



On Tuesday, December 2, 2014, a distinguished panel of architecture and construction leaders assembled in the Vitra Store of Manhattan's Meatpacking District. The group consisted of architects and designers with experience in a range of firm types: solo practitioner, a partnership, small or large firms. Each individual brought colorful and pointed perspectives to the discussion, which revolved around the role of women in architecture.

In today's architectural profession, where architecture firms are filled with people from many countries, who speak many languages, and are roughly split 50/50 women and men, one might ask "Why are we *still* talking about women in architecture, as a separate and special focus?"

### ***Introduction***

*Hana Kassem*

Hana began with a brief memory of the late Paul Katz. They were in Abu Dhabi on their way to meet with a client. She put on a fresh coat lipstick before the meeting. Paul turned to her and admitted, "Oh I wish I could do that." He went on to explain that, with a single coat of lipstick, a woman becomes a warrior.

*Jill Lerner*

18%. That is the number of women who are licensed to practice architecture in the US. 24% of women hold licenses in New York City. 14% of Deans of Architecture are women. 30% of professors are female. These numbers reflect the absence of women in high-powered architectural positions. The statistics demand that we discuss women's involvement in architecture and construction. We must strengthen our presence.

Forty years ago, roughly 10-12% of graduating classes were made up of women. There were almost no women in professional practice. Today we have made substantial progress. Roughly 43% of women are graduating from architecture schools. So why and how can the situation be improved for them?

How can talented women play an equally important role later in life— as professional leaders?

The answer can be found through a variety of means. We can get the word out, illustrate the work and ideas of women. We can show up, stand up, and be visible--in large firms, in professional leadership, on juries, as clients. All the women in the Leaning Out II panel are role models.

A quick glance through recent architectural publications shows there has been a lot of focus on women in architecture. For example, Cathleen McGuigon from *Architectural Record* spotlights women's leadership issues. She highlights their accomplishments by founding a women's' design awards program.

Similarly, two women at Harvard petitioned to challenge the Pritzker Prize committee to recognize Denise Scott Brown, as well as Robert Venturi. The AIA National Gold medal was changed last year in 2013. Recently in New York, the Art & Design Film Festival featured "Making Space," a film interviewing five architect women architects.

Jill shared quotations from women business leaders around the globe:

- *"Leadership is about being passionate, taking risk, setting a vision, and being inspiring enough to motivate others to achieve their full potential"* - Stacy Bash-Polley, Goldman Sachs
- *"Being a leader is articulating the vision with great clarity and generating the energy in others, whether it is a team, or an entire organization, to pursue the aspirations."* - Dr. Zeri Akhatar Aziz, Governor of the Central Bank of Malaysia
- *"Being a leader means providing a vision and inspiring others to work together to fulfill it."* - Susan Ganz, Estate & Financial Services

Jill pointed out the powerful common themes that were pervasive in all of the leaders' statements, including vision, inspiration, energy, teamwork.

With those themes in mind, we heard from the panel about their work and their stories. Then we asked a few questions...

### ***Presentations***

*Hayes Slade:*

My practice designs at all scales (total design), from buildings to a restaurant's dishware.

When I started in the practice of architecture, I had a vague notion of someday working with my husband. September 11th put all of our plans in perspective. Within 12 months we were working together. In 2006, we started working on civic projects.

The complexity of our clients grew. For instance, Barbie-owning company Mattel hired us to design a statement store in Shanghai. As a mother, I did not see the possibility of leaving my children at home. The client responded unexpectedly by offering the accommodations to include my children. Shortly thereafter, I attended the Shanghai meetings with children in tow!

I experienced with many of my residential clients that, as the clients' families have grown, so have the size of my firm's projects. At the beginning of my career I was designing NYC bachelor pads; now I'm designing those same clients' full-family homes.

I have found that working together with your partner, there is a natural alignment of interests. You can leverage your relationship. When your partner is different from you, you can tailor the way you communicate with your clients. There is flexibility, which leads to work life balance, but can also lead to tacit decision making. There is fluidity; people cannot tell where one person starts and another one ends. It is difficult for a person that is outside of the team to understand the workflow.

It is amazing sharing your personal and professional life with your partner, pushing each other to succeed.

*Galia Solomonof, Solomonoff Architecture Studio, Dia Beacon*

Architecture is the child of art and politics.

In the beginning of my career, I worked for several well-known architects: Raphael Vinoly, Bernard Tsumi, and Rem Koolhaas. Maybe I decided I don't like to work for men because I am now working by myself.

Architecture requires consensus, and transcend the practical issues of life. For instance, my work on Dea Beacon landscape and architecture was unique. With the goal of creating a daylight-only museum, the times at which the artwork can be viewed and exhibited are limited. It took a lot of legal efforts to make the museum possible. We had to develop a technique to make the artwork possible at such a large scale.

My work is very local. My ambition is not local, but my work focuses on a few blocks surrounding lower Manhattan.

I want to make money in architecture, which is a difficult position as you know. I have to make choices to do what I love when I'm working for art collectors and artists. I fly economy.

*Winka Dubeldam*

I have a mixed life. And most women on this panel have a mixed life. I am a little between academic thinking and the form of architecture. I took the job of Chair at University of Pennsylvania a year and a half ago. I didn't sleep much for a year, wondering how on earth I would learn something new at my age.

It's very much a project like any other project: you have to use innovation to figure out how to get new work and how to recreate ideas. How do you get people to see the work? How do you become a host of a school? And how do you invite other people to do the same, and publish afterwards.

The most important thing you can do as an architect is to keep working. Mainly because I decided I didn't want to work for other people, I started my own office. The beginning of my career was definitely not without bumps.

My latest foray into architectural design has been residential building.

In the 70s residential architecture was largely focused on repetition and modulation. Now with technology, we can mass produce customization. However when I made each of the units in my residential project unique, fights broke out between future tenants and people began requesting this unit or that one. I thought they were all cute.

*Lisa Gould*

I have a history of working for big corporate architecture firms. I have spent most of my time working for Perkins & Will and SOM. Now I am the Director of Science and Academics at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. I design universities that look at clinical healthcare. I invent new building types by merging different buildings together. When I first started at SOM, I worked on Ohio State University, UPenn, and University of Connecticut.

One of my formative experiences was working in China in the mid 90's. It changed my life. I love working in China, participating with their ongoing process of developing construction standards.



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I left Skidmore in 2007 to 2014. I was lucky to develop my own design consulting practice and work as a design consultant with the client. I was able to have a window into how different firms work and how clients think. I loved having my own consulting practice, being able to work on big projects and maintain individual identity.

Yet in 2014, I went back to SOM. I **LOVE** big (messy) projects, with their clients, big teams, and collaboration. I am currently working on a project in Egypt, the University of Cairo, in Giza. I am very happy to be back in SOM's environment; I love the coordination and collaboration.

*Susan T Rodriguez*

I find New York City my home. I have mostly worked in the U.S., designing projects in the public realm.

I spend my time thinking about how our work and how the intersection of a building and its place can make an everyday quality of life more memorable.

For instance, I was invited to design for the Sackler Center of Feminist Art. As a woman, I was well-qualified. A woman's point of view for the arts make this an increasingly important museum that is a place to view feminist art. We designed a triangular gallery to house the large piece of art. It is a provocative work, allowing the audience for close glimpses in at each corner.

What fuels me is our clients and a point of view. Take affordable housing, for instance. You wonder sometimes when you walk around the city, why are there green patches in the city? It is with the goal of trying to to give dignity to affordable housing in the city.

While designing an arts center, I was inspired by a mannequin on the street, it seemed to have such dignity and poise. I thought, this building needs to have as much dignity.

### ***Panel Discussion***

[Jill]: Great range, impressive work. What a great range.

[Solomonoff]: So nice to see the work of everyone. The dance school next to a jail (by Eenead Architects), is such a wonderful way of thinking. To have such fragility next to [a prison].

[Roderiguez]: The Brooklyn Ballet. It is for Actors Fund of America. For HIV patients and out of work lighting designers, this is how to get the vitality of the street to come alive. What I think is very important is working on the program.

Everyone is capable of making beautiful things, but beautiful things in the act of service, that is very important.

### **Q: [Jill Lerner]: Identity, how do you feel you reflect your own identity in your practice and your work?**

A: [Solomonoff]: As your own practice, it *is* difficult to get work. When I work with partners, it was an easier sell to be in a mixed practice, to have that amount of resources. As a single practitioner, I have to take coach [economy class]. But I am now closer to getting the identity of what I want to be. I see how you are teasing out the components of that team. When you are a



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single practitioner, a lot of the struggle, is a building with a core identity, but with not enough armor to push through. Even if you are a licensed architect, as a single practitioner, it is hard to convince the client that the building will be done on time, done on budget, etc.

A: [Susan Rodriguez]: There is a real truth to being a woman, no matter what scale you practice at. There are internal issues, external issues. It is complicated.

A: [Lisa]: The challenge of being an architect is being a woman within a large firm. It is the interaction and getting projects within the large firm which is difficult.

A: [Winka]: Maybe that is why I haven't worked for large firms. It is not a good idea to get into my work issues. I like a building with identity. People say "she tries to much, does too much." I go from designing shops to cities. People say "she should specialize." It is important to have an identity, not just as a woman, but as a business model.

A: [Hayes Slade]: There is very little distinction in a room from where an idea comes from. The editing process that isn't totally streamlined (euphemism for occasional shouting...). We all want whatever is best [for the project] in the end.

At magazine interviews, they always try to parse out what *you* did. The press likes to talk about people. The press always wants to know "*who did what?*" It is a difficult thing to claim who did what. Ideas are coming from everywhere. It is a dynamic process.

Marketing, image and branding.

Some of us cringe. If we got into this to improve the world, it is hard to take so much effort to brand what we do. I think the buildings should speak for what they do. I like this idea of buildings with personality... some of them are uptight and some of loose.

Identity leads to marketing, and also leads to leadership. To standing up for something. Identity, when it leads for standing up for a thing, it is a good thing. As a woman, as an architect, and as a citizen of NYC. If standing up leads to you having a personality, that is a good thing.

A: [Winka]: I think what is interesting about that whole thing, when I started my office, I was working for someone, and I got my first project and started my own firm, I had to decide on a name. I thought of my name, but then I decided it should not be my own name, it should incorporate everyone that will work for me in the future. Everyone wants a name [Winka], although I try to make the *firmsname* first.

"We," Architecture is teamwork. It is never ending, small to big, big to small, and crisis, back to small.

There is a continual need to bring in work. To always look into the future. Now the expectation of clients is higher than ever before.

**Q: [Jill Lerner]: When in your career did you feel like you were breaking down barriers and how?**



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A: [Galia]: When I was a student, I was oblivious to gender. I thought gender and feminism was my mom's issue, not my issue. I thought we were all equal. Male competition was healthy.

There was a moment at 30 something, where you stop being the cute good student.

Now it is about something else. And that something else is tougher than the appearance. Transition to womanhood, it is not funny. 70 cents to the dollar, that is not ok. That needs to change. It is not funny. That sinful inequality, that needs to change. There is something structurally wrong.

My mom and I get along very well now.

A: [Heyes]: I studied engineering in undergraduate. It is a profession with mainly all men.

When I became pregnant, I felt very self-conscious, it was very stressful to go to work sites. I went to one work site where the men were being very helpful, it was all construction workers, and they were bending rebar for me and holding my arm as I stepped over building materials. I was about 8 months pregnant, but I joked that I had the smallest belly here. That broke the ice.

There was another moment (usually these awkward moments happen around motherhood) when you are in the role of that, it feels very taboo and very unprofessional. We had to go to shanghai for two weeks for a project. Mattel was our client, and they 'put their money where their mouth was' as a child friendly company. I was able to bring my child with a nanny. All of the meetings and brainstorming happened with my child in the room. The benefit much outweighed the difficulties.

A: [Susie]: Breaking barriers. I concur that happens every day. You try not to focus on the barriers, you try to focus on the work. I had the opportunity to work with some great women in my office. The community of women can support each other a lot. The women in my office are great.

10 years ago able to meet on a jury in San Francisco, I met 8 other women. To share the great work everyone was doing. Community is very important to being a woman in the architecture profession. Heyes and Jill have collaborated over the years. The biggest thing that holds us back is not getting a shot.

A: [Jill Lerner]: The great thing about being an architect is having a great community. We have a community that we have worked in and went to school with and that is very important to getting a shot.

**Q: [Jill Lerner]: Working abroad, have you ever felt uncomfortable?**

A: [Lisa]: I have not felt uncomfortable. Especially working in Communist China, a lot of women have been treated the same.

A: [Galia]: Chinese students are suppressed with the gender barrier we have here. Especially in Brazil and South America. In Brazil it is crazy. Even though the president is a woman, somehow the structure of the society has not reflected the change. I



cannot explain it. How the primary leader is a woman, but then you relate to women the same way you always have as a country.

A: [Winka]: The way I grew up in Holland, the guys and girls are so similar. There is an ongoing balance. Internationally, people fall in love with what you do, rather than your gender. In Holland, architecture is still a boys club. It's a boys club in the US, in NY. Guys are much more supportive than women are, if we are to be very critical we need to look at ourselves. We should stop trying to join the boys club, and start a girls club!

### **Audience Discussion**

#### **Q: In your experience, have any of you experienced being a woman as an asset?**

A: [Jill Lerner]: I see more scrutiny as a potential opportunity. You sometimes find more opportunity to be unique.

A: [Winka]: A sense of humor. The moment you become defensive, it is hard. You win if you are funny.

#### **Q: Susan do you feel like you are not allowed to be a woman on other project?**

A: [Susan]: At times, being a woman is not an asset, but it was so great that this was actually an asset for the museum. People hire people that they want to work with. Having a client that looks to you, what we do is portraiture, something people can look to.

Q: [Jill Lerner]: It is really hard to get work, small or large, male or female. How can people entering the architecture practice, it is difficult to get work?

A: [Galia]: People have a tendency to think they need to have a lot of prior work. Now I just want the work to come to me. I have a male assistant so that I can concentrate on the work I want to do. How you engage the work that you get.

A: [Susan]: My assistant is a guy too.

#### **Q: I would like to know what type of mentors you had, men? And which woman do you actually look up to and admire?**

A: [Jill]: As the oldest person here. All of my mentors are men. There were no women professors when I was at school. Having a mix of genders to mentor is the best thing. I didn't think it was that important, until I was asked to speak on women's leadership seven times this year. It became a much more serious issue for me once I realized this.

A: [Lisa]: One of my first jobs out of school was working at SOM. I had an incredible female mentor that taught me everything was possible.

A: [Susan]: I have never worked for a woman, except for a woman client. Jim Polshek was my mentor and gave me a chance. I was 26, and he let me design buildings, it was amazing. Having a mentor was so important, there is so much to know in architecture.



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A: [Heyes]: Men were always mentors for me. I took tremendous mentorship from coworkers for me to succeed, I could see that.

A: [Winka]: My mentor was a woman. It was my mom, a fashion designer. She is the strongest woman I know, convinced that there is equal opportunity for everyone. You have to respect everyone up and down. Kids are great but you should do what you want. She was the equal opportunity guide that everyone needs.

A: [Galia]: I taught at Cooper. It was at that time I was looking at how architecture fits in the larger spectrum. I had many enlightened men as professors and coworkers.

This sense of network, and belonging to a generation where I see a lot of mutual agency and help. There is something about being a mother and seeing kids as being different now. There was a faculty meeting where we all said the most important topic to us, the older women stood up and said “women and politics” as their most important topic, and we went around the circle and a young woman stood up and the young woman said “feminism and politics”, and a male coworker stood up to say “women and politics.” It is so good to see this is important people of all genders today.

A: [Susan]: As a mentor “be really good at what you do,” that is the most important thing to do. If you can wrap your mind around that.