

Women Architects in the Shadow: Aino Marsio-Aalto

Aino Marsio-Aalto, one of the most important Finnish architects of the beginning of the 20th century, was Alvar Aalto's professional and personal partner from the start of his career until her death in 1949. But like other female partners of renowned architects, Marsio-Aalto worked behind the scenes. Her work has never been valued despite the fact that she was co-author of Alvar Aalto's projects, designed independently and led an international design company (ARTEK). The scope of her work encompassed architecture, interior projects and industrial design, with interest in residential architecture, minimum habitation projects, furniture and glass design.

Analysis of her work showed adherence to rationalistic principles of the Modern Movement, with emphasis on functional and practical issues, use of natural materials and mass-production. She created projects with an exquisite sensitivity to detail, colour, materials and textures. Aino Marsio-Aalto focused on small-scale projects to improve everyday life.

This paper highlights the work of the architect Aino Marsio-Aalto, who has been hidden behind the shadow of her husband. All these female pioneers of the beginning of the 20th century are the workhorses of the emancipation of women, and it is necessary that their personal stories uncovered to give them their due recognition.

Keywords: women architects, Aino Marsio-Aalto, Modern Movement, rationalism, Finland, Alvar Aalto

Introduction

Aino Marsio-Aalto (Fig. 1) was one of the most important Finnish architects of the beginning of the twentieth century. She was the professional and personal partner of Alvar Aalto from almost the beginning of their professional career in 1920 until her death in 1949. However, her work has not been extensively studied in spite of her being a key figure in modern Finnish architecture and also a key figure in the work of her husband.

In the many studies about Alvar Aalto, limited credit has been awarded to Aino Marsio-Aalto and few written articles that analyse her work can be found.¹ The aim of this paper is to study and bring to light the professional career of Aino Marsio-Aalto, to understand and appreciate her architecture and design and to publicise and value her work placing it justifiably within the history of modern art, as a matter of historical justice. In the case of Aino Marsio-Aalto, the tandem with Alvar Aalto was not only personal but also professional, working with him as a collaborator, co-author and independent designer. She worked on architecture and interior design projects, preferring residential architecture, small dwellings, interiors and the design of furniture and everyday objects.

Aino Marsio-Aalto was always kept in the background, and her work in collaboration with her partner has not been clearly defined or fairly acknowledged until recently. The same thing has happened with other known professional couples of the twentieth century. After analysing the personal history of the great



Fig. 1. Aino Marsio-Aalto drawing at her desk in the office of Jyväskylä, around 1924.

Photo: Alvar Aalto Estate/Alvar Aalto Museum

¹ This article is based on the introduction to a study dedicated to one of these female architects, but acknowledging also the great number of other women forgotten by history. Heiki Alanen, "Preface," in Ulla Kinnunen (ed.), *Aino Aalto* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2004), 7.

architects of the past century we find that many had a female architect at their side, both professionally and personally. This is the case of the group, The Four, formed by two pairs of architects, Charles Mackintosh and his wife Margaret MacDonald and Herbert McNair and his wife Frances MacDonald. The *Deutscher Werkbund* had several architect couples, such as Hermann Muthesius and his wife, Anna Muthesius, Hans Poelzig and Marlene Poelzig, and Mies Van Der Rohe and Lilly Reich, who was his professional and personal partner before he immigrated to the United States. The list also includes Auguste Perret and his wife Karola Bloch, Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand, and Louis Kahn and various lovers who were architects like Anne Tyng and Harriet Pattinson. Ernst May's professional partner was Margarete Schutte-Lihotzky. Heikki Siren and Kaija Siren were personal and professional partners. In the Netherlands, Jan Frederik Staal was the partner of Margaret Kropholler, Mart Stam was married to Lotte Stam-Beese, and the architect Johan Niegeman was married to Bé Niegeman-Brand.

Alvar Aalto has always been considered a genius and a charismatic architect. However, this has not taken into account important professional collaborators and that he never directed the studio alone. In particular, two female architects accompanied him during his life, first Aino Marsio-Aalto and after her death, Elissa Mäkkiniemi. This implies that work attributed solely to Alvar Aalto should take into account his professional partners, who were a great influence in the practice.

It is well known that Aino Marsio-Aalto co-directed the office with her husband, taking responsibility for the clients, employees and economical and family issues. During Alvar Aalto's frequent foreign journeys, Marsio was responsible for the office and all the projects.² 'However, she never appeared in the foreground or admitted what had really been designed by her. She was always at work behind the scenes'.³

Biography

For a better knowledge of Aino Marsio-Aalto it is important to study her biography to understand her influences and shed more light upon her work.

She was born in Helsinki in January 1894 to a proletarian family and was brought up in a housing complex for railway families. According to Suominen-Kokkonen her natural modesty, her interest for minimalism and preference for simple design is due to the atmosphere in which she grew up.⁴ In 1913 she began to study architecture at the Polytechnic University of Helsinki. 'At that time there was



Fig. 2. Aino Marsio and Alvar Aalto in the Finnish Pavilion at the New Yorks World Fair, 1939. Photo: Alvar Aalto Museum

no professional separation between architects, interior and furniture designers, so her studies covered these subjects'.⁵ Whilst studying she worked as a carpenter and building apprentice. This experience strongly influenced her later work and her work as director of Artek.

In 1919 the Female Finnish Architects Association *Tumstocken* was founded, which in 1942 evolved into *Architecta*. Marsio was a member from the beginning.

When she finished her university studies in 1920, she started to work for Oiva Kallio in Helsinki. In 1923 she collaborated in the studio of the architect Gunnar A. Wahlroos in Jyväskylä. A year later in 1924, she moved to the studio of Alvar Aalto in the same city. Six months later they were married. From that moment on they worked as a team, with Marsio acting as co-director of the office. In 1927 the practice moved to Turku when they won the competition to build the Agricultural Co-operative in the Southeast of Finland. In 1933 the studio relocated to

Helsinki where it remained for the rest of its existence.

In 1935 together with Alvar Aalto, the Gullichsen couple and Niels-Gustav Hahl, Marsio created Artek (Art & Technology) in Helsinki.⁶ The company was conceived to develop objects for the domestic industry. From this moment onwards, Marsio-Aalto's principal interest was the business, first as the creative director, then as the general director, after the death of Hahl in 1941. She continued to lead the company, alongside many other projects, until her death from cancer in Helsinki in 1949 at the age of 55 (Fig. 2).

Analysis of Her Work

Aino Marsio-Aalto was an architect who remained almost exclusively in the shadow of her husband, and of whom we know very little either of her work or of her person. Very few of her written works exist so the most important primary sources are her projects. However the work of Aino Marsio-Aalto is closely tied to that of her husband, and we must also bear in mind that the creative process

2 Mia Hipeli, "Aino Marsio-Aalto architect," in Kinnunen (ed.), *Aino Aalto*, 59.

3 Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 667.

4 Arne Heperauta, "About Aino Marsio-Aalto," in Kinnunen (ed.), *Aino Aalto*, 17.

5 Kaarina Mikonranta, "Aino Marsio-Aalto Interior and Furniture Designer," in Kinnunen (ed.), *Aino Aalto*, 110.

6 "Artek (Company)," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artek_\(company\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artek_(company)), (accessed January 27, 2017).

is usually the result of several imaginative strengths, which complicates the task of discovering the independent roles played by each architect.

To understand the work of Aino Marsio-Aalto it is fundamental to analyse the work that can be credited to her without joint authorship. The objective is to highlight Aino Marsio-Aalto as an independent architect and not to analyse her work in relation to the one of her husband, as has been done before, thus keeping her still in the shadow.

She was interested in improving an individual's everyday life, so her main focus was the design of small and domestic scale projects that helped to facilitate people's daily routines. Consequently, in this paper some of these will be studied.

For the clarification of the authorship of the designs it is necessary to examine the proof. In the case of utilitarian objects and furniture, the authorship is based on the exhibition named *Alvar & Aino Aalto. Design* carried out in Germany in 2004. For the design of kitchens and interiors, this justification is based on the study and catalogue of all the drawings of the studio of Alvar Aalto, between 1924 and 1939, in which we find the signature of Aino Marsio-Aalto.

Aino Marsio-Aalto was especially interested in questions related to the ideals of the Modern Movement like the practicality of objects, geometric shapes, standardization and universal timeless design.⁷ She was concerned with questions of economic, serial production, storing and stacking, and the use of durable and economical materials. This led her to design objects without an aesthetic presumption. Aino Marsio-Aalto could be considered as the more rational element of the couple.

Design of Glass Utensils. Competition Karhula-littala: Series Bølgeblick, 1932

In 1932 the Karhula-littala factory organised a competition for the design of glass tableware (Fig. 3). Aino Marsio-Aalto won second prize with her Bølgeblick series (a view of waves), which consisted of a jug, cups, dishes, plates, a sugar bowl and a milk jug. The range went into mass production in 1932. Later a collection of glasses, vases and bowls was added. This series became very popular, and was exhibited in 1933 in London, at the Fortnum & Mason department store, and in 1936 at the Milan Triennale where it won the golden prize.⁸ The Bølgeblick series is still in demand and being produced and imitated today.

The objects designed by Marsio had a simple shape, with no aesthetic boasting, according to the

7 Timo Keinänen, "Alvar and Aino Aalto as glass designers," in Pirkko Tuukannen (ed.), *Alvar Aalto Designer* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002), 135.

8 Ibid., 135.



Fig. 3. Bølgeblick Series.
Photo: Majja Holma,
Alvar Aalto Museum

Modern Movement statements of Le Corbusier in which 'objects are just tools, pretty tools' that 'need to fulfil a special aim'.⁹ As Adolf Loos said in 1910, design has nothing to do with personal taste but must answer practical necessities.¹⁰

The design of the collection is united to the production methods and the materials used. Rings were introduced for practical reasons as they helped to hide irregularities in the inexpensive pressed glass. This type of glass was much cheaper than blown or strained glass and, mass production was automated. All the objects could be stacked, thus saving space and adapting to the minimum kitchen and housing standards, which were being studied at the time and were of great interest to Aino Marsio-Aalto.

The design of this series could be summarised in the ideas of Le Corbusier about the making of useful objects: they had to be above all perfect, precise, efficient, and inexpensive tools.¹¹ Eighty years later, they are still modern and can be found in any of our households. This is exactly what a designer at the beginning of the 20th century aimed for, a timeless, universal design for the general use of society.

9 Le Corbusier, "Argument," in Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today* (London: The Architectural Press, 1987), 23; Le Corbusier, "Ripolin Law," in Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art*, 18.

10 Adolf Loos, "Architecture," in Panayotis Tournikiotis, *Adolf Loos* (Princeton Architectural Press 2002).

11 Le Corbusier, "The Decorative Art of Today," in Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art*, 84.

Furniture Design

Stool for the Tuberculosis Sanatorium, Paimio, 1929–1932

On winning the competition to design the Tuberculosis Sanatorium in the southeast of Finland in 1929 (Fig. 4), Aino and Alvar Aalto were contracted for the complete design of the hospital complex. This was a dream for them; it was their first opportunity to carry out their philosophy of global design. Alvar Aalto, in 1925, spoke for the first time of one ambience that would be created when the architect takes charge of the complete building and the interiors, where each detail had a special importance.¹²

Aino and Alvar Aalto centred all their design on the comfort and well-being of the patients. Their proposal considered that they would spend most part of the day lying in the sun or in bed. So they paid special attention to the design of the beds and loungers, as well as all the elements in the rooms. One of these objects was the stool designed by Aino Marsio-Aalto in 1932, for the hospital. It was a three-legged tubular stool with steel lacquered legs and a circular seat of lacquered wood. The tubular structures of the legs were finished with a circular tube joining them so they could be easily stacked and occupy very little space. This stool is a clear example of the purest International Style in furniture design which always created durable objects, easy to clean and cheap without unnecessary ornamentation, with regular shapes, metal structure, stackable and close to the geometric and estereometric elementarism as displayed by Walter Curt Behrendt.¹³ The stool is light for the patients to move easily. Made in neutral colours, the part in contact with the body is smooth and warm. All of these details show the designer's great interest in the practicality of the object.

The stool, together with two armchairs –41 and 42– designed by Alvar Aalto for the hospital, formed part of a programme of modern furniture launched in 1932, after being shown in the Scandinavian Housing Fair in Helsinki in the Standard Furniture section.¹⁴ This furniture would be produced and manufactured by Finnish manufacturers, and it is still being made today by the Artek company.¹⁵ All the furniture designed by



Fig. 4. The Paimio stool in different finishing's. Photo: Martti Kapanen, Alvar Aalto Museum

the Aaltos during these years and especially those produced for the hospital of Paimio displayed in great measure the ideals of the Modern Movement.

Kitchen Design

'Minimum Kitchen' of the Minimum Apartment Exhibition in the Finnish Society of Art and Craft Fair, Helsinki, 1930

For the Minimum Apartment Exhibition in the 'Finnish Society of Art and Craft Fair' that took place in Helsinki in 1930, the Aaltos designed a modern minimum home comprised of living/dining room, kitchen and two bedrooms. Aino Marsio-Aalto designed the kitchen and its different utensils, a table and a sideboard for the dining room and curtains for the bedroom (Fig. 5). During this period Aino and Alvar Aalto's ideas in design in the domestic space were influenced by the social transformation and the new role of women in society. Alvar Aalto displayed his ideas about this topic in 1930:

I am referring to the complete transformation of the role played by women nowadays. Their independence and emancipation from a submissive position to a complete comradeship, as much in the work as at home involves completely new requirements in the design of the home. Woman's independence leads to radically new requirements in living commodities such as easy cleaning, weight of the objects and the mechanical uses of the fixtures.¹⁶

The most innovative element of the apartment was the *Minimum Kitchen* that was greatly influenced by the practical ideas of Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, who created the *Frankfurter Küche* (Frankfurt Kitchen) in



Fig. 5. *Minimum Kitchen* of the Minimum Apartment Exhibition in the Finnish Society of Art and Craft Fair, 1930, Taidehalli, Helsinki. Photo: Heinrich Iffland, Alvar Aalto Museum

¹² Kaarina Mikoranta, "Alvar Aalto: Master of Variation," in Pirkko Tuukannen (ed.), *Alvar Aalto Designer* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002), 75.

¹³ Kaarina Mikoranta, "Aino Marsio-Aalto: Interior and Furniture Designer," in Kinnunen (ed.), *Aino Aalto*, 116; Walter Curt Behrendt, *Modern Building: Its Nature, Problems, and Forms* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1937).

¹⁴ Thomas Kellein, "Aino and Alvar Aalto's Hospital rooms," in *Alvar & Aino Aalto: Design*, (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2005), 57.

¹⁵ Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2007), 260.

¹⁶ Alvar Aalto, "El problema de la vivienda," in Alvar Aalto and Goran Schildt, *De palabra y por escrito* (El Escorial: El Croquis, 2000), 113 and 115.

1926. Ideas like efficiency, organisation, modulation, simple cleaning, reduced space, storage and resistant and continued surfaces. Much influenced by the ideas of the American engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor and his Industrial Efficiency Movement, Schütte-Lihotzky was able to create a laboratory for the modern woman, and by rationalising the space she helped to save time.

The great novelty of the *Minimum Kitchen* in comparison with the *Frankfurter Küche* is that the height of the countertop is set at the height of a table, this means that all the elements were at an ideal height for working while sitting on a chair or stool thus making life easier and more comfortable for the 1930s housewife. The kitchen was small and rectangular, approximately 3 x 2 m, separated from the living room by a sideboard.¹⁷ It contained two working surfaces; a long counter and a kitchen stove. On the side of the counter, we find a continued surface, long and easy to clean. The material of the countertop also runs along the length of the wall to a height of 30 cm, eliminating joints and creating a simple design. On the counter was a stainless steel kitchen sink, designed by Aino Marsio-Aalto, with a sliding wooden lid to cover the sink and provide more workspace. Next to the kitchen sink and sharing the same tap, there was another sink for washing clothes. Below the second sink was a rubbish bin on wheels with a removable lid, made of metal and easy to clean. Below the worktop there were four cupboard modules, one of them with drawers. Any type of utensil that did not fit into the cupboards was hanging on the walls. In this way, it was a neat space with everything in its place as if it was a laboratory, thanks also to the modulation of every element.

The kitchens designed by Aino Marsio-Aalto and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky in the 1920s evolutionized the world of kitchen design, setting the basis for the present day kitchens. They created extremely practical kitchens in which everything down to the last detail was thought out, therefore making the work of women who were beginning to enter the labour market much easier, and also helping with their emancipation. With the compact modulated kitchens, time and space was saved and domestic life moved into the background, taking women out of the place where they had historically been confined.

Interior Design

Competition for the Finnish Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, 1938

Aino Marsio-Aalto submitted a proposal –USA 39– for the competition of the Finnish Pavilion at the 1939 World Fair of New York (Fig. 6).

At the same time Alvar Aalto presented two other proposals *Maa, Kansa, Tjo, Tulos* (Country, People, Work, Product) and *Kas kuusen latvassa oravalla* (The squirrel has a nest in the spruce tree's top).

¹⁷ Kaarina Mikonranta, 'Aino Marsio-Aalto Interior and Furniture Designer,' in Kinnunen (ed.), *Aino Aalto*, 118.

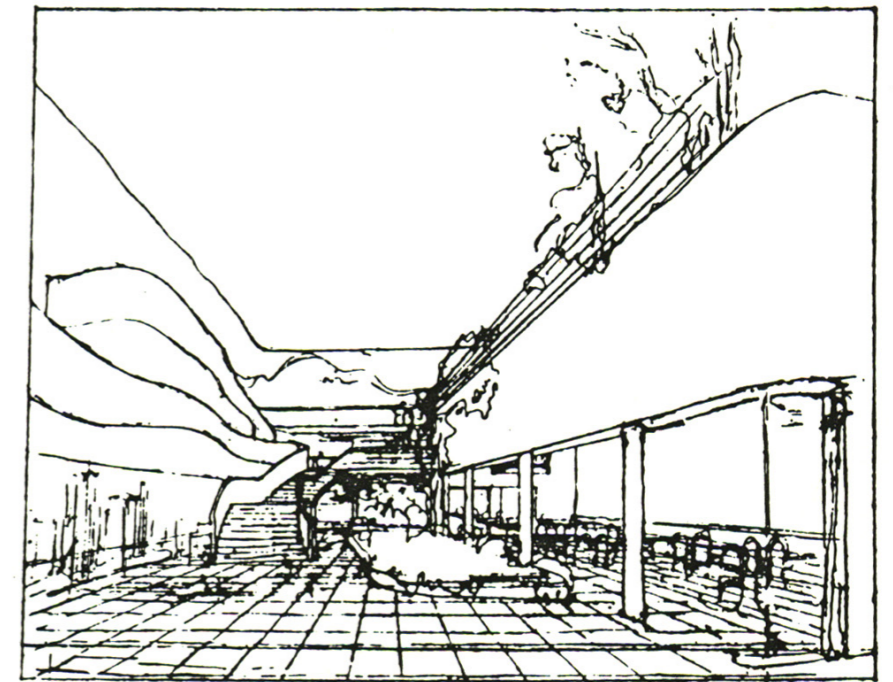


Fig. 6. Interior perspective of Aino Marsio-Aalto's proposal for the competition of the Finnish Pavilion in New York World's Fair, 1938. Photo: Alvar Aalto Museum

Aalto won the first and second prize while Marsio came in third.

The Finnish pavilion had strict design restrictions, because Finland could only afford a cubicle in a shared pavilion with other countries. Firstly it did not have an outside elevation; secondly the exterior form was fixed. Thirdly, the volume was determined and fourthly, and most important, the project was limited to an interior design that was supposed to impress a public overwhelmed by the great number of pavilions of the Fair. The trigger for the couple to present several proposals was the chance to be able to implement some of the ideas that were left pending in the design of Villa Mairea, the couple's most famous single-family house.

A fourth project designed by Aino and Alvar Aalto was finally built combining all of the proposals submitted.¹⁸ The project that was finally carried out is one of the most analysed works of the practice, and because it is difficult to distinguish the individual input of each of the architects, we will study the proposal that Aino Marsio-Aalto presented independently. The project had to deal with a long and tall space (four stories high) so Aino Marsio-Aalto's proposal tried to break this pronounced long and narrow volume by creating two converging longitudinal façades in order to reduce the tunnel effect of the space. These two elevations had different architectonic treatments; one had two undulating balconies that break the high interior façade and provide dynamism and excitement, and the opposite side had a long linear terrace acting as counterweight to the facing elevation.

¹⁸ Göran Schildt, "Finnish pavilion at the World's Fair in New York," in Alexander Tzonis, *The Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto. 1917–1939* (New York: Garland Pub., 1994), 170. Göran Schildt, "Finnish pavilion at the New York World's Fair 1939," Alvar Aalto Museum, <http://file.alvaraalto.fi/>, accessed August, 2015.

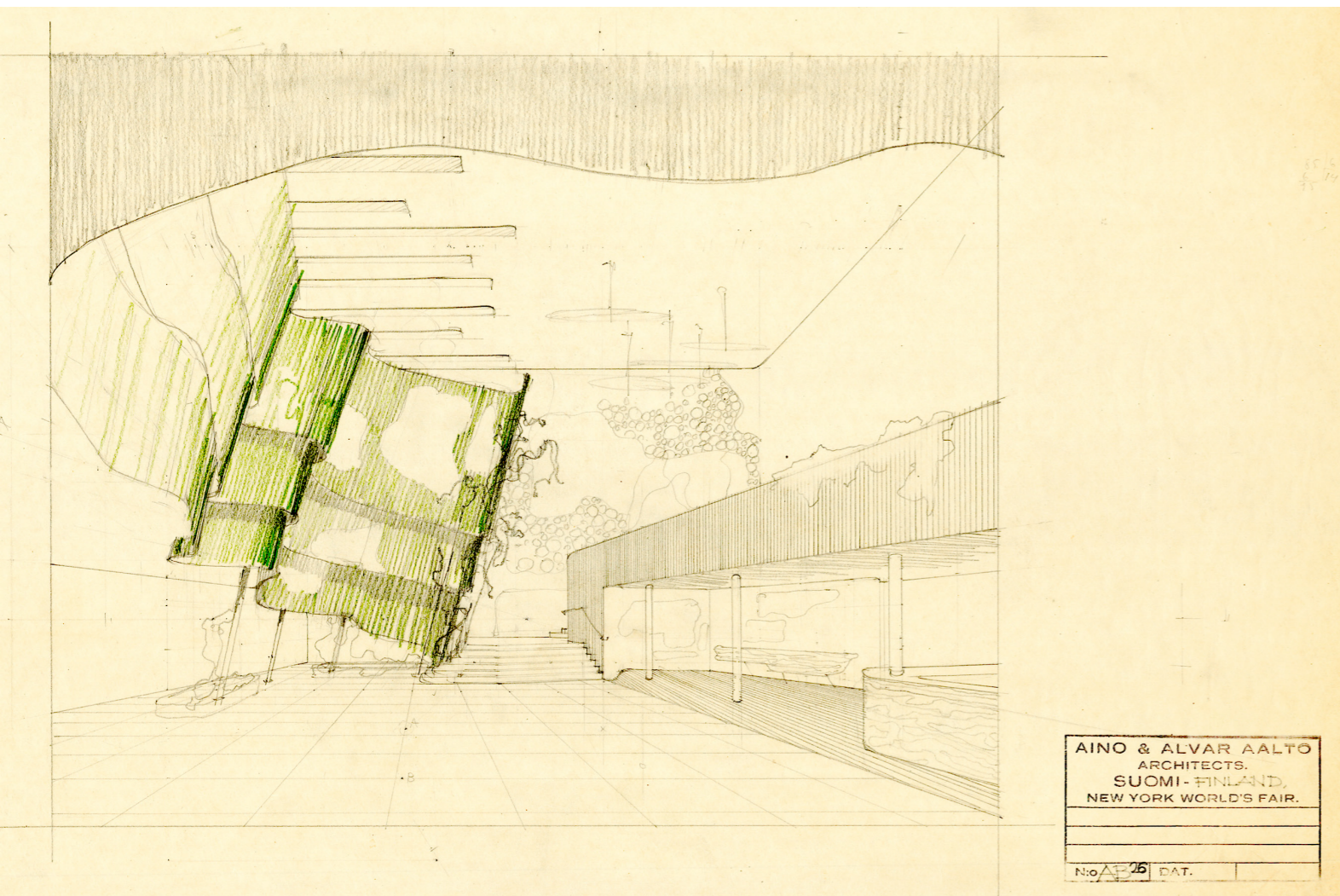


Fig. 7. Perspective of the final Project, 1939. Photo: Alvar Aalto Museum

The two converging facades created an artificial valley, which made you forget that this was an interior prismatic volume. This central void was the most interesting spatial point of the pavilion. The balconies were all connected creating a spatial continuity around the inner space; they generated an ascending walk towards the top terrace like a corbusian *promenade architecturale*. On the ground floor we find the access to the pavilion and in the centre of the main space there are two important elements: a garden with an irregular shape that broke the long room and brought nature to the interior (reminiscent of a Finnish forest), and an Italian ramp-staircase located at the end of the space that connected with the first floor balconies. This pavilion was an object of great dimensions, an important sculptural object that also shortened the length of the space.

The first floor was composed of two balconies –one linear and the other undulating– that met on a large landing where the staircase ended. The undulating balcony on the first floor contained the main exhibition space of the pavilion, where interesting viewpoints were created. The linear terrace was closed and used as a projection room, thanks to the trapezoidal shape of the floor plan.

The second floor had the smallest footprint; here the undulating balcony disappeared and only the linear terrace remained. Stylistically, this gallery was designed following the Modern Movement principles. It was a linear platform elevated on *pilotis*, rendered presumably in white, with rounded edges and a tubular horizontal balustrade reminiscent of some emblematic buildings from the International Style, like the houses for the Bauhaus masters of Walter Gropius from 1925–6 or the *Villa Savoye* of Le Corbusier from 1929. This mezzanine had a large space that mainly acted as a top balcony where one could admire the whole pavilion. An important feature was the *jardinière* on the second floor that was connected to the lower floor garden.

If the perspective sketched by Aino Marsio-Aalto is compared to a photo of the final project we can see that they were extremely similar (Fig. 7). Both had a linear balcony supported on *pilotis* on the right hand side, an undulating wall on the left that brought dynamism to the space, an important central staircase and natural elements along the building reminding us of Finnish nature. The main architectonic element is the central 'inverted valley' around which everything revolves and which endeavours to transport us out of the interior space to the magnificent Finnish lakes and forests.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper is to cast light on the professional work of the architect Aino Marsio-Aalto, almost forgotten in the shadow of her genius husband. It is not intended to highlight the value of a female architect for the mere fact of being a woman, but as a matter of historical justice. Until recently, history has belittled or ignored the role of women in any professional environment, especially if it is technical or architectural.

Recently, in Finland some articles have been devoted to the role of Aino Marsio-Aalto as an important collaborator in the work of Alvar Aalto, however they do not approach her work individually or try to value her professional career apart from the work of her husband.¹⁹ This individual approach happened for the first time in 2004 in an exhibition dedicated to Aino Marsio-Aalto at the Alvar Aalto Museum. It was the first time that her personal life and professional career was addressed separately.

Due to the limited attention that Aino Marsio-Aalto's independent professional career has received, it has not been given its deserved place in history. This is because 'in the period that is discussed it appeared to be quite common for the joint projects of architect couples and the work of their joint offices to be recorded predominantly as the achievement of one spouse, thus overshadowing the

¹⁹ Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, *Aino and Alvar Aalto: A Shared Journey: Interpretations of an Everyday Modernism* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation and Alvar Aalto Museum, 2007).

other'.²⁰ Therefore when we bring to light a compilation of her architecture and design projects we help to clarify her important figure as a Modern architect and design pioneer.

There is enough evidence that Alvar Aalto respected the work developed by his wife in and outside the office. As Giedion described, all Aalto's exhibitions and his work up to 1949 were signed 'Aino and Alvar Aalto'. It was not a gesture of chivalry²¹ but to the fact that their marriage was a 'partnership marriage'. In Finland in the 1920s this concept was a distinct expression of the modern.²² If we talk about her talent, according to Viola Markelius, Marsio was more interested in social issues and her ingenuity was deeper than Alvar's.²³

Aino Marsio-Aalto was mostly focused on small scale projects in which she put all her time and interest, so as to enrich and improve the daily life of the individual in his most intimate dimension through the improvement of his close surroundings (Fig. 8). If we analyse her work, we could consider Aino Marsio-Aalto as the rational element within the couple. If we examine her pieces there is a big emphasis on utilitarian, functional, and practical issues, as well as to the use of natural materials and mass-produced objects. She created pieces and designs without a strong aesthetical display, where the needs set the aesthetics of the objects. These ideas were less evident in Alvar Aalto's work. According to her grandson, Alanen, 'Aino remained loyal to functionalist ideas and designed practical things that were carefully studied and finished throughout'.²⁴ Based on this analysis, we can deduce that during the functionalistic period of the 1930s Aalto's work was highly influenced by Aino Marsio-Aalto's ideas. The domestic scale in the buildings of Alvar Aalto might also be strongly influenced by Aino Marsio-Aalto. The detailed design of every project, from its architecture, interior design, furniture and lighting, could not be the work of one sole person but of a design team. The sensitivity and the exquisite taste of the interiors of the buildings of Alvar Alto could be the work of Aino Marsio-Aalto. Marsio's concern for detail, colour, materials and textures can be detected in the drawings that she created which were full of annotations and where everything was designed down to the smallest detail.

Marsio was defined as quiet, punctual, calm, with her feet on the ground, and a counterpart of the bohemian, singular and creative personality of her husband. But after the analysis of her work and her life, we can conclude that she was a strong, responsible and creative professional. Accordingly, she was able, in the beginning of the 20th century, to lead a company that produced furniture and consumer goods for a domestic and international market. Her strength is reflected in the fact that

aside from directing the company she led an international architecture firm, and during Alvar Aalto's frequent travels she directed the practice, the projects, and the family.

Female pioneers from the beginning of the 20th century like Aino Marsio-Aalto were the workhorses of the emancipation of women. It is more than justified that these personal stories start to be uncovered, to give them their due recognition. Moreover, if we take into account the role of women during this historical period, their value is even greater, because their professionalism implied a rebellion against society and its established rules that relegated women solely to the domestic sphere. Architects like Marsio were strong and very talented women, but due to the historical time they lived in, they were kept in the shadow of their professional partners. They worked together with men, out of necessity or by choice, to be able to carry out their professional career. Very few of them managed to succeed independently and if they did it was always as designers. What it is striking is that in most of these architect couples, particularly in the case of Aino and Alvar Aalto, the male partner appreciated, valued and acknowledged the professional role of female partners. The denial of women as professionals is more an omission to be attributed to the narrators of history.

20 Alanen, "Preface," 7.

21 Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 667.

22 Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, "The Ideal Image of the Home," in Suominen-Kokkonen, *Aino and Alvar Aalto*, 139.

23 Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: His Life* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Museum, 2007), 276–277.

24 Alanen, "Preface," 9.

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