Werner Seligmann and the Syracuse School of Architecture (1976-1990). A Pedagogical Legacy

Caterina Frisone, Mark Shapiro

Oxford Brookes University

In the attempt to explore and bring to the attention of educators and researchers a pedagogical model that has had a strong impact on architectural education, this research presents the fundamental contribution of an academic curriculum that has yet to be told. Dean of the Syracuse University School of Architecture between 1976 and 1990, Werner Seligmann focused his pedagogy on the belief that "architecture can be taught" and built the School strengthening its "Identity", "Team" and "Curriculum" and increasing its visibility and centrality in the international educational network.

Within the curriculum, the entire teaching was structured around the principles of the art of 'space-making', the importance of the historical precedent and the responsibility of the architect towards the urban realm, creating a solid foundation for the student's architectural thinking. Seeing the classroom as a "laboratory" to monitor how space affects learning and the core of the whole school as a manifesto of active, dynamic and evolving knowledge, Seligmann was adamant in enhancing the entire academic community with lectures, exhibitions, competitions, publications and more. With the establishment of the Florence program, he completed his academic strategy to empower faculty and students, in which traveling and sketching were the real tools for absorbing knowledge of the past and analysis was the means of extracting architectural principles. By "raising the bar" and transmitting his energy to all who met him, he worked to increase the student's self-esteem and ambition. Today, his legacy is embodied by successful practitioners and deans still acting upon his principles.

This research is about the contribution of an Architect and Dean and his exceptional academic methodology in conveying the art of learning and teaching architecture, in forging the minds and lives of generations of students and faculty, as well as
establishing a reference for the future development of other architecture programmes.

• **Author(s) Biography:**

  Frisone is a PhD researcher and Associate Professor in Interior Architecture at Oxford Brookes University. Her doctoral thesis studies the influence of architecture on people’s well-being. While carrying out her thesis, based on phenomenology, she came across the well-known phenomenological “transparency essay” conceived by Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky in 1955 at the University of Texas in Austin. Finding here the link with her past, which had an important turning point at Syracuse University between 1986 and 1989, in the present study she wants to shed light on Dean Werner Seligmann and on his pedagogy. Born in the footsteps of ”The Texas Rangers” (1951-1957), an extraordinary event in architecture that saw protagonists Colin Rowe, John Hejduk, Robert Slutzky, Werner Seligmann, Lee Hirsche, Bernhard Hoesli, Lee Hodgden, and John Shaw, the academic curriculum founded by Seligmann at the SU is of all the programmes that have resulted from it, the one that has had the greatest impact on the transmission of knowledge. Frisone was selected to present her PhD research at the Florida conference in January 2020 and her research on Crowded Places at the London conference in June 2021. As an unknown research, this work aspires to impress education professionals.

  Mark Shapiro works and lives in Portugal where he writes and actively collaborates with Carnegie Mellon University and the Instituto Tecnológico e de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM). Maintaining the same pragmatic rigor in practice as in the academy, his focus has always been centred on both the architectural and urban design scales. Currently working on large-scale projects in China, Shapiro has shaped the built environment as an architect, planner, urban designer, author and educator. Graduated in architecture from the University of Cape Town and in urban planning from Harvard University GSD, he taught at the universities of Tulane and Syracuse before becoming head of the Department of Architecture at Kansas State University. In 1985 he arrived at Syracuse where he taught Design Studio and Theory. In addition to fully experiencing this engaging academic and life experience, Shapiro worked intimately with Seligmann on international competitions and personally managed the second edition of the Soling Competition. Between 1989 and 1991 he directed the Master Course in Florence following the dissertations of students who today have become successful professionals and academics. In this project with Frisone he aspires to create the basis for the development of a publication that will reveal the value of Seligmann and the curriculum of Syracuse University.