Innovative Women in Architecture & Design: Marion Mahony Griffin, 1871-1962

by Kim Hay

"The functions of land planning are: 1) To protect and preserve natural features, so that the Earth may not die." Marion Mahony Griffin, The Magic of America

This statement, written in the 1900’s in a full page of progressive design, is one small indication of how forward thinking this woman was in a world of men. Marion Mahony Griffin was a groundbreaking architect, one of the first women to practice in the United States. For over 30 years, she and her husband, Walter Burley Griffin, were influential architects in Chicago

Mahony had a very close relationship with Wright and his family. During this time, she contributed greatly to the development of Prairie Style architecture through her designs in WYK’s office. During the summer of 1914, Mahony was primarily involved in architectural rendering, earning the moniker, ‘the greatest draftsman of her generation’ by the architectural writer Reyner Banham. 1 According to one source, Mahony “was an important contributor to his (Wright’s) reputation, particularly for the influential WYK Portfolio. Mahony is credited with creating “more than half of the renderings.”

An “outspoken, dramatic woman,” 2 Mahony considered herself a draftsmen in Wright’s studio, 3 Mahony had a very close relationship with Wright and his family. During this time, she contributed greatly to the development of Prairie Style architecture through her designs in WYK’s office. Mahony’s personal work strongly shows the influence of her mentor. This home, while a clear example of Prairie Style architecture, was torn down in 1956, but a triple glass window she designed for the home managed to survive. This window, which features stylized wheat sheaves is on display at the Art Institute of Chicago.

In 1909, Mr. Wright ran off to Europe with Mamah Cheney, leaving behind his wife and family and creating a huge public scandal. During the uproar, Wright demonstrated the ability to smooth out the jagged ups and downs of risk-taking. While not an extreme example of cavalier discrimination, it is, however, an illustration that true diversity has yet to be achieved. As the world is divided culturally, wasn’t this experience sound familiar? A highly placed principal at a local firm was delivering a talk on the CWA website as well as the online blog at Architect magazine.

Does this experience sound familiar? A highly placed principal at a local firm was delivering a seminar recently about new influences that architectural firms would have to prepare themselves for in the future. In order to promote gender and racial diversity in architectural firms, ISPs? should require applicants to show what steps are being taken to diversify their top levels of management.

Solution 2: Join a board. To further your career, get involved! Join a social group or volunteer for a local election. Networking is not only about meet and greet, it is about becoming an active part of the community. In fact, just because you want to join a board, it does not mean that you will have the opportunity to influence how the board will make decisions.

Solution 3: Critical mass. Women represent a large portion of practicing architects in all parts of the United States. Get to know them and share experiences. Part of a good diversity program is to develop a program of peer mentorship.

Solution 4: When you find another solution to our common problems in diversification, add it to this list and pass it on.

References and Credits

[25] Spring Brugh @ location and speaker TBD.

<http://www.artic.edu/aic/education/mural_project/pages/M armstrong.html>

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CWA Panel Discussion by Gal M. Cassagne

CWA’s member’s meeting was held on September 29th at the Staceekeen showplace located at the Menardette Mall. The topic was entitled “The State of Architecture: Strategies for Success in the Economic Downturn.” Panelists included Carol Ross Barney, FAIA, of Ross Barney Architects, Sarah Dunn, Assistant Professor at SIUE, College of Architecture and the Arts, Eric Rola, Rola Studi, Catherine Baker AIA, Landon Bond Baker and moderated by Debbie Colgan of Executive Director of Sacred Space International, Chicago. This topic was originally conceived in February and after many months of planning, it is still relevant. Over the last year, the economic downturn has taken a toll on the architectural profession. The climate changing in the economy and in the profession has left us with many questions. In next month’s event, we will respond the challenges ahead and how we will restructure the profession. This panel sought an understanding of what is happening now, and inspire.

Professionally Devoted

5 Minute Speed-Mentoring for Designers by Mac Hay

On October 27th, CWA and Archeworks held a Speed Mentoring workshop at Archeworks studio. Lee Walding, assistant director of undergraduate student services at the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign facilitated the event. The host, is the author of “Being an Architect: A Guide to Careers,” and has co-led sessions on Speed Mentoring at the last three national AIA Conventions. He is a president of the Architect magazine.

Don’t Miss Out on Joining the CWA Panel Discussion next month!

Get your tickets now for this exciting event on December 9th! The CWA Panel Discussion will be held at the Staceekeen Showplace located at the Menardette Mall. This event is an exclusive member’s meeting and will feature a panel of experts addressing issues of women in architecture since 1973.

The right will include a Silent Auction to benefit the CWA Scholarship fund. $25 CWA members & non-members

All money collected at the door will benefit the CWA Scholarship Fund.