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A HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE

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A HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE

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30. COLLECTIVE ACTION: WOMEN ARCHITECTS AND ACTIVISM SINCE THE 1990s Lynda Simmons

The mood of the 1990s may have changed from the previous decades, but there was no reduction in energy for instigating change for women in the field of architecture. The activism of this decade reflected prevailing social attitudes towards feminism – there was no appetite for separatism, and essentialism had faded (similarities between genders, rather than any differences, were now highlighted) – but it was still very clear that the professional experiences of women architects were quite different to those of their male colleagues.

The emphasis began to shift towards a focus on the profession, rather than on education, with concurrent professional support groups emerging out of previous incarnations in both Auckland and Wellington. In 1992, the Thursday Lunch Group was founded by some of the original members (Denise Civil, Claire Chambers and Ellen Brinkman) of WIA (the Women in Architecture group discussed in Chapter 25), which had by then become inactive. This group had a significant impact on the profession, their regular informal professional development meetings eventually becoming a template used by the NZIA for ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) small practice support groups to meet the requirements of the Registered Architects Act 2005.

In Wellington, a professional-support and activism team was also emerging, led by Deborah Cranko, Jane Dykes, Anna Kemble Welch, Christina Mackay and Fiona Christeller, who had been a founding member of WIA when she was a student and who had relocated to Wellington after graduation.² In 1993, Wellington Women in Architecture instigated a national exhibition called *Constructive Agenda: 60 years of women in architecture in New Zealand* in order to celebrate 100 years since New Zealand women won the right to vote as well as 60 years since the graduation of the first woman (Merle Greenwood) with a bachelor of architecture degree in 1933.³ Cranko later observed that *Constructive Agenda* was a means by which women could record their work, as they were not able to do so in other ways, and many did not or could not enter awards.⁴

The energetic response to their call for entries led to a separate exhibition in Auckland, organised by a team headed by Amanda Reynolds, Sarah Treadwell and others. Selected panels from both exhibitions were then combined and toured nationally, hosted by interested NZIA regional branches. The intention of raising the visibility of women who worked in architecture with both the public and the profession was achieved, and Wellington Women in Architecture received an NZIA Award for this project in November 1993.

Wellington was also the force behind bringing a chapter of the global organisation NAWIC (The National Association of Women in Construction) to Aotearoa New Zealand in 1996. The New Zealand chapter was co-founded by Wellington and Wairarapa architect Gina Jones, who was the inaugural national president, a role she combined with being president of the New Zealand Institute of Building (NZIOB). Since then, chapters have also been established in Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Wellington, Canterbury and Queenstown.

A construction workshop for women architects, architectural graduates and students, organised as a collaboration between Architecture+Women NZ and Strachan Group Associates in 2017.





NAWIC has a strong focus on technical and professional development, and bringing women in all fields in construction together, including people in the trades, developers, and those involved in businesses who provide services to the construction industry. It has a regular programme of events, including women-hosted visits to construction sites, and an annual NAWIC Excellence Award programme. Jones won NAWIC's Helen Tippett Memorial Award for the woman who had made the greatest contribution to the construction industry for the decade 1996 to 2006, and Auckland architect Rachael Rush was recognised in 2017 by winning Professional Woman of the Year. In 2016 Jones observed that women tended not to put themselves forward for industry awards: 'In an ideal world we wouldn't have an award that was just for women, but we've already seen how it encourages women to come forward and tell their stories.'6

In the second half of the 1990s there was considerable architectural political activity in Auckland, sparked by the strong opposition to a redevelopment proposal for the Britomart and Quay Street areas, championed by then-mayor Les Mills (1990–98). Leading this political activism was Amanda Reynolds (co-founder of WIA), who recognised that a political approach might have more effect in stopping a project of such magnitude. She campaigned in the Auckland local government elections on a 'stopping Britomart' platform and backed mayoral challenger Christine Fletcher, who was also opposed to the scheme, which would have erased a large area of heritage buildings. Reynolds was not elected to council, but Fletcher became mayor (she held the role until 2001) and proceeded to cancel the contract that bound the council to the development.

During this period, Reynolds was also the chair of the NZIA Auckland Branch (she held the position for five years, until 2000), which lobbied the council to run an open architectural competition for the Britomart area, a process that changed the urban environment significantly. Needing more flexibility for this activism, in 1996 Reynolds stepped down as director of the Australasian practice Hames Sharley to set up her own practice, with a focus on urban design: 'Britomart was a long haul – five years of meetings, events, street shouting, court cases, political speechifying, TV/ radio appearances and loads of articles,' she recalled in 2021.

The campaign had begun within the NZIA as a separate organisation called Rethink Britomart, with Reynolds as one of the founders. In 2000 Rethink Britomart evolved into Urban Auckland, which still exists today. The organisation comments on and gets involved in many urban issues in central Auckland, and its successes include the instigation of the Auckland Urban Design Panel. Urban Auckland is currently led by architect Julie Stout.⁸ Elizabeth Aitken Rose, a planning academic at the University of Auckland, and Natalie Allen, an urban strategist and director for consultancy firm The Urban Advisory, are among those involved.

Political activity by female architects has been a constant thread of activism throughout the decades, from Esther James (1900–1990) — campaigning for a revision to the Matrimonial Property Act 1963, after she had designed, constructed and then lost several houses as chattels in divorce proceedings — to Jessamine Fraser, who ran in the New Zealand elections 2020 as a List candidate for the Green Party.

By the new millennium, a gender balance had almost been achieved across the three New Zealand university architecture courses, and the illusion of equality that this offered reflected the era more broadly. This was a decade when gender and other social-equity issues were not popular and the backlash against feminism was strong. The third wave of feminism that had started in the mid-1990s had promised economic and social equality across genders, but this did not eventuate, and by the end of the decade activism was again stirring. The third wave of the decade activism was again stirring.

By 2011, the promises of professional equity remained unfulfilled, and it was evident that half of the country's architectural graduates were not gaining the same opportunities as their male peers. In March 2011, a volunteer-

2010 2011

The Architecture+Women NZ Timeline, installed in Hawke's Bay in 2018, shows the stories of early New Zealand women architects, and was first displayed in Auckland in 2013. based organisation named Architecture+Women NZ (A+W NZ) was formed by Megan Rule, Lynda Simmons, Sarah Treadwell and Julie Wilson, joined in 2012 by Elisapeta Heta (Ngātiwai, Waikato Tainui, Sāmoa, Tokelau), and becoming an incorporated society on 14 January 2013. To raise the visibility of women practising in architecture and its expanded fields, A+W NZ held a nationwide exhibition that included the work of almost 500 women. Between Silos (Auckland), Diverse Practice (Wellington), Re-Think (Christchurch) and Small-Town Girl? (Queenstown) were held concurrently in September 2013, timed as a twentieth anniversary of the 1993 Constructive Agenda exhibition to acknowledge its impact and the work of so many prior to the formation of A+W NZ.

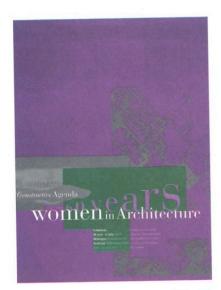
The Auckland *Between Silos* event included 42 separate exhibitions and took two full years to plan, involving a strong and consistent core team and many helpers. A symposium was held and the *A+W NZ Timeline* was exhibited for the first time. The timeline, which fills gaps in the published version of New Zealand's architectural history, was created by Marianne Calvelo, with Joy Roxas (designer) and Lynda Simmons (curator). Since then, it has been reinstalled multiple times in various locations, with additional researchers assisting at each reinstallation, including Deidre Brown, Lucy Treep, Lynda Simmons, Ashleigh Smith and Alex Pirie, with soundworks by Elisapeta Heta. The *A+W NZ Timeline* has been described as 'the most substantial survey of women in New Zealand architecture to date'. 12

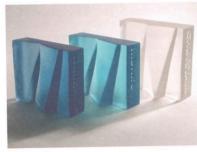
The Wellington exhibition *Diverse Practice* included a visual display of survey results from 95 architects about their life in architectural practice, designed and installed by Jan Smitheram, Kerstin Thompson, Catherine Griffiths and Sharon Jansen. *Re-Think* aimed to highlight the unique challenges of post-earthquake Christchurch, highlighting the voices of women in architecture in the city, including those working on transitional architecture and art, a sector in which women had been in the forefront, unlike many other sectors of architecture at the time. Jane Rooney, then at Wilson + Hill Architects in the city, wrote that she felt the exhibition was a step in the right direction towards making Christchurch a richer and more inclusive place, and helping to ensure that women 'share the responsibility and opportunity to be involved in the creation and redevelopment of Christchurch'. The Queenstown exhibition, supplementing the national exhibition with work by women from the area, highlighted the joys and challenges of practising architecture in the lower South Island.¹³

There are many marginalised groups in the profession, and A+W NZ works to fill the support gaps that other organisations and institutes do not provide, using the strong platform of gender for the benefit of the broader architectural community. The organisation regards itself as radical and inventive, and has created many programmes, archives and events to bring about change in the profession.

The foundation of the organisation's success has probably been the A+W NZ database, a self-uploading and free record of anyone trained in architecture who is female-identifying and has an association with Aotearoa New Zealand. This valuable resource ensures visibility and connectivity to the members and the wider architectural community. The database had over 900 names in 2021. The triennial A+W NZ Dulux Awards is designed to reward long careers, the promotion of diversity and contribution to the community through mentorship. Significantly, one of the three awards is aimed at women in the second decade beyond graduation, in order to keep them visible at a stage when various barriers reduce career progression.¹⁴

One of the three award categories is open to all genders, and the Chrystall Excellence Award aims to rebalance the lack of women recognised in the NZIA Gold Medal programme to date. A publication accompanies each awards event, overcoming the previous lack of publication of women's work. Until 2014, a total of 18 female architects had been named in recognised publications. Since 2014, A+W NZ has added 45 names to that list through its award publications.





ABOVE: Poster for the Constructive Agenda: 60 years of women in architecture in New Zealand exhibition, 1993.

BFLOW: The Architecture+Women NZ Dulux Award 2017 castglass sculptures made by Ainsley O'Connell.

OPPOSITE: The Between Silos exhibition in Auckland, organised by Architecture+Women NZ in 2013.

The annual A+W NZ Speed Mentoring series is designed to create easy access to people at all stages of the profession without the formalities usually associated with mentoring programmes. The initial 2015 event was created by Janice Au, Siran Li, Kayley Feng, Bojana Kavrakovska and Pam Sando, and there have been eight A+W NZ Speed Mentoring events to date.

The A+W NZ Tatuhi / Drawing Architecture: Sarah Treadwell Archive is a digital storehouse of architectural drawings, established in 2017 in recognition of Sarah Treadwell's career in architecture and her influence on several generations of architects, artists and thinkers. Each year, a drawing is selected by Treadwell and her nominated team, the online archive serving as a slow-building record of drawing styles and influences over years and decades. Tātuhi / Drawing Architecture was created and is maintained by Lynda Simmons, to acknowledge Treadwell in her year of retirement.

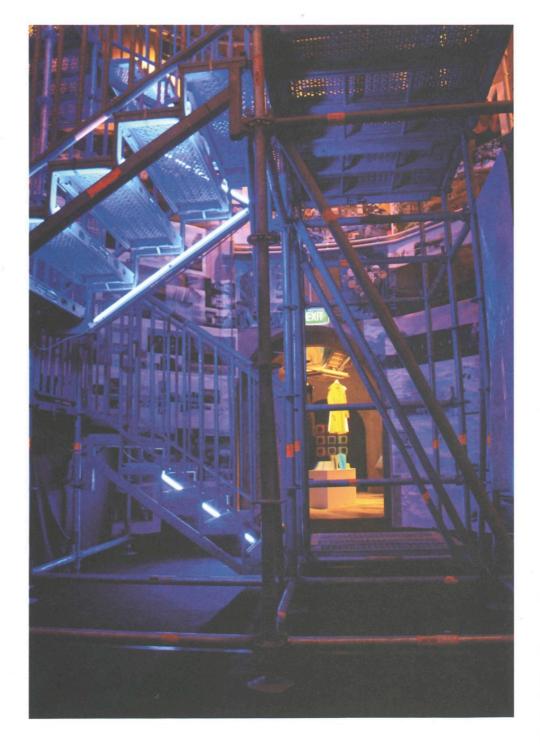
Other initiatives include the A+W NZ Construction Workshops, in association with educators such as Strachan Group Architects (SGA)16 and New Zealand Timber Boatbuilding School (NZTBS), and the A+W NZ Fathers' Forum event series, which highlights positive examples of 'care' work carried out by male architects in support of the careers of their partners, irrespective of gender. A+W NZ campaigns for genderless parental leave, reduced hours and flexible hours in order to achieve equity. In addition to the above, A+W NZ holds many other events and forums that relate to the organisation's two core aims of visibility and inclusiveness, and all events are open to all genders. Rather than setting up to oppose or disrupt the NZIA, as the WIA initially did in the late 1970s, A+W NZ has always worked closely with the institute. The aim is to fill any gaps in member support that the institute does not currently reach, rather than replicate its work.

The awareness of social equity tends to arrive in cyclic, global surges, and A+W NZ caught the early wave which saw, over the next few years, the establishment of many similar groups around the world during this decade. Examples include Equity by Design (2011, San Francisco, USA), ARCHITEXX (2011, New York City) and RebelArchitette (2016, Italy). The W Awards were established in 2016 by the Architecture Review and AJ (UK), a documentary titled Arab Women in Architecture was made (2013, Saudi Arabia), and Women in Design (Harvard, USA) was rejuvenated in 2013 with a petition to the Pritzker committee to retroactively add Denise Scott Brown to the 1991 prize awarded to her partner.

Also catching the early wave was Parlour, established in 2012 in Australia, with two New Zealanders - Justine Clark and Gill Matthewson - at its core along with Naomi Stead, Susie Ashworth, Julie Willis and Karen Burns. Parlour emerged from an Australian Research Council-funded research project,17 and has continued to be a research-led organisation. At the 2014 A+W NZ inaugural Awards, Clark and Matthewson won the A+W NZ Munro Diversity Award for their contribution to Parlour's world-leading innovation and research.

Many decades of indigenous activism in architecture culminated in some powerful outcomes in the 2010s, backed by the formation of an organisation for Māori design professionals, Ngā Aho (Māori Design Professionals Inc.).18 The organisation's many female architecture members, such as Elisapeta Heta, Raukura Turei (Ngãi Tai ki Tāmaki, Ngã Rauru Kitahi) and Jade Kake (Ngãpuhi, Te Whakatōhea, Te Arawa), are a strong force within it.

The changes to both the profession and education have been significant. Some examples include the Auckland Council's inclusion of Ngā Aho's Te Aranga Principles (developed in 2007) into its urban design manuals in 2012.¹⁹ The principles were applied to, among other projects, the massive City Rail Link (CRL) infrastructure project. In 2012 a new annual award was added to the annual Best Design Awards, when the Designers Institute of New Zealand (DINZ) collaborated with Ngā Aho to add the Ngā Aho Design Award.



MAKING SPACE

The Waka Māia advisory group at Jasmax. From left: Monsul Dewes-Tupara, Kahurangi Eruera, Danielle Koni, Apenti Tamanui-Fransen and Elisapeta Heta.



In early 2017, Te Kawenata o Rata, the covenant agreement between the NZIA and Ngā Aho, acknowledged the responsibilities of both signing parties to their obligations under te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi). The document was signed on behalf of the NZIA by then NZIA president Christina van Bohemen (with significant work carried out by her predecessor, Pip Cheshire) and others, and one of the signatories on behalf of Ngā Aho was Elisapeta Heta, who became the first Ngā Aho representative on the NZIA Board, a position created by this covenant.²⁰

In 2019, as noted earlier in this volume, the appointment of Deidre Brown (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahu) as head of school at the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Auckland made her the first indigenous woman in the world to hold such a position.

Indigenous advisory groups have been established, including Waka Māia within Jasmax in 2015. New, post-Treaty settlement iwi clients, and the impact of the Te Aranga Principles and the Kawenata, have prompted architecture practices to develop an indigenous knowledge base internally. Elisapeta Heta (founding member and Kaihautū Whaihanga), Danielle Koni and Marianne Riley (Kai Awhina) are prominent with Waka Māia (a name gifted by kaumātua Haare Williams).

There are also alternative models in smaller practices, an example being ĀKAU, based in Kaikohe, Northland, an indigenous-led practice co-founded by interior architect Ana Heremaia (Ngāpuhi), architect Felicity Brenchley and artist and architectural designer Ruby Watson. The practice puts community engagement at its core, running a design studio alongside an education foundation for youth.

The institutional acceptance of marginal communities within the broader architectural community can be seen as a sign that the activism of many decades has been, and continues to be, effective. In 2018, again under the presidency of Christina van Bohemen, the NZIA formed an alliance with Engineering New Zealand and the Association of Consulting and Engineering (ACE) to form The Diversity Agenda. It was originally focused on achieving 20 per cent more women in the engineering and architectural workforce by 2021, and creating workplaces where women wanted to work, but its remit has expanded to include all facets of diversity. In 2021, over 100 organisations are members of The Diversity Agenda, including many architecture and landscape architecture firms. This is the first time the NZIA has formally established a support group for women working in architecture, illustrating – finally – an awareness that the profession has many barriers to resolve, and that solutions are not the responsibility of individuals but rather require collective action.

- 1 The Thursday Lunch Group was also recognised as a finalist in the A+W NZ Awards 2014 Munro Diversity category.
- 2 Fiona Christeller received the NZIA President's Award 2020 for her continued activism. The citation read: 'She has always challenged herself as an architect and designer and has demonstrated admirable fortitude in pursuing a career as a female practitioner in what, for much of her working life, has been an unsympathetic professional environment.'
- 3 From Auckland University College (now the University of Auckland).
- 4 Deborah Cranko, email to Elizabeth Cox, 11 January 2022.
- 5 'Women in Architecture', Home and Building, June/July 1993, 22-28.
- 6 Women Leave Their Lasting Mark', New Zealand Herald, 10 November 2016 (https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/women-leave-their-lasting-mark/WA3TWBVKWJ6DWQJ3O2HUSV3UYM/).
- 7 Amanda Reynolds, personal communication, 21 March 2021.
- Julie Stout has a long history of protest activism leading to High Court injunctions, beginning in the 1980s to save Courtville Apartments (Parliament Street, Auckland) from demolition, and more recently stopping extension of the Bledisloe Wharf into the Waitematā Harbour.
- 9 Errol Haarhoff, Practice and Gender in Architecture: A Survey of New Zealand Architecture Graduates 1937–2008 (Auckland: School of Architecture and Planning, The University of Auckland, 2010). A fourth master's degree in architecture was established at AUT in 2020, as well as bachelor-level courses now offered in Dunedin and Christchurch.
- 10 Kira Cochrane, 'Feminism Not Finished', Guardian, 24 July 2010.
- Architecture+Women New Zealand Exhibition Catalogue (2013), Architecture in an Expanded Field symposium, 21 September 2013, organised by Sarah Treadwell, Sue Hedges and Charissa Snijders, with others. The proceedings were published as Lucy Treep and Sarah Treadwell (eds), Architecture in an Expanded Field (Auckland: Aalto Books and A+W NZ, 2015). Megan Rule, Lynda Simmons and Julie Wilson received an NZIA President's Award in 2014 for establishing A+W NZ and running the 2013 A+W NZ National Exhibitions.
- Julia Gatley, 'Women in New Zealand Architecture: A literature review', in Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, 31, Translation, ed. Christoph Schnoor (Auckland: SAHANZ and United ePress, 2014), 250.
- 13 Jane Rooney, 'Re-Think Christchurch', Women in Architecture, Architecture New Zealand, April 2014, 32–38.
- 14 Lynda Simmons, 'Filling the Gaps', 5 November 2018 (https://architecturewomen.org.nz/archives/parlour-article-aw-dulux-awards-lynda-simmons).
- 15 Gatley, 'Women in New Zealand Architecture', 250.
- 16 'SGA & A+W NZ Building Workshop 2017 Kaikoura Trust', Architecture+Women NZ (https://www.architecturewomen.org.nz/news-events/sga-aw-nz-building-workshop-2017-kaikoura-trust).
- 17 Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work, and Leadership, research project, University of Queensland (2011-14).
- 18 Desna Whaanga-Schollum, 'Weaving Many Strands', Koha, An Offering of New Zealand Architecture and Design, no. 1 (2016) [NZIA broadsheet for Venice Biennale 2016], 12–13. Ngā Aho became an incorporated society in 2009.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 'The Gift of a New Cloak: Dr Haare Williams and Elisapeta Heta with John Walsh', Tapoto The Brief, NZIA, February 2019.