

The exhibition *Crossed Histories* is very well documented and based on archival material. How did you find these archives, and why did their study inspire you to create both a book and an exhibition?

We often hear that women's work has been rendered invisible because of a lack of archives. But in the case of *Crossed Histories*, it is quite the opposite. The three women I chose to focus on – Gae Aulenti, Ada Louise Huxtable, and Phyllis Lambert – all have substantial archival collections, which remain largely underexplored. It was precisely this abundance, combined with the lack of mediation around these archives, that led me to develop an exhibition and a book.

For Ada Louise Huxtable, her archives were transferred to the Getty Research Institute, preserved in a highly institutional and structured setting. Phyllis Lambert's archives are kept at the CCA, the Canadian Center for Architecture, in a collection separate from architectural drawings and documents – a dedicated personal archive. And in the case of Gae Aulenti, her family opened a private foundation just as I was starting this project. That archive was still being established, in a more intimate, less institutional context, but it too held an extraordinary wealth of material.

Across all three cases, the archives contained drawings, models, photographs, as well as more personal and professional documents. For instance, Huxtable's collection includes not only her writings and research but also a vast correspondence: letters exchanged over many years, both professional and personal, including with her readers.

Why do these archives exist, and what explains their preservation?

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Ada Louise Huxtable, for example, carefully kept everything. A few years before her death – I don't have the

exact date – she decided to sell or donate her archives to the Getty Research Institute. This choice may seem surprising since she spent her entire career in New York, yet her papers are housed in Los Angeles. But her close ties with the Getty and Richard Meier shaped her decision: she believed it was the right place to safeguard her legacy.

Phyllis Lambert took a similar approach. She founded her own archival center and made a point of preserving her documents meticulously, even employing a dedicated archivist. She has always had a strong awareness of what archives mean and why they matter.

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These are exceptional cases: women who, thanks to their influence and professional recognition, not only produced significant work but also took responsibility for its preservation. For many other women, especially in the past, this was far less common – their work often disappeared because it was neither valued nor archived.

Can we speak of these archives as feminist archives?

One of the most striking aspects of this project was the question of feminism. I asked it in many ways: through oral history, interviews, directly with Phyllis Lambert, and by examining the archives. The answer was unanimous: no. None of the three women – Aulenti, Huxtable, or Lambert – identified as feminists. That discovery surprised me, and I find it very revealing. It shows that speaking about professionally accomplished women does not necessarily mean speaking about feminism.

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These were powerful, influential women, often tough, sometimes adopting attitudes perceived as “masculine” in their ways of working or presenting themselves. They did not frame their work as feminist, nor did they particularly position themselves to support other women. They were primarily driven by their own careers and ambitions. This insight emerged clearly, both from written and oral archives.

What kinds of sources did you choose to exhibit, and how did you present them in the exhibition?

One common element across all three archives was photography: family pictures, childhood portraits, images that had often never been shown before. For me, these photographs are crucial, especially in studying women’s lives – they reveal origins, social class, motherhood or its absence, all of which shape biographies. Some were displayed in the chronological timeline of the exhibition, though many more exist. There were also numerous photographs by Phyllis Lambert herself, who worked extensively with photography alongside Richard Pare.

Another key source was correspondence, particularly in Huxtable’s case. Her letters are incredibly rich, whether addressed to readers or political authorities. We enlarged some of these letters to a large scale for the exhibition. This both highlighted their content and conveyed her voice and tone in a very direct way.

Original drawings from Gae Aulenti’s archive were also exhibited – the only truly original materials on display. We complemented them with magazines, publications, and archival video clips from the French Institut national de l’audiovisuel (INA).

Finally, we included oral archives. Visitors can hear three short audio excerpts, each featuring the voice of one of the women. Their voices – distinctive and recognizable, like Gae Aulenti’s particularly striking tone – bring them to life within the exhibition.

What advice would you give to young researchers interested in uncovering women’s contributions to the history of architecture?

The invisibility of women in architectural history is often explained by the lack of sources or archives. That is true, but there are ways to work around it.

Oral history is one approach: even if the women themselves are no longer alive, those who worked with them or knew them may still be available to interview. Written sources are another path: looking at what they published, but also considering more popular or unexpected formats like television, radio, or other media. Most importantly, it’s essential to broaden our definition of what an architect is. If we move beyond the singular figure of the building designer, and include critics, clients, philanthropists, political activists, or preservationists, many more women emerge in the story.

My advice to young researchers would be to explore these alternative sources and perspectives. By expanding the lens through which we view architecture, we not only recover forgotten women but also reshape the very way we tell architectural history.

Archives Through the Lens of Gender, interview of Léa-Catherine Szacka (architect, associate professor at the University of Manchester and director of the Manchester Architecture Research Group, MARG) by Archizoom, Paris, France, 09.2025. On the occasion of the exhibition *Crossed Histories, Gae Aulenti, Ada Louise Huxtable, Phyllis Lambert, on Architecture and the City*, Archizoom, EPFL, 24.09-28.11.2025