

MASTER JURY REPORT

Statement of the 2004 Aga Khan Award for Architecture Master Jury

The Jury met for the first time in January 2004 and started by reviewing 378 projects that had been nominated for the Ninth Cycle of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. After vigorous and concentrated discussions, the Jury shortlisted twenty-three projects that were proposed for On-Site Project Review. During the second meeting, in June 2004, the Reviewers presented to the Jury their detailed reports and, after discussions, the Jury selected seven projects to receive the 2004 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

From the outset, the Jury agreed that they would need to seek out a comprehensive approach in order to discover, understand and explain the challenges of architecture in the Muslim world as it confronts modernity in all its diversity. Four areas of social meaning came to the fore, and the Jury expressed these as a series of questions.

The first question raises the issue of how the complexity of history and of historical memory can be expressed in architecture. Because restoration deals with history in architectural terms, it tends, pragmatically, not simply to freeze the past as it may have existed at a given moment. Instead, restoration increasingly responds to the needs of present-day groups and individuals, who often use historic buildings for new purposes. By accommodating historical meaning and contemporary needs, a building retains social meaning rather than becoming simply an object of tourism.

Secondly, the Jury considered the question of how private initiatives are integrated into the emerging public sphere. The Jury believes that the development of a pluralist public realm is one of the most important issues facing many Muslim countries. Today, more and more private initiatives in the public realm empower societies and address their needs, be it in the fields of education, sanitation or other social requirements. Architecture plays an important role in manifesting these endeavours, and the Jury especially appreciated a balanced relationship between the social content of an initiative and its architectural representation.

The winning projects also address the question of how to express individuality in complex social settings. In modernity, architecture expresses individuality, permitting a poetical

interpretation of the self. The Jury recognized the growing awareness and appreciation of individuality in the Muslim world. On the one hand, this individuality counters the idea that Muslim societies emphasize collective identities, and on the other hand it reveals the plurality of Muslim traditions.

The fourth question the Jury considered was the issue of how power and authority in the global domains of technology, culture and economics might be addressed through architecture. The Jury paid special attention to the responsibility of architecture in the Muslim world and to projects that show understanding of the worldwide exchange of technological, cultural and economic knowledge in local contexts. The translation of global identities into architecture – which can occur in the technology used in buildings or in the potential functions of buildings – was considered by the Jury to be of great importance for many parts of the Muslim world.

The Jury also analysed how these four issues have been transferred to architecture. It is common sense that the way structure and design are used in a project should always be adequate to the issue addressed. Adequacy, however, does not mean simply assigning a form to a problem and updating traditional architectural solutions. It means adopting a critical perspective on the problem and addressing it by means of architectural techniques. The Jury recognized this by giving importance to projects that raise the standards of excellence.

Finally, the Jury focused on the social, cultural and environmental impact of the projects, analysing the balance between intention and realization, meaning and material, and functionality and use. The integration of projects within the environment and the criticism of tradition were also factors in assessing projects.

Architecture in the Muslim world partakes of all the features of modernity in architecture. However, it often also tries to incorporate specific Islamic meanings, and it is only in such deliberate instances that architecture can be labelled 'Islamic'. When 'Islamic' traditions are followed instinctively, the result is simply architecture in a Muslim cultural context. This means that there is a difference between architecture in the Muslim world and what is defined in discourse as 'Islamic architecture'. The plurality of architecture in the Muslim

world is evident at many levels: in varied discourses on architecture; in architecture that deals with restoration in ways that re-establish the generic pluralism of Muslim culture; and in the multiplicity of forms produced by a variety of social, cultural and economic environments. The Jury was particularly aware of the complexity of the plurality of the Muslim world and was critical of those projects that tried to establish a cultural normativity that could threaten that plurality.

The Jury believes that all seven projects selected for the 2004 Aga Khan Award for Architecture meet with the foregoing criteria.

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