

Frida Irving Søltoft

The Genius Is So Over! Using Collage as a Tool to Write Women's Histories

With my scissors, I cut professor and landscape architect George Boye out of an old photograph that we can take to be the professor strolling along with a group of women landscape architecture students. Collage is my tool. It clarifies interpretation. As part of my landscape architecture course, we are learning to use collage to develop ideas. Often, the collage is not included in the end product. It is considered to be unspecific, not a fixed landscape plan, and thus to be insufficiently academically weighty. I place the unknown women architecture students at the entrance of the architectural gem, the canonized public swimming facility Kildeskovshallen. The design of Kildeskovshallen is often credited to the architects Ebbe and Karen Clemmensen. They were two – a man and a woman. Kildeskovshallen is famous for its pillars. As many people may not know, the pillars were inspired by the surrounding landscape, which is characterised by tall old trees. The landscape was designed by the woman landscape architect Agnete Muusfeldt. So, really they were (at least) three – one man and two women.¹ In the photo, the unknown women students wear flat shoes, functional dresses and cool sunglasses. Apparently, they are indifferent to the photographer's lens. They are at work, not objects. I Google their names in vain. I print. I drink tea. I go to the archive, searching for unknown women architects. I tell a fellow student that I have cut George Boye out of the photo. She laughs and says: "The genius is so over!" I enlarge the women. A new lens is placed before my eye. Through my collage, I investigate an unexplored field. A history of women architects.

I drink coffee with my teachers, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner, and once again they remind me that one of the conclusions of the research project *Women in Danish Architecture* is that architecture has mostly been created through collaborations, not by individuals. But from a historical perspective, architecture has mostly been named after men. I Google again. I glue. I make the women students smaller in InDesign. I am not satisfied. I print. I tear pieces of coloured paper. I go and buy thick paper in the art and paper shop Tutein og Koch.

I visit the library, and in a database, I find an article by the famous philosopher and feminist Donna Haraway. She writes: "The visual metaphor allows one to go

¹ Jannie Bendtsen, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner, "Collaborations," in *Untold Stories*, ed. Jannie Bendtsen, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner (Copenhagen: Strandberg Publishing, 2023), 248–296.

beyond fixed appearances, which are only the end products. The metaphor invites us to investigate the varied apparatuses of visual production”². Haraway gives me the courage to go “beyond fixed appearances” because a collage allows one to challenge “end products” and play with the authority of history. The collage is an honest visual tool because the torn paper clearly shows that the photo has been interpreted. It is not a traditional, objective history. As Haraway puts it: “There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts.”³ The collage can be seen as a scientific method that is explicit about references, where the interpretation is visible, and the result is – in Haraway’s famous words – “situated knowledge.” I go back. I enlarge the women students in the photo again. I move them around. I highlight them and put them in front. I insert tall trees, torn out of the thick paper. I cut long strips of printed multicoloured paper from a fashion magazine for the tree trunks. I want to highlight the reference to Muusfeldt. This is important to me because landscape architecture has often been overlooked. I know from the research of the *Women in Danish Architecture* project that many landscape architecture students have been women. I frame the photo with white fabric.

What happens when I cut Boye out of the photo? It is the same picture; it is just seen from a different angle. I want the audience to become curious about the women in the photo, to open the door to an untold history. How can I write the history of these women? I have no sources, no names, just a picture of the young women around the famous old architect Boye. I am still searching for information about the six students in the photo, so maybe what I can do it to acknowledge their place in the network of history visually as I clumsily tried to as I was arguing with myself over how to make the collage.

References

- Haraway, Donna. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988): 183–201.
- Bendsen, Jannie Rosenberg, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner. “Collaborations.” In *Untold Stories. Women, Gender, and Architecture in Denmark*, edited by Jannie Rosenberg Bendsen, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner, 248–296. Copenhagen: Strandberg Publishing, 2023.

2 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988): 195.

3 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” 190.