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Library Award Essay

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Researching Lina Bo Bardi's Impact on Architecture

To conclude the semester in Architecture History 2, we were asked to write a final research paper on any topic we liked relating to the second half of the course. Although I liked learning about the different architectural styles and movements around the world, during this class, I specifically took interest in the individual lives of the major architects we studied. I particularly enjoyed learning about the famous female architects that overcame huge challenges to succeed in an industry historically controlled by European men. There were a handful of women that pioneered the way for others in architecture that we discussed in lectures, so I chose to start my research by studying Lina Bo Bardi further, mainly because she was a modernist. I did not like most of the buildings that we looked at in the modern style, but bright colors and emphasis on community in Bo Bardi's buildings caught my eye, so I wanted to learn what drove her to design the way she did.

Knowing my topic was broad, I started by searching "Lina Bo Bardi" in the WorldCat search bar on the UMD Libraries homepage. I saw that there were a few books at the Architecture Library that seemed cover everything about Bo Bardi from her early history to late career. I then searched other terms hoping to shape my results by including phrases like "women in modern architecture" or "brazilian modernism", but I did not find any sources that discussed her work with a particular lense like I was hoping. When I went to the stacks I found just two books about Lina Bo Bardi, and then picked a few chapters to read and take critical notes on. Throughout this process I kept in mind that I needed to focus my topic to write a 5 page paper that made a specific point about Lina Bo Bardi's work.

In effort to find writings with a more in depth analysis of Bo Bardi's work, I turned to the database JSTOR. There, I found two very insightful articles about some themes that reoccur in her work, hybridisation and preservation. These articles were written by the same author that wrote one of the comprehensive books on Lina Bo Bardi. I did some further research to see why he wrote more than anyone else about this architect and evaluate his credibility. I made sure that

all my sources were credible by using books and journal articles that are peer reviewed. Also, since there were only a handful of people that wrote significant works on Bo Bardi, I researched the authors' backgrounds and reasons for why each source was written. The other major book source I used was sponsored by a museum to celebrate Bo Bardi's career and impact, featuring many architectural historians and critics. I found all these sources to be very credible because the authors came from well educated backgrounds with no obvious bias. Their work looks at Bo Bardi's career holistically and provide factual information to support their claims.

I did not consult a professor or librarian during my research, but I did share my findings with my peers, mainly because I thought it would be of interest to them. Discussing with my friends all the possible directions I could take my paper based on the research I had done helped me make decisions and shape my thesis. The feedback I got about which way of supporting my thesis interested my friends the most contributed to the direction I took in the final draft significantly.

After taking detailed notes of what I thought were the most significant sources, I reread the notes and picked out themes. Then, I decided that the best way to summarize my research and make a significant argument in my paper was to describe what made Lina Bo Bardi unique in the context of the modern movement in Brazil by showing how two of her major projects exemplified her distinct design process. Overall, this research paper taught me to be more confident to research something that I start off with little knowledge about. I started with a very broad topic, and only refined it after researching heavily. The compromise for going about it this way is that I had more notes than I usually would for this size paper, and I did not use most of them in the final paper. This is not the way I would typically approach a research paper, but I am glad that I did because it gave me the flexibility and freedom to learn as much as possible before making decisions that would narrow my learning.

Finally, the only change to my research process that I could hope for is a greater variety of sources about Lina Bo Bardi, and significant women in architectural history like her. In the conclusion of my paper, I discussed this importance of studying architects with unique backgrounds and techniques. This conclusion was prominent throughout my research on Bo Bardi, as her approach and ideas were much different from how I assumed most modern

architects thought. Upon looking for sources to research the significance of her work, the only credible and insightful sources were very comprehensive, which made it hard to refine a particular direction in the research until the very end. For the future, I hope that more researchers and people in academia decide to write about architects that have previously been studied less or overlooked, and in turn, university libraries will make those sources available to students. It is important that students have the opportunity to discover historically significant people that may not be as famous as their popular counterparts.