



Aga Khan Award for Architecture

Report of the Master Jury

2022 Cycle of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture

This is the first Award cycle to have coincided with a global pandemic, aggravating the already existing social, economic and environmental challenges of our times. As the 2022 Aga Khan Award for Architecture Master Jury, we wanted our collective message to reflect the extraordinary times we are living in (from Covid and climate change to social polarisation, poverty, inequality and conflict).

To that end, we sought to identify exemplary and transformative practices that address these particular challenges, albeit with full awareness of the fact that we were tasked with selecting *architectural* projects and not humanitarian programmes per se. We debated the complicated dialogical relationship between the two, affirming that the “architectural” and the “humanitarian” need not be mutually exclusive, but on the contrary, are intimately connected.

In the Steering Committee Brief to the Master Jury, the definition of “excellence in architecture” was given as “reimagin[ing] reality”, or more precisely, “reimagin[ing] processes and empower[ing] new constituents”. We take that recommendation seriously and see it as the key to what makes the Aga Khan Award for Architecture different and unique, with its focus on the difference architecture makes in the lives of people and local communities, especially women and children as both users and makers. Perhaps partly due to the nature of the unprecedented times we are living in, we worked with a renewed appreciation of the physicality of real spaces that bring people together – for open, free, public spaces that have a capacity to heal and restore a sense of dignity. We looked for quality, not only of the architectural space, but the quality of life and social relationships facilitated by architecture – the generosity and beauty that architecture can strive to make more accessible.

We especially valued the impact and transferability of a project – whether it embodies a potential for acting as a model or a trigger for similar initiatives elsewhere ... a ripple effect beyond its own



specific circumstances. We all felt strongly that “how to spread good ideas” is a profound question for our times.

Our selections reflect a very rich and stimulating array of discussions and debates that coalesced around three constellations of themes which capture the issues that we all felt were important to our overall message and embodied transformative potentials to make us rethink what our discipline and profession is all about.

First, we valued diversity in all senses of the term: diversity of scales, typologies, geographies and cultures. The 20 shortlisted projects, as well as the selected six, reflect this across a vast geography from Senegal to Indonesia; across a typological spectrum from airport and school to museum/arts centre; and across a scalar range that reflects the blurring of boundaries between architecture, landscape and infrastructure. We would also like to point out that although not in the final six, housing projects in the shortlist that experimented with different ways of urban densification allowed us to discuss the importance of typological innovation that challenges existing urban paradigms.

This expansive vision of the discipline is also reflected in the value we placed on sensible use of resources: how the project responds to or emerges from climate and addresses broader environmental concerns of sustainability, ecology and energy efficiency, not to mention the experiential values of architecture when in harmony with nature and the local landscape.

Secondly, central to our selections (and to the mission of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in general) is community involvement. We deeply valued participation – not, however, as an overused cliché term, but rather how it is actually practised, demonstrated and achieved on the ground; how architecture fosters participation, not only in its making but afterwards in its use.

We were particularly drawn to practices that challenge the traditional definitions of the discipline and the authorial role of the architect, towards what is commonly theorised as “spatial agency” – that is, architects acting as much as agents and facilitators as they are designers, identifying needs, raising funds, forming NGOs, mobilising the local population and even disappearing afterwards,



leaving it to the people to take over. We were however also deeply aware of the asymmetries and imbalances of how European/Western architects find opportunities to do such outreach work in the Global South with relative ease, while the same does not apply in the opposite direction. After all, the broader political implications of architectural initiatives are inescapable points of contention in the post-colonial context of the Global South.

Given our conflict-ridden world, a lot of very interesting discussion and debate arose around the subject of the healing capacity of architecture as therapeutic spaces for traumatised people.

Thirdly, and equally significantly, we focused on and discussed the importance of an architecture that not only addresses existing needs but allows for change – how the afterlife of the project is of as much concern as its inception and construction. This brings us to a category central to the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, namely conservation and adaptive reuse projects – a type that we agreed carries great value and critical potential, in a world where there is too much demolition and new building.

Perhaps more pronounced in this cycle was our particular interest in the preservation of modern heritage – underappreciated, much neglected, much maligned and often easily demolished across the Muslim world, obliterating remarkable buildings that are, in fact, of utmost importance for challenging the perception of modern as alien and imposed, for “decentring Modernism” as the property of everyone across the world and for recognising these structures’ significance in many Muslim countries’ histories. Several important and provocative examples in the shortlist highlight collective memory against erasure of recent history.

With these guiding concerns, and immensely stimulating and provocative discussions, the Master Jury embarked on the very difficult task of bringing the 20 shortlisted projects down to the final six, which are addressed in more detail in their respective citations.

By way of conclusion, the Master Jury would like to express its gratitude first and foremost to the uniquely rigorous process and the remarkable organisation of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, from the nominations to the final selections of each cycle. For us, coming from



different disciplines and backgrounds (practising architects, academics, artists, preservation specialists), it was an amazingly enriching learning process, getting to know each other over the course of two intense work weeks in Geneva and then in Lisbon, listening to thoughtful, sophisticated and provocative arguments, debating them, sometimes convincing each other, sometimes agreeing to disagree, but also having a lot of fun. It is an experience we will cherish for the rest of our lives.

Last but not at all least, we would like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to the amazing group of on-site reviewers, whose thoughtful, well-researched reports and observations offered new insights and new angles of interpretation, sometimes corroborating our convictions, but frequently prompting us to rethink and revise. Their work, along with that of the film crews and numerous others, brought these projects to life for us and made our jobs easier. They gave us a renewed appreciation of what makes the Aga Khan Award for Architecture different – that is, the rigour and thoroughness of the process, far beyond and far richer than the typical awarding of architectural products.

The recipients of the 2022 Aga Khan Award for Architecture are:

Banyuwangi International Airport, Blimbingsari, East Java, Indonesia

Kamanar Secondary School, Thionck Essyl, Senegal

Community Spaces in Rohingya Refugee Response, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Bangladesh

Argo Contemporary Art Museum and Cultural Centre, Tehran, Iran

Renovation of Niemeyer Guest House, Tripoli, Lebanon

Urban River Spaces, Jhenaidah, Bangladesh

Amale Andraos and Sibel Bozdoğan (co-chairs), Nada Al Hassan, Kazi Khaleed Ashraf, Kader Attia, Lina Ghotmeh, Francis Kéré, Anne Lacaton, Nader Tehrani



Banyuwangi International Airport

Blimbingsari, East Java, Indonesia

Unlike generic airport buildings that are often hermetically sealed spaces detached from their surroundings, the Banyuwangi International Airport is an elegant counter-thesis to that type. Weaving in the culture, ecology and landscape of the place, as well as presenting remarkably efficient and pleasing spaces and converting the familiar the practical into a new architectural sensibility, the Banyuwangi can claim to be a new paradigm in the design of airports.

Arising from a sea of a paddy fields, the building extends the language of the landscape into a concentrated event that coalesces architecture, functionality and setting in a seamless yet discernible disposition.

Modern and efficient in all aspects, but at home in its place, Banyuwangi may be a game-changer in airport architecture, especially considering that the Indonesian government is set to build some 300 airports in the near future. The profile of the new airport is created by a low, horizontal building broken up into two segments, marking arrivals and departures, but also presents a striking roof with an elevated green lawn that resonates with local architecture and invites the landscape of surrounding paddy fields into the airport building itself. The pragmatic aspects of movement, circulation and waiting in an airport are choreographed in a set of wonderfully comforting spaces. A material palette relying on timber, water and plantations extends the human quality of the interior volumes.

The fully perforated building allowing air flow, the insulating mass of the green roof, and the rechannelling and recycling of water from both outside and inside the building, have produced a remarkable example of how passive design in architecture can be demonstrated sensually and experientially.

What is also commendable is the series of decisions made by the client and architect that evidence a collective commitment for making public or infrastructural buildings that resonate with human and ecological values.



Kamanar Secondary School

Thionck Essyl, Senegal

A campus replete with infrastructure, buildings, landscapes and furnishings, the Kamanar Secondary School is unique in that it addresses the multiple scales of urbanism, landscape, architecture and building technologies with equal commitment and virtuosity.

The site's topography and flora are the key found conditions of this project, prompting the introduction of a grid of classroom pods organised around pre-existing tree canopies, adopting their shade as social spaces that serve the students and teachers alike. The slope of the landscape is structured around these pods into terraces, cut and filled to step gently down the hill, their peripheries composed of irrigation channels. The grid is interpreted as a flexible system, scalable to terraces, courts and sports fields, demonstrating the malleability of the organisational system to incorporate programmatic, material and ecological differences.

The classroom itself is formed by a simple catenary vault; excavated from the site, clay is moulded into blocks and aggregated to form a structurally efficient figure that can be extruded further to create larger spaces of assembly. Thus, while maintaining the efficiency of the standard vault, flexibility is designed into the DNA of the spatial module.

A fundamentally collaborative project, the design team was composed of foreign protagonists who, in dialogue with local craftspeople, formed a larger team to not only build the campus, but also build up the knowledge of each construction trade that is represented with clay, wood and tiling as core materials. Through building workshops for these members of the team, some of that knowledge was able to be transferred to other projects after this campus was completed.

Characterised by a synthetic approach, this project is exemplary of a pedagogical vision whereby the school's design and construction has become part of the learning process for the students and the community alike.



Community Spaces in Rohingya Refugee Response

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

The fundamental need of all human communities for a collective space, and particularly for those who have survived traumas, implies the care of physical encounter in a space that is both protected and open to exchange, dialogue, to enjoy and continue to live together.

The six temporary community spaces of the Rohingya Refugee Response programme provide a dignified, sensitive and ingenious response to emergency needs related to the major influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladeshi host communities, with particular attention to the safety of women and girls.

The concept and design of the six spaces are the result of appropriate planning, solid partnerships and inclusive processes involving the diverse refugee and host communities, such as defining spatial and functional needs. The project's implementation succeeded in adapting to various constraints (physical, social, regulatory, budgetary, climatic and environmental) and harsh working conditions, and harnessing the skills of workers and artists – women and men from refugee and host communities – for both construction and decoration, drawing from a variety of Rohingya and Bangladeshi construction techniques, spatial and architectural features, ways of life and aesthetic references.

The architecture's ingenious use of locally available materials, dismantlable and reusable, while abiding by restrictive building requirements, showcases the project designers' and managers' creative adaptability, despite the very limited time span at their disposal.

In a world of growing refugee crises, the project's approach, concept and design provide a successful and transferable model that could inspire a change of mindset in response to refugees' and host communities' needs in Bangladesh and elsewhere. This is already occurring in the Teknaf refugee camp where several organisations opted for design choices and approaches inspired by these six community centres.



The refugee crisis in Teknaf has resulted in the deforestation of the area and a subsequent shortage of bamboo, the major construction material in the camp, thus raising the issue of its use in future constructions.

Argo Contemporary Art Museum and Cultural Centre

Tehran, Iran

In the dense urban neighbourhood that is Tehran's historical centre, this untypical reuse and conservation project has transformed the Argo Factory – a former brewery whose activities were moved 10 years before the Iranian Revolution, for pollution reasons, to a site outside the city – into a private museum for contemporary art.

From the ruins of the original building, the existing was renovated and new surfaces built with a subtle approach and design. A variety of spaces for exhibitions, talks and films were developed over four levels, and a new artist residence was built adjacent to the museum.

A central courtyard invites visitors to enter, interacts directly with the street and makes it possible for large events to extend to the street. Wide stairs connect to the upper level through a double-height space which reveals the interior of the new roof. The distinctive shape of the concrete roof creates a new identity as well as beautiful volumes inside.

Since this was an industrial building, no decorative or traditional ornamental features are seen in the original structure or the new addition.

Respect for the building's history is shown by keeping traces, not in a sense of passive memory but as an active recognition of the will to accumulate value and to maintain the reading of time.

This building has a chaotic history. After the threat of demolition, its rebirth as a new place is a positive, restorative act that has given the site a second life, its history influencing the whole life of the district.



The relationship between the exhibition and meeting spaces is balanced. Even though the entrance area is much larger, the exhibition spaces offer a wide range of possibilities. Large sculptures, paintings and installations can be displayed here. Visitor circulation through the spaces follows an uninterrupted loop, flowing freely through from the entrance to the exhibitions.

Argo is an urban place that goes far beyond the initial function of a contemporary art centre. It is an appropriable complex for collective life that is much more inclusive than the classic contemporary museum and brings a new public to art.

Renovation of Niemeyer Guest House

Tripoli, Lebanon

The renovation of the Niemeyer Guest House is an inspiring tale of architecture's capacity for repair, at a time of dizzying, entangled crisis around the world, and in Lebanon in particular, as the country faces unprecedented political, socio-economic and environmental collapse.

Located on the outskirts of Tripoli – one of the oldest and most beautiful port-cities, once renowned for its craft but today ravaged by extreme poverty, migration and lack of public space – the rehabilitation of the Guest House is part of the Rachid Karami International Fair (RKIF), the unfinished masterpiece of the architect Oscar Niemeyer.

Commissioned to showcase the young nation, the fair's construction was halted by the outbreak of civil war in 1975, and subsequently abandoned to disrepair, dispute and abortive competitions, while continuing to spark the imagination of artists and architects in Lebanon and around the world. The Niemeyer Guest House renovation is a hopeful first burgeoning of a meaningful revival of the fair's structures, modelling exemplary restoration of Modernist heritage while inviting a new public life for the future of this unique site.



The project has been carried out with great precision, its high quality revealing the exhaustive research the architects undertook. A sensitive understanding of the fair's specific architectural language is carefully deployed to revive this important architectural and urban heritage. The architects' particular concern for self-containment as well as success in crafting custom details that can be removed is admirable in ensuring reversibility of use for the structure in the future.

In this carefully crafted space, reverence for the "hand" is perpetuated through the proposed programme: an active wood workshop sustaining small-scale carpentry and reviving the city's history of craft. The project regenerates much-needed micro-economies and advocates inclusiveness, inviting the surrounding community into its heart. It reveals how paramount it is today to consider architectural rehabilitation and socio-economic revival as an indivisible whole.

It is our hope that this award can celebrate the collaborative work behind this project and become the first step towards exemplary, careful rehabilitation and adaptive reuse for the rest of the fair site.

Urban River Spaces

Jhenaidah, Bangladesh

As a result of rapidly growing populations across the globe, urbanisation has had a heavy toll on the quality and liveability of urban and rural spaces, and on the environment at large. A lack of urban planning and the sprawl of informal housing have left many urban and semi-urban communities without public spaces for social interaction or quality living, and with degraded environments, thus deepening inequalities and the marginalisation of poorer communities. This is especially the case of riverbank spaces in Bangladesh.

By way of a lengthy and consistent community-driven process, led and created by the vision and leadership of committed designers and social workers, the Urban River Spaces project managed to rally local governance actors and inhabitants, and act as a catalyst to drive change in similar urban contexts in the city and beyond.



The project is part of a broader initiative in the town to provide decent housing in informally built areas, which led to a change of paradigm in urban governance, in Bangladesh and beyond, to create a long-lasting impact on people's lives and the environment.

Through consistent community participation and appropriation, extensive involvement of women and marginalised groups, and a local workforce, the seemingly simple undertaking of cleaning up the access to the Nabaganga river in Jhenaidah led to a thoughtful and minimal landscaping project with local materials and construction techniques, thus transforming a derelict informal dump site into an attractive and accessible multifunctional space that is valued by Jhenaidah's diverse communities. As such, the project managed to reverse the ecological degradation and health hazards of the river and its banks, and induce effective ecological improvement of the river, in one of the most riverine countries on earth.

The Urban River Spaces project in Jhenaidah is one of a transformative nature that rallies all segments of local actors and communities to achieve the collective endeavour of reclaiming the commons and regaining connection with the river, including for ritualistic, functional and recreational purposes, with each participant and user having a strong sense of ownership.