

Master Jury Report

2010 Award Cycle

The intersection of identity and pluralism in a globalised world, where memory, heritage and belonging are threatened, emerged as central concerns during the jury debates. Since its inception, the Award has striven to explore new frontiers while maintaining a generous and pluralistic perspective, engaging projects that contribute to the transformation and improvement of the quality of the built environment. It has considered projects of significance both to the Islamic world and to multicultural societies in which Muslims represent a minority or an expansion of new or historic diasporas. We understood our task as being to engage those projects which respond to the mounting challenges facing Muslim societies or societies where Muslims have a significant presence, ranging from environmental issues, neglect of rural communities, rapid industrialisation and deterioration of urban infrastructure to concerns about heritage and memory in the broadest sense. As a jury, we remained mindful of promoting the most successful interventions in the built environment, while ensuring that they set the highest standards of excellence.

While reviewing the 401 nominated projects (19 of which were shortlisted and 5 selected as Award recipients), the jury had the opportunity to survey a broad range of themes and trends. As a jury, we did not prejudice our selection by any prior definition of an agenda, but remained sensitive to priorities brought to the surface by our review of the work of practitioners and stakeholders in the built environment everywhere, broadening our scope both in and outside the Islamic world.

The Award-winning projects represent the diversity of the Muslim world and its diasporas, as well as being innovative in their own right. In the jury deliberations, specific themes emerged which defined our understanding of the scope of the Award.

First, ecologically sound projects in conception and implementation which demonstrated sensitivity to environmental concerns emerged as preferred models for replication in urban contexts and in alleviating ecological problems. They can provide alternative social spaces for urban populations and counterbalance the proliferation of malls and shopping centres as central spaces for entertainment.

At the technological level, innovations in providing ecological alternatives for the recycling of water while addressing natural seasonal problems such as floods were also recognised as crucial.

Second, projects aiming at the preservation and reclamation of recent heritage, associated with the colonial period, highlighted the role of urban centres in former European colonies as sites of

experimentation with modernism, and their centrality in a reconsideration of global modernities. Several of the shortlisted projects highlighted the importance of promoting civil initiatives which are sensitive to issues of funding, the revitalisation of local economies and their role in providing opportunities for local employment and training.

Third, there was an understanding that enlightened design is crucial in the development of safe and efficient workplaces, and that the worst effects of an industrialising world can be avoided. Such a need, for workers and management alike, was identified as of utmost priority in a time of rapid industrialisation in the Muslim world.

Fourth, the importance of building institutions for the preservation and display of cultural heritage in the context of active archaeological sites demonstrated the need for extreme sensitivity to location and historic landscape. This has been coupled with the importance of such projects in rethinking identity in Western contexts and the role of Islamic cultures and civilisation in the shaping of the European Enlightenment and modernity. Finally, the importance of looking for innovative small-scale projects as models of inserting modern structures within traditional and rural settings in a sensitive and non-intrusive manner also came to define one of the jury's criteria in identifying winning projects.

In a historically interconnected and increasingly globalised society, perceiving the world in stereotypes of separate cultural entities does not hold strong credence. Today, professional practitioners, as well as decision makers and funders, are beginning to understand the extent of the contributions of the Muslim world both geographically and historically. In a postcolonial context, culture is understood as something to be shared and cultural diversity as a value to be cherished. In this regard, the Islamic world has not only made major contributions to the narratives of global history but also to particular local histories within and outside its recognised boundaries.

The built environment is subject to rapid processes of transformation, very often backed by larger and more robust investment. In the midst of such change, concerns for the environment, for the built heritage and for the social fabric are often relegated to a secondary importance, if not neglected altogether. The shortlisted and awarded projects try to redefine priorities and emphasise a sensitive understanding of their immediate and broader contexts. Despite the great difference in their scale, context and functionality, they exhibit a responsible quality, of treading lightly on earth.

Muslims are majorities in some places, minorities in others and absent elsewhere. Globalisation should not be viewed only as an intrusion into Muslim cultures but an opportunity for diverse cultures to merge in a mutually coexisting manner. The winning projects reveal

the ways in which Muslim societies are positioned to accommodate otherness as part of a process of reconciliation and conviviality. Improving the image of Muslims in a world that is both increasingly globalised and segregated is but one way this issue has been addressed. Yet also, accepting the other into the very definition of Muslim heritage is a very powerful way of addressing conviviality and multiplicity. The very definition of who is included within this collective remains problematic.

The above mentioned themes—defining the boundaries of Muslim culture in a globalising world, treading lightly on earth and conviviality—have emerged from a diligent review of projects presented. The projects brought forward the need for improving the quality of life in local communities while being capable of serving as role models for other communities in the Islamic world. They provide an ethical sensitivity to their contexts, by promoting sustainability on all fronts: environmental, social and economic. And while we understand that no one project can provide all the answers to the needs of Muslim societies, we believe that these projects collectively tell a story of hope matched with perseverance, pride tempered with humility and unity without sacrificing diversity.

Geneva, 10 June 2010

