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Since the foundation of the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich in 1967, the gta Archives has been collecting and archiving original documents – dating from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day – on the subjects of architecture, urban planning, civil engineering, design and landscape design.

The gta Archives is positioned as an active research platform within an internationally oriented university. It makes a major contribution to the preservation and protection of cultural assets and thus to preventing a loss of knowledge. In addition, it provides historical perspectives on which to base current architectural debates on theory and practice. The majority of the archives' holdings are of international significance and thus reflect the lively relations linking Switzerland and ETH with the rest of the world. The gta Archives was founded at the university's School of Architecture, now the Department of Architecture (D-ARCH), and has expanded along with it. Teaching work at the D-ARCH and the architectural development of ETH are impressively documented in the relevant posthumous papers and collections. The numerous collections of posthumous papers donated by ETH graduates make it possible in turn to trace the department's influence on Swiss and international architectural debates.

The gta Archives is more than just one division of the gta Institute; it represents the "material basis" for it. Committed to the same ideals as ETH, it is involved in teaching work and provides students and researchers with low-threshold access to original historic documents. It develops synergies together with the D-ARCH and the institute's various chairs and other divisions (gta Digital, gta Exhibitions, gta Verlag) and is thus an indispensable partner in teaching and research work at the D-ARCH.

The influence of the archives and their holdings – in the published research literature, in exhibitions held by prestigious museums and in numerous national and international collaborations and networks – makes a fundamental contribution to the recognition that ETH enjoys in Switzerland and abroad. Planned improvements in accessibility through digital networks (based on the open-source principle) will once again decisively expand the archives' sphere of action over the coming years. Even today, the gta Archives acts as a magnet for researchers not only from Switzerland but from all over the world.

The essence and mission of a living, active archive include ensuring continuous and well-planned growth in its holdings in order to secure historical knowledge in its physical and material form and keep it available for future generations. The gta Archives is committed to this fundamental principle.

Holdings

The main focus of the gta Archives' collection work is on cohesive original holdings in the fields of architecture, architectural theory, local, regional and national planning, and garden architecture and landscape design, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. There is a lesser emphasis on outstanding individual documents. The core holdings consist of over 200 collections of the posthumous papers of major figures in these fields (such as the Semper school, reform architecture around 1900, pioneers of modernism, Neues Bauen and the Solothurn School). Architects who have taught at ETH have often also been the same architects who designed the university's own buildings. The ETH buildings in Zurich and the continuing extensions of the historic fabric are therefore also comprehensively documented in the gta Archives. The collections of posthumous papers that have been brought together in the archives over many decades representatively cover the most important and internationally significant standpoints taken in Swiss architectural culture over a period of more than 150 years.

The gta Archives also maintains various special collections (plan collection, photograph and image collection, model collection or cinématheque) and in addition is responsible on commission for the archives of various other institutions, such as the Archive of the Federation of Swiss Architects (FSA), the Historical Archives of the Swiss Society of Engineers and Architects (SIA) and its Zurich section (ZIA), and the Photography Collection of the Schweizerischer Werkbund). The NSL Archive (Netzwerk Stadt und Landschaft/Network City and Landscape) includes the posthumous papers of the pioneers of Swiss regional and national planning, and of important Swiss garden and landscape architects. A special collection that attracts particular attention internationally is the Archive of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (International Congresses of Modern Architecture, CIAM), which includes the materials from the office of the organisation's secretariat in Zurich, run by Sigfried Giedion, and documents from numerous prominent members of the organisation from all over the world.

Further information

Das Architektur Gedächtnis der Schweiz

Andreas Tönnemann und Bruno Maurer. "Collecting Architecture Today and Tomorrow". [I]CIAM print 03/[I]