

Report of the Master Jury

Tradition and modernity are often seen as opposing forces, locked together in a permanent state of tension. This is perhaps most keenly felt in societies undergoing rapid transformation, where the aspirations of the future confront the lessons of the past in complex and testing ways. Continuity has historically been one of the cornerstones of Islamic societies throughout the world, but the enormous shifts over the past 50 years, whether as a result of war, migration or advances in communication, present new challenges and opportunities for architects and those involved in shaping the built environment. Unique among architecture awards, the Aga Khan Award seeks projects across a vast range of contexts, cultures and conditions. Throughout its history, it has also celebrated works that straddle the sometimes uneasy divide between tradition and modernity.

The jury for the 13th cycle embraced the notion of plurality, exploring not just projects in diverse contexts but the boundaries of the discipline itself, recognising that new knowledge sometimes emerges in the lines between categories. For established practitioners, this posed a particular dilemma: how to identify merit in projects whose very terms force us to question the limits of our understanding. The traditional categories of our discipline – corporate, cutting-edge, infrastructure, socially responsive, environmentally sound – are not as fixed or concrete as they once seemed. How does one push an edge that is continuously shifting? If a woman may never enter a space that she herself has conceived and executed, then can that project be considered ‘cutting-edge’? Or if a building blurs the divide between landscape, dwelling and ecology, can it be considered to push the boundaries of all three? Rather than respect the conventional segregation of architecture into works of different scale and scope, the jury sought to paint a more nuanced and perhaps even pixelated portrait of a world – and a discipline – in a state of flux.

The six Award recipients, arrived at after long and sometimes heated discussion, accurately reflect the wide range of entries: a pedestrian bridge that privileges use over form; a sacred space that plays inventively with tradition; a project that is at once landscape and building; a bold, contemporary insertion into a traditional setting; a diminutive library operating at a much larger micro-urban scale; and an urban park that provides new forms of public space.

In such a context, a universal language of architecture no longer seems appropriate: what remains are creative and often modest site-specific responses that generate new vocabularies of their own.

Bait ur Rouf Mosque, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Friendship Centre, Gaibandha, Bangladesh
Micro Yuan'er Children's Library and Art centre, Beijing, China
Superkilen, Copenhagen, Denmark
Tabiat Pedestrian Bridge, Tehran, Iran
Issam Fares Institute, Beirut, Lebanon

Luis Fernández-Galiano (Chair), Suad Amiry, Emre Arolat, Akeel Bilgrami, Hameed Haroon, Lesley Lokko, Mohsen Mostafavi, Dominique Perrault, Hossein Rezai