

MoMA A&D talks: on curating architecture and design

Amanda Saba Ruggiero (A), Luis Michal (L)*

During Fall 2016 we had the unique opportunity to participate in the regular internship program of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and assist with ongoing exhibition projects in the Architecture and Design Department (A&D). This Department was established in 1932 as the first curatorial department dedicated to architecture and design and built on an ambitious collection covering major figures and movement of architectural culture from mid-19th century to the present. With looking back on a rich history of influential exhibitions such as Modern Architecture: International Exhibition (1932), Architecture Without Architects (1964/65) or Deconstructivist Architecture (1988) it has been one of the key institutions to push the format of the architecture exhibition and which it keeps doing up to today.

Having this in mind we both came to New York with great respect and honored to gain insights in this institution for a period of three months. The department currently employs around 15 people which made it a really pleasant, intimate place to work with highly passionate and professional individuals full of remarkable expertise and respect for each other. This said and with the department going through some recent (at that moment) personnel changes, most notably the new directorship of Martino Stierli since 2015, as well MoMA reconfiguring and adding gallery spaces set to be open in 2019, we felt it was a very interesting moment for us to talk to our curator colleagues about their personal history and professional ambitions as curators at MoMA as well specific challenges of exhibiting architecture and design.

*Amanda Saba Ruggiero is architect, postdoctoral researcher enrolled at Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism - University of São Paulo, Brazil; Luis Michal is architect, currently enrolled in the Masters Program at Technische Universität München, Germany.

Being both educated in architecture in different countries (Brazil and Germany) we could gain not only a lot of professional insights but also talk about personal aspects of the curators' – not always linear – careers. In total we conducted six interviews with all (senior) curators and one curatorial assistant of the Architecture and Design Department, all of whom we asked the same, around ten questions in order to produce a complete "panorama" of the departments staff at that very moment. In the following

we would like to share with you some first three interviews with Paola Antonelli, Barry Bergdoll and Michelle Millar Fisher. The second half with Sean Anderson, Juliet Kinchin and Martino Stierli will follow in an upcoming issue of this magazine.

About the interviews, in the first question we read that become a curator and making exhibitions was not on the mind of Barry Bergdoll and Paola Antonelli since they were art history respectively architecture students. Bergdoll was interested in archival and original documents, inside an academic career, while Antonelli was writing on magazines like *Domus* and *Abitare*. Michelle Fischer such as Bergdoll was inside an academic career before. The teaching position is a shared common background for both Bergdoll, Antonelli and Michelle Fischer, as Bergdoll affirms “a similar sharing of passion”, and they understand that communicating an idea is one of the main competencies of a curator.

For Antonelli a curator is trusted, a barrage of information and need an audience, while Bergdoll defends that curating is ABOUT something, firstly connected to the idea of taking care of a collection and secondly also connected to making events and public displays. For architecture exhibitions, he mentions that “in order to display architecture you have to create an architecture” as a collective work: “Making an exhibition is a highly collaborative process with sorts of teams and all sorts of expertise”. In relation to the work at MoMA, Fisher argues about the top hierarchy of the curator within the institution which in her opinion is not helpful for collaborative work. Bergdoll and Antonelli agree on the bureaucracy inside the museum as something necessary but not pleasant to work with. The “power of the institution as Antonelli says, is its big resonance and a guaranteed audience at a museum like MoMA.

Bergdoll remembers that an exhibition is a medium for communicating an idea and “not in the end itself”. For Antonelli it must stimulate peoples existing critical tools to make them curious about an object in a different way. At the end, the curators give some advices to young people who aim to become curators, Fisher recommends to be “someone who is just collegial and good to work with”, Antonelli proposes to grab the opportunities and try not to have regrets while Bergdoll ends advising “to develop a passion for the subject” one aims to communicate. We wish you an enjoyable and insightful read.