In Memoriam: Milka Bliznakov

Dr. Milka Tcherneva Bliznakov, Professor Emerita of Architecture at Virginia Tech, passed away from natural causes last Thursday, November 4, 2010 at age 83. She was born in Varna, Bulgaria on September 20, 1927, and immigrated to the U.S. in 1961.

A distinguished architect, scholar and educator, Dr. Bliznakov joined the faculty of architecture at Virginia Tech in 1974 to teach in the urban design program, and she continued to teach advanced design in urban environments until her retirement in 1998. After earning her M.Arch degree from the State Polytechnic University of Sofia, Bulgaria, she practiced architecture in Bulgaria from 1952 to 1959; in France from 1959 to 1961; and in the United States from 1961 to 1972. In 1971 she earned her Ph.D. in architectural history from Columbia University and went on to teach at the University of Texas from 1972 to 1974.

During a span of more than two decades, Dr. Bliznakov established a solid international reputation as one of the most effective and respected teachers and scholars of her generation and as an authority on Russian Constructivism and the Avant-garde.

In 1972 she became the co-founder of the Institute of Modern Russian Culture, and in 1985 she founded the International Archive of Women in Architecture (IAWA) at Virginia Tech.

She received a number of awards and recognitions, including the prestigious Parthena Award in 1994 for her efforts to document the work of women in environmental design, Fulbright Hays Fellowships in 1983 and 1991, International Research and Exchange Grants in 1984 and 1993, National Endowment for the Arts Grant in 1973-74, and Wilson Center of the Smithsonian Institution Scholar in 1988.

Throughout her life, she was a passionate supporter of music and the visual arts. Her numerous publications, focused mainly on the European avant-garde and the contributions of women to the built environment, include the major works: From theory to practice in constructivist architecture (1979), History and theory of urban form (1985), and A bibliographical guide to their work: Soviet women architects, 1917-1937 (1994).

A gifted, inspirational teacher and exceptionally caring individual who always championed the cause of human rights, she leaves behind a rich legacy which will continue to shine brightly for generations to come. She will be dearly missed by family, colleagues, students and friends.

In lieu of flowers, her family requests that donations be made in her name to the Milka Bliznakov Prize Fund of the IAWA, c/o Donna
A memorial service and celebration of Milka’s life will be held at the University Club on Saturday, December 4, 2010, 10:00 am-12 noon.

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