

Foreword

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Too often, the successes and failures of architecture, planning, landscape architecture and urban design—or any other projects that alter our natural and built environments—are never transmitted. We build as if we have no history and no future. Yet this information is of utmost importance if we are to avoid the destruction of what nature has bequeathed and what our ancestors constructed. If we are to create a better future, we need to learn these lessons.

One way to ensure that this information is transmitted is through the critical evaluation of projects in ways that uncover best practices. The aim is to create a sharper awareness of the aesthetic, cultural and social aspects of architecture among those who commission, those who build and those who use these projects, leading to a recognition of the deeper, “implicate” order that is inherent in the visible architectural project. This notion of the implicate and the explicate order is presented in the introduction by Mohsen Mostafavi.

Since 1980, select groups of architects, planners, artists and social scientists have convened every three years to examine a diverse selection of recently completed projects presented to them through the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. One of the main aims of this exercise is to highlight success stories.

In the 2010 Cycle, 401 projects were presented to the independent Award Master Jury, from which jury members selected a shortlist of 19 projects for in-depth review. The Award’s Steering Committee—which sets the priorities for each triennial cycle—emphasised its desire for greater transparency in the selection process, and consequently the shortlist was released to the public for the first time. This created dialogue and discussion in both professional and public circles. After the On-Site Reviews and further analysis by the jury, five projects were selected to receive the 2010 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

In this book, all 19 shortlisted projects are presented, grouped under five themes: environment, institutions, industry, dwellings and conservation. The issues they raise are further analysed from different perspectives in a series of essays. What they all share is the high level of interaction and discussion that occurred among the people who envisaged, realised and use these projects, as well as the exceptional processes of their creation.

The selection of projects for the 2010 Award started with a statement by the Steering Committee—presented to the Master Jury at the beginning of their mandate—outlining concerns about the status of the current built environment. The jury’s response is manifest

in their choice of projects but also in their report, which challenges many of the assumptions commonly held by professionals and decision makers today.

The final section of the book is dedicated to Oleg Grabar, the distinguished art and architectural historian and recipient of the 2010 Chairman's Award, given in recognition of lifetime achievement. The awarding of this honour does not fall under the Master Jury's mandate, but is the choice of the Steering Committee. Professor Grabar was one of the first individuals to be called on by His Highness the Aga Khan in 1977, when he established the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Since that time, the Aga Khan's efforts to engage with the challenges faced by the natural and built environments have grown to encompass 11 major institutions, all designed to address issues that affect the quality of life. Other agencies focus on particular development issues, from economic development to culture, and from deforestation to university education. Common to all of these initiatives is a commitment to stimulating positive change. Like the other institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network, the Award aims to provide sparks of hope and models for action. With the natural and built environments under increasing threat, these messages have become ever more urgent.