

AIANY VISIONARY AWARD ACCEPTANCE

By Beverly Willis, FAIA

AIANY HERITAGE BALL and GALA, PIER 6, NEW YORK, NY

Oct 22, 2018

Page 1

Thank you, Guy, for your very special introduction. And- my heartfelt thanks to the New York Chapter for the honor of being recognized by my colleagues. It means a **lot** to me.

Let me tell you why:

I went to art school in Honolulu and in 1955 began my first career there as a multi-media artist. The 4-star generals and admirals there- hired me to redesign their officer's clubs. I needed to hire architects for the construction documents. One architect that I hired, bristling at my comments about his work, snarled, "if *you* think *you are so smart*, why don't **you** become an architect." ... A good idea, I thought ---, so I applied to the California licensing board to take the exam. But it took a senator and a governor to convince the board to let me take the examination. The issue was that *I had never worked **FOR** an architect*. I proudly passed on the very first take in 1966. Then I happily joined the AIA San Francisco Chapter, and signed up for work on a committee. Yet, despite my many repeated complaints, I never received any notices of meetings. What to do?

By sheer co-incidence, I received a call from the national AIA asking if I would be interested in serving on a national committee. So, I began a long-term cross-country commute from San Francisco to Washington, DC to participate on a committee. Then other organizations in Washington invited me to join them. The first was the ***Board on Infrastructure and Constructed Environment*** of the **National Academy of Science**. This organization asked me to represent them on the ***Federal Facility Council***, which consisted of the heads of construction of all the government agencies, including the military. I served as their Chair for 3 years.

In 1976, I was appointed by the State Department to be one of 2 architects to serve on the US Delegation to the United Nations conference, HABITAT 1, in Vancouver. There I was approached by Wolf von Eckhart, then architecture critic of the Washington Post, to join him and architect Clothiel Woodward Smith, to create a National Building Museum in Washington, DC. While these contacts helped me build my practice, it also made me an AIA organization outsider. SO, tonight's Honor for me transcends this past.

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Page 2

However, two years later in 1978, the national president of AIA declared to the press, making headlines, that he would never hire a woman architect. In response, the following year, the California Council of AIA asked me to run unopposed for its presidency. So, I did.

Now Fast forwarding a number of years –

In 1988, because of the depth of the construction depression – there was little design work – I decided to follow Frank Lloyd Wright’s example and take a 2-year sabbatical from my office, and spend time in New York instead of Europe. At the end of 2 years, the construction depression showed no signs of weakening—so, I decided to stay in Manhattan.

In 2002, at age 75, distressed by the fact that women’s architecture designs were not included in architectural history books, I created the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation to document and make this work visible, so students in both high school and college would have role models to *guide and inspire* their futures as well as to provide architectural historians with necessary and valuable research. Women architects in the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties were denied role models by the culture of AIA and its practices.

Since its founding, The Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation has been documenting and celebrating women’s contributions to the built environment, both past and present, while also providing inspiration for the success of future generations. Today, we have 3 generations of women in design and construction, contributing to today’s cultural change.

To achieve this - the Foundation has developed programs to record the history of women in our profession, including the program ***Pioneering Women***, a research effort sponsored by the ***National Endowment for the Arts***, which provides scholarly descriptions of over 40 women practitioners in history. This work grew out of the **Dynamic National Archive (our DNA) project**, a crowd-sourced repository of biographical information for hundreds of women, working in design and architecture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries across the US, a history that might have otherwise been forgotten.

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Page 3

The Foundation's **annual Awards program and Gala** recognizes the contributions of contemporary individuals, both **men** and women, as well as **firms** who are making a difference in the advancement of women.

The Foundation has partnered with public and private entities to provide education and lead cultural change. This includes its **Built by Women** program where in we partnered with **NYAIA** to distribute a map of Manhattan during the national AIA convention, showing the location of construction designed or led by women. The Foundation also produces films, this year "**Unknown New York – the City that Women Built**" features 73 women.

The Foundation's **Emerging Leaders' Program** works to address the loss of young, talented and well-trained women who leave our profession every year, by providing much needed business acumen and resilience training. Now in its third season, the Emerging Leaders' Program has reached almost 100 young women. In addition, the Foundation's trustees write occasional articles, like the one recently on sexual misconduct.

I am optimistic that the Foundation will carry on my work and continue to provide leadership for a more equitable profession until our objective is reached.

It takes a sea of unsung heroes to create a successful movement. I wish to thank everyone, but time limits me to a few – though I give my most heartfelt appreciation to all:

I'm deeply indebted to the foundations' Board of Trustees, its Chair, Patricia Harris and chair-elect Julia Murphy, its executive committee and its executive director, Cynthia Kracauer. Also to the organization's major sponsors, who are: The New York City Building Congress Foundation, Brookfield Properties, SOM, Thornton-Tomasetti, Turner Construction, AECOM, Stantec, Goldman Sachs, HOK, plus Skanska, Jacobs, STV, KPF, Boston Properties, the Durst Organization, and Langan, among many others. They make the foundation's work possible.

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Page 4

In closing, I'd also like to congratulate the AIANY on its recent successful national convention and want you to know how important the work of the AIANY has been this year in moving forward the agenda of recognition and equality for women, and encouraging younger women with the support that AIA gave the **flash mob**, "Voices of Women."

As well, I congratulate the other honorees on their well-deserved recognition

Thank you all.

Beverly Willis, FAIA