



## The Exhibition SAFFA 1928, 1958 ... 1988? *Und heute: A Collaborative, Experimental, and Low-Cost Architecture of Display*

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The exhibition *SAFFA 1928, 1958 ... 1988? Und heute: Ein Projekt von Inès Lamunière, Flora Ruchat-Roncati und Beate Schnitter* held at the Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum in Basel in 1989, commemorated the Schweizerische Ausstellung für Frauenarbeit (SAFFA) exhibitions held in 1928 and 1958 on Swiss women's work and reflected on women's navigation of professional, private, and public spheres. The project was the joint work of three women architects, Inès Lamunière, Flora Ruchat-Roncati, and Beate Schnitter, who handled everything from the selection of the exhibits to the design of the furniture and the scenography of the display. This intergenerational and intercultural collaboration yielded a novel exhibition structure: the installations formulated a different theoretical statement on each theme and had a distinct architectural atmosphere. The article examines the commemorative context and the collaborative approach of the exhibition, highlighting its lasting impact along with the role of the curators and the participants and thus touching on many aspects in today's feminist curating practice.

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**Keywords:** Swiss women architects; women exhibition; SAFFA; collaborative work; exhibition scenography; women's history

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## A Commemorative Exhibition

The exhibition *SAFFA 1928, 1958 ... 1988? Und heute: Ein Projekt von Inès Lamunière, Flora Ruchat-Roncati und Beate Schnitte*, held from 1 April to 25 June 1989 at the Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum in Basel, reflected on the contemporary circumstances of Swiss women (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

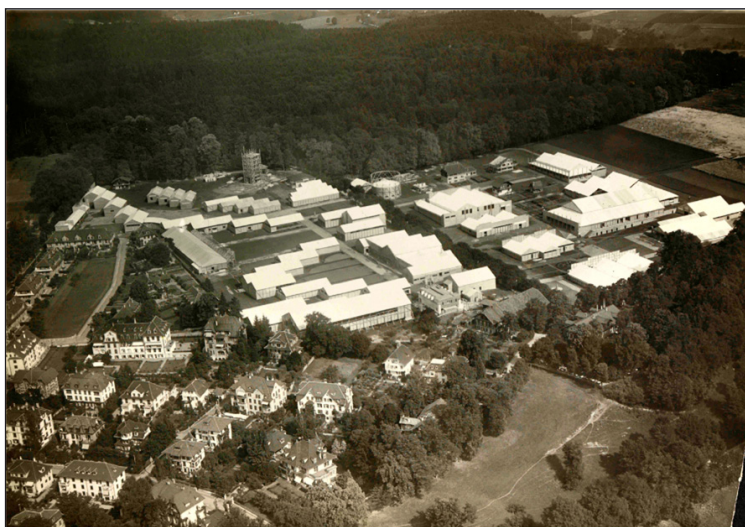
As the title of the exhibition suggests, it was conceived as a commemoration of the historic 1928 and 1958 Schweizerische Ausstellung für Frauenarbeit (Swiss exhibition for women's work), referred to as SAFFA, which would have celebrated their 60th and 30th anniversaries, respectively, in 1988. Similar to national and world exhibitions, the 1928 and 1958 exhibitions, hosted by the Bund Schweizerischer Frauenvereine (the umbrella group for of Swiss women's associations) together with other women's organizations, had documented women's work and their socio-economic involvement in public life on a large scale. The hope was that their successes would support women's demands for political equality (see Voegeli 1988 and Gosteli 2000). The exhibitions were milestones for the women's movement in Switzerland.



**Figure 1:** Invitation card to the exhibition *SAFFA 1928, 1958 ... 1988? Und heute* at the Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum in Basel, 1989 (Dorothee Huber, Basel).

Women's suffrage was introduced in most European countries between the two world wars and was often linked to the work women had accomplished during the first one. Switzerland remained neutral during World War I; women there were thus denied the opportunity that other European women were given to demonstrate their ability to contribute to society, and suffrage was not granted to them. In the depression after World War I, Swiss women's associations shifted their efforts to the field of employment; they set up vocational guidance centers, new training centers in nursing, social work and domestic science, and new professional organizations. Improving training opportunities for women and increasing their access to the labour market were therefore the main concerns of the organizers of SAFFA 1928, who wanted the exhibition to show the importance of women's work for the Swiss economy and society in the fields of home economics, agriculture and horticulture, commerce, arts and crafts, industry, the hotel trade, science, literature and music, education, social work, health care, sport, and so forth.

The organizers hoped that their achievements would be recognized and that women would be granted the right to political participation. SAFFA 1928 took place in Bern in the late summer and was planned by Lux Guyer (1894—1955), the first independent woman architect in Switzerland, who had been running her own office in Zurich since 1924 (Vogt, Huber and Zschokke 1983; Claus, Huber and Schnitter 2013). Guyer designed the exhibition halls for the thematic sections, all related to women's activities, several restaurants, a large model house (now relocated and rebuilt in Küsnacht near Zurich; see ProSAFFAhaus 2006), and a monumental 30-meter-high panorama tower (**Figure 2**), although construction was partly entrusted to three local architects, Hans Beyeler, Karl Indermühle and Walter von Gunten (Bernoulli 1928; Meyer 1928a and b).



**Figure 2:** SAFFA 1928 in Bern, aerial view by Walter Mittelholzer (ETH Library Zurich, Image Archives).

The budget was tight for the exhibition, so Guyer used prefabricated wooden frames of various sizes to construct the halls and covered the walls with wooden formwork, the roofs with white canvas and the interior walls with fabric panels. Guyer was aware of the novelty of an exhibition on women's work and emphasized its special character in the layout of the site (see Guyer 1928). To avoid a 'conventional scheme', she designed the exhibition halls on different scales and grouped them according to a symbolic pattern ranging from manual work to arts and crafts and the liberal arts to trade and industry. The staggered arrangement of the halls created a series of differentiated spaces. The sophisticated colour scheme, developed with the artist Bertha Tappolet (1887–1947), delineated the structure of the exhibition and facilitated orientation within the site (Bernoulli 1928; Meyer 1928a and b).

The 1958 SAFFA was held on the shores of Lake Zurich. It was originally launched as a housing exhibition. Housing and its social and sanitary issues were a field in which women's organizations had always been active, leading to the organization of modern 'model home' exhibitions, such as the ones sponsored by the Dutch women's advisory committee in the early 1950s.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on SAFFA 1928, the Bund Schweizerischer Frauenvereine expanded the original idea of a domestic exhibition into a major national exhibition on the life and work of women at home, in the community and in the world of work (Figure 3).



Figure 3: SAFFA 1958 in Zurich, aerial view (ETH Library Zurich, Image Archives).

The thematic sections of SAFFA 1958 were united under the motto 'the Swiss woman, her life, her work' and documented women's professional activities in relation to the conservative three-phase model promoted by the organizers as the ideal life course for



women: education and professional activity before marriage, motherhood, and re-entry into the labour market after children. Numerous sections focused on the domestic and maternal aspects of women's lives, while professional activities were summarised in the section 'In Praise of Work'. The extension of the traditional feminine sphere into the public sphere reflected the idea of the 'world as a living room', supported by the middle-class women's movement, in which women were tasked with making the world more humane and homely through caring, nurturing and community-building activities.<sup>3</sup> The organizers emphasised complementarity and cooperation between the sexes and avoided any political stance in an effort to make their ideas palatable to the patriarchy.

The chief architect of SAFFA 1958, Annemarie Hubacher-Constam (1921–2012), and her team of professional women — 33 architects and 7 interior designers, an engineer, 2 garden architects, 38 graphic designers and over 30 artists — created a highly modern exhibition architecture, using cheap materials, rented or borrowed pieces and new construction techniques. Most of the exhibition halls were built with prefabricated wooden frames, but instead of being assembled to form the traditional rectangular hall, they were arranged radially, in a new and unconventional way, to form round pavilions, a design that had symbolic implications. The surface of the roofs was sloped towards the center of each pavilion to facilitate drainage, and white canvas, rough horizontal timber planks, recycled glass panes and fibre cement panels were used to create the façades. A few pavilions were new; some of these lightweight structures were built with the membrane structure developed by the German architect Frei Otto and the Mero steel tube construction system, both of which were first used at the 1957 international building exhibition Interbau in Berlin (see Frey and Perotti 2022a and b).

These two unique exhibitions represent important steps in the unwritten history of Swiss women architects, planners, and designers (Joris and Witzig 1986; Voegeli 1997). Despite their different political and ideological positions, both the 1928 and 1958 SAFFA exhibitions offered Swiss women a rare opportunity to give the broader public a glimpse of their skills and abilities. The architecture served the essential medium for the realization of the exhibitions and contributed greatly to women's recognition. The chief architects in each case had specific ideas as to the character of a women's exhibition. Guyer worked with differentiated scales and spaces, while Hubacher-Constam (1957: 2) chose the circular form as a symbol of women's solidarity and hired many active women professionals to help realize the project. Both exhibitions were also financial and popular successes, even though they failed to achieve their political goal — the right to vote was not granted to women in Switzerland until 1971.

Held at a time when feminist awareness was slowly growing in architecture in Switzerland, the commemorative exhibition *SAFFA 1928, 1958 ... 1988? Und heute* took

up the discourse of women's work that characterized the 1928 and 1958 exhibitions. In what follows, this article documents new aspects of feminist practices in architecture more generally by highlighting the curators' and participants' commitment to women's issues and the working process chosen to realize the 1988 exhibition.

### **Feminist Efforts in Architecture in Switzerland: Individuals, Institutions and Networks**

The Swiss women's organizations showed no interest in the idea of a third SAFFA once political equality had been achieved in Switzerland. In the architectural profession, Swiss women slowly followed the example of the American and British feminist movements as indicated by articles in European architectural journals at the time.<sup>4</sup> The debate interest for the role of women in architecture was stimulated by a landmark exhibition, *Women in American Architecture*, curated by Susana Torre at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 1977, which inspired many similar efforts in European countries.<sup>5</sup> In Germany, the first survey was presented in 1984 in Berlin, as part of the 7th Congress of the International Union of Women Architects (Architektinnenhistorie 1984).

In Switzerland, the first exhibitions of women architects were held around the same time: in 1983, the ETH Zürich had a small exhibition on Guyer, which then travelled to the Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum in Basel in 1985. In 1987, the group exhibition *Ladies First* became the opening event of the newly founded Architekturforum in Zurich, showing the work of 33 contemporary Swiss architects.

In this context of growing feminist activity throughout Europe and in Switzerland, an exhibition commemorating SAFFA 1928 and 1958 was initiated by art historian Ulrike Jehle-Schulte Strathaus (b.1944) Jehle-Schulte Strathaus, a researcher of 20th-century architecture at the Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur, ETH Zürich, was a founding member and the first director of the Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum. Founded in Basel in 1984, it was the first museum dedicated to architecture in Switzerland and occupied four floors of the Domus-Haus, a small commercial and office building designed in 1958 by Max Rasser and Tibère Vadi that had been converted into a museum by the architectural firm Diener & Diener.

Jehle-Schulte Strathaus believed developing 'an awareness of the discrimination hidden in social conventions' was necessary and wanted to make a contribution in her field (1989: 1). She must have known about the exhibition on women's professional training and activities held at the Bernisches Historisches Museum in 1988 to mark the centenary of the professional school in Bern, the catalogue for which included a critical assessment of SAFFA 1958 (Berchtold and Ryter 1988). Although Jehle-Schulte Strathaus saw that active women architects were distancing themselves from the outdated and conservative image of women conveyed by SAFFA 1958 — especially

concerning work and family life — she still thought it was important to commemorate the anniversary of the two SAFFA exhibitions with an exhibition at the Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum (2017).

For the curation of the exhibition, Jehle-Schulte Strathaus secured the collaboration of art historian Dorothee Huber (b.1952), who was her successor at the Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur. Huber was familiar with SAFFA 1928 and its chief architect. She had worked on establishing the architectural legacy of Guyer in the archive of the institute, taught a course on Guyer and, in collaboration with her students, prepared an exhibition and an accompanying publication (Vogt, Huber and Zschokke 1983).

Jehle-Schulte Strathaus and Huber drew on key features of the historical SAFFA exhibitions for the commemorative event. The new exhibition was to use architecture to present the ‘current life situation of women in professional, private and public spheres’ (Jehle-Schulte Strathaus and Huber 1989: 1), and it was to be realized by women architects. Using SAFFA 1958 as a model, the architects were to represent the cultural diversity of Switzerland as well as the generational diversity among active professionals. Three women from the three main regions of the country were chosen for the task: Beate Schnitter (1929—2023) from the German-speaking part, Flora Ruchat-Roncati (1937—2012) from the Italian-speaking part and Inès Lamunière (born 1954), from the French-speaking part (**Figure 4**).



**Figure 4:** Architects Inès Lamunière, Flora Ruchat-Roncati and Beate Schnitter at work, Basel, 1988–1989 (Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum, Basel).

The selection was based, on the one hand, on connections between the curators and the participants and, on the other hand, on their personal and professional commitment to issues of gender in architecture. Huber met Schnitter when the latter donated Guyer’s architectural estate to the Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur archive in 1982. Schnitter was not only the niece of Guyer but had also participated in SAFFA 1958 as a

young architect, though she had always been critical of its organizers, whose compromises affected the architectural implementation of the exhibition. By 1988 Schnitter was a recognised figure in the German-speaking part of the country. Growing up in a family of architects, engineers, and artists, she had developed a strong self-confidence and saw no reason to question the idea of women entering the profession. After graduating from the ETH Zürich in 1953, she moved to Rome but had to return to Zurich to take over Guyer's office after her sudden death in 1955. As a member of the Zürcher Arbeitsgruppe für Städtebau, a group of young architects and planners focused on urban development, Schnitter (2005) naturally took part in the debate on town-planning issues in Zurich and also experimented with housing programs of different scales and typologies, approaching them from theoretical, historical, economic and social perspectives.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of her political urban and regional planning work, Schnitter developed a deep interest in monuments policy. She acted as an advisor to the Schweizer Heimatschutz, sat on various official committees for the protection of the natural and built environment, and published regularly on these topics and also taught heritage conservation, housing history and art history at the university of applied sciences in Rapperswil (see Ineichen 2005). As one of the few successful women in architecture to run an agency without a male partner, she was regularly invited to participate in feminist and gender-focused events, opportunities that she always embraced with intellectual curiosity. In 1984, as a result of spending time analyzing many buildings designed by women through history in preparation for a lecture she was giving on women and architecture, Schnitter (1984: 1014) became convinced that women shared an approach to design; they were interested in atmospheric perception and nature, showed a sensitivity to the needs of clients and had a deep knowledge of building techniques.

Ruchat-Roncati seemed an obvious choice to represent the Italian-speaking region of Ticino, as she was a well-known figure of the Swiss rationalist movement *Tendenza* (Steinmann and Boga 1975). Moreover, she had gained a high public profile when, in 1985, she became the first woman to receive a professorship at the ETH Zürich, a position she held until her retirement in 2002, where she was regularly confronted to gender issues in architecture, both in the public and academic spheres. Born into a family associated with architecture and the building trade, Ruchat-Roncati graduated from ETH Zürich in 1961 and within a short time got married, had children, and was widowed, events which led to a merging of her life and work (see Bihlmaier, Frey and Perotti 2017; Frey and Perotti 2018). In 1975, after a decade of successful practice with her Ticino colleagues Aurelio Galfetti and Ivo Trümpy, she moved to Rome in search of new opportunities and worked as a consultant for the *Consorzio nazionale cooperativo d'abitazione* (the Italian national housing cooperative).

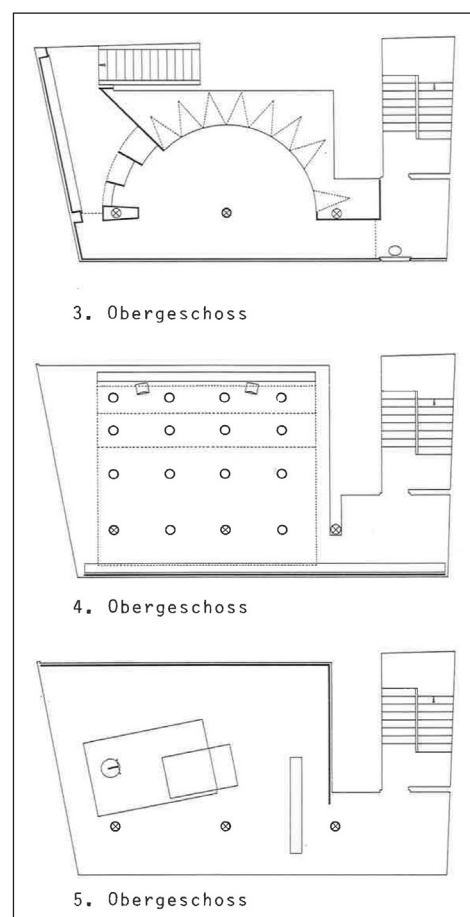


Lamunière, who represented the western, French-speaking part of Switzerland as well as the younger generation, was at the time setting up her own architectural practice in Geneva with her partner Patrick Devanthéry. Like Schnitter and Ruchat-Roncati, Lamunière had a family background in architecture, being the daughter of the Geneva architect and university professor Jean-Marc Lamunière. She graduated from the *École polytechnique fédérale* in Lausanne in 1980 and continued her studies in architectural theory and history at the *Istituto svizzero di Roma* (1981–1983). There she met and became friends with Ruchat-Roncati and, as Lamunière (2017) recalls, they discussed their shared interest in gender issues in architecture from early on. On her return to Switzerland, Lamunière pursued her academic interests at the *Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur*, where she remained employed until 1988.

### Reflecting on the Role and the Identity of Women Through the Means of Architecture

The commemorative 1989 exhibition drew on many aspects of the historical events, such as their thematic sections, national representation, collaborative approach, and economy of means. It also reflected on the importance of architecture as the medium for the realization of the event. The concept for the exhibition emerged out of an intensive exchange and close collaboration between the three architects, who met regularly in Basel and Zurich between 1988 and the spring of 1989 to prepare the exhibition.

The core idea was to depict the trajectory of a female professional from her beginnings to the recognition of her contribution, ‘from the search for recognition to self-affirmation’ (Lamunière, Ruchat-Roncati and Schnitter 1989: 13). These phases were articulated in three thematic sections set up on the upper three floors of the *Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum* (Figure 5). On the first floor of the museum, documentation on SAFFA 1928 and SAFFA 1958, prepared by Huber, introduced and contextualised the new project (see Jehle-Schulte Strathaus and Huber 1989; Malangone 2016).



**Figure 5:** Floor plans of the 1989 SAFFA exhibition on the three levels of the *Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum* in Basel (*Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum*, Basel).

Lamunière, Ruchat-Roncati and Schnitter paid tribute to the achievement of the historic SAFFAs by designing inexpensive and innovative ephemeral exhibition architecture that included a stool, a full-length Cheval mirror, a display case, choosing cheap materials such as cardboard and fabric for the scenography, and integrating borrowed elements.

Financial constraints had forced the architects of the 1928 and 1958 SAFFAs to make a virtue of necessity and search for new building strategies using prefabricated and recycled materials. By making visible the ephemeral nature of the scenographic space in the 1989 commemorative exhibition, Lamunière, Ruchat-Roncati and Schnitter addressed the question of exhibition architecture and its appropriate materialization and form, acknowledging the inventiveness of women in dealing with architecture and space in the face of limited material possibilities and resources.

The first section, entitled 'The Multifaceted Woman', illustrated women's multiple relationships to society: the central column of the room, covered with mirrors, represented multifarious women standing in a piazza, spatially symbolised by the semi-circular arrangement of the exhibits (Lamunière, Ruchat-Roncati and Schnitter 1989: 14). Photographs of women were arranged according to archetypes, ages, activities, and occupations, indicating the multiple roles women play in society, in many cases at the same time. Photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Anita Volland-Niesz (a friend of Schnitter), and Luca Zanier (the son of Ruchat-Roncati's partner Leo Zanier), as well as images from Edward Steichen's (1955) famous exhibition catalogue *Family of Man* and from Jerry Mason's (1979) book *Family of Woman* were displayed with backlighting. Photographs of women's hands, such as Russell Lee's *Hands of Old Homesteader, Iowa* (1936) and August Sander's *Grandmother and Child* (1919), spoke to the multiple identities of women and the different stages of their lives. Shoes of different sizes and types, corresponding to the different activities and ages of the women, were presented in a display case designed by the architects, and expertly arranged by an employee of the Swiss shoe company Bally, who was happy to lend its shoe samples (Schnitter 2018). In a small adjoining room, a stool in front of a window overlooking Basel's old town provided a view of the city.

'The Voice of Women,' the second section, offered a synaesthetic experience. The space presented itself as a forest of columns — three of which were supporting columns, 14 of which were scenographic elements — symbolising the many obstacles women face in their everyday lives. Women's voices filled the room metaphorically, sensually, and intellectually, creating a dense atmosphere. A wide range of songs, from classical opera arias to jazz and pop melodies by Maria Callas, Jessie Norman, Janis Joplin, Mrs. Miller, Barbara Streisand, Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, Kathleen Ferrier, Cathy Barberian, Barbara, Edith Piaf, Christiane Eda-Rierrel, Nina Hagen, Cleo Lane and Marianne Faithfull were played over the loudspeakers, accompanied by

pictures of women's mouths displayed on the walls. Books presented expressed the knowledge generated and published by women in different disciplines and languages. The three architects had compiled lists of works in different fields, drawing on their own knowledge, interests, and preferences. In interviews, Schnitter (2018) recalled that on her trip to London, she had taken the opportunity to go to libraries and browse the shelves for classic and contemporary literature on women for the exhibition, and Huber (2017) talked of the lists of mostly theoretical and philosophical books that Ruchat-Roncati kept sending her. Experts were called in as advisors to help with certain disciplines: Lamunière asked the Geneva pedagogue Martine Chaponnière and Schnitter asked the psychiatrist Dora Knauer for suggestions in their respective fields (Figure 6).



Figure 6: 'The Voice of Women' section of SAFFA 1989 (Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum, Basel).

The final section, 'The Woman within Herself', evoked themes of intimacy, seduction, and the feminine world. The lighting, furnishings and objects with feminine connotations, such as the standing Cheval mirror (the so-called Psyche mirror) designed by Lamunière, the stool designed by Ruchat-Roncati, a real fur coat and a wooden jewellery box, both of which belonged to Schnitter, and an early version of a portable computer all hinted at the complexity of the roles modern women experience between their newfound independence and their intimate sense of self (Figure 7). Photographs by Volland-Niesz and paintings by Georgette Boner — Boner, like Volland-Niesz was a friend of Schnitter — were lined up on the walls to form a continuous frieze. This was intended to echo Warja Lavater's SAFFA 1958 art installation *The Line*, consisting of a series of 10 large-format paintings of outstanding female figures from Swiss history (Honegger-Lavater, Bührig and Sarasin 1958).



**Figure 7:** 'The Woman within Herself' section of SAFFA 1989 (Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum, Basel).

### Creating Space as a Collective Work

In interviews, both Schnitter (2018) and Lamunière (2017) stressed the importance of their collective authorship. According to them, their intense collaboration resulted in a new kind of exhibition structure, a sequence of installations that not only formulated statements on the themes but also created an atmosphere of their own. The selection of the exhibits, the design of the furniture and the scenography of the exhibition, was wholly a joint effort, even though each of the architects took the lead in the realization of one section: Ruchat-Roncati managed the installation on women and public space; Schnitter was responsible for the experimental all-embracing space, and Lamunière oversaw the development of the motif of the woman and her intimate self (Schnitter 2018; **Figure 8**).

Collaborative work has shaped many feminist activists and practices in art and architecture since 1970s (see Rendell 2012). An early example of a collective exhibition is *Womanhouse*, a project organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro (1972) in Hollywood. For this event, students from the first feminist art program at the California Institute of the Arts along with local artists took over an empty house and filled it with art and installations, held talks and put on performances (Musteata 2015). The collaborative practice of the feminist design cooperative Matrix (1984), founded in London in 1981 (Grote 1992), is also well known.

From the beginning of her career as an architect, Ruchat-Roncati had always favoured shared authorship (Davidovici and Frey 2021). After establishing her reputation through successful collaborations with Aurelio Galfetti and Ivo Trümpy, she maintained formal or informal partnerships with many others — for example Dolf



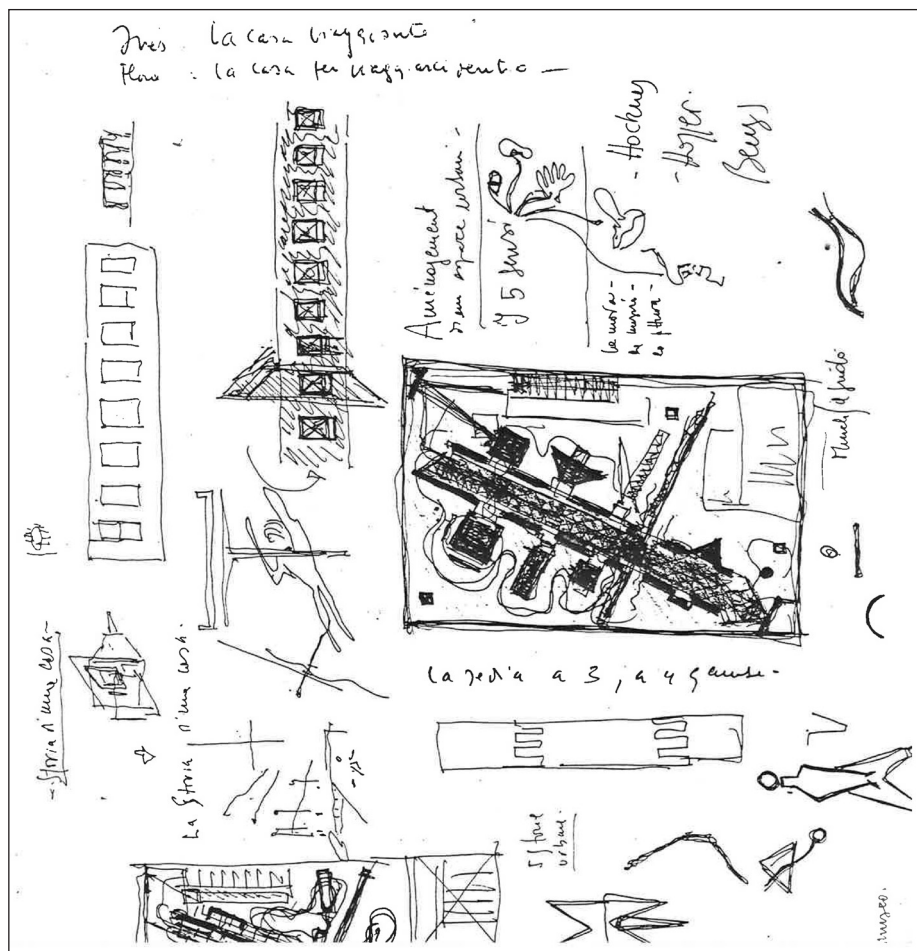


Figure 8: Sketch with handwritten notes by the three architects, 1988–1989 (Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum, Basel).

Schnebli, Tobias Amman and Renato Salvi — with the exact extent of each contribution remaining unclear (Albrecht and Davidovici 2017).

Schnitter, who preferred working independently as an architect, worked in close collaboration with her friend Ruth Lanners-Oldani building three pavilions for SAFFA 1958. In an interview (2018), she mentioned that she appreciated the fruitful exchange and enjoyed the shared activity of experimenting with space as she, Ruchat-Roncati and Lamunière prepared the exhibition. Schnitter's (1984) close reading of the buildings of early women architects — such as Guyer's house, which she lived in — led her to conclude that women thought and perceived space in an all-encompassing way and that, as builders, they generally preferred undogmatic approaches. Working on the different sections of the exhibition, the three architects were able to experiment with this theory, creating spaces with a new 'tactile quality' (Lamunière 1998).

## Promoting Feminist Awareness and Creating Role Models in Practice and Academia

The exhibition approached the issue of role models for women in architecture, which remains a concern to this day, on many levels, but most especially through the idea that women assume multiple and parallel identities in society. The importance of role models was a common feature of feminist discourse at the time, and Ruchat-Roncati in particular was able to relate this issue to her own situation as the first female professor at the ETH, where she had to deal with the expectations of various groups, including students, colleagues, school management and the public. In preparing the exhibition, she reflected critically on the fundamental aspects of a woman's life course and career, the importance of education, and financial and political status. She dedicated her notebook for the year 1989 to fellow architect Eileen Gray, a designer who had been overlooked in the history books. Ruchat-Roncati also referred to other women architects and designers in her notebook, including Aino Aalto, Gae Aulenti, Lux Guyer, Franca Helg, Charlotte Perriand, Lilly Reich and Flora Steiger, who, she noted, were overshadowed by the 'ambitious and arrogant' personalities of their male colleagues. Bringing the work of these women to light would, she believed, make evident their significant contribution to architecture.<sup>7</sup>

Ruchat-Roncati and Lamunière — who became the first female professor of architecture at the École polytechnique fédérale in Lausanne in 1994 — would go on to shape the history of women in Swiss academia. Their work on the 1989 exhibition deepened their feminist awareness, especially historically and discursively. Ruchat-Roncati was able to bring new perspectives to the curriculum as a result; in 1994, together with Petra Stojanik, an architect and her former assistant, she developed an elective course called 'Women in the History of Architecture' that was the first of its kind in the ETH Zürich's architecture department whose aim was to rediscover pioneering figures hidden from history. The course also explored the contribution of women architects to exhibition design, paying particular attention to the work of Lilly Reich. Sadly, the course was dropped from the curriculum after Ruchat-Roncati retired from the university in 2002.

Ruchat-Roncati also supported women in their careers: she recommended Lamunière for the position of assistant professor at the ETH in 1991 and Stojanik in 1993. Much younger than Schnitter and Ruchat-Roncati, Lamunière was in her formative years when the so-called second wave of feminism swept the world. She was not only interested in gender issues in architecture. As Schnitter (2018) recalled, Lamunière was interested in all aspects of women's lives and identities as well as in changing concepts of femininity. During her time as a professor in Lausanne, Lamunière was

actively involved in improving gender equality. She and a number of other women professors founded the EPFL-WISH Foundation (Women in Sciences and Humanities) in 2006 to support and promote women's studies on campus, and she helped increase the representation of women in her department when she became its dean, a position she held from 2008 to 2011. A prolific publicist, she was editor of the Geneva-based architectural journal *Faces* from 1989 to 2004. With art historian Catherine Quéloz, she also coedited a special issue on women in architecture in 2002 for *Faces*, which included the text of the 1989 SAFFA exhibition booklet.

The 1989 exhibition and accompanying events attracted public attention and received positive reviews in regional and national newspapers and in the specialized press. The exhibition also encouraged interested women to reflect on their role in society. The architect and architectural critique Evelyne Lang (b. 1960), now considered as a pioneer in historical research on Swiss women architects, wrote a review in the journal *Archithese* (1989). Lang traces her interest in the topic back to her enrollment in Huber's course on Lux Guyer and wrote her dissertation on the first women architects in Switzerland, engaging Ruchat-Roncati as her co-supervisor (Lang 1992; Lang Jacob 2018). Lang's research led to numerous entries in biographical and architectural encyclopaedias, thus securing many Swiss women architects a place in the historiography.

### Early Feminist Curating Activism

*SAFFA 1928, 1958 ... 1988? Und heute* documented a special moment in the history of Swiss women in architecture, when the field, both in practice and in academia and museums, began acknowledging feminist demands. Schnitter, Ruchat-Roncati and Lamunière created a low-cost collaborative exhibition in the tradition of exhibitions of women's work that also referenced contemporary feminist practices. All three had lived or worked outside Switzerland and had a broad knowledge of different languages, and so discussions about women in architecture in the European and American context were fairly accessible to them.

The 1989 exhibition is an early example of an architectural installation that did not present architecture as an exhibit and that did not focus on a single architect (as did the 1983 monographic exhibition on Guyer). Nor did it present a group survey (as did the exhibitions *Architektinnenhistorie* in Berlin in 1984 and *Ladies First* in Zurich in 1987).

Yet, architecture played an essential role in SAFFA 1989 — not in the form of plans, drawings, photographs or models but as a physical space that appealed to the senses, the intellect and the emotions. The women who visited the exhibition must have felt its novelty. In a 1989 letter, Schnitter mentioned an art historian who, after seeing the exhibition,

allegedly reported that ‘she was very moved by the way thoughts were conveyed with a few personal objects — and they had to be few, otherwise they would become banal. It had not only interested her, it had touched her emotionally’.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the contribution of the three architects also differed from the more traditional involvement or participation of women as represented in the work of Zaha Hadid, Myra Warhaftig and Christine Jachmann at the International Building Exhibition in Berlin 1984 (IB 1987; STERN 1988).

A feminist consciousness also characterized the curatorial approach of SAFFA 1989, which was innovative in many respects and made similar demands with respect to feminist curating in art and architecture exhibitions, as theorised by many curators, as today in seeking gender equality, in proposing a new paradigm regarding authorship, and in understanding the curatorial work as an active means of providing meaning (Richter, Krasny and Perry 2016). By engaging in a collaborative working process and collective authorship and offering a new personal and collective reflection on the situation of the professional women, the curators and the architects of the SAFFA exhibition of 1989 thus participated in a new form of feminist activism.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> All translations from German are mine.
- <sup>2</sup> See the article by Maria Novas Ferradas in this issue.
- <sup>3</sup> See the article by Inge Beckel in this issue.
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Bauwelt* 31/32 (1979) and *Arch+. Zeitschrift für Architektur und Urbanismus*, 14(60) (1981). In 1980, the Swiss construction magazine *Aktuelles Bauen* interviewed a number of Swiss women architects and published four of these conversations with Trix Haussmann, Lisbeth Sachs, Beate Schnitter and Flora Ruchat-Roncati. See Rey and Wanner 1980.
- <sup>5</sup> See the article by Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner in this issue.
- <sup>6</sup> Founded in 1959, Zürcher Arbeitsgruppe für Städtebau took public positions regarding the development of Zurich, mainly on issues of traffic planning, housing program, urban consolidation and destruction of historic buildings. The group generated many papers and was politically active. See Huber 2000.
- <sup>7</sup> See Ruchat-Roncati 1989: n.p.: 'Pochi, pochissimi sono i personaggi femminili che la storia dell'architettura ha annoverato tra i suoi protagonisti. E quei pochi estremamente recenti ... si possono contare sulle dita di una mano: Aino Aalto, Charlotte Perriand, Franca Helg, Lilly Reich, Eileen Gray, Gae Aulenti, Lux Guyer, Flora Steiger. Le prime tre sono purtroppo adombrate sulla personalità emergente e arrogante dei loro partner maschili – Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier, Franco Albini, Mies van der Rohe. Perché da un'analisi delle loro opere e dell'impronta lasciata in loro presenza, rispettivamente dal vuoto lasciato dalla loro assenza, ci è evidente il contributo e l'impegno personale dato all'architettura.'
- <sup>8</sup> 'Das ist ja eine neue Art von Ausstellung. Sie sei ganz ergriffen gewesen davon, wie mit wenigen persönlichen Gegenständen – und es müssten wenige sein, da sie sonst banal würden – Gedanken vermitteln würden. Es habe sie nicht nur interessiert, sondern eben emotionell angesprochen.'

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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