

## Miriam Mkawe (2003 – 2041) By Rob Bullen



Image: Darren Baker / Shutterstock

### *Extract from “Making of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (on-line edition)*

**Miriam Mkawe (2003 – 2041):** The most influential architect of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, founder of the “organic” or “M-box” school of architecture.

*{arkboy351: M-box is NOT organic. It is INSULTING to say that Miriam “founded” M-box. You might as well say Albert Einstein “founded” the atomic bomb.}*

Mkawe was born in what was then Birmingham, England, the daughter of Malian refugees. In her early life she experienced both poverty and racial prejudice. Prone to emotional outbursts, she was characterised in a school report as “probably incapable of achieving her undoubted potential”. Nevertheless, throughout secondary school she consistently showed exceptional ability in all subjects, especially mathematics and art.

In her early life, Mkawe also developed a strong social conscience. She saw the effect of an increasingly fragmented and unequal society on people from her own and similar backgrounds, and came to believe that there must be a better way. *{MrSavvy: Cue the violins}* This belief intensified through her time studying architecture at Cambridge. In 2023 she wrote in her “Architypes” blog:

“The first 20 years of this century were an extended goodbye kiss to the certainties and structures that existed through at least the previous five centuries. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has

been called ‘disruptive’, because of advances in technology and the effect of two so-called ‘world wars’ (which actually had minimal impact on much of the world’s population). But the disruption we are seeing now is much deeper, and it is truly global. The architecture that we build around us now must be radically different from anything that has gone before. Otherwise, we die.”

She saw the escalating worldwide civil unrest of that period as caused by a breakdown in the pattern of interpersonal relationships, coupled with partially-suppressed terror at the strength of the forces being unleashed by climate change. Mkawe and a number of followers proposed a response, in terms of what they called “organic” architecture. The group’s manifesto, published in February 2025, reads as follows.

1. There must be no more phallic high-rise. ALL development must be single-storey. High-rise breeds hierarchy, severs connections, and entrenches a male-oriented dominance/submission paradigm.
2. Work and non-work must be integrated in the same architectural unit. The separation of work from the rest of life breeds disconnection and alienation, and promotes a style of decision-making that ignores the community interest.
3. Architecture must reflect a community, not a “family” or a collection of individuals. The entire community’s living, working and recreational areas must be integrated in a single architectural unit, preferably under one roof.
4. Communication within a community must always be face-to-face. Electronic communication must be used only between communities. Therefore, transportation within a community must be highly optimised, based on small-world network theory. [Note: In practice this meant using “transport pods” routed between different living, working and recreation areas using complex mathematical algorithms to minimise the connection time. See “graph theory”, to which Mkawe made significant contributions between 2024 and 2031.]
5. All communities must be at least emissions-neutral.

Wide publication of the “organic” manifesto in on-line media and endorsement by well-known intellectuals and celebrities ensured that Miriam Mkawe quickly became a celebrity in her own right. *{MrSavvy: Her well-oiled publicity machine also helped}* The manifesto was taken up by progressive planners throughout the world, and organic communities were formed in Thailand, Chile and New Zealand, as well as in the crime-ravaged rims of cities such as Los Angeles, Marseille and Mkawe’s native Birmingham. Until the events of 2031 these generally successful, thriving communities were seen *{MrSavvy: by some}* as beacons of hope in a fast-disintegrating world.

*{arkboy351: ... and MrSavvy’s narky contributions just show how small-minded he is}*

Mkawe’s personal life at this time was complex and fraught. In her “Etc ...” blog in June 2026 she wrote:

“Phillipa [Conway, daughter of Canadian Prime Minister Julia Conway] has been unforgiving of my relationship with Jorge [unknown – apparently an unemployed man from Rio De Janeiro]. But I will not back down and I will not apologise. My love is mine, and I will give it to whomever I please. Those who cannot accept this should move on.”

But in November 2028 she wrote:

“Returned from Phillipa’s wedding [to actress Camille Foucault]. Gutted. Shaking. I need a line. Badly.”

*{pipconway: M made 647 posts in 2028. But everyone quotes that one.}*

In 2031, of course, everything changed. Coordinated world-wide attacks on critical infrastructure coincided with a series of extreme weather events, leading to severe instability in financial markets, and fear and anger in the streets. From March central governments began to collapse, first in what was then the U.S.A. and subsequently in other western countries. By the end of 2031, even China was ungovernable. The only functioning large-scale infrastructure was the internet, operating through still-working satellites and kept alive by a legion of hackers.

Community Protection Boards - homogeneous, racially segregated groups of 100 to 1000 people banding together for self-protection – arose spontaneously. The architecture promoted by Mkawe proved useful for CPBs – cheap, almost self-sufficient living spaces that could easily be turned into fortresses, excluding all outsiders. The principles of low-rise building and integration of the entire community under a single roof also proved useful to those who wished to seal themselves off, as far as possible, from what they saw as a threatening world. These isolated and isolationist buildings came to be known as Mkawe-boxes, or M-boxes.

Mkawe herself railed against this use of her ideas to promote division and mistrust rather than a new world order of inclusiveness.

*{MrSavvy: For “division and mistrust” read “safety and security”}*

*{arkboy351: @MrSavvy: Did you really feel safe inside your M-box? Admit it - you were terrified, just like we all were.}*

She attempted to set up a multi-racial, inclusive CPB, but this failed because other CPBs refused to trade with it. Eventually she was allowed into the CPB organised by Phillipa Conway, under a “special racial exemption”. There were rumours that their sexual relationship was rekindled during this time.

*{pipconway: Oh PLEASE! The world is burning and you’re worried about who’s sleeping with who?}*

From within Conway’s M-box Mkawe posted frenetically for several years, attempting to form a world-wide alliance of architects to define the “next phase” of global building design. However, it became apparent that this attempt would fail. Mkawe’s vision was considered too idealistic and impractical, and she refused to take opposing views seriously. Her posts grew less coherent. A post from February 2035 reads:

“The fault, dear Brutus, is not in the stars. Homo sapiens is a fundamentally flawed species. We are an evolutionary mistake. Our brain capacity expanded way beyond any other species, so we can change the planet, but underneath our instincts are still eat, fuck, fight. Protect the insiders, fight the outsiders. We need to be put down, before we take the entire biosphere with us.”

Mkawe became increasingly dependent on cocaine (procured by Conway using valuable trade credits) and in the latter part of the 2030s she spent most of her time investigating abstruse problems in pure mathematics.

In the meantime, Conway formed the “Standing Stones” network of young intellectual leaders from across the world. This group worked to define practical political, economic and social structures for a viable post-2031 order. With Conway’s oversight, and working entirely through the internet, their ideas began to be put into practice, eventually resulting in a return to world-wide stability through the combination of global oversight and local governance that we know today.

*{CamilleF: That’s the usual story, but it wasn’t quite like that. Yes, in those days M was extreme. Incandescent would be the word. She would rage and rail and sound completely incoherent, and Pip would look at her and say “What are you actually trying to say, Mimi?” And M would say “There are no good deals with racists” or “History doesn’t matter unless it’s emotional history” or “Forget politics. Society is architecture. Form follows function.” I didn’t always understand, but Pip understood her very clearly. She heard her, trusted her and acted on it. OK, when M was wired you just had to ignore her. But Pip could NOT have done what she did without Miriam. No way. The mathematics? M believed it was a path to some kind of ultimate truth. Maybe she was right - who knows? As for a sexual relationship, I’ve never asked Pip about it and I never will.}*

Mkawe’s death in 2041 occurred just as the new order was beginning to be established. A cut to her wrist, which some believe was self-inflicted, became infected, and a combination of low tolerance due to drug abuse and lack of available medical treatments meant that the infection spread quickly. She died three days later.

*{pipconway: My beautiful Mimi. Rest with the angels, my love, and may they show you the final proof of the Riemann hypothesis}*

*{MrSavvy: @pipconway: Get over it babe. We’re all better off without her}*