

**Image Manipulation:
The Advertisement Media and Female Architects
in Puerto Rico during the late 1960's**

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The School of Architecture at the University of Puerto Rico was founded in 1966 with a class composed of 56 students, 14 of who were female. To commemorate the opening of the School, *El Mundo* published an article showcasing these determined women who were forging a new identity for themselves and for others to come.¹ Even though the newspaper conveyed the notion that women are intelligent and strong enough to withstand the rigors of male professional disciplines, it returned them to their domestic fate by stating that “the architecture of interiors would surely be something fit for a woman architect.” The female condition is stressed even more when it concludes with the question: “who better than a woman to deeply know the needs of comfort and esthetics in the home?” The article in *El Mundo*, the only one about female architects published during the sixties in this Caribbean island, gave women in the profession much needed exposure, but unfortunately it also pigeonholed them into an architecture related exclusively to the domestic sphere.

At the same time, the female architects interviewed in the article understood that being a women in the field was advantageous since “we are more practical...more sensible, and would focus more on providing better spaces for the housewife in the homes we design...no doubt they [the homes] would have that special touch.” With this statement, the first female students of architecture in Puerto Rico used what was considered to be their “female virtues” outside of the domestic realm and into the professional sphere. In an attempt to justify their incursion into the profession, they demanded their female expertise be recognized as valid.² Although these were

the first female students to study architecture at the new school, there was already a minority of female architects that had studied abroad and were practicing architecture in the Island at the time.

The research discussed in this paper considers the way society perceived the working woman, particularly the female architect, during the sixties in Puerto Rico and does so through a critical analysis of the advertisements in the magazine *URBE*, the professional architecture magazine at the time. The tendency to emphasize the identity of the architect as male, ignoring women as architects, will be clear from this critique of advertisements from *URBE* which, like most professional magazines, acted as the center of production and reproduction of the architectural discourse and the practice of the profession. The advertisements reinforced the idea of men's right to salaried work while promoting the domestic sphere for women even though there were several female architects already practicing at the time. This paper will demonstrate that, with its gender bias, the media promoted the male as the quintessential architect and kept female architects on the margins of the profession.

A precedent considered in this study is the work of Adams and Tancred, *Designing Women: Gender and the Architectural Profession*.³ Adams and Tancred utilized the magazine of The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada to analyze the way the profession perceived the female architect during the modernist period. According to historian Peter Burke, the visual images used in advertisements are valuable sources for the study of society's attitudes in the past.⁴ The use of advertisements as primary sources for gender analysis derives from the way stereotypes homogenize the images of men as well as women, placing them apart, thus reinforcing the mental notions of society and denying any variation in gender roles already established.⁵ This difference was used as a process of distinction and distance that defines

woman opposite of men.⁶ The advertisements therefore become the evidence of gender attitudes in society at the time of the study.

Historic Context

The decade of the sixties in Puerto Rico, like in many other parts of the world, was a time of revolutionary events. The industrial economy had replaced the agricultural era, a new middle class with ideas of progress and consumer values was established, and education became essential for better employment. This emphasis on education brought new opportunities to all, but particularly helped women better their working conditions, going from cheap labor in manufacture to cheap labor in jobs like administration and sales.⁷ Even though there was not a considerable jump in the salary scale, the new jobs provided better working environments, from the machine work in the manufacture of garments and the packaging of fish, to the more hygienic conditions of working in a modern office. Education also increased their numbers in traditional professions for women, like nursing and teaching. However, modernizing ideas were slowly transforming society's patriarchal structure, facilitating the participation of women in non-traditional professions as well, as long as the field could be related to the feminine sphere. In the case of medicine, pediatrics and gynecology were accepted as appropriate occupations, and in architecture, residential and interior design were considered befitting a woman.

This is obviously demonstrated by the newspaper article presented at the beginning of this paper about the first female students of architecture and the way they were presented as natural masters of the domestic sphere. The students reacted by stressing the feminine in order to counterbalance their infiltration into the masculine arena. The problem was that, by exalting their female 'ways of knowing', they risked segregating themselves into a small branch of the profession while giving away the more important architecture to their male peers. As observed

by Bourdieu, society moved the location of women's oppression to the labor market. By compartmentalizing tasks according to gender, these architects were not aware that they were extending their subordination out of the domestic sphere.⁸

The Architect as Male

The image of the architect as a male practitioner was based on the modern ideal of masculinity and responded to the power structure established in the construction field. In the imagery of the profession, to be an architect meant to be male, heterosexual, middle class, intellectual, and be endowed with refined taste. All of these abstract qualities were translated as handsome and sophisticated looks in the masculine body. An example of this is an advertisement of windows for Miami Tropical⁹ published in 1964 where the professional is depicted in the drawing of a handsome face with European features (fig. 1).

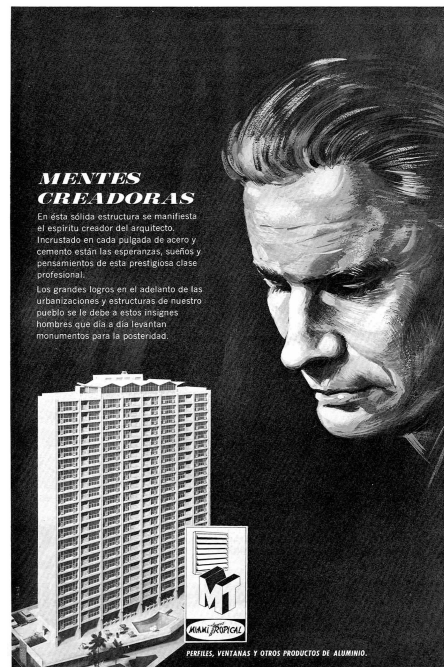


Fig. 1. Window advertisement for Miami Tropical, *URBE*, 1965.

The text is addressed to the 'illustrious men' in architecture, to whom it refers as a prestigious class of 'creative minds responsible for great achievements in the advancement of Puerto Rico.'

The advertisement pictorially portrays the man as a professional worker, thus strengthening a masculine image devoid of all things feminine. It also concentrates on the face and the head, leaving out any doubts about the intellectual nature of the vocation and separating the profession from the physical labor associated with construction. According to Bourdieu, the image of the practitioner that professions created took into account the nature of work, its social value and prestige, as well as other considerations such as sex, age, nationality and social origin. The advertisement of Miami Tropical conveyed an exclusive image, based on the ideals of the profession that excluded and marginalized those who lacked the necessary attributes.

Power Struggle

During the sixties, the engineers in Puerto Rico had already established a male identity and a dominant position in the field of construction. The architects constituted a threatening minority to the engineers, who defended their hegemonic position labeling the architects as ‘effeminate decorators concerned with cosmetic issues.’¹⁰ Because of its association with art, architecture is considered a more humanistic field than engineering, with its particular technical expertise. At the same time, the association of art with the feminine and of technology with the masculine gave an excuse to the engineers to claim that architects have a more feminine identity. All of this was part of a struggle created by the shifting of power positions in the field of construction during the time studied.

The competition and antagonism that existed between architects and engineers during the decade of the sixties in Puerto Rico was reflected in the advertisement that Banco Popular¹¹ frequently published in 1969, where it used gender notions to establish the difference between the professions (fig. 2).

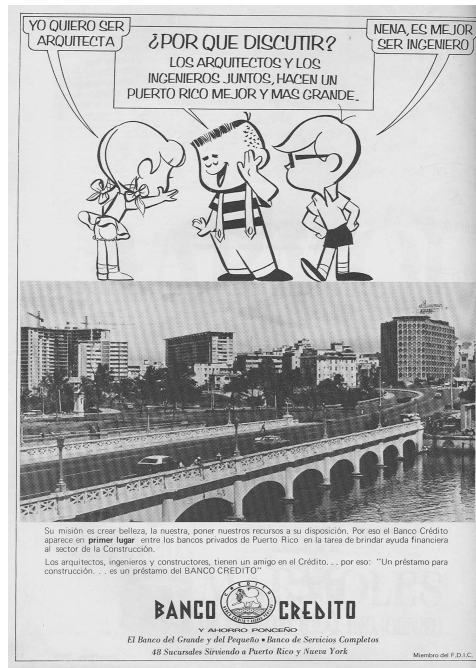


Fig. 2. Banco Crédito, *URBE*, 1969.

The advertisement shows Credilito, a cartoon character popularized by the bank, mediating an argument between a girl and a boy. To the implicit question of ‘what do you want to be when you grow up?’ the girl states that she wants to be an architect while the boy tells her that “it is better to be an engineer”. In the image, the girl is portrayed as confuse and insecure, while the confident boy, in a boastful way, implied that engineering was the profession to choose *par excellence*. Credilito assures them that both professions are needed to “work together for the progress of Puerto Rico”.

The advertisement of Banco Popular is evidence that there was an emasculating campaign against the architects, portraying them as insecure and effeminate professionals. The architects responded by creating a male image in tune with that prevailing in the construction field; this move adversely affected the formation of a broader and more inclusive identity and left out the female architects that were practicing at the time.

Subordinated Class

The idealized male image based on the virile and heterosexual man was the subject used in Clubman's advertisements. Although the advertising campaign of this clothing retail company was directed toward the professional market in general, it was a recurrent advertisement in the professional magazine, which claimed as their mission the education of the community about the profession of architecture. In a Clubman's¹² advertisement of 1969 we can see a full body image of a male professional placed over the face of a female office worker (fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Clubman, *URBE*, 1969-70.

The image of the woman with a pencil on her lips shows an aspect of power relations that were present in the professional field: male boss, female secretary. Not only does it refer to the imaginary attributes of the professional man, but also to the subordinated position of the working woman as part of those attributes. It implied that working women are in the labor force, not as serious participants, but as temporary ones in pursuit of their real interest: to find and marry a

professional man. The bigger face of the woman portrays her desire for the professional man and shows her as a kind of man-eating creature. The ad eroticizes the male body for the admiration of women and the approval of other men. Furthermore, the Clubman campaign plays with the idea of the self-assured man who is allowed and even encouraged to seduce women who work under his supervision while at the same time having a housewife waiting for him at home. Even though this advertisement is one of a few that presented an image of a working woman, it did so echoing the traditional relationship of master and slave.

The Family as Subject

The values of the middle class, molded according to the prevailing structure of society and embodied in the image of the family, were used by the media for marketing products while promoting the idea of progress. The recurring theme in the advertisements by the Puerto Rican Cement Company¹³ during the sixties engages the figure of the working man with the idea of progress for his family and his country (fig. 4). The image is divided into two traditional gender role scenes, a kind of soap opera that pretends to linger afterwards in the imagination of the reader. The title reads: 'Carlos M. Sánchez creates a better life for him and his family'. Besides presenting the male as provider, the image presented the female as caretaker. The text reflects the aspirations and expectations of the working class: a career, a housewife, a home, a new car and money set aside for the education of the children.



Fig. 4. Puerto Rican Cement, *URBE*, 1969-70.

Even though the Puerto Rican Cement advertisement tries to sell a product, in reality the corporation is selling the emerging Puerto Rican middle class based on the division of labor. The stereotyped images that granted more value to masculine attributes maintained the belief that the work of women was subordinated to the work of man, all framed by a period when women architects were beginning to join the profession.

The attraction of society towards the middle class family turned it into a subject used in a variety of advertisements during the sixties; it was the dream that kept social cohesion. Like the Puerto Rican Cement ad, the Phelps Dodge¹⁴ advertisement about electric cables published in 1969 links the idea of progress with the calming image of the family¹⁵ (fig. 5). In a neutral space without walls, each member is shown happily performing their expected role without establishing contact with each other, and holding an electronic item related to their gender. The size of the family has been reduced to conform with the prevalent American ideology of two

point something children. The wife, the only figure presented sitting in a chair, thus emphasizing the passive nature of her role, is placed in the middle of the composition, highlighting her central duty in the preservation of the family. The advertisement tried to assure society that new technological advances taking place were beneficial, as they would contribute to the perpetuation of the modern patriarchal society.



Fig. 5. Phelps Dodge, *URBE*, 1969.

It is important to understand that these advertisements were published in the magazine of the profession, the center of the architectural discourse and practice, at a time when female architects were joining the practice. While women were portrayed as inhabitants of the domestic sphere, the masculine ideals of work guaranteed the continuity of the idea of the male architect, giving it advantageous positioning in the field of construction.

Women as Objects

While there were magazines aimed at the female market before the sixties that published advertisements recognizing the changes that were taking place in society and the efforts of working women, those published in the magazine of the profession of architecture did not

recognize women's presence in the field of architecture. Instead, the advertisements in *URBE* repeatedly emphasized the image of women as users of space, particularly in kitchens and bathrooms, while the portrayal of men was always related to his dominant position as architect.

The bathroom advertisement of Comercial Adolfo Pagán,¹⁶ published in 1968, presents photos of women dressed either in formal outfits or a wrapped towel, amid a selection of bathroom furniture (fig. 6). Its purpose was to attract the attention of practicing architects and it assumed those to be male.



Fig. 6. Comercial Adolfo Pagán, *URBE*, 1968.

Similarly, in one of Orbit Kitchen's¹⁷ advertisements published in 1968 we can see the image of a beautiful woman, barely covered by a cloth, next to a modern kitchen cabinet manufactured in Puerto Rico (fig. 7). Under the image, a checklist of attributes tries to single out "the better product". Again aimed at the male architect, the checklist under the image questions which is the better product, the woman or the furniture, in terms of the best proportions, the best

design, and the best materials. Comparing the attributes of both would likely result in a tie, except for the last question that considers the type of hardware used in the construction; obviously the furniture wins with superior results compared to the woman. The narrative tries to demonstrate that Orbit kitchens work better and are less problematic than the woman in charge of one.

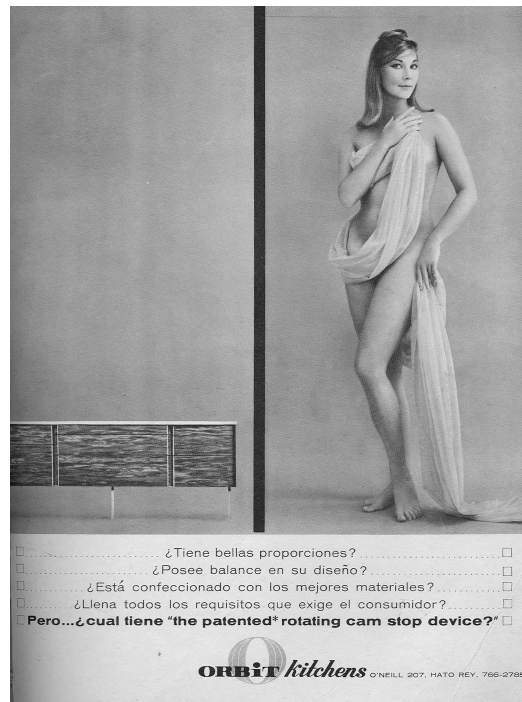


Fig. 7. Orbit Kitchens, *URBE*, 1968.

According to Roland Barthes, the association of two objects as if one was part of the other, used in the majority of advertisements, is based in the substitution of meaning for proximity.¹⁸ When the reader is accustomed to the association of two objects, either by nature or tradition, one of the objects ends up giving meaning to the other. Little by little, the furniture and the woman acquire the same domestic meaning; the relationship of these two objects, of different orders, becomes not simply equal but equivalent.¹⁹ The traditional association of woman +

kitchen becomes women = kitchen. That way, the female architects were made equivalent to the kitchen cabinet, and thus, to the domestic sphere.

Scale

The advertisements of the construction industry published by *URBE* never presented the image of women as architects in the field. Besides being presented as sexual objects, the image of women was also used in relation to size and weight, a kind of human scale that showed the physical qualities of materials and equipment.

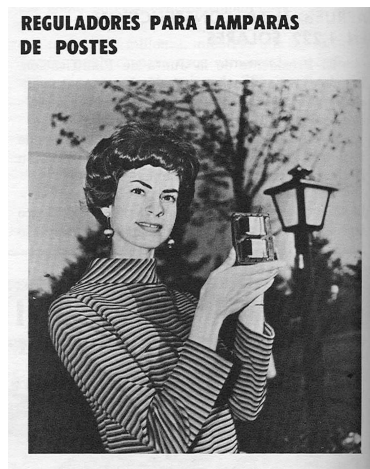


Fig. 8. Electric regulators, *URBE*, 1968.

In the products section of the magazine, an advertisement promoting outdoor lamps²⁰ used the image of a woman holding a power regulator in the same manner as she would hold an object in a perfume or coffee advertisement (fig. 8). The familiarity of the pose and the relationship between the hands of the model and the product communicate how small and lightweight the regulator is. The text of the advertisement together with the image of the woman as the “weaker sex” conveyed the product’s ease of installation. With the same idea, another advertisement uses the notion of weakness and fragility when it presents the image of two

women carrying a plastic tube²¹ to demonstrate how lightweight it is (fig.9). These last four images build a relationship between the female body and the physical qualities of technology products, often imparting a kind of sensuality and eroticism that has nothing to do with the product but with sexual desire, undermining all efforts to the contrary from professional women.

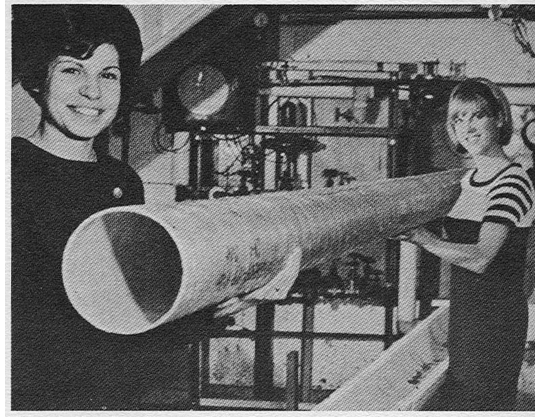


Fig. 9. Lightweight plastic pipes, *URBE*, 1968.

Global Phenomena

While this research is particular to a specific culture and time, as I look into other contexts my observations seem to coincide with a more global condition. An example of this is a double page spread in the journal of the American Institute of Architects in Texas²² during the late fifties (fig. 10). On the left side is an advertisement of the National Electrical Contractors Association using the image of a male construction professional holding a set of plans with a drawing of a building in the background. The right side is an advertisement for Modern Gas Appliances and shows the image of a woman happily at work amid a selection of modern devices. The use of gender roles in advertisements was as strong here as it was in Puerto Rico at about the same time.

Fig. 10. Full spread ads in *Texas Architect*, April 1958.

The advertisements support Karen Ross' theory, stated in her book *Gendered Media*, that an analysis of women's representation in the news demonstrate that media's framing of women in negative and restricted ways is not simply an oddity from a particular newspaper or TV channel or radio station, but instead it is a global phenomenon which has endured over time and across media formats.²³

Conclusion

The advertisements published in the architectural professional magazine in Puerto Rico during the sixties portrayed a professional male image and a domestic female one at the same time that female architects were joining the practice. As a marketing tool, the advertisements portrayed the architect as thinking male, while the image of the woman was related to the advertisements of domestic interiors. The images are testimony to the fact that society, and to a certain extent the profession, were ignoring the efforts and contributions of female architects in practice at the time in the Island. The gender differentiation portrayed aimed at preserving the

traditional roles in society, and contributed in maintaining a subaltern position for women, in this case for female architects.

The advertisements in the professional magazine demonstrate that, with its gender bias, the media gave prominence to the male architect as an affirmation of his rights to the practice, while keeping female architects on the margins of the profession. It ensured the perpetuation of the gendered division of labor and the male identity of the architect while keeping society from perceiving the potential of female architects out of traditionally feminine fields.

- ¹ '14 Chicas en Primera Clase de Arquitectura en PR.' *El Mundo*, (August 20, 1966), "Home", 17.
- ² Barceló Miller, María de Fátima. "Estrenando togas: la profesionalización de la mujer en Puerto Rico, 1900-1930." *Revista ICPR*, no. 99, (1992), 66.
- ³ Adams, Annemarie, and Petra Tancred. "*Designing Women: Gender and the Architectural Profession*." (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2000).
- ⁴ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 94.
- ⁵ Mosse, George L. *The Image of Man; The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996), 6.
- ⁶ Burke, *Eyewitnessing...*, 135.
- ⁷ Luz del Alba Acevedo, "Política de Industrialización y cambios en el empleo femenino en Puerto Rico: 1947-1982" *Homines*, vol. 10, núm. 2 (1986-87), 41.
- ⁸ Fowler, Bridget and Fiona Wilson, 'Women Architects and Their Discontents.' *Sociology*, (UK, US and India: Sage Publications, 2004) Volume 38(1):107.
- ⁹ Miami Tropical, *Urbe*, 1965.
- ¹⁰ Information obtained through the interview with architect Nelson Acevedo.
- ¹¹ Banco Crédito y Ahorro Ponceño, *URBE*, 1969.
- ¹² Clubman, *URBE*, 1969.
- ¹³ Puerto Rican Cement, *URBE*, 1965.
- ¹⁴ Phelps Dodge PR, *URBE*, 1969.
- ¹⁵ Barthes, Roland. *La Torre Eiffel: textos sobre la imagen.*, Enrique Folch González, trans., (Barcelona Ediciones Paidós Ibérica, 2001), 103.
- ¹⁶ Comercial Adolfo Pagán, *URBE*, 1968.
- ¹⁷ Orbit Kitchens, *URBE*, 1963.
- ¹⁸ Barthes, *La Torre Eiffel*, 101.
- ¹⁹ Barthes, Roland. *Mitologías*, Héctor Schmucler, trans. (Argentina: Siglo XXI, 1980), 203.
- ²⁰ Reguladores eléctricos, *URBE*, 1968.
- ²¹ Tubos livianos, *URBE*, 1969.
- ²² *Texas Architect*, April 1958.
- ²³ Ross, Karen, *Gendered Media; Women, Men and Identity Politics*. (United Kingdom: Rowman & Little field Publishers, Inc., 2010), 118.