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## WOMAN'S INTUITIVE WAY TO ARCHITECTURE

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### INTUICYJNA DROGA KOBIET KU ARCHITEKTURZE

#### Abstract

Architecture was for a long time only available to men – but was this always true? Aren't women behind the great successes of "male architecture"? The issue of no women in architecture stems from the patriarchal scenarios which defined culture and nature in western nations. Women were categorized on the side of nature. It was assumed that the architect's profession is connected to the temperament and psyche of a man. However, at some point, women started to emerge with their architectural passions. Architecture is a mix of constructive precision and humanistic sensitivity. During higher education in Poland, women often make up half of the students, but later? When they can't make a living from architecture, they turn to designing childrens toys or clothes. In 1999 there were 13.5% of female architects – in 2009 it was 28%. The breakthrough which is taking place – more women pursuing architecture – brings new values through their intuitive approach to this subject.

*Keywords: architecture, woman, intuition, design, interior*

#### Streszczenie

Architektura była do pewnego czasu kierunkiem zarezerwowanym wyłącznie dla mężczyzn. Jednak czy tak było naprawdę? Czy za wielkimi sukcesami „męskiej architektury” nie stoją kobiety? Problem nieobecności kobiet w architekturze jako projektantek wiąże się ze znanym zjawiskiem scenariuszy patriarchalnych, które w cywilizacji zachodniej definiowały kulturę i naturę. Zgodnie z nimi kobiety lokowane były po stronie natury. Uważano, że zawód architekta jest przypisany do temperamentu i psychiki mężczyzny. Jednakże w pewnym momencie kobiety zaczęły się ujawniać ze swoimi architektonicznymi pasjami. Architektura jest syntezą konstruktorskiej precyzji i humanistycznej wrażliwości. Na studiach w Polsce kobiety stanowią często połowę studentek, ale potem... Kiedy nie mogą się utrzymać z architektury, projektują zabawki dla dzieci czy ciuchy. W 1999 roku procent kobiet architektów wyniósł 13,5, w 2009 roku wzrósł do 28. Przełom, który wydarza się współcześnie i polega na włączaniu kobiet w świat architektury, przynosi nowe wartości, ukazując rolę ich intuicyjnej drogi ku architekturze.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura, kobieta, intuicja, projektowanie, wnętrza*

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The author is a woman – an architect working together for over 40 years with men in both design – building and teaching future designers at the Building, Architecture and Environment Engineering Department of the Lodz Science University. Architecture was for a long time only reserved for men. The problem of no women in architecture as designers stems from the patriarchal scenarios which defined culture and nature in western culture. According to these, women’s biological purpose is procreation and culture is created by men. It was believed that the architect’s profession is connected to the temperament and psyche of a man. According to the Bible, the first architect was Adam, who created a hut for Eve. Architecture is made by man and woman is only the user of the created space. Even today it is said that a man should build a house, plant a tree and have a son. However, at some point, women started emerging with their architectural passions.

In the 19th century, American women noticed that house designs did not meet their expectations. This observation resulted in the appearance of the so-called “domestic engineers”. The Beecher sisters started this phenomenon in the middle of the 19th century. Modern women, who even wrote a manual for other women interested in house design. Catherine E. Beecher was the author (1841) of: *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School*. Apart from tips about managing a household, there was a chapter about interior design. Similar to Robert Kerr’s *Gentleman’s House*, Ms Beecher put emphasis on health and comfort when designing a house, while seeing aesthetics or taste as less important matters. The guides written by men almost never mentioned woman’s activities and practical solutions. Therefore it was the first different guide, where Beecher took an interest in a woman’s living space, comfort in the kitchen for example, not decoration, trends or fashion. In later editions there were a number of architectural and technical details. Where other architects recommended a place for the kitchen, Ms Beecher pointed the place for the oven, sink, practical ideas for drawers, management of kitchen utensils or organizing the larder. There were also tips about bedroom and bed location, wardrobes and even the direction the door should open in order to better use the chimney in the living room. Thanks to her guide, Catherine Beecher was recognized as the precursor of modern architecture. The author saw the house in a practical light and from the point of view of a user – a woman. She opposed the visual concept of a house as designed by men – since activities in a house are performed by a woman, its design should include her needs. Men’s vision of a gentleman’s house was as a place of rest, relaxation, retreat, while a woman saw the house as a dynamic place of work and practicality. Catherine Beecher, along with her sister Harriet, published another guide in 1869 – *The American Woman’s Home*. It included chapters about ventilation, a heating system which spread to every room, eliminating the need for chimneys. Their house design included two toilets (one near the bedroom and the other in the basement), which were supplied with water from cisterns under the roof. The proposition for rooms with changeable functions was practical as well. All of this for young people, so that the houses were smaller and therefore cheaper. Rollaway beds, built in wardrobes and careful design put into every room decreased the amount of work in the house. Furthermore, most importantly for the authors, small houses were more comfortable, since they were more easily maintained and all elements were comfortably close. This was connected to small Dutch houses – comfortable and practical. The authors described the design of around 40m<sup>2</sup> for eight people. Even though, in the 19th century, it was believed that comfort is space, the changes introduced by Beecher and their inception was a matter of time. In turn, the house proposed in Christine Frederick’s

*Household Engineering*, which was built in Tracy in 1912 (Chicago outskirts), was around 50m<sup>2</sup>. It had four bedrooms and was designed for a medium income family. It doesn't mean that it was uncomfortable. It contained a living and dining room, as well as a children's playroom. Some American houses, not much larger, also had a sleeping sunroom (popular since 1900) as well as a windowed veranda for daytime activities. The rooms were simply smaller and better designed than in the 19th century villas, where the wardrobe alone was the size of a saloon from the early 20th century. Christine Frederick proposed, due to men's ignorance in household activities and their conservatism, that women engage in active design and oppose architects who don't understand the idea of practicality presented by modern women. The architects at the time thought that the established methods worked well and changes were not needed or feasible. Therefore, Frederick proposed technical drawing lessons in her books, so that women could control the activities of "their" architects. Ellen Richards wrote in 1905 that a special kind of house designing architects should be trained, which would show the difference in approach of architect – engineers to practicality and design. All of these guides and magazines, such as *The Ladies' Home Journal* influenced the so-called domestic engineering, which basically became science. This is proven by Ellen Richards at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Balderston at The Columbia University (*House Economy* subject). Therefore the pioneers of practicality, such as Lillian Gilberth, Christine Frederick and the precursor Catherine Beecher created what we know today as *ergonomics* in house. At the end of the 19th century European Universities start noticing studying women. The first diplomas emerged in Finland. In Poland the situation was complicated – we gained independence in 1918 and women gained voting rights. However, women began studying architecture in 1915 – the occupying Germans opened the architecture studies at the Warsaw Science University, with both women and men having the same rights to study. The first four women to study were: Barbara Brukalska, Jadwiga Dobrzyńska, Anatolia Hryniewiecka-Piotrkowska and Helena Syrkusowa. These "architect-women" – Helena Syrkusowa, Barbara Brukalska and Anatolia Hryniewiecka-Piotrkowska – worked in a sort of "marriage tandems". The phenomenon of architect marriages, the smallest artistic group, working under their own brand, was especially evident in the Polish environment. In interwar Lodz there were two marriages of note – Brukalski and Syrkusowa. They created two exceptional housing complexes (approved by TOR) in the form of row houses – Stoki, [Ill. 1] and Marysin III [Ill. 2]. All of these artistic groups presented avant-garde and radical modernistic views. In relation to the avant-garde, the abstract artist marriage should be mentioned – Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński [Ill. 3]. Additionally, it is worth mentioning Miruta Tomira Słomska, who cooperated with Jerzy Berliner and Mieczysław Łęczycki to create the housing complex of The City Council (Polesie Konstaktynowskie) [Ill. 4]. The designers were active in the Praesens avant-garde group, (their publishing house used the same name) and represented Poland in the CIAM society, which was founded by Le Corbusier in 1928. It is interesting to ask who was the author of their joint designs? Brukalska was so fascinated with Le Corbusier, that her diploma was basically a copy of his designs. She quoted all of his characteristic elements – winding stairs, big panoramic window... Her designs in art deco were close to the works of Eileen Gray or Le Corbusier's co-worker, Charlotte Perriand. Barbara Brukalska was a beautiful woman. In the picture ("Architektki") she has short hair and is wearing a geometric shapes dress. She had her hair cut in Paris, when she visited the EXPO with her husband in 1925. She caught the eye of Antoine, a famous Paris hairdresser, who came up with this haircut for Baker. Actually Antoine was born in

## KOLNIA MIESZKALNA T.O.R. (STOKI)

### TWÓRCY:

BARBARA I STANISŁAW BRUKALSCY, BIURO PLANU REGIONALNEGO W ŁODZI  
W PLANACH DUŻE OSIEDLE ROBOTNICZE DLA 6 000 MIESZKAŃCÓW NA POW. 31 ha,  
206 DOMKÓW JEDNORODZINNYCH W ZABUDOWIE SZEREGOWEJ NA POW. 7 ha  
DZIAŁKI OGRODNICZE O POW. ok. 300m<sup>2</sup>  
SEGREGACJA RUCHU KOŁOWEGO I PIESZEGO  
BRAK KANALIZACJI, WODA Z HYDRANTÓW ULICZNYCH



## KOLNIA MIESZKALNA T.O.R. (MARYSIN III)

### TWÓRCY:

BARBARA I STANISŁAW BRUKALSCY, HELENA I SZYMON SYRKUSOWIE,  
BIURO PLANU REGIONALNEGO W ŁODZI  
212 DOMÓW JEDNORODZINNYCH W ZABUDOWIE SZEREGOWEJ W TYM  
138 WG. PROJEKTU SYRKUSÓW  
DOMY Z OGRODAMI O POW. ok. 300m<sup>2</sup>  
SEGREGACJA RUCHU KOŁOWEGO I PIESZEGO  
BRAK KANALIZACJI, WODA Z HYDRANTÓW ULICZNYCH  
ZAŁOŻENIE BOISKA SPORTOWEGO I OGRODÓW JORDANOWSKICH  
DLA DZIECI POZOSTAŁO W SFERZE PLANÓW



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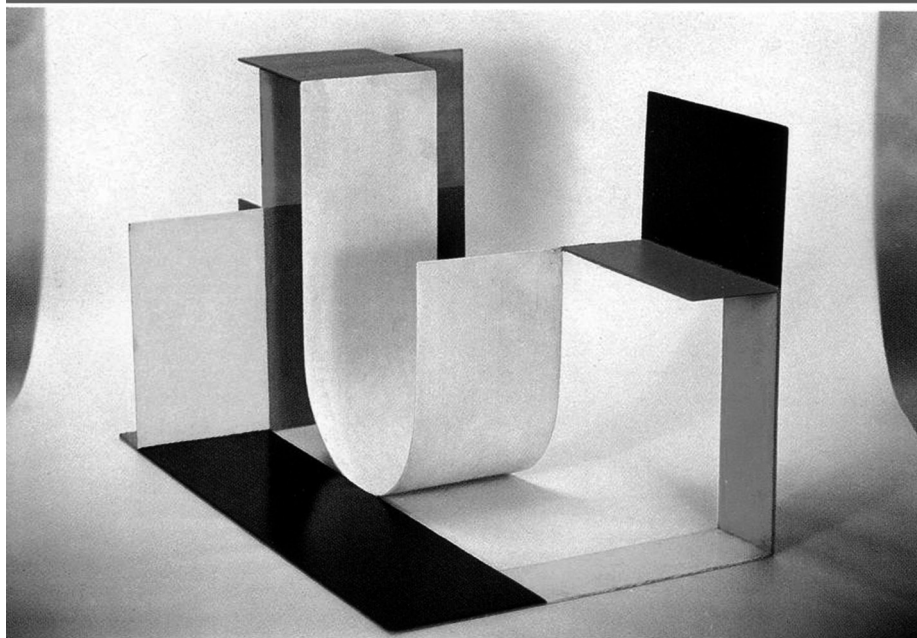
Sieradz. In 1938 a short haired woman read a paper: “An architect-woman is building a house”. This took place during the 1st Working Women Social-Citizen Congress and the lecturer was Barbara Brukalska – the main architect of the 1920s interwar period – the first woman architecture professor in history. She said that a woman architect is *the perfect cook*, who shapes the *dough from which cities are made*. The cooking analogies may mean nothing or maybe there is something to them after all – since women got into architecture from “the kitchen”. This year was full of various artistic breakthroughs – the first Le Corbusier Pavillon, Josephine Baker arrived, an extravagant dancer who came with a group of black American jazz men, Eileen Gray designed an apartment for Suzanne Talbot (Paris Expo 1925), where the floor was made from matte silvered glass with illumination from below. At the same time, Syrie Maugham opened in London and later in The United States, a number of shops with interior decoration materials. The most known decorators are: Dorothy Draper designing shops, offices, hotels, restaurants, using her own ornamental style; Henry Parish II (The Parish Sisters), known for imitating the English province style and Billy Baldwin, designing fashionable house and apartment interiors for a rich clientele in a style similar to art deco. Another reason for the slow progress in modern interiors was the lack of adequate and modern furniture. After the 1929 stock market crash Lady Sibyl Colefax took an interest in interior decorating. In 1933 she designed interior decoration for her noble friends. In 1934 she started her own company, Colefax and Company, using a mix of neoclassical colour styles with angular regency style shapes. After the war, she sold the company to her niece, Lady Astor, Nancy Lancaster (1897–1994), who came from a rich Virginia family and later moved to England. She perfected her old age style in Ditchley, Oxfordshire. She focused on the comfort provided by upholstered furniture and correct fabrics. Charles and Ray Eames’s works were important for architecture and decoration as well. Their own house, made of factory produced materials (steel, corrugated iron – popular materials at the time) was the Case Study House No. 8 (1949). This proved, that a house-machine, a house based on technology can have beautiful, liveable and most importantly practical interiors. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs was a breakthrough for modernism. The author claimed that planning city structure should not be simplified but kept as it is and only the structure and hierarchy should be reorganized. She criticized modernism for a lack of soul, expression and no respect for tradition. Laura Ashley (1925–1985) promoted the English Country House style, whose company designed breathtaking interiors according to the rules of Elsie de Wolfe and her inheritors. Bernard and Laura Ashley founded a company (1953) which sold silk screen printed fabric. In 1966 they expanded to clothes, and in 1972 they introduced decorative design wallpapers to the market. In 1969 they opened a store in London and in 1974 in Paris – future successes resulted in further expansion and many imitators. It can be said that Laura Ashley style is historic in design, since in the 1970’s, when the mission style started to be popular in The United States, she found very fertile land there. Returning to modern designs, we must mention Andree Putman (1925–2012), who led the international design and production of furniture and interiors (villas, apartments, offices and shops). She designed new office interiors in Villa Turque (Chaux-de-Fonds), an early design of Le Corbusier from 1916. In Lodz women marry architects once again and keep designing – the

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Ill. 1. TOR estate on Stoki, fot. W. Stępień i M. Olenderek

Ill. 2. TOR estate in Marysin III, fot. W. Stępień i M. Olenderek

**KATARZYNA KOBRÓ \_ KOMPOZYCJA PRZESTRZENNA 4 \_ 1929**  
**KOLEKCJA MUZEUM SZTUKI W ŁODZI**



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**KLONIA MAGISTRAŁA - POLISIE - JAN LEFASIK, MIEUTA SŁONSKA,  
TIOŁD SZERESZEWSKI, JERZY EKLINER - 1928-33**



“Domus” department store, located at Piotrkowska St. [Ill. 5] (Helena and Jerzy Kurmanowicz). There are also female designs, such as Danuta Walter design studio, the main author of medical staff apartment complex near “Centrum Zdrowia Matki Polki”. The text’s author had a relationship with an architect friend during the design internship, led by Prof. Bolesław Kardaszewski in “Miastoprojekt Łódź Miasto”, a general construction design studio. They co-designed a twin set of apartment buildings in the city centre – “Bolek i Lolek” [Ill.6] (Piotrkowska and L. Zamenhofa St. crossing) as well as taking part in a competition for Dom Zasłużonego Kombatanta at Sasanek St.

Intuition is an ability that functions beyond time and space, it is a link between the subjective and objective world. It functions with the knowledge that the past, present and future exist simultaneously. It speaks through revelations and insight – it tries to guide to a world of joy. In this carefree world, one can find all answers which were out of reach before. Intuition can create ideas in a blink of an eye. Geniuses like Tesla or Einstein gained their inspiration from beyond time and space. Intuition offers answers, which may not be logical due to the earlier experiences, but after an in-depth analysis they are correct. If you want to give your intuition a physical shape, develop qualities, such as: patience, trust, belief in your own strength, concentration and most of all diligence. Because it is intuition that goes forward. When you listen to your intuition, you will feel your real strength. Look behind and cleanse your memories, so that your ego does not recall painful times which hampered your progress. Convince yourself, that you did everything you could with your knowledge at the time.

Women in architecture often function in a male context. They are their husband’s and co-worker’s partners, their father’s inheritors. They exist as “invisible helpers”. Twentieth century architecture is an experimental space, which revolutionizes modernism, Bauhaus and negates ornamentation. Beside relaxing the architectural borders, the sex division stays strong. Until 1958 there were only one percent of women in architecture. During the next 30 years it increased by 3 points. This is influenced by the social and habitual background, the general exclusion of women in professional work and the slow destruction of a plan which had existed for centuries. In light of other professions, architecture stays strong and favours men. Constructive drive and building skills are attributed to men’s minds, women seem to have a more humanistic spirit. Architecture is a mixture of the constructor’s precision and humanistic sensitivity. New technological inventions also changed the character of the living space. Natural materials were exchanged for their cheaper, artificial and mass produced equivalents. Plastic and synthetic fabrics were introduced. PCV floors and vinyl tiles started to appear... However, good design became an international field, more than ever before. Magazines and books printed globally, a large flow of information and regular air communication allowed for trend popularity all over the world. Designers and their potential clients became fully mobile, and new materials and technologies spread from places of origin – usually the United States – to Europe. During higher education in Poland, women often make up

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Ill. 3. Katarzyna Kobre’s project, fot. J. Olenderek

Ill. 4. Residential Colony in Konstantynowskie Polesie, fot. W. Stepień

Ill. 5. Domus House “Domus”, fot. J. Olenderek

Ill. 6. Complex of residential buildings “Bolek i Lolek”, fot. J. Olenderek

half of the students, but later? When they can't make a living from architecture, they turn to designing children toys or clothes. In 1999 there were 13.5% of female architects – in 2009 it was 28%. The breakthrough which is taking place – more women pursuing architecture – brings new values through their intuitive approach to this subject – *Art is restoring objects, creating shapes or expressing experiences – if the result of this restoring, creating, expressing is capable of fascinating or thrilling or shaking*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Tatarkiewicz, *Definicja sztuki*, [in:] *Wstęp do historii sztuki*, PWN Warszawa 1973.