

YALE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE GRADUATE WOMEN ALUMNS 1942-2020

Elizabeth Mackay Ranney 1946 B.Arch. Leslie Leonard Armitage 1968 B.Arch. Patricia Patkau 1978 M.Arch. ... Margaret Marsh 2018 M.Arch. II

** Did not graduate

HOW WE CAN MAKE ROOM(S): CREATING A COLLECTIVE ARCHIVE FOR YALE WOMEN ALUMS

by Jessica Varner, Ph.D. (M.Arch. 2008, M.E.D. 2014)

Locked away in underground storage at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, are the letters, posters, journals, films, photographs, and a T-shirt of Yale graduate and activist architect Noel Phyllis Birkby. In addition to Birkby's materials, the Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History, founded in 1942, holds the documents and other items of hundreds of women, from landscape architect Alice Recknagel Ireys to reproductive and race rights activist Loretta Ross. In the winter of 2020, when I requested access to Phyllis' items, staff brought the boxes to a temporary research office, in use while the college constructed a new home for its collections. The Sophia Smith Collection is a feminist archive par excellence, and Birkby's ninety-two boxes, tubes, and flat files vividly capture the activist architect's life and career.

“FEMINIST HISTORIES ARE HISTORIES OF THE DIFFICULTY OF THAT WE.” —SARA AHMED, IN LIVING A FEMINIST LIFE

Phyllis Birkby's, Toni Harp's, Constance Adams's, and many of the Yale School of Architecture graduate women alumns' lives have been unevenly recorded. For example, the detailed midcentury Wisconsin and Illinois house drawings by the Yale School of Architecture's first woman graduate, Elizabeth (Betsey) Mackay Ranney ('B.Arch. 1946), remained unseen, rolled up in her son's attic, until this exhibition, which displays several of them for the first time. Another Yale architecture alum, Marion O'Brien Donovan ('B.Arch. 1958), invented 'The Boater,' a reusable waterproof diaper. The patent drawings for it are held at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, yet her name barely appears on Yale's official student roster.

Many other women alumns remain absent from the public record. Yale women graduates are no exception to intentional and unintentional archival silences. Their patriarchal marital name changes go untraced, their documents are deemed less valuable and thus discarded, or, most egregiously, women's work falls victim to institutional priorities fixed on exclusionary procedures, wherein lack of resources or a different definition of what should be collected prevails, often exhaustingly replicating notions of male greatness. And, as history shows us, what is omitted is often forgotten and left behind. Unfortunately, in the case of Yale women graduate alumns, too much has been left out.

Room(s) centers on creating a new feminist record in which the lives and work of Yale women alumns make their own histories. To create this collective record, the exhibition team asked what it meant to record inclusive "sensations, experiences, and memories," rather than dismissive "doctrines, dogmas, or philosophies." Historians Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai offer, for example, the radical act of listening to women's words to capture more voices. Our team listened—to alumns from different geographies, to their family members, to faculty, colleagues, and friends. Institutional collections often exclude women; therefore, we imagined the archive anew, refilled with women's books, vinyl records, student work, objects, personal photographs, conversations, and memories. Still, many questions remain. Such as, What happens when we consider women alumns' work as a collective body? Writer Mimi Zeiger has tackled the notion of what asserting a collective voice can determine for women. As Zeiger recalls, the

1970s Brooklyn Museum exhibition and publication Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective marked a significant moment for reclaiming and rewriting the history of women in architecture on its own terms, because "representation and visibility matter, but so do our feminist histories and practices." To be visible and counted as a growing statistic is not enough. Room(s) does not provide numbers or a comprehensive history of women at Yale as an answer; instead, the presence or lack is felt by experiencing the women's works on their own terms. The point of the exhibition is to reject a "star" system that structurally made some women invisible and thereby made their "success" well nigh impossible; it was a system that effectively or intentionally denied certain groups success simply by methodically excluding them. The exhibition creates a more inclusive set of rubrics with which to understand the collectivity of a more extensive set of activities and actors. Yale alumns and architects Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson call attention to feminist scholar Nancy Fraser's statement that, "although gender dominance is ubiquitous, in sum, it takes different forms at different junctures and sites, and its character varies for different situated women. Its shape cannot be read off from one site or one group and extrapolated to all the rest." With these ideas in mind, the exhibition asks, How are women situated differently or the same, and how do those women make room?

In summary, the Yale School of Architecture exhibition Room(s) is twofold: a celebration and a call to action. Arising from two years of research, the show constructs a physical archive for women graduates—a collective, undeniable force. The exhibition team gathered more than four thousand documents, reproductions, and objects. The works collected by the team are now archived to provide a historical record, and that record is in various forms: on hard drives, in notebooks, and on library shelves, for example. From the patent drawings of Marion O'Brien Donovan for "The Boater," to a vinyl record, Mountain Moving Day, by Harriet Cohen (M.C.P. 1966) and the New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Band—each piece highlights work by Yale women graduates as students, architects, urban and landscape designers, academics, politicians, inventors, engineers, artists, developers, planners, lawyers, activists,

and citizens. The show displays work from alumns that exhibition team members have gathered from institutional archives, personal records, conversations, and emails, and acquired from graduates in an open call. The items from the featured alumns—Phyllis Birkby, Toni Harp, and Constance Adams—as well as from more than five hundred others, create a collective record of women graduates, redefining architectural education's paths. Room(s) documents the lives, educations, struggles, and joys the graduates experienced, from torn grade sheets indicating a failed design course after experiencing evident sexism to photographs and invitations from a president of the United States. Yet, the collection remains nascent, unfinished, and open. Representation continues to discriminate by gender. For example, the Yale School of Architecture's collection in the university's Manuscripts and Archives division holds some evidence of the school's educational past, but it is sparse—a filmed lecture here, a T-shirt there. For example, Constance Adams is the only woman architect whose papers are in the Yale collection. Therefore, the exhibition efforts are just the beginning.

The exhibition's call to action is simple: collect every record you can find, remember and celebrate other alumns and their work, and support new students entering the program from every socioeconomic background. As activist L.A. Kauffman states, the history of "direct action"—or movement building—"is one of hope: no matter how long the odds, with smart organizing, and right tools, we can win more than we imagine." This is how to build a collective future, a future written with underlying parity requirements and intersectional feminist values at its core. It is also how to create a continuing feminist history for Yale. By reasserting our past and imagining a different future, this is how we make room.

GRADUATE WOMEN ALUMS 1942-

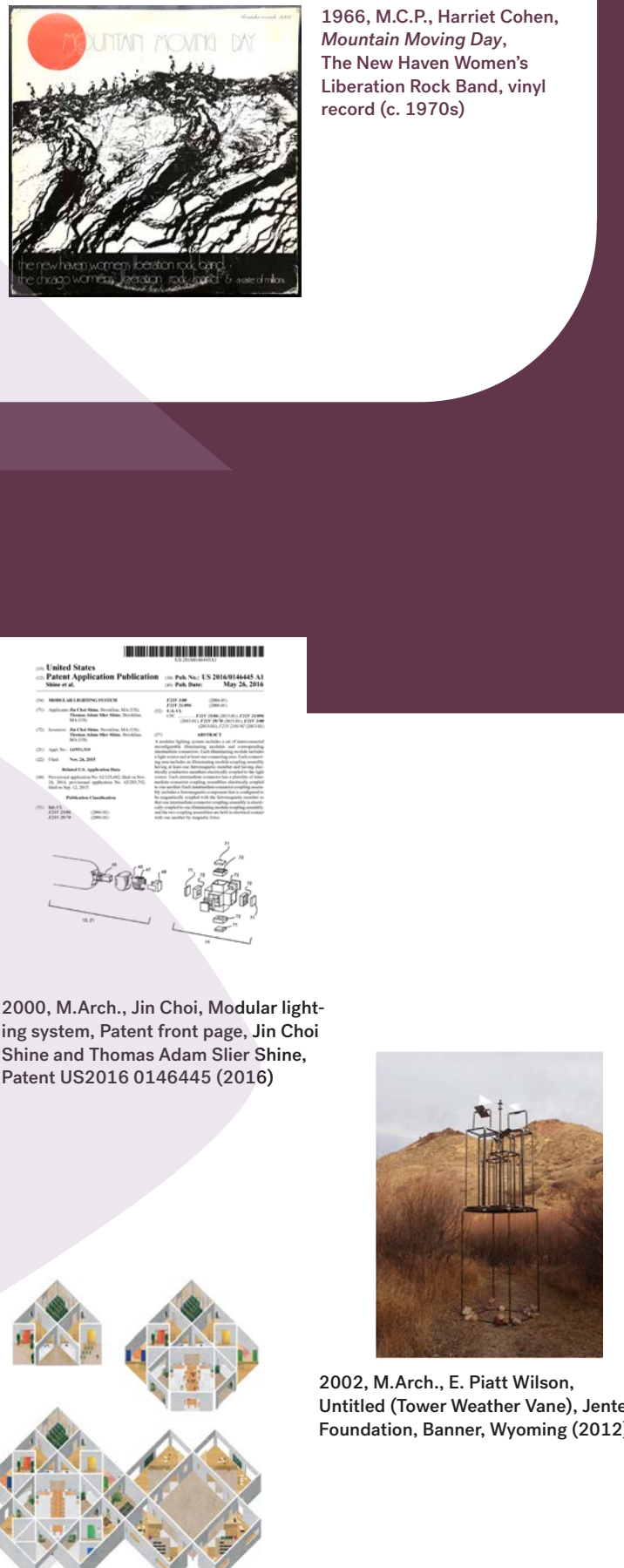
The Yale School of Architecture. Assistance was provided by the Smith College Special Collections staff, including Nichole Calero and the Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History, which holds the (Noel) Phyllis Birkby Papers. Southern Connecticut State University Special Collections and Archives staff, including Patrick M. Crowley, also contributed valuable assistance. As the exhibition team gathered more than twelve hundred works from more than five hundred women alumns, Mary Carole Overholt and Limy Fabiana Rocha provided invaluable research and curatorial assistance. Thanks also go out to Omnivore Inc., Julie Cho, Alice Chung, and Karen Hsu for their design collaboration and dedication. Also deserving of recognition are recent Yale M.F.A. graduates Julia Schaefer and Yuanbo Wang, whose typefaces are crucial throughout the exhibition design. Many thanks to Andrew Benner, Alison Walsh, and the exhibition team for the final result. Finally, and most importantly, a profound thanks to all Yale School of Architecture women alumns.

Exhibition Acknowledgments Bringing together more than seven hundred works by more than five hundred Yale women graduates required the collaboration of both the women who were there as well as those who continue to document, archive, collect, and preserve these histories. We would like to thank the many people who made time for conversations, dug up family records, opened collection doors during the global health crisis, and generously shared artifacts and memories from their personal collections. The works in the exhibition speak for themselves, and most importantly they speak as a collective body. We offer admiration and awe for the Yale women's contributions to architecture and beyond. Several alumns contributed time and materials beyond those included in the exhibition, especially Joseph Ranney, for items from the collection of Elizabeth (Betsey) Mackay Ranney; Kimberly Wallace, from the collection of Constance M. Adams; and Sal Wilson. Special thanks go to Dean Deborah Berke, Wanda Bubliski, Patti Glazer, Toni Harp, Mary McLeod, and Beverly Willis for their contributions. Among the institutions, collections, and archivists who provided access and assistance, we wish to acknowledge the Manuscripts and Archives staff of Yale, including Stephen Ross. The archive provided access to many works from the more than eighty-year history of women students at

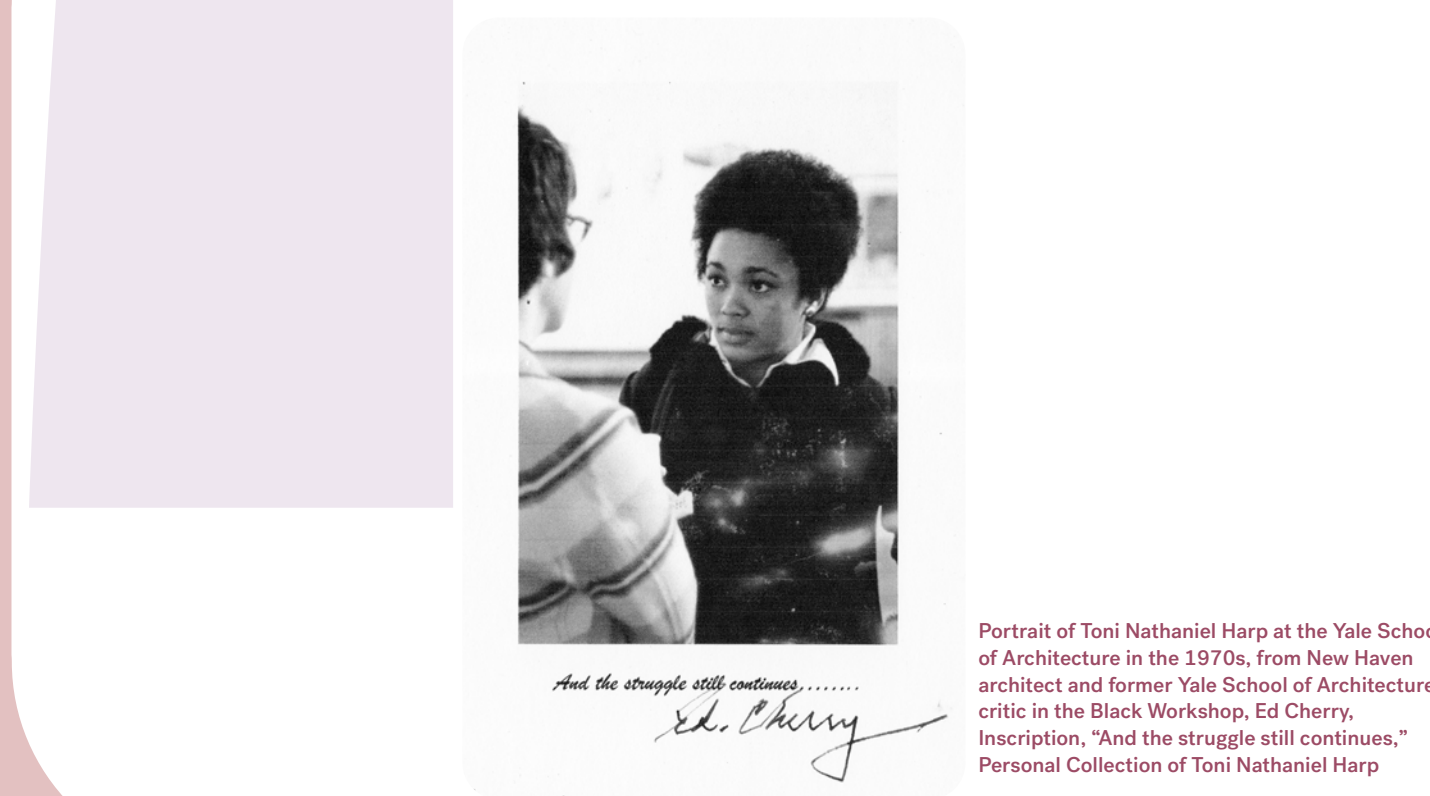
- 1 The Room(s) exhibition research started just months before the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring 2020. Archive and library closures presented an issue, but I am fortunate and thankful for the many archivists, staff, and institutions who opened their doors and vaults, despite the overwhelming moment. I am also profoundly grateful for the women graduate alumns who collectively gave this show meaning through their work and writings.
2 Not coincidentally, 1942 is also the first year graduate women were admitted into the Yale School of Architecture. As women took on more roles in society during the 1930s and 1940s, efforts to document, record, and remember this critical historical transition became more frequent. Two examples are the World Center for Women's Archives, established in 1935, and the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, established in 1943. For more, see Karen Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher, "A Room of One's Own: Women's Archives," Archival Issues 24, no. 1 (1999): 37-54.
3 Gayatri Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," History and Theory 24, no. 3 (1985): 248.
4 Spivak, "Rani of Sirmur," 270.
5 There has been a surge of historical feminist scholarship to reclaim women architects' work. I am grateful to FAAC (Feminist Art and Architecture Collaborative), cofounded by Martina Tampa, Olga Touloumi, Tessa Paneth-Pollak, and Ana Maria León, Anoradha Iyer Siddiqi, and Sophie Hochhäusel, among many others. See FAAC, "Counterplanning from the Classroom," Field Note, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 76, no. 3 (September 2017): 277-80; FAAC, "To Manifest: Harvard Design Magazine, no. 46 (2018). https://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/46/to-manifest; Sophie Hochhäusel, "Memories from Resistance: Women, War, and the Forgotten Work of Margarette Schütte-Lihotzky, 1919-1989," in 2017-2018 Follow-up Presentation Series at the Radcliffe Institute for

- Advanced Study, March 19, 2018, online lecture, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1JlaqOWwAnoradha Iyer Siddiqi, "Crafting the Archive: Minnette De Silva, Architecture, and History," Journal of Architecture 22, no. 8 (2017): 1299-1336; and Ana Maria León, "Crowdsourcing Knowledge: Cowiting, Coteaching, and Colearning," Art Journal Open (College Art Association), July 24, 2020, http://artjournal.colleageart.org/?p=10593. Additionally, for context on the role of feminism in architecture in the 1970s and 1980s, including the work of Phyllis Birkby, see Andrea Merrett, "The Professional is Political: The Women's Movement in American Architecture, 1971-1985" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2020).
6 Eric Bennett, Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing during the Cold War (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 97. The quoted phrases reflect the effort to bring forward individual narratives, and they arise from the Iowa Writers Workshop.
7 In their example, "oral narratives," including informal interviews, conversations, life histories, scrapbooks, and testimonies, can "recover" experiences and stories of less heard voices. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History (London: Routledge, 1991), 1-2.
8 Mimi Zeiger, "How Feminists Sought to Make Architecture a Truly Collective Endeavor," Metropolis, August 8, 2019, https://www.metropolismag.com/architecture/women-feminism-american-architecture/. A Publication and Exhibition Organized by the Architectural League of New York through Its Archive of Women in Architecture of the Women's Faculty Forum (2001-). Yale Women in Architecture (2000s), and Equality in Design (2010-). Furthermore, archival records at Yale offer records for those interested in the history

- (London: Routledge, 1995), 159, quoted in Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson, Architecture and Feminism: Yale Publications on Architecture (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), xv.
10 Several efforts to write the history and amend the record of women at the Yale School of Architecture should be noted. In 2012, the Yale Women of Architecture Alumni group, primarily comprising New York City architects and designers, held an alumni gathering and symposium. See Jamie Chan and Nina Rappaport, "Yale Women in Architecture," Constructs (Fall 2012): 6-7. Additionally, student, faculty, and alumni movements have and continue to take on gender representation, among them are the Women Faculty Forum (2001-), Yale Women in Architecture (2000s), and Equality in Design (2010-).
11 L.A. Kauffman, Direct Action: Protest and the Reinvention of American Radicalism (New York: Verso, 2017), xiv.



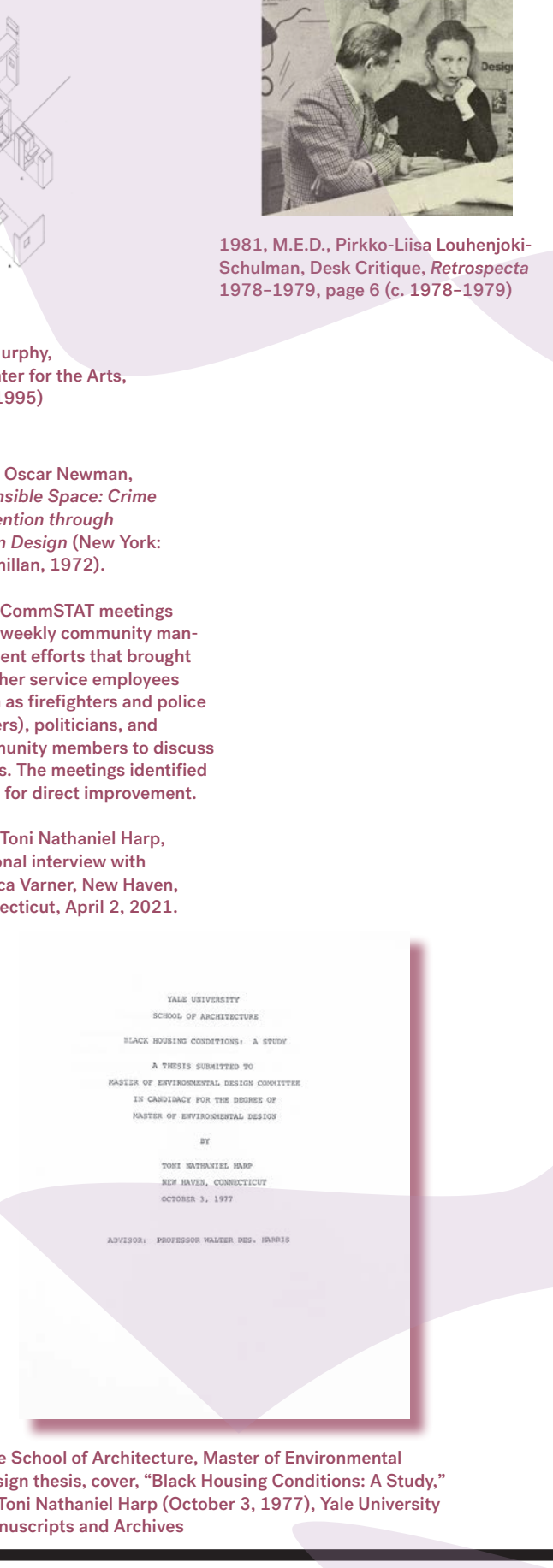
TONI JEWEL NATHANIEL HARP (M.E.D. 1977)



Politician, community organizer, and advocate for housing, youth education, women's health, and Black equality in New Haven and greater Connecticut, Toni Harp was born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah, before moving to Chicago, Illinois, to attend Roosevelt College. While participating in an American Planning Society meeting during her undergraduate studies, Harp met Thelma Rucker, a member of the Yale environmental design faculty. Rucker led the Black Environment Studies Team (referred to as BEST, formerly known as the Black Workshop) alongside Edward Cherry and Richard Dozier. At the meeting, Rucker recruited Harp to attend Yale for graduate research. At Yale, Harp worked with advisor Walter Harris on a thesis titled "Black Housing Conditions." The forward-thinking study looked at Black housing inequalities in both federally managed public housing as well as the private

real estate market. Her studies were inspired by public health research, including the Yale Child Study initiative, and urban studies, including Oscar Newman's concept of defensible space.¹ In her own research, Harp asked profound questions about community investment and local ownership, a theme that she would reference throughout her political career. After graduating with a master's in environmental design in 1977, Harp embarked on a life in politics. As an M.E.D. student, she had worked at Umoja Extended Family, a community outreach house founded by Yale students. The project familiarized Harp with the joys and difficulties of community activism. While at Yale, she also met her husband, Wendell Harp (M.C.P. 1970, M.Arch. 1971), who assisted her as a partner and political organizer in Connecticut. She started her political career at the local level by working on the

election campaign of a candidate for the New Haven Board of Alders, and she also served as ward committee secretary following the election. Eventually, she herself ran for the Board of Alders for New Haven's Second Ward, defeating the incumbent after tirelessly knocking on doors to meet the community. As alder, she emphasized the importance of community-owned housing (Section 221 housing was common at the time, before Section 8 housing became standard) and design measures to inspire neighborhood safety. After five years on the Board of Alders, in 1993 Harp shifted to politics on a larger scale. She ran for the District 10 Connecticut state Senate seat and won. During her Senate tenure, she served on influential committees such as budget appropriations, despite experiencing stereotyping from the beginning. In her two decades in the state Senate, Harp fought for a variety of legislation, such as bills relating to women's health, the expansion of health care to vulnerable populations, housing initiatives, state economic investment in New Haven (including the Dixwell Q House, a historic community center in New Haven), and raising from sixteen to eighteen the age limit at which youths could be charged with crimes as juveniles rather than adults. In 2013, Toni turned from state politics back to issues closer to home. Harp ran for mayor of New Haven and won three elections, serving from 2013 to 2019. During her mayoral tenure, she focused on community-based ideas. One such initiative was CommSTAT community management meetings.² Others included establishing parks (e.g., Cherry Ann Park), community-based policing, bringing jobs and economic development to the Newhallville neighborhood, and pushing for the completion of the Dixwell Q House Community Center project.³



1994, M.Arch., Elizabeth Song Lockard, Materials in Architecture Project, Retrospecta 15, page 22 (1991-1992)

1981, M.E.D., Pirko-Liisa Louhenjoki-Schulman, Desk Critique, Retrospecta 1978-1979, page 6 (c. 1978-1979)

1991, M.Arch., Jane E. Murphy, Case Study—Wexner Center for the Arts, House Rules Exhibition (1995)

2 Oscar Newman, Defensible Space: Crime Prevention through Urban Design (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

3 CommSTAT meetings were weekly community management efforts that brought together service employees (such as firefighters and police officers), politicians, and community members to discuss issues. The meetings identified areas for direct improvement.

3 Toni Nathaniel Harp, personal interview with Jessica Varner, New Haven, Connecticut, April 2, 2021.

CONSTANCE MARGUERITE ADAMS (M.Arch. 1990)



Constance Adams at NASA Flight Control Center at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center, Houston, Texas, undated (c. late 1990s), Papers of Constance M. Adams, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives

Constance Marguerite Adams was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on July 16, 1964. As the daughter of a historian and a champagne expert, she spent her youth traveling back and forth to Europe as her parents pursued research and sabbatical leisure. While majoring in sociology at Harvard College, Adams became fascinated with modern architecture and wrote her senior thesis on the architect Le Corbusier. Then, without looking back, she turned to architecture for graduate work and pursued a master's degree at the Yale School of Architecture.

Following her initial curiosity, Adams applied for a job with Lockheed Martin and was hired. She began by prototyping a surface habitat for Mars and went on to design TransHab, a three-level habitat for use on the International Space Station. The structure utilized high-technology materials such as Kevlar. Adams also developed an innovative lightweight inflatable enclosure to reduce structural load. Unfortunately, the TransHab never made it to space. Adams's ideas and space design collaborations often remained unbuilt. However, her work translated creativity and ingenuity into prototype designs.¹

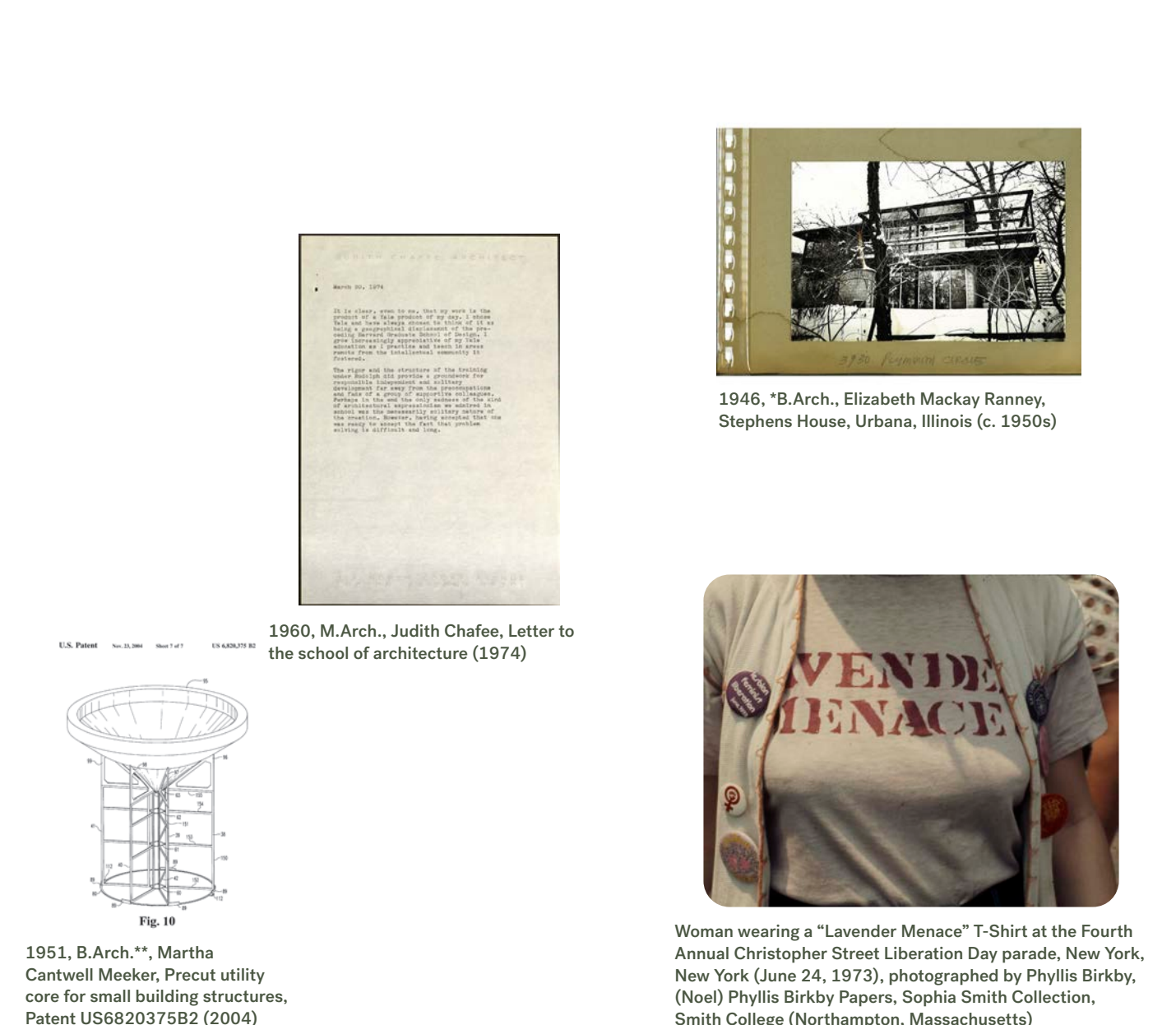
Her collaborations with the US space program would last almost twenty years. Over her career, she consulted for Lockheed Martin and Futron and founded the firm Synthesis International in the 1990s. Adams participated in NASA's X-38 crew vehicle development and consulted on the design of Virgin Galactic's Spaceport America in New Mexico. Her ideas were always outside the box, from the six-person Bio-Plex habitat designed for the Martian surface to the TransHab. Unfortunately, Adams's career came to an abrupt halt when she lost her valiant battle with colorectal cancer in 2018.²

After Adams finished that degree in 1990, she went to work for several notable architecture firms, including those led by César Pelli, in New Haven; Kenzo Tange, in Tokyo, Japan; and Josef Paul Kleihues, in Berlin, Germany. Working on everything from high-rises and housing to urban development plans, she spent the decade gaining varied experience in architecture offices. Then, following an economic downturn in the 1990s, Adams returned from Germany to seek employment in the United States. While interviewing for a position in Texas, she toured NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. During her short visit, she felt her interest piqued at the thought of building in outer space. It was a passion that would change her career path and lead her to a life of thinking about the challenges of zero gravity, living in small areas, and everyday life in extreme environments.



1 Constance Adams Papers (yet to be cataloged).

2 Richard Sandomic, "Constance Adams, Architect of Space Habitats, Is Dead at 53," New York Times, June 28, 2018.



1946, 'B.Arch., Elizabeth Mackay Ranney, Stephens House, Urbana, Illinois (c. 1950s)

1960, M.Arch., Judith Chafee, Letter to the school of architecture (1974)

1951, B.Arch., Martha Cantwell Meeker, Precut utility core for small building structures. Patent US620375B2 (2004)

Woman wearing a "Lavender Menace" T-shirt at the Fourth Annual Christopher Street Liberation Day parade, New York, New York (June 24, 1973), photographed by Phyllis Birkby, (Noel) Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts)

Phyllis Birkby photographed at an equal rights' protest in New York, New York (1977), photograph by Betty Lane, (Noel) Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts)

(NOEL) PHYLLIS BIRKBY (B.Arch.* 1966)

Noel Phyllis Birkby was born in Nutley, New Jersey, on December 16, 1932. Birkby enjoyed architecture and drawing pictures of cities from a young age, but at sixteen she was told, "There just [aren't] any women architects."¹ She studied art at the University of North Carolina's Women's College in 1950 but did not complete her degree. Birkby returned to New York City in 1956 to take evening classes at Cooper Union while working during the day in several architecture offices. After graduation from Cooper Union in 1963, she started graduate studies at the Yale School of Architecture, Birkby finished in 1966 after several setbacks, including difficulties associated with being one of only six women in the school. Following graduation, Birkby worked as a designer at Davis, Brody, and Associates, a New York firm. She worked on the Hudson River development, Waterside Houses, and the Long Island University Library in Brooklyn. Though successful, Birkby felt her activist side grow restless. Her criticism of professional feminism was that it was "mostly about housewives in the suburbs."² Despite her misgivings, she sought a place in the liberation movement.

Birkby led and participated in many significant feminist liberation efforts, including the Lavender

Menace collective (1970), Fifth Street Women's Building Takeover (1971), Consciousness Raising Group One (CR Group One, 1971), Alliance of Women in Architecture (1972), and the Women's School of Planning and Architecture (WSPA, 1974), among many others. Birkby, as part of the Lavender Menace group, interrupted the Second Congress to Unite Women in 1970 to bring attention to discrimination against lesbians. In January 1971, Birkby joined two hundred activists who took over an abandoned building at 330 East Fifth Street in New York City. With intersectional feminist ideals, the group transformed the former school annex into a women's center offering services in Spanish and English, including child care, a food co-op, books, and clothes, and they also established a feminist school. Later that year, Birkby joined the Consciousness Raising Group One, a working group of feminist theorists and writers that included Sidney Abbott, Barbara Love, Kate Millett, and Alma Routsong (also known as Isabel Miller). Each of these events shifted Birkby's identity as an activist and architect.

community residences for addiction recovery. Her architectural projects embodied a profound care ethic, as in the Great Neck Elderly Housing Development (1980), Bronx Children's Psychiatric Center (1987), Amethyst House (a recovery house for women, 1989), and the Pilgrim Psychiatric Center and Community Residence (1991). At Pratt Institute, the University of Southern California, California State Polytechnic, and the New York Institute of Technology, she taught students about design's environmental and social implications. Regrettably, Birkby lost her life to breast cancer in 1994, to the end surrounded by a cohort of activist friends known as the SOB (Sisters of Birkby).⁴

1 Finding Aid, January 7, 2020, Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History, Rare Books and Special Collections, Smith College Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

2 Finding Aid, January 7, 2020, Phyllis Birkby Papers.

3 Phyllis Birkby, "Women's Fantasy Environments: Notes on a Project in Progress," in the issue "Patterns of Communication and Space among Women," edited by the Heresies Collective, Heresies 2, 1, no. 2 (May 1977): 116.

4 Finding Aid, January 7, 2020, Phyllis Birkby Papers.