

Beth Alber, *Building Forward*
Discipline: Architecture

“Architecture starts when you carefully put two bricks together. There it begins.” Mies van der Rohe

Women have fought their way into the profession of architecture from the first graduates of Canadian universities in the early 1920s to today where we find women in all aspects of the profession from entry-level positions, to founding partners in Canadian architectural firms, to running their own small practices. Statistics show, however, that only 20% of women graduates see their way through to the completion of their stamp even though undergraduate students are a 50-50 ratio of male to female. Looking through the history and CVs of graduate women architects across the decades, many of these young professionals have dropped out of the profession to raise a family before completing the three-year article requirement. It is generally accepted among the profession that this internship type requirement is grueling and an opportunity for firms to demand long hours of mundane but necessary work from eager interns. Women have broken through and are doing rewarding work personally and important work for our culture and society. Many women return to the profession after their children have grown and establish their own firms and often focus on working on residential projects that are more manageable within the scope of their multifaceted lives.

Working with the age-old structural form of the roof truss and focusing on the idea of shelter, I created a work based on the slowly emerging but progressive development of women in the profession. The completed piece is skeletal in nature and sits on an oversize base of maple and acrylic representing both the Canadian landscape and technological materials used in our contemporary society. 70+ names of Canadian women architects have been laser cut into the acrylic plate in a vortex pattern in non-hierarchical order creating the sense that we are all in this together. It is so inspiring to see the accomplishments of women architects who are currently practicing such as Marianne McKenna who was the senior architect on the design of Koerner Hall, Toronto and is currently the lead architect on the restoration and redevelopment of Massey Hall, Toronto.

While researching various aspects of the broader field of architecture and building, I found myself drawn to the age-old form of the roof truss. Metaphorically I used the roof truss to represent women's involvement, scramble and movement in their fight to become players in the architectural game in Canada and internationally. It is this form that holds up the roof. Trusses were probably first used in primitive lake dwellings during the early Bronze Age about 2500 BC and the first trusses were built of timber. The Greeks used trusses extensively in roofing, and trusses were used for various construction purposes in the European Middle Ages. They were designed to meet the various forces of nature present in our everyday life. Whether the structure is a simple shed or a sophisticated concert hall or office tower, the roof maintains the integrity of the structure.