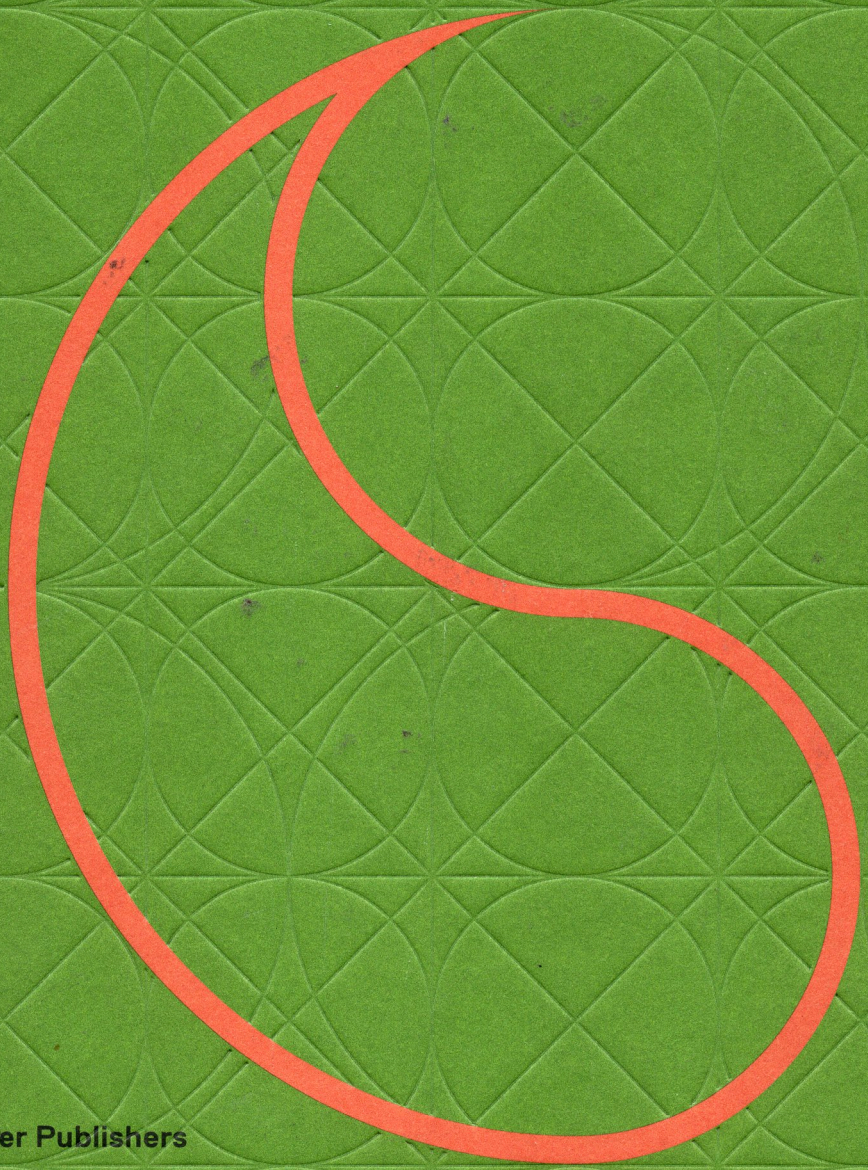
ARCHITECTURE IS LIFE

Edited by Mohsen Mostafavi



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FOR ARCHITECTURE

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PREFACE

Farrokh Derakhshani

Some four decades ago, rapid change and transformation in built environments had reached crisis levels in a great number of countries. New models of building were being adopted or imposed and were not responsive to the needs of communities faced with the deterioration and loss of existing traditions; the conflict between global trends and local requirements had become apparent both in architecture and in the societies for whom such architecture was intended. Observing this led His Highness the Aga Khan to establish the Award for Architecture in 1977, with the hope and objective of creating a platform to search for common experiences and examples that would point to directions for the enhancement of the built environment for future generations. From the very beginning, it was vital to conceive and nurture a dynamic process that would keep the Award at the vanguard of contemporary thought and ensure its present and future relevance. The Award embodies the belief that culture in general – and that architecture, the tangible manifestation of culture, in particular – is an essential vector of social development and cohesion.

It is in this manner and spirit that the Aga Khan Award for Architecture strives to stimulate discourse on the betterment of human life through the built environment. This monograph features the dialogues initiated and the path taken by the Award during the three-year period from 2011 to 2013, the 12th triennial cycle since the Award was founded. The directions taken by the Steering Committee reflect the specificity of this particular cycle – yet it is also aware of the Award's continued existence over time and the need to integrate the issues and debates of each cycle into a vision for the future. The process began with the hundreds of nominators around the world who contribute by identifying recently completed projects that are already in use. The Steering Committee identified an initial set of pertinent challenges and issues confronting contemporary societies that are reflected in the built environments; and it is the Steering Committee that selected

the members of the independent 2013 Master Jury who, in their turn, debated these challenges and issues, as well as others brought forward by them, in the context of the actual building projects submitted and documented for the triennial Award. During this cycle, the Master Jury studied the pool of 411 nominated projects and selected amongst them a shortlist of 20 finalist projects, each exceptional in its own right. Experts conducted thorough On-Site Reviews of the shortlisted projects, after which the Master Jury selected five of them to be the recipients of the 2013 Awards.

In his introduction, Steering Committee member Mohsen Mostafavi describes the dynamics of the Award process, and the rigour and constancy of dialogue and debate that characterise it. In his essay "The Particular and the Universal", Mahmood Mamdani, Chair of the Master Jury, addresses some of the complex free-ranging topics and multifaceted issues that informed the Jury in its deliberations, and other members of the Jury have written on further topics for discussion and consideration. The volume concludes with an afterword by Steering Committee member Homi Bhabha, addressing the concept of the quality of life within the context of the Aga Khan Award, and other Committee members have contributed essays on ideas essential to the ongoing evolution of the Award. Throughout, we believe that the projects presented in this volume demonstrate unique and creative solutions for the communities in which they are built, and contain lessons for professionals all around the world. These past three years reflect yet another step in the Award's journey in search of architecture to enhance the quality of life for future generations of human society.

STEERING COMMITTEE BRIEF

The Award has an open perspective that promotes architectural projects that contribute to the transformation of the quality of life for Muslim communities. The setting of these transformations can be either urban or rural, national or diasporic. Within these contexts, the Muslim *umma* represents a pluralistic coming together of diverse values. In a world where the freedom of cultural expression is increasingly challenged, the Award aims to identify positive modes of practice that enable Muslim communities to take on the challenges of global transformation. Furthermore, the Award seeks to enable emerging Muslim communities to negotiate their role within the multicultural context of their host countries. Architecture and design provide alternative opportunities for promoting understanding, respect and reconciliation.

In its 12th Cycle, the Award will be considering projects in many Muslim societies that are at a critical political juncture. The significance of Muslims within the transnational networks of commodity production and consumption, which are expanding in emerging economies, can also be explored. The impact of such developments on local communities has been enormous, with social changes often lagging behind economic development. The impact, however, has not been uniform. Consequently, issues of equity, sustainability, scalability and good governance have become key factors that affect architecture and the built environment. But what is the effect of architecture on equitable governance? The Master Jury is urged to take these factors into consideration as part of its deliberations.

The Award is committed to the promotion of innovative responses to the built environment while recognising the importance of traditional methods and forms of architecture. The Award proposes an integrated approach that works towards the utilisation of best practices. In addition to architecture, master planning, landscape architecture and

other modes of addressing and managing urban development, public transportation and infrastructure are high priorities for the Award. Of equal importance are places of work, sites for industrial production, public spaces, residential sectors, and spaces of retail and leisure. This interpretation of the built environment must also place a high premium on the issues of economic opportunity that profoundly affect the welfare and security of vulnerable people and communities.

In the context of these conditions, it is necessary to consider projects both for their overall architectural excellence and for the way they contribute to emerging paradigms for places of work, planning conditions, public spaces, housing and spaces of domesticity, health and welfare, conservation and adapted reuse.

In addition, it would be desirable to consider the following criteria: excellence in design, workmanship and craft, risk and reliance, sustainable practices, resource management, community activism, innovative governance and specific forms and manifestations of technical knowledge.

While it seems unlikely that any individual project fulfils all the above criteria, we hope that the projects premiated by the Master Jury will exemplify the historic and enduring aspiration of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. This aspiration remains the understanding of, and appreciation for, the contributions that the built environment makes to the enhancement of the quality of life.

Excerpts from the Steering Committee brief to the 2013 Master Jury

REPORT OF THE MASTER JURY

The 2013 Cycle of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture

Contemporary Muslim communities live in contexts defined by large-scale movements and constantly negotiated notions of identity and homeland. These processes lead to an ongoing understanding of Self and Other, making for different combinations of volatility and creativity. The 2013 Jury was committed to identifying, acknowledging and awarding initiatives with the potential of helping communities negotiate challenges at multiple intersections, whether of historical time or space, or of the articulation of heritage with modernity. The dominant themes that define this cycle of awards are: restoration, as the revitalisation and adaptation of tradition; integration, as a way to unify fragmented environments, urban and rural; the pursuit of excellence in design in low-budget settings; and the embrace of the solemn dignity of death as a way to affirm life and the living.

Restoration often leads to the "museification" of spaces and artefacts as so many relics of a past gone by. The assumption is that tradition is something clinically separated from the present. The effect is, further, to ossify the past and disconnect it from the present. Where the immediate history of the peoples is concerned – in this case Muslim communities whose immediate past is anchored in colonised societies where the project of modernity was introduced as part of a foreign "civilising mission" – the damage is even greater. The Jury seeks to identify and acknowledge initiatives that highlight heritage as both alive and flexible, thereby affirming its potential as a resource that can invest the present with meaning. The objective is to make it possible for a people to take ownership of their history as a living tradition.

Restoration is never simply a return to the original. Among the projects the Jury awarded are those that highlight the potential of restoration to integrate a fragmented present. If in one instance the challenge is to let a community take ownership of its past, in another it is to unify a landscape fragmented by the confluence of multiple developments,

official and unofficial. Muslim communities live in diverse environments, urban and rural. When it comes to village-based populations, the challenge is to validate the rural environment. Here, restoration is more than just about design; it calls for a participatory process and holistic approach that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Architecture is a quintessentially urban activity that is identified with urbanism and urban life. In spite of their density, urban settlements often generate an experience of solitariness, a feeling of being cut off in a disintegrated world. In a context where big bridges tend to be destructive elements within the city structure and the landscape, a bridge that touches the ground lightly and seeks to create places for pedestrian activity stands out. The bridge connects society, both metaphorically and physically, and contributes to a threefold integration: of public design, infrastructure and landscape.

Is it possible for a low-budget project to combine functionality with design, utility with beauty, affordability with excellence? Can architecture, historically a human activity highly destructive of the environment, take a posture that combines a low profile with high innovation, one that enables low-energy use alongside a recycling of resources? Among the projects the Jury acknowledges is that of a construction that turns decommissioned containers, a consumer culture waste product, into an aesthetically pleasing, low-cost building material, able to be used to provide much-needed health facilities and a high level of care to patients.

Rapid movement makes for a changing composition of communities, ethnic and religious. Questions around definitions, of home and away, self and other, have the potential of unleashing divisive tendencies. When an architectural intervention turns this volatility into an occasion for a sober and focused reflection, on life rather than death, it has

the potential of giving the living a second chance. The Jury honours the grace and beauty of one such intervention, and its inclusiveness and foresightedness.

The Jury followed a two-step process in making its selection. The first step, which led to a shortlist of 20 projects, was based on identification of themes and challenges faced by practitioners of the built environment today. The second step was based on a threefold consideration – a holistic participatory approach, the quality of design, and its socio-economic-environmental impact – which led to the final selection of five worthy projects for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture:

– Salam Centre for Cardiac Surgery, Khartoum, Sudan
– Revitalisation of Birzeit Historic Centre, Palestine
– Rehabilitation of Tabriz Bazaar, Iran
– Rabat-Salé Urban Infrastructure Project, Morocco
– Islamic Cemetery, Altach, Austria.

Mahmood Mamdani (Chair), David Adjaye, Howayda al-Harithy, Michel Desvigne, Kamil Merican, Toshiko Mori, Shahzia Sikander, Murat Tabanlıoğlu, Wang Shu

ENDLESS INVENTIVENESS

Shahzia Sikander

As a visual artist, what inspired me most about being a member of the Master Jury for the 12th Cycle of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture was the lack of any culturally specific lens throughout the process. There was no intent to champion a solely Islamic context or valorise an Islamic aesthetic. It was, in fact, an emphasis on originality that preceded all concerns: originality as located within the creative responses to a set of unique problems.

As values are discerned within the built environment, the need to reflect and question what can be improved and addressed differently becomes a necessary dialogue. The needs that dictate reinterpreting the existing norms are often a catalyst for new ways of arriving at a solution. Such active engagement is also necessary in defining the larger context of Islamic art and architecture. Muslim communities have varied histories and geographical locations that challenge singular definitions. Furthermore, in today's transnational ways of living and being, the older frameworks feel increasingly restrictive. Inherently nationalistic sentiments remain strong even in art history. The quest to define an Islamic identity in the contemporary visual context may be a paradox in itself. Though it has been laboured upon and often reduced to a cliché, its potential remains strong, since fundamental values of inclusiveness and plurality lie at its core.

Art, and especially architecture, interfere and interact with the social, political and economic changes in a society. At these cross roads lie artistic interventions that, when harnessed to unique visions, independent from their historical representations, encourage others to experiment, explore and expand upon the notion of an inherited form. In fact, there lies the challenge: to conceive and imagine an aesthetic that is inclusive and a reflection of a community's unique relationship to its local environment.

2013 AWARD ON-SITE REVIEWERS

Sultan Barakat
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ARCHITECTURE IS LIFE
AGA KHAN AWARD FOR ARCHITECTURE 2013

This monograph has been conceived by Mohsen Mostafavi and Farrokh Derakhshani on behalf of the Steering Committee of the 2013 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

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