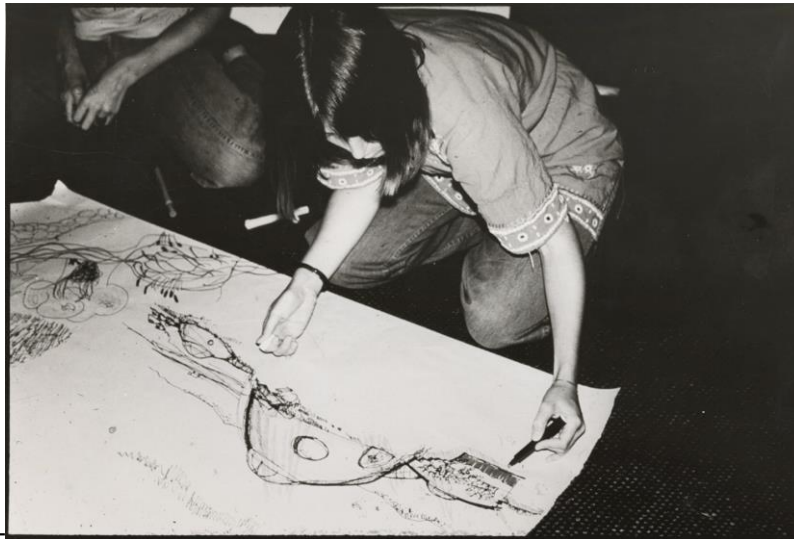


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Credit: Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History, Smith College Special Collections.

***Fantasizing Design: Phyllis Birkby Builds Lesbian Feminist
Architecture to Open at the Center for Architecture***
May 8–September 2, 2025

This exhibition traces the life, work, and networks of lesbian feminist architect Phyllis Birkby, who pushed design professionals and the public to imagine a built environment beyond the confines of existing male-dominated forms.

February 24, 2025, New York, NY – The Center for Architecture is excited to present [Fantasizing Design: Phyllis Birkby Builds Lesbian Feminist Architecture](#), opening Thursday, May 8, 2025, at 6:00pm. Curated by [Stephen Vider](#) and [M.C. Overholt](#), this exhibition explores the life and impact of architect Phyllis Birkby (1932–1994).

Inspired by the women's rights movement and gay liberation, Birkby joined one of the first lesbian feminist consciousness-raising groups, staged a feminist building occupation, and co-

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founded the [Women's School of Planning and Architecture](#). Her most groundbreaking intervention, however, was a series of workshops that encouraged women to imagine and draw their “fantasy environments”—the home and community spaces they would like to inhabit. *Fantasizing Design* takes Birkby and her circle of friends, lovers, and collaborators as a lens on the broader ways feminists and lesbian feminists have worked to remake architectural practice, domestic space, and the broader built environment.

The exhibition will showcase over 80 images, fantasy workshop drawings, and personal letters, as well as other artifacts and ephemera from Birkby's archive at Smith College, bringing the largest show of her work to date to the Center for Architecture.

“Birkby's immense archive is a crucial lens on lesbian life and activism in the 1960s and 70s, at turns playful, moving, and deeply inspiring,” says curator **Stephen Vider**. “While her professional aspirations were often constrained by the limits placed on women in architecture, the spaces she designed and built speak to her desire to push past the limits of conventional architecture, placing the needs of women, queer people, the elderly, and people with disabilities at the center. This was all informed, first and foremost, by her fantasy architecture project. At a moment of ongoing housing crisis and gentrification, Birkby's work calls on all of us to reimagine how the spaces and places we call home can best serve the needs and dreams of our communities.”

“Through tracing Birkby's life, activism, and architectural work, the exhibition works to raise awareness about the 1970s lesbian feminist movement and its investment in reconceptualizing a more inclusive and just built environment,” says curator **M.C. Overholt**. “For architects today, *Fantasizing Design* offers Birkby's idea of fantasy as an engine of design—one that continues to inspire creativity in the service of marginalized communities.”

The exhibition will also feature two contemporary installations that engage with Birkby's life as well as themes of queer and feminist identity and agency. Artist [LJ Roberts](#) has been commissioned to create a mixed media installation for the front gallery of the Center for Architecture. Quilted textiles, wheatpasted posters, and a series of neon signs drawing from the Birkby archive collages elements of her intimate life, activism, architectural accomplishments, and fantasy drawing practice. Roberts' installation intertwines Birkby's blueprints and love letters, manifestos and mementos, and drawings and documents, to build a richly textured non-linear mosaic of Birkby's life, friendships, entanglements, and desires.

The second piece of commissioned work, “(Glue is More Permanent and Stronger Than Tape,) But Tape is Easier to Use and Can Be Used Immediately,” (working title) is an installation by [Audrey Tseng de Melo Fischer](#) and [Chong Gu](#), co-founders of Rehearsing, a collective dedicated to framing others in transience. The piece is a mnemonic rehearsal on the transient

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habitats of migrant Asian massage and sex workers in Queens. Using temporary materials like tape and cellophane to represent the repairing and sustaining of dwellings, the installation traces economic and cultural survival as well as commercial ingenuity, domesticity, and policing.

[Marissa Martonyi](#) created the exhibition's graphic identity drawing from the styles and aesthetics of the 1960s and 70s as well as Birkby's working environment. Organic shapes and forms pull from Birkby's fantasy drawings and the Wholeo Dome, an iconic artistic structure of stained glass completed in 1974. **Xiaoxiao Guo** developed the exhibition's design and layout.

"*Fantasizing Design* expands our understanding of familiar concepts like housing, community, and domestic spaces," says **Jesse Lazar**, Assoc. AIA, Executive Director, AIANY and the Center for Architecture. "In the context of the gay rights and civil rights movements of the 1960s, Birkby's workshops were a radical exploration of identity, community, and belonging. Their themes resonate just as powerfully today, as we face a renewed urgency for new forms of solidarity for marginalized communities."

"In a city and society that is striving for solutions around inclusivity and housing for all, this exhibition is a form of joyful advocacy," says **Peter Robinson**, Board Chair of the Center for Architecture. "We're honored to have the unique opportunity to present an architectural showcase driven from a deeply personal as well as political lens. *Fantasizing Design* encourages design professionals and members of the public alike to wonder at the capabilities of architecture to transform how we view the world."

This exhibition will be on view through September 2, 2025.

Exhibition Opening

Please join us May 8, 6–8pm, at the Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Place, New York, NY for an [opening reception](#). From 5–6pm, members of the press are invited to a VIP tour with the curators (RSVP to lkim@aiany.org).

Supported by

Fantasizing Design: Phyllis Birkby Builds Lesbian Feminist Architecture is supported by the [Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts](#).

This exhibition is made possible by the [New York State Council on the Arts](#) with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, and by public funds from the [New York City Department of Cultural Affairs](#) in partnership with the City Council.

This exhibition is funded in part by [Humanities New York](#).

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About the Center for Architecture

The Center for Architecture is the premier cultural venue for architecture and the built environment in New York City, informed by the complexity of the City's urban fabric and in dialogue with the global community. The Center shares a home with the AIA New York Chapter and has the unique advantage of drawing upon the ideas and experiences of practicing architects to produce thought-provoking exhibitions, informative public programs, and quality design education experiences for K-12 students. It also leads New York City's annual monthlong architecture and design festival, Archtober. The Center for Architecture's aim is to further public knowledge about New York City architecture and architects, foster exchange and collaboration among members of the design, development, building, scholarly, and policy sectors, and inspire new ideas about the role of design in communities by presenting contemporary and practical issues in architecture and urbanism to a general audience.

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