



Aga Khan Award for Architecture

UAE Projects on 2019 Shortlist for Aga Khan Award for Architecture

Master Jury to decide share of US\$ 1 million prize

Sharjah and Dubai, UAE, 25 April 2019 – Three architecture projects in the UAE have been shortlisted for the 2019 Aga Khan Award for Architecture. They include: **Concrete at Alserkal Avenue**, in Dubai, a major element of a former industrial complex that has been transformed into a cultural hub; the **Al Mureijah Art Spaces**, in Sharjah, which encompasses the renovation of five dilapidated buildings that offered the perfect urban and architectural setting for a contemporary art venue; and the **Wasit Wetland Centre**, in Sharjah, a design that transforms a wasteland into a wetland and functions as a catalyst for biodiversity and environmental education. The announcement was made by Farrokh Derakhshani, Director of the Award, in a ceremony in Kazan, Russia, today.

For information about the other 17 projects on the shortlist, please see www.akdn.org/architecture and the full on-line press kit, which includes briefs on each project and high-resolution images: www.akdn.org/2019ArchitectureAward.

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture is one of the oldest major awards in the field of architecture. It selects projects – from slum upgrading to high-rise “green” buildings – that not only exhibit architectural excellence but also improve the overall quality of life. The Award rewards architects, but also identifies municipalities, builders, clients, master artisans and engineers who have played important roles in the realization of a project.

“The common element of all three shortlisted projects in the UAE is really education,” said Farrokh Derakhshani, Director of the Award. “Both Concrete and the Al Mureijah Art Spaces are dedicated to educating people about culture, and Wasit Wetland Centre is dedicated to environmental education. All are dedicated to helping people understand the world in which we live in today.”

Concrete at Alserkal Avenue, a former industrial complex in Dubai, has been transformed into a cultural hub. This project took four existing warehouses and reimagined them to create Concrete, a flexible, multipurpose space for artists and cultural events in the centre of the complex. In order to maximise the area for events, the services were consolidated at one end of the building. The entrance and events space, with a flexible floorplan containing four 8-metre high pivoting and sliding walls, are situated close to The Yard, the district’s main outdoor public space. The front façade has large-scale, translucent doors that open onto The Yard, forming a symbiotic relationship between indoors and outdoors and allowing activities to flow between both spaces.

The **Al Mureijah Art Spaces** emerged from the Sharjah Biennial, when the Sharjah Foundation wanted to make investments in non-museum spaces while simultaneously reclaiming historic links to the city centre. Five dilapidated buildings in the **Al Mureijah** neighbourhood offered the perfect urban and architectural setting for a contemporary art venue. Now renovated and combined with additional outdoor exhibition areas, the five buildings provide a range of interior and exterior spaces to experience art in a variety of ambiances. Rooftops were cleared and interconnected to serve as extra open-air galleries and particular attention was given to natural lighting. The Sharjah Art Spaces were



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designed so as to allow the continued preservation of almost 40 percent of the urban fabric while creating a new gathering place for local and international art enthusiasts.

Wasit Wetland Centre is part of a much larger project to clean up and rehabilitate an ancient chain of wetlands along the coast. The Centre aims to provide information and education about this unique environment – and to encourage its preservation. The architecture of the centre uses the existing topography of the site to minimise the structure’s visual impact. Upon arrival, visitors are led underground along a pathway into a linear gallery with a transparent wall that allows them to observe birds in their natural habitat. The centre also has shops, restaurants, lecture halls and offices. Eight bird observation structures are built around the wetland route. The site offers a safe place for reproduction for local fauna and migrant birds, and a unique opportunity to learn about and connect to nature – while serving as a green lung for the inhabitants of Sharjah.

The sites will now undergo a rigorous investigation by experts who visit and evaluate each project on-site. Their reports are the basis for the Master Jury’s selection of the eventual laureates. It should be noted that projects commissioned by the Aga Khan or any of the institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) are ineligible for the Award. To be eligible for consideration in the 2019 Award cycle, projects had to be completed between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2017, and should have been in use for at least one year.

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture was established by the Aga Khan in 1977 to identify and encourage building concepts that successfully address the needs and aspirations of communities in which Muslims have a significant presence. The Award recognises examples of architectural excellence in the fields of contemporary design, social housing, community improvement and development, historic preservation, reuse and area conservation, as well as landscape design and improvement of the environment. Since the Award was launched 42 years ago, 116 projects have received the award and more than 9,000 building projects have been documented.

Press contact:

Sam Pickens
Telephone: (41.22) 909.72.00
E-mail: info@akdn.org
Website: www.akdn.org/architecture

Notes

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture is part of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). It currently operates 1,000 or so programmes and institutions in 30 countries.. It employs approximately 80,000 people, the majority of whom are based in developing countries. The AKDN’s annual budget for non-profit development activities is approximately US\$ 950 million. Its economic development arm, the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED), generates annual revenues of US\$ 4.3 billion, but all surpluses generated by its project companies are reinvested in further development activities, usually in fragile, remote or post-conflict regions.