get opportunities to build and – which mattered to her just as much – to work as an urban planner. Key to her self-promotion was her involvement in a series of exhibitions. Already in 1939, she spearheaded an exhibition on planning in Washington, D.C., that challenged the primacy of L'Enfant's plan for the city. Two years later she was the key instigator of the "City for Living" exhibition that prompted the creation of Montreal's city planning department. Working with the American Institute of Architects, she organized the exhibits they displayed at the Pan American Congress of Architects held in Havana in 1950, and at the International Union of Architects in Moscow in 1958. Her participation in these events was frequently cited in the letters that supported her nomination for AIA fellowship, which she achieved in 1960. Smith's service to the profession was widely recognized by male colleagues who were well aware that she always did more than her share, as men focused instead on designing and marketing their own work. However, once Smith was busy with commissions, largely for federally subsidized middle income housing erected as a result of urban renewal, she was widely profiled in mainstream media, and no longer engaged in such events.

### **Pioneers in Model Home Exhibitions. The Women Advisory Committee in Rotterdam in the 1950s**

María Novas Ferradás, Universidad de Sevilla and Delft University of Technology

In the post-WWII period in the Netherlands, a women's organization set the agenda for improving the quality of social housing projects. Through bureaucratic procedures, the Vrouwen Adviescommissie (VAC, Women Advisory Committee) managed to open up a path for women's interventions at the Municipality of Rotterdam, while expanding its network to more than 285 VACs in the Netherlands from 1946 to 1994. Their expertise influenced building codes, regulations and policies in social housing and urban design. However, their early role as model home organizers remains unknown. This paper unveils the conceptual and design work of the VAC through the model homes exhibitions they produced in Rotterdam and its surroundings in the earlier 1950s — such as the one in Overschie (which attracted around 3,000 people), in Hoogvliet (around 2,700) and Schiebroek (1,500). The research reveals that, before the well-known model homes exhibited in the Netherlands by the foundation Goed Wonen (Good Dwelling) during the mid-1950s and 1960s, the VAC made pioneering efforts in strengthening the public's relationship with social housing and interior design. They displayed traditional and modern furniture in different combinations, focusing on the needs of women performing domestic (unwaged) work.

### **Martha Huber-Villiger's Furnishings: Shifting from 'Set' to 'Outfit'**

Inge Beckel, Zurich University of Applied Sciences

Originally planned as an exhibition of housing and living, the SAFFA 1958 showed different examples of dwellings of the fifties in Switzerland. Thus, on the showground in Zurich, a smaller and a larger one-family houses were to be found, as well as a house for a farmer's family and a holiday house. Furthermore, different types of apartments were at display in a tower. One of the interior architects was Martha Huber-Villiger, a woman who, before getting married, was working in Paris and Tokyo with Charlotte Perriand. Also inspired by Scandinavian design, Huber-Villiger was an interesting figure, aiming to create new combinations regarding the furnishing of apartments. But not only the arrangements were new and kind of fresh, also the possibilities for women to live their lives were changing at that time, in any case for those who didn't care about conventions. By creating new, free furnishing outfits – instead of the older, more uniformed fixed sets – the women of the fifties performed less standardized living solutions.

### **Close to the Body - From Underwear to Space. On the Exhibition Design by Lilly Reich**

Eliana Perotti, Zurich University of Applied Sciences

Lilly Reich (1885-1947) began her professional career as a crank embroiderer and represented the positions of the reform clothing movement in the 1910s, which saw itself as a liberation crusade against the movement restrictions of 19th century fashion.

Reich's work as a trade fair designer and exhibition architect, starting in 1912, develops the constituent elements of the open floor plan and the fluid space: light, non-load-bearing, movable, transparent partitions or room dividers – shelving systems, partition walls, screens, curtains, counters and boards – which at the same time focus on movement in space as well as the physical perception of the liberated body. The visual and tactile meaning of textiles as a space-forming element and as a connection between space and body plays a central role in this context.

## The Exhibition Project as Testing Ground: Barcelona 1929

Laura Martínez de Guereñu, IE University

Some works of architecture are born with a calling to disappear. This applies to the architecture designed by Lilly Reich for the exhibits of the German section at the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition, which was originally intended to showcase the products being exhibited, and which subsequently provided some of the technical and formal solutions for the architectural elements of the emblematic German Pavilion.

When the time came to define the boundaries of the pavilion, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich relied on the details and proportions of the glass screens they had designed and built for the exhibits. This can be verified by simply comparing the elevations of the glass screens in the exhibits with those of the Barcelona Pavilion reconstructed in 1986. However, the gender biases of the time and Mies's probable uneasiness about sharing credit erased Lilly Reich from the project of the German Pavilion, as well as from the history of modern architecture. Today, the thorough analysis of the plans in multiple scales developed for the exhibits demonstrates how the work done aided the design autonomy and singularity of the pavilion while also attesting to the co-authorship of Lilly Reich.

## Display as a Manifesto

Ana Tostoes, Técnico Lisboa

By combining architectural projects with written reflections, Lina Bo Bardi was able to act politically and socially throughout her profession. The conceptual work she applied to the design of exhibitions and museum displays addressed an intense and immersive experience. In fact, the exhibitions she organised represented moments of experimentation and laboratories of communication with popular art intermingling with the social role of architecture. The inspirational reuse of the Solar do Unhão – as a kind of manifesto – highlighted the contrast between the language of the original seventeenth-century building and the identity of the internal space, stripping it of unnecessary frills and deliberately leaving it unfinished.

The conceptual approach to the design of the new building of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP, 1957-1967) highlighted her determination to achieve levels of transparency with an eloquent result. Being a public space, situated in the heart of the economic and financial centre of the metropolis of São Paulo, this building was to become the very symbol of the city. In 1958 Lina abandoned São Paulo and accepted the invitation to “found and direct the Museum of Modern Art”, settling in São Salvador, where she would remain until 1964. There she engaged in a number of pioneering projects anticipating the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s shaking up the old academic world with the aim of bringing about a revolution in the area of erudite culture. As the first capital of Brazil and the port of arrival of the slaves, São Salvador da Bahia participated in the rebirth of the region's erudite and popular culture as a genuine cultural force. Innovative, fearless and full of spirit, Lina placed her creative energy at the service of the public, inventing beauty and poetry for the improvement of the everyday life of the common citizen.

**Gendered Norms and Alternatives. The Exhibition  
“Alternative Architecture”, Copenhagen 1977**  
Svava Riesto, University of Copenhagen

In 1977, audiences flocked to the international exhibition Alternative Architecture at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, north of Copenhagen. With reference to the growing critique of modernism, the exhibition’s curators wanted to show that it was possible to build differently and thereby stimulate alternative ways of living and ultimately a better society. The catalogue proclaimed that a new generation was now busy redefining ‘the very tasks of architecture’ (Knud W. Jensen 1977) and featured several participatory and vernacular projects. The exhibit that drew the most public attention was a life-size model of a housing block made by Danish architects Susanne Ussing and Carsten Hoff. I examine this model and its imagined participatory process through photographic documentation, films, newspaper articles and oral history interviews and question the alternative architecture that it articulates. Further, I ask to which extent and how this project and the norms it wanted to challenge can be understood as gendered. My presentation will argue that Ussing + Hoff’s work suggests ways to think beyond simple binaries between femininity/masculinity and expert/non-expert and therefore is still relevant today.

**The Exhibition «Saffa 1928, 1958 ... 1988? Und heute». Architectural Reflections on Women’s Identity and Work.**

Katia Frey, Zurich University of Applied Sciences

The exhibition «Saffa 1928, 1958 ... 1988? Und heute», a project by the architects Inès Lamunière, Flora Ruchat-Roncati and Beate Schmitte, was held in 1989 in the Architecture Museum Basel. As a commemoration of the historic exhibitions of 1928 and 1958 on Swiss women’s work (Saffa), it provided a reflection on the life situation of women between the professional, private and public spheres.

The entire exhibition project – from the selection of the exhibits to the design of the furniture pieces, and the scenography of the display – was conceived, realised, and communicated as a collective work by the three women architects. This intergenerational and intercultural collaboration resulted in a novel exhibition structure, a sequence of installations, that not only formulated differentiated statements on each theme, but also created an architectural atmosphere of its own in each section.