Museums of the World

Museum Quartier, Vienna
Um Kalthoum, Cairo
Saudi Science, Riyadh
Science City, Giza

Aga Khan Award 200
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Politics and Architecture have always been deeply intertwined, and never has this been more visible than times like this. Politics are involved in every step of the design, selection and tender process of any project, especially in competition commissions. And this issue seems to touch heavily on both competitions and political buildings: museums.

The highlight of this issue is the result of the prestigious Aga Khan Awards cycle for this year. Another important competition, the Egyptian Science Museum, is also featured, together with another national project, the Om Kholthom museum, which is near completion. It is a project that is long overdue in a country where such a person was so pivotal in its history.

Again and again we see the interference of politics pushing for or de-railing architecture projects. The Saudi Science Museum was a joint commission granted to Dr. Abdel Halim Ibrahim Abdel Halim and Rasem Badran as a result of an international competition. After much thought and effort went into perfecting a suitable construct, the Gulf war de-railed the commission and the project is currently being built by others deemed politically more suitable. The influence of politics is no stranger on art, works in the exhibition ‘Missing Links: Art Practices From Lebanon’ is full of the latent energies that result from non-sensical war and politics. It may be easy to say that if quality, innovative architecture is to persist then obstacles such as politics must be overcome, but architecture is not merely subject to politics, it is a symbol of politics. This can be seen in the events revolving around the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center in New York, and the following acts of violence on Mosques all over the world. Architecture as a symbol of attack, hate and revenge is indeed a frightening evolution of the role of design. Let us hope that architecture persists as a symbol of innovation, faith, education and memory as can be seen in the examples discussed this issue.

Tammy Gaber

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Om Kalthum Museum rendering, Akram El-Magdoub

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