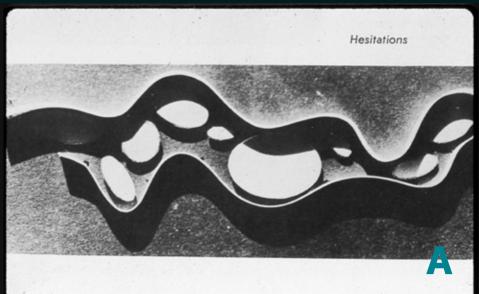
C NTU CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART SINGAPORE

C

THE LAB

14 FEBRUARY - 14 JUNE 2020

MARY OTIS STEVENS. THE I PRESS SERIES



NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY



Thomas F. McNulty and Mary Otis Stevens at the Lincoln House, Massachusetts, 1965.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank **Mary Otis Stevens** and the **MIT Museum Architecture and Design Collections** for their kind collaboration and support.

All images (except pages 4 and 5): Courtesy of the artist and MIT Museum Architecture and Design Collections.

MARY OTIS STEVENS. THE I PRESS SERIES

Mary Otis Stevens is a pioneering American architect based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Both in partnership with Thomas F. McNulty and later with Design Guild, Stevens linked architectural projects to her civic involvements and to a radical re-envisioning of spatial/social relationships in various media. This presentation showcases her sketches, drawings, and designs that provide insight into concepts and visualisations around people, space, cities, and society. In the context of the Cold War and American political activism of the 1960s, Stevens' work reflects her background in philosophy and her commitment to de-centralise hierarchies. The themes of active citizen participation in government, integrated planning, and genuine risk-taking to make substantial change in people's lives remain relevant and a crucial means of incorporating a social context into the practice of architecture and other activities affecting human wellbeing for each and for all.

This research presentation links to her role as a co-founder of i Press, an influential publisher of books on architecture and urban theory. It also connects to NTU CCA Singapore's ongoing inquiry into urbanism after the Bandung Conference of 1955, including the work of Singaporean Architects William S.W. Lim (b. 1932) and Datuk Seri Lim Chong Keat (b. 1930), a contemporary of Mary Otis Stevens at MIT. Lim's books Cities for People: Reflections of a Southeast Asian Architect (1990) and Incomplete Urbanism: A Critical Urban Strategy for Emerging Economies (2012) have been explored at NTU CCA Singapore in multiple ways, including the exhibition Incomplete Urbanism: Attempts of Critical Spatial Practice (2016), CITIES FOR PEOPLE NTU CCA Ideas Fest 2016/2017, and the recently published book The Impossibility of Mapping (Urban Asia) (2020).

Stevens and McNulty founded i Press in 1968 in association with the New York Publisher George Braziller. Between 1969 and 1974 they published five books in the i Press series on the human environment (see page 2) Each book used architecture and urban design as tools to explore alternatives to dysfunctional social and cultural practices—and their underlying assumptions in societies then dominant—as well as applying these concepts to those emerging. Writing about i Press in 1974, Stevens reflected that, "Although the authors and i Press itself have tended toward a planning and architectural orientation, this background has not necessarily narrowed the contents or perspectives of either. It has, however, provided a point of departure for visualising how urban and industrial processes affect and indeed radically shape and alter the lives of most people in most societies today." 1

THE I PRESS SERIES ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

1969 The Ideal Communist City

English language translation of *Idee per la Citta Communista* (il Saggiatore, Milano 1968) of urban concepts by architects and planners at the University of Moscow proposing that "the new city is a world belonging to all and to each" and "how life in the future might be in an industrial society anywhere on earth", Preface by Giancarlo De Carlo.

1970 World of Variation

Conceptual concepts for sustainable humanistic environments by Mary Otis Stevens AIA and Thomas F. McNulty. "The authors of *World of Variation* explore this problem of growth and order using an architectural imagery that reflects the new social and social and visual scales of peoples' involvement with society."

1972 Towards a Non-Oppressive Environment

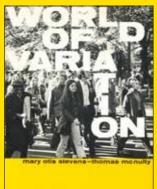
By Alexander Tzonis, it "interweaves several movements of our time: the anthropological, linguistic, urban planning, and radical dissent..." The essay is devoted to the description of the impact of the concepts of oppression on the formation of theories of architecture and the emergence of a new approach to the creation of the man-made environment."

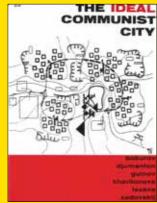
1972 Playing Urban Games

A critique by Martin Kuenzlan, an "architect-urbanist from Berlin investigates planning in highly developed capitalist societies, especially the United States, whose cities have become scenes of physical chaos, class and race struggles, in short urban massacres..." The book concludes with the social changes that must occur in the planning profession as well as in society at large before either can be truly rational and human."

1973 From Tipi to Skyscraper: A History of Women in Architecture

By Doris Cole, a critical review of the role of women in architecture, "Even the heritage that pioneer women passed down to their female descendants was forsaken as women were slowly cut off fromtheir men and from the public life of their communities. The American women's gain in comforts and leisure must be measured against their loss of status as well as by the dulling of their pioneer spirit."





NTU CCA Singapore's presentation in The Lab presents a deep dive into two of the i Press titles: World of Variation and The Ideal Communist City. Thinking about how these books and their content can best be presented to new audiences, they are offered in multiple

formats—original, enlarged, and digital. *The Ideal Communist City* offers a way of thinking about mobility, access and equity, and social interaction in neighbourhood planning, in direct response to suburban development and its focus on private spaces for family life. *World of Variation* explores the concept of variation as a fundamental component of life and design. In Stevens' words, "Only by variation can there be change. Only through contrast can one measure, appraise, and relate." ²

In order to help introduce the i Press series on the human environment to a wide audience, NTU CCA Singapore, with series editors **Ute Meta Bauer** (Founding Director, NTU CCA Singapore and Professor, NTU ADM), **James D. Graham** (Director of Publications, Columbia University GSAPP), and **Pelin Tan** (2019-2020 Keith Haring Fellow in Art and Activism, Bard College), is currently working with **i Press** and **Mary Otis Stevens** to republish several original i Press books with revisions and commentary by contemporary theorists and practitioners.

The past half century has demonstrated that the knowledges of ecologically based societies are invaluable amidst the climate crisis and the global struggle for survival. Many of the themes and proposals in the five published books—and those on the original list of the i Press series on the human environment—are even more pertinent today. Revisiting i Press fifty years later is therefore not just a project to examine the rare out-of-print books, but a chance to re-examine the issues, architectural concepts, and urban arguments presented by the authors and introduce them into the discussion and contemporary debates on planning sustainable architecture and urban development on local, national, and global scales.

¹ Mary Otis Stevens, Unpublished manuscript, 12 September 1974, typescript, MIT Museum Architecture and Design Collections.

² Mary Otis Stevens, "Notes on the Theme of Variation" (unpublished manuscript, 24 November 1969), typescript, MIT Museum Architecture and Design Collections.



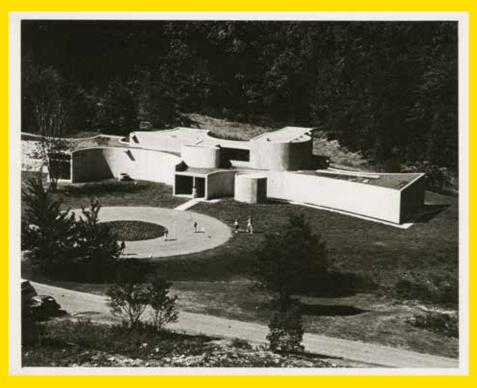












With the collapse circa 1970 of the Modern Movement, which had never rooted in the American society, Stevens began her search for vernacular origins of American architecture. She was fortunate to receive two successive Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1975-1978) to continue her pursuit. That led to Stevens teaching part time at the Boston Architectural Center founded in 1899 with the mission to provide professional instruction for students and others interested in the practice of architecture or the allied arts, "especially those whose employment might interfere with such education in day schools and universities." As a faculty and Board member Stevens helped the BAC obtain accreditation. It is now the degree granting Boston Architectural College.



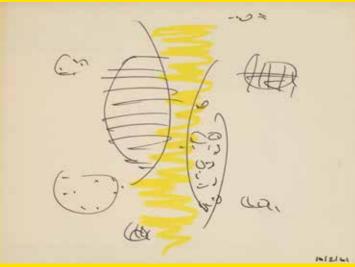
MIT Museum calls **Mary Otis Stevens** "one of the most important female architects in the Northeast during the 1960s and 1970s." Stevens graduated from Smith College in 1949 with a degree in philosophy. Beginning in her undergraduate years she was active in the civil rights movement, presaging a lifelong commitment to social, political, and civic activism. Stevens entered the architecture programme at MIT in 1953, graduating with an SBArch in 1956. Influences at MIT included Alvar Aalto, Eero Saarinen, Kevin Lynch, and Buckminster Fuller, who was also a family friend. Stevens worked for The Architects' Collaborative (TAC) before launching a practice with MIT faculty member Thomas F. McNulty (1919-1984) in 1957.

Stevens and McNulty practiced together until 1974 and were most known for the Lincoln House—the communal concrete and glass curvilinear house they designed for their own family in Lincoln, Massachusetts, a rural suburb of Boston. It won international attention.

Above: Aerial view of the Lincoln House, Massachusetts.

Right: Mary Otis Stevens, The internal structure of things, drawing, 10 February 1961.

Right above: Mary Otis Stevens, The Enclave, mixed media.



Mary Otis Stevens, together with colleagues and students in the Boston area, established Design Guild (1973-1992), a multi-disciplinary collaborative committed to sustainable and socially responsible developments. Its mission statement—"to preserve the past while building new, and to build new what will be worth preserving in the future"—guided its professional teams and daily operations selecting projects, most in the public domain, that were process as opposed to product oriented.



A member of the Boston Society of Architects since 1973, Stevens served on its Board, co-founding Architects for Social Responsibility (ASR) to promote sustainable architecture and planning. In association with other professional societies, ASR sponsored public educational programmes on environmental issues, organised design charrettes dealing with the adaptive re-use of demobilised military bases like Fort Devens, and similar public facilities. ASR published handbooks on sustainable architectural practice and urban planning for professionals that were widely distributed by the BSA to other AIA chapters and the interested public.

This research presentation in The Lab is organised by NTU CCA Singapore and curated by **Karin Oen**, Deputy Director, Curatorial Programmes, in collaboration with **Ute Meta Bauer**, Founding Director, NTU CCA Singapore, and Professor, NTU ADM; **Mary Otis Stevens; Gary Van Zante** and **Jennifer Tran**, MIT Museum Architecture and Design Collections. All images courtesy Mary Otis Stevens and MIT Museum.

Above: Mary Otis Stevens, Cultural Collage, mixed media.

Right: Mary Otis Stevens, Establishing a new nucleus, drawing.



NTU CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART SINGAPORE

NTU CCA SINGAPORE STAFF

Professor Ute Meta Bauer, Founding Director, NTU CCA Singapore and Professor, School of Art, Design and Media, NTU

EXHIBITIONS & RESIDENCIES

Dr Karin Oen, Deputy Director, Curatorial Programmes
Dr Anna Lovecchio, Curator, Residencies
Magdalena Magiera, Curator, Outreach & Education
Ana Sophie Salazar, Assistant Curator, Exhibitions
Frankie Fang, Assistant Manager, Production
Isrudy Shaik, Senior Executive, Production
Ilya Katrinnada Binte Zubaidi, Curatorial Assistant, Outreach & Education
Seet Yun Teng, Curatorial Assistant, Residencies
Susan Htoo, Young Professional Trainee, Residencies
Nurshafiqah Zainudin, Young Professional Trainee, Exhibitions
Arabelle Zhuang, Young Professional Trainee, Exhibitions
Jolene Lau, Intern, Production

RESEARCH & EDUCATION

Soh Kay Min, Executive, Conference, Workshops & Archive **Kong Yin Ying**, Young Professional Trainee, Research

OPERATIONS & STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

Peter Lin, Deputy Director, Operations & Strategic Development
Jasmaine Cheong, Assistant Director, Operations & Human Resource
Jillian Kwan, Assistant Director, Development
Joyce Lee, Manager, Finance
Cheryl Ho, Manager, Communications
Perla Espiel, Special Project Assistant
Iris Tan, Senior Executive, Administration & Finance
Louis Tan, Executive, Operations
Ong Xue Min, Young Professional Trainee, Communications & Development

ABOUT NTU CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART SINGAPORE

A leading international art institution, NTU CCA Singapore is a platform, host, and partner creating and driven by dynamic thinking in its three-fold constellation: **Exhibitions**; **Residencies Programme**; **Research and Academic Education**.

A national research centre for contemporary art of Nanyang Technological University, the Centre focuses on *Spaces of the Curatorial*. It brings forth innovative and experimental forms of emergent artistic and curatorial practices that intersect the present and histories of contemporary art embedded in social-political spheres with other fields of knowledge.

NTU CCA SINGAPORE VISITOR INFORMATION

EXHIBITION HOURS

Tuesday – Sunday, 12.00 – 7.00pm Closed on Mondays Open on Public Holidays (except Mondays)

FREE ADMISSION

ntu.ccasingapore.org

ntu.ccasingapore

f NTUCCASingapore

Enquiries:

ntuccaevents@ntu.edu.sg
School/ Group Tours:
ntuccaeducation@ntu.edu.sg

A RESEARCH CENTRE OF



EXHIBITIONS

Block 43 Malan Road, Singapore 109443 Tel +65 6339 6503

RESIDENCIES STUDIOS

Blocks 37 and 38 Malan Road, Singapore 109452 and 109441

RESEARCH CENTRE AND OFFICE

Block 6 Lock Road, #01-09/10, Singapore 108934 | Tel +65 6460 0300



LOCATED AT

GTLL MAIN BARRACKS

© NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore Printed April 2020 by First Printers