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Issue No.1 Vol.1 Winter 2023



Issue No.1 Vol.2 Summer 2024



Issue No.2 Vol.2 Winter 2025



Issue No.3 Vol.3 Summer 2025

## JOURNAL STAFF



National University of Iran SINCE 1959

Website:

[memarmelli.com](http://memarmelli.com)

Email:

[memarmelli2023@gmail.com](mailto:memarmelli2023@gmail.com)

Instagram:

[memarmeli\\_oh](https://www.instagram.com/memarmeli_oh)

[memarmellijournal2023](https://www.instagram.com/memarmellijournal2023)

[archway\\_group](https://www.instagram.com/archway_group)

### License Holder: Research & Interview Group

Executive Managers: Elaheh Mayani - Issa Zokaie

Editorial Board: Fereshteh Habib - Seyed Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi - Khosrow Bozorgi -  
Abdolhosein Tavakolian

Advisor: Farrokh Derakhshani

Translate: Research & Interview Group

Graphic Designer & Layout: Research & Interview Group



## Prologue

**A**rchitecture and art, two fundamental words in today's world, are of great importance from an aesthetic, social, economic, cultural and even political perspective. The architect's ability and power of influence in shaping the flow of thought and guiding the line of thought, by crossing geographical borders, affects the most distant point of the universe.

Architecture can harm or improve the culture of a society's life. Perhaps, in some cases, it has more power than a politician or a world-famous musician.

We always see trend-setting architects who sometimes lacked academic architectural education but were influential geniuses who, after their death, are admired and criticized in scientific and professional communities. Frank Gehry (1929-2025) was one of those architects who was famous for his deconstructive designs and ideas. The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (1997), the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles (2003), the SAT Center in Massachusetts (2004), and many others are examples of his deconstructive architecture.

The Research and Interview Group, while honoring all trend-setting architects at the national and international levels, hopes that through its efforts, it will be able to introduce and honor Iranian architects, many of whom have produced noteworthy works and are still active, both domestically and in other parts of the world. Iranian architecture, whether during the brilliant era of the 1960s and 1970s or in the post-revolutionary era, has succeeded in winning many titles and honors at the national and international levels, which we should respect and be proud of and honor our Iranian architecture.

This issue of the journal will be published in 2026, and in the final days of the Iranian year. This group, while congratulating the Christian compatriots of Iran and other countries around the world on the New Year 2026, and also congratulating the compatriots of the restless land of Iran on Nowruz and the year 1405, wish God Almighty, economic, political, social and cultural stability. We deserve the best.

### **The contents presented in this issue include the following titles:**

Introduction and memoirs of two veteran architects, continued introduction of two other essays from the book «Where is Iran, Who is Iranian», introduction of Four new generation of architects, and finally, a review of the seven finalists of the 16th Aga Khan Award for Architecture are some of the interesting readings of the journal.

Issa Zokaie - Winter 2026





# One Decade of Architecture, Ten Mansions of Tehran

Negar Mansuri MS Independent Researcher

The Manouchehr Mozayani Award (1) is an award that is given every two years during a ceremony by the Iranian Association of Architects to the most important books and publishers active in the field of architecture and urban planning.

The Architecture and Urban Planning Book Biennial in 1404 dealt with works produced between 1401 to 1403. The content of the works reviewed includes: restoration, urban renewal, architectural and urban history, landscape design, oral history and autobiography, modern construction technologies, Architectural criticism, rural studies, project management, rural development, aesthetics of art and architecture, documentary, urban and regional planning, urban design and urban development, architecture, thought research and theory.

The first award cycle was held in 2010, in which works from 2008 to 2010 were reviewed. In the seventh biennial cycle, 162 book titles in the fields of architecture, urban planning, and related fields were presented, of which 72 received a special award and plaque, and 48 received an award and plaque of appreciation. Also, 7 book titles received honorable mentions and 2 top publishers received silver and gold plaques. 10 publishers (public and government sectors) were introduced as selected publishers.

The seventh cycle of the award was held on January 2026, at the Arasbaran Cultural Center in Tehran.

## ORAL HISTORY OF THE BOOK



1- Manouchehr Mozayani (2002-1934) completed her architectural engineering studies at the University of Tehran and then received his master's degree in urban planning from the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago (1966). He received his master's degree with the title «A Proposal for the Division of Rural Lands in Azerbaijan» under the supervision of Ludwig Hilbersheimer and then received his doctorate in urban planning from the Technical University of Munich.

Manouchehr Mazini taught at the National University of Iran (Shahid Beheshti), the University of Tehran, Boston University, King Abdulaziz University of Jeddah, Islamic Azad University, and Sahand University of Tabriz.



ISBN: 987-622-90302-0-2



**Author:** Negar Mansouri  
**Scientific Supervisor:** Kaveh Bazrafkan  
**Book Designer (Cover and Layout):** Majid Kashani «Studio Daftar»  
**Page Layout:** Somayeh Nazifi Nouri «Studio Daftar»  
**Editor:** «Negah-e-nu» Tehran Cultural and Artistic Institute  
**Publisher:** Tehran City Studies and Planning Center Publications



In addition to expressing unspoken perspectives, oral history is an accurate reference for researchers and scholars in various fields in recording and documenting.

Narrative of the subject, along with oral history based on reliable documents, corrects many incorrect judgments. It increases the intellectual growth and thought of society, both experts and ordinary people.

The book «**One Decade of Architecture, Ten Mansions of Tehran**» is one of the few books that has succeeded in accurately and accurately depicting the oral history of ten mansions of Tehran from the second Pahlavi era to the post-revolutionary era. Ten buildings, with a documentary-like narrative and the use of relevant documents, allow the reader to be fully and accurately informed about the design and implementation of the project.

The presentation is so engaging that it is as if the reader sees the beginning and end of each of the ten projects, like the birth of a baby and reaching adulthood, on the screen of life. We reads and hears the ups and downs, the disadvantages and advantages of each of. It is as if this book connects with our five senses and activates them.

Research and Interview Group



**In an interview with Research and Interview Group in February 2025 about the selection process and challenges of preparing documents for the ten mansions of Tehran, Negar Mansouri said:**

Initially, about 700 projects were selected in the residential, administrative, government, private, and public sectors during the first and second Pahlavi periods and after the revolution. The selection criteria were determined and prioritized, including the level of access to information, whether the project was built or remained as planned, the project timeframe, the possibility of visiting the building, the diversity of the employer and thematic diversity, and finally, the correct presentation of the design and implementation process. The client was the Tehran Municipality, and according to the contract, the book was supposed to be completed within six months, but for various reasons, it took three years.

Mansouri considers the main problem of preparing project documents in Iran to be the weakness of information archives. The lack of attention to recording the design and implementation process and the lack of a documented and rigorous architectural history are the most important reasons for the lack of oral history of projects. The present book *Ten Mansions of Tehran built between 1922 and 2022* over a century.

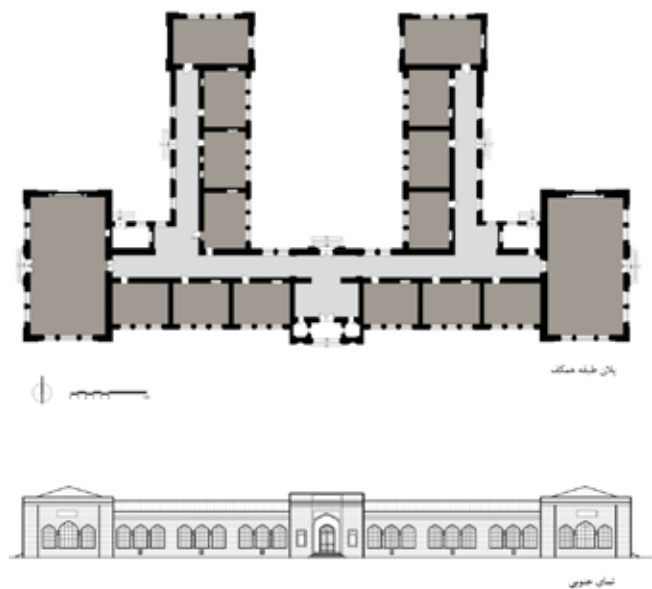


**-PROJECT: Teachers College and Higher Education**

**-ARCHITECT: Nikolai Markov – 1928**

**-CLIENT: Ministry of Education, Endowments and Specialized Industries**

**T**he lack of original plans was my biggest problem. The construction timeline was vague and there were no accurate aerial photos at the time. Therefore, we had to make multiple visits, match the documents to the construction status of the building, and redraw the plans.



**-PROJECT: Pahlavi Wireless Radio**

**-ARCHITECT: Hochtief Company, Pul-e-Abkar - Inaugurated in 1940**

**-CLIENT: Ministry of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones**

**T**he multiple design and implementation factors of the project made it difficult to assess the effectiveness of each factor. The project was under the supervision of the Ministry of Communications, and due to information security issues and the inability to properly access documents, it took a long time to visit and photograph the building.



- PROJECT: Metropole Variety Cinema
- ARCHITECT: Vartan Hovhannisyan – Inaugurated in 1946
- OWNER: Metropole Cinema Company

The multiple owners of the project and the inability to communicate logically with the main owner made it difficult to review how to refer the work to the designer. Although we thought that in private projects, it would be easy to prepare documents, this project had no documented plans and no permission was given during the document preparation process.

However, after numerous follow-ups, only a small portion of the documents were received by the original owner and we only managed to obtain permission to photograph the building. This project is still privately owned and inactive.



- PROJECT: Canada Dry Factory
- ARCHITECT: Houshang Seyhoun – Inaugurated in 1957
- CLIENT: Sasan Company

In about 90 percent of written and visual sources, even in reputable architectural sources, the Pepsi-Cola building on Khosh Street is introduced as the Canada Dry factory, which is unfortunately incorrect.

For this reason, accurate information was not available, and we had to extract documents from the archives of industrial estates and bulletins of the Planning Organization, the Etelaat newspaper, and the Archives of Contemporary Iranian History. Fortunately, the initial maps were available. However, it took a lot of time to correct the existing documents.



- PROJECT: General Course Building of Ariyamehr University of Technology
- ARCHITECT: Hossein Amanat and Manouchehr Iranpour – Inaugurated in 1966
- CLIENT: Trusteeship of Ariyamehr University of Technology

The main challenge of the project was the accuracy of the project designer. The design belonged to Hossein Amanat. However, in the year of the design, Hossein Amanat was constructing Shahyad Square in Tehran. For this reason, we were not sure how Amanat had completed two important projects in such a short period of time. Even at one point in the studies, it was said that perhaps the signature on the plans did not belong to Amanat and was forged. With the follow-up, we managed to talk to him. It turned out that the Shahyad Square project would be postponed at some point. At the same time, Amanat would have the opportunity to design this building.



- PROJECT: National Assembly Meeting Hall
- ARCHITECT: Sardar Afakhmi Consulting Engineers (Ali Sardar Afakhmi and Abdolreza Zokaei) – 1973 to 1977
- CLIENT: National Assembly

IRAN ISLAMIC PARLIAMENT

Among the ten projects reviewed, it was one of the most difficult. The fifty-year time span and the long path of design and implementation from the 1930s to the 1980s, the multitude of plans submitted during this period, the large volume of existing documents, and the need to review all of them, made it very complex.

The security of the project was an additional reason, and given that the necessary documents had been obtained to visit and take photos of the inside the building, permission to visit was denied at minute. However, with further coordination, maps and images of the project were prepared.



- PROJECT: Iran University of Science and Technology Dormitory Complex
- ARCHITECT: Sekna Consulting Engineers – Competition 1983
- CLIENT: Iran University of Science and Technology

One of the projects that was designed and implemented from 1983 to 1989, and all of its documents were available. Although the design consultant and the design staff were not available and some of them had passed away, the university's technical office provided the project drawings.

Other documents such as the report and design process were also prepared through the Program Organization, the National Library, and the Ministry of Interior. One of the positive points of the project was that there was no encroachment on the project and the implementation was carried out according to the plans. The least challenge in preparing documents was in this project.



نمای شمالی و جنوبی - دانشجویان



نمای شمالی و جنوبی داخلی حیاط - دانشجویان

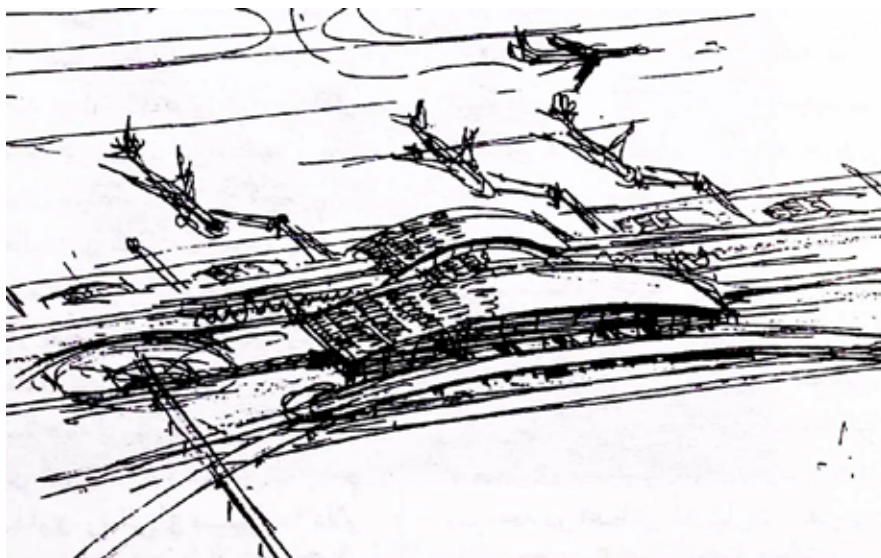


نمای شرقی و غربی - دانشجویان

- PROJECT: Passenger Terminal No. 1 - Imam Khomeini International Airport
- ARCHITECT: Paul Andrew – 1994
- CLIENT: Ministry of Roads and Transport

After the parliament building, Imam Khomeini International Airport took a lot of time and energy. The long design and implementation period from the 1960s to the 2000s, the scattering of project documents, and the unclear design and implementation process took a lot of time.

Also, the lack of information about the design teams on the one hand and the failure to provide information and documents from the National Airports Organization was a strange challenge. Finally, some information was received from the planning organization and consultant. Considering that the terminal was not very large and extensive, the information and project documents were prepared with difficulty.





**-PROJECT: Mosque of Tehran University**

**-ARCHITECT: Issa Hojjat – 2004**

**-CLIENT: University of Tehran**

**T**he mosque was built in the 2000s. Due to the location of the project within the University of Tehran, it has not been properly introduced. Although in the initial plan, its location was in the urban space and arena, later, due to the security of the university area, the mosque was enclosed and joined to the space inside the university.

The information was not very complicated, and the required documents, visits, and photographs of the building were easily completed. Given the contemporary nature of the design, gathering documents was not very challenging.

**-PROJECT: Hana Boutique Hotel**

**-ARCHITECT: Iranian Garden Architecture Company, Mahsa Majidi – Inaugurated in 2018**

**-CLIENT: Iranian Garden Architecture Company**

**T**he choice of the project was the only challenge. Many believed that the choice of this building was irrelevant. In my opinion, the approach of restoring and revitalizing the building was a good reason for the choice. Because there was a developing trend that subsequently led to the expansion of the process of restoring and restoring such buildings.



The main problem in reviewing the design process and preparing documents was the lack of proper communication with the project designer. Although the project architect was alive, whenever we were supposed to have a chat, he would regret providing information. For this reason, the required documents were extracted from magazines and websites that had published information about the building.

Note: for sources and references, Refer to the book

## Negar Mansouri

**N**egar Mansouei (b. 1983, Iran) is an architect and researcher holding a degree in Architectural and Urban Conservation, specializing in urban heritage preservation, from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran. Since 2005, she has collaborated with architectural and urban planning consultancy firms, including Bavand Consultants and Hamkar Pars Boom Consulting Engineers. Her professional work has primarily focused on architectural and urban projects within the historic fabric of Tehran, particularly in District 12, Oudlajan neighborhood, and Bazaar neighborhood.

Her research interests center on contemporary Iranian architecture and the socio-spatial transformations of Tehran. Since 2011, Mansouri has been a member of the research group “Architecture of the Changing Times in Iran” and has contributed as co-author to several publications, including Paul Apcar Architecture (2015), Roudaki Hall: Graphic Design, Architecture, and Everything1967-1979(2018), Tehran Bazaar (2019), and Roland Dubrulle Architecture (2020).



# An architect

in memory of Farshad Faro Farahi (1945 - 2024)  
biography and works



After completing his primary and secondary education, Farshad Farahi entered the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning at the National University in 1963 and graduated with a Master's degree in Architecture in 1970. He continued his studies at the San Francisco Art Institute, University of Southern California, and the Oslo School of Architecture in Norway.

After returning to Iran, in collaboration with Masoud Jahanara(RIP) and Parviz Vaziri(RIP), he founded «Tadbir Tarh Consulting Engineers» and worked until 1978. Given his interest and expertise in photography, while taking professional architectural photographs, he also took charge of the photography department of the Museum of Contemporary Arts of Iran and prepared and published a valuable collection of images of Iranian gardens.

as one of the founders of «Naqsh,e-Jahan-Pars Consulting Engineers» (NJP) in 1988, he managed and participated in the design of several projects:

Khorramshahr Master Plan (1988), Shiraz Karimkhani Historical Area and Complex (1994), Islamic Republic of Iran Academies (1994), National Library of Iran (1994), Khovardin Multipurpose Complex (1994), National Water Museum (1995), Kansai Library of Japan (1996), Export Development Bank of Iran (1997), and are worth mentioning.

Another prominent period of Farahi's career was his collaboration with the «SHIRDEL & PARTNERS», during which he participated and collaborated in a number of the office's flagship projects, including the Tehran World Trade Center design competition.

Farshad Farahi expanded his professional activity by establishing the «Far Studio» in the United States.

The architecture and architectural space of his works are imbued with art, and given his aesthetics in photography and painting, the color composition and arrangement of interior elements were evident in the most beautiful way in his design. Farahi's residential and commercial projects have created unique and contemporary living and working spaces. The "Alpha" House and the "Z" House in U.S. are two beautiful examples of his work.

National Water Museum - Tehran  
Naqsh,e-Jahan-Pars (NJP)

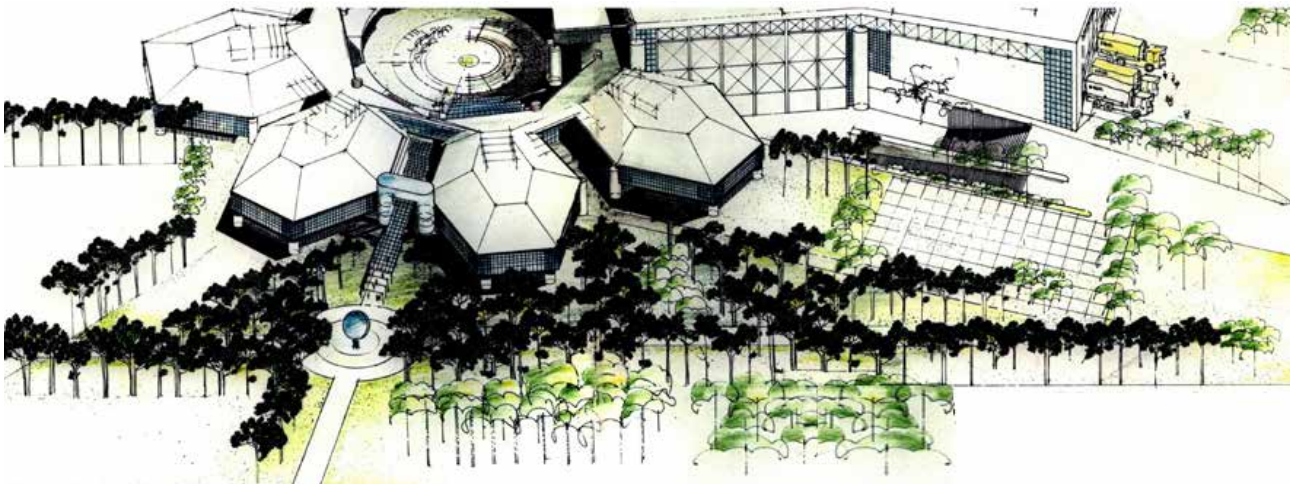


In addition to his architectural work, Farahi spent most of his working time on professional and cultural activities. Membership in the board of directors of the Graduate Association of Architects of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Shahid Beheshti University (Memar Melli), effective and valuable collaboration in the field of research with the Mirmiran Architecture Foundation, and membership in the policymaking council and jury of the Mirmiran Architecture Award were part of his contributions. Participating in specialized and cultural associations and maintaining close contact with the younger generation, especially architecture students and young architects, as well as creating works of art including photography, painting, fashion, jewelry design, perfumes, and art objects, have always been one of his interests. Farahi, in collaboration with Ebrahim Sina (1945-2024), his classmate at the faculty, designed and implemented several joint projects. Tehran Judicial building (1984) and Hexal Pharmaceutical Complex in Germany (1992) are two beautiful examples of their collaboration.



Judicial building - Iran

Hexal Pharmaceutical Complex - Germany



Farahi. Given his active presence in the fields of architecture and art and the creation of magnificent and noteworthy works, he was an opinionated and thoughtful person. Farahi's points of view on education, fashion, and architecture are interesting and readable.

### **The Originality of Practice in Architecture; A Look Inside an Experience**

Dialogue with the Research and Interview Group - February 2020

**M**y thesis was formed in collaboration with Dr. Mehdi Raees Samiei; a fascinating experience that took shape in the context of the transformative events of the late 1960s and as a kind of intellectual and cultural protest against the state of architectural education at that time. The main focus of the research was «the originality of practice in architecture.» In fact, contrary to common practice, we did not design a project, but rather presented a series of philosophical thoughts and ideas in the form of film and video art. This experiment was carried out in 1969 and was unique in its kind. Using video projection and the construction of Euclidean volumes, we created a space that displayed a reflection of its surroundings at various points. Our goal was to emphasize that architecture in any situation is a reflection of its context and surrounding conditions. This view, at the time, was considered a reaction to the static and purely formal view of architecture.

At the same time, many architecture students in France were introduced to Le Corbusier's Villa Sava in their first year of study. This educational experience was particularly important because it showed how modernism began and how architecture could be understood through philosophy and social thought.

But in Iran in the 1940s and 1950s, there was neither proper education in modernism nor a serious understanding of our own indigenous and historical architecture. Although Iranian architecture is rich in cultural and artistic values, there was never a systematic effort to introduce and reinterpret this heritage, no one taught us how to draw inspiration from it, nor did anyone encourage us to revive it. If my collaboration with the Naqsh,e-Jahan-Pars office and my discussions with Seyyed Hadi Mirmiran (1944-2006) later took shape, it was all the result of personal research and experiences; not the continuation of an educational stream or intellectual approach that was established at the university.

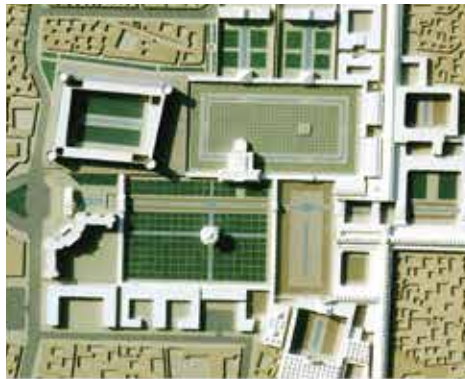
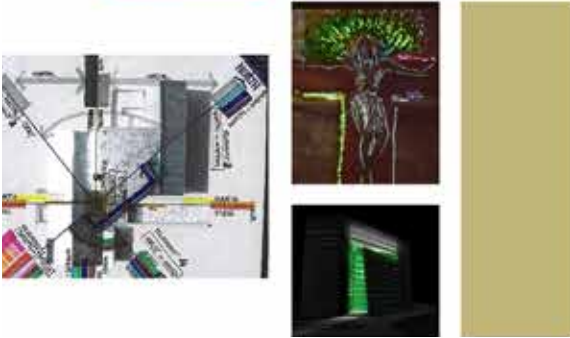
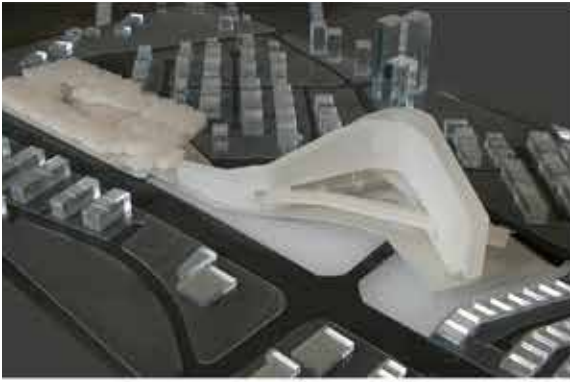
#### **Architecture as a way of life**

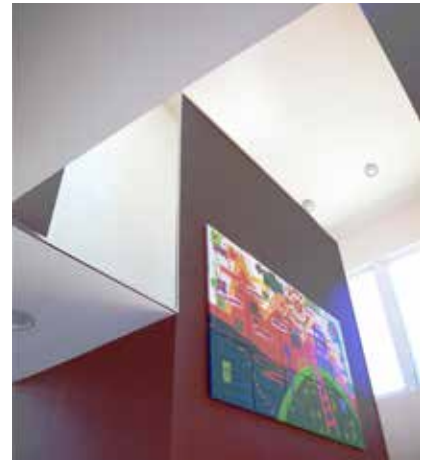
##### **A cultural perspective on fashion and architecture.**

**T**here are many similarities between architecture and the world of fashion; both are in search of expressing beauty, order, and creativity in a tangible form. One of the architects who erased the boundary between architecture and fashion was Zaha Hadid (1950-2016). In addition to architecture, she was also active in designing clothes, bags, and shoes, trying to translate her architectural language into the language of fashion design. In his works, the same fluid lines and dynamic forms of architecture came to life in the form of fashion. Another example is Frank Gehry (1929-2025), who designed a collection for Tiffany that perfectly reflected his personal architectural spirit and style. In fact, he transferred his same deconstructive and free-spirited vision from buildings to jewelry.

Architecture does not necessarily mean Implementation of the building. «Louis Kahn» (1901-1974) says: ««If you can design their room properly, it means you understood architecture»». This sentence is also the essence of my view; because architecture is more than anything, a kind of understanding of aesthetics. And order in life. I believe that architecture is present in everything, from fashion design to space layout and even in cooking. There is difference between someone who cooks with an architectural mind and someone who does so simply to satisfy a need.







## Alpha House

## Z House



*Farshad Farahi passed away on an autumn day in 2024. His grave was determined and buried in the Lavasan region according to his will. The artistic and professional architectural community honored the memory of the prominent architect in a ceremony. This ceremony was held in December of the same year at the Iranian Society of Consulting Engineers with the efforts of the Mirmiran Architecture Foundation, the National Architect Association, and Research and Interview Group.*

May God have mercy on him

### Names mentioned in the interview:

- Parviz Vaziri (?-2010) PhD in Architecture from the University of Rome, Professor of the Faculty of Architecture at the National University.
- Masoud Jahanara (1997-1982) from Isfahan, PhD in Architecture from the University of Rome, Professor of the Faculty and one of the founders of the National University of Iran in 1959.
- Seyyed Hadi Mirmiran (1986-1944) from Qazvin, Master of Architecture from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran, Architect and Professor.
- Mohammad Mehdi Raees Samiei, born in 1945 in Guilan, master of Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of the National University.



## References

- Architect Archives*  
*Naqsh,e-Jahan-Pars Consulting Engineers (NJP)*  
*Research and Interview Group Archives*



# German Expressionism

The Last Chamber of Modernity: Expressionism and the Problem of Progress

Farzad Akhavan architect, educator, and multidisciplinary designer

«Alas,» said the mouse, «the whole world is growing smaller every day. At the beginning, it was so big that I was afraid. I kept running and running, and I was glad when I saw walls far away to the right and left, but these long walls have narrowed so quickly that I am in the last chamber already, and there in the corner stands the trap that I am running into.» «You only need to change your direction,» said the cat, and ate it up.”(1)

The trajectory of the Expressionist movement, as exemplified in Franz Kafka’s short story “Die Fabel,” can evoke discomfort and prompt reflection on the societal anxieties surrounding its emergence, thereby resonating with contemporary discourses. This essay aims to explore various incidents related to the movement’s genesis, analyze how its core values have diminished over time, and demonstrate its ongoing significance in our contemporary societies.

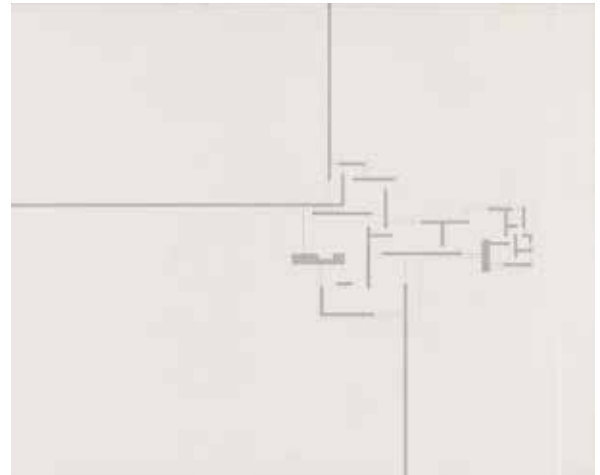
The increasing influence of industrialization on urban redevelopment and the evolving conception of human identity prompted a cohort of artists at the beginning of the twentieth century to reassess their conceptual frameworks. These artists aimed to apprehend reality more fully in a reactive, aware state, rather than accept the representations imposed by rapid social and technological transformations. Peter Eisenman, in his book *The Lateness*, cites Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* drawing, wherein he describes history as an angel propelled backward into the future by a storm emanating from paradise.(2) «The winds are so forceful that the angel is unable to close his wings, and even if he wished to, he cannot halt... The storm, which signifies progress, compels the angel to move past the ruins of war against his will.»(3)

It is unsurprising that numerous figures within the movement adopted anti-war and pacifist stances, as they anticipated that the war would be central to their government’s political agenda, especially in the German Empire. Nonetheless, they perceived it as epitomized by the aggression inherent in the modern movement: a rapid transformation that shaped a new conception of humanity and a hostility toward any territorial or boundary that could be subjected to conquest. The human body was identified as one such territory. The progression of experimentation on biological humans emerged as a hallmark of nascent societies at the turn of the century. The advent of chemical anesthetic agents diminished the resistance posed by boundaries to accessing internal organs. As Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley observe in their work, *Are We Human?* “The modern Idea of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy is contemporary with the age of industrialization. Aesthetics in the modern sense itself, therefore, is already an anesthetic – it has removed all bodily sensations.”(4) In essence, the modern movement was laying the groundwork for a transformative interface—whether on Earth’s surface or on the human body—aimed at perpetual alteration. This perspective aligns with theories of colonization of uncharted territories, emphasizing the need for minimal resistance when infiltrating new domains.

One of the quintessential examples of modern architecture, characterized by minimal friction between inhabitants and surfaces, features white walls, curves, corners, and expansive glass curtain walls. It could be argued that modern ideological approaches toward the human body mirror their treatment of the architectural surface as an extension of spatial configuration. As Walter Benjamin contended, the paucity of architectural elements and ornamentation leaves no space for concealment, neither visually nor otherwise. He asserts that such architecture lacks an aura.(5)

In a visual context, the aura functions as a sanctuary for the senses, reminiscent of classical architecture, which was often adorned with ornamentation. This concept is exemplified in the mouse narrative, “die Fable.» I posit that we remain in the initial phase of this story, where the mouse’s fear stems not from a tangible threat but from the perception of an absence—aligning with Benjamin’s critique.

Reflecting on my experience designing a primary school in Baluchistan, near the border region, we initially conceived an enclosure to mitigate extreme climate conditions. However, the children found the space uncomfortable, as their upbringing in expansive fields had conditioned them to perceive the horizon as omnipresent. The sound of external objects readily infiltrated traditional structures, making acoustic awareness a vital component of their daily experience.



Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Brick Country House, project, Potsdam-Neubabelsberg, Plan. 1964

(© 2026 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

The notion of the unknown signifies a void for the mouse—an absence to cling to. While the walls initially delineate its movements, the realization that the labyrinth leads to a dead end transforms this space into a teleological entity. This purpose-driven conception of space embodies the modernist ethos: a guiding path with minimal resistance. In this context, the corridor functions as the ‘cat’ in the narrative, representing the endpoint towards which all movement is directed.

The Expressionist movement did not develop in isolation; rather, it was influenced by several artistic and philosophical currents, including the Secession group, the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk, and Jugendstil, which drew inspiration from medieval art. A prominent feature of Expressionism was its critical stance toward society, viewing the city as a toxic environment. Analyzing the color palettes of many Expressionist painters reveals a tendency to depict skies in shades of green (image right). They were departing from city life, which they were deeply rooted in, and the city itself became the starting point for a new vision. Their art served not only as reactionary commentary but also as a visionary tool aimed at conceptualizing an alternative future. Sacred architecture and art provided significant inspiration, as these artists sought to envisage a new conception of humanity that countered modern perceptions.



Potsdamer Platz , Ernst Ludwig Kirchner 1914 (© Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin )



Bruno Taut, 5 Chapter of Alpine Architecture, 1917

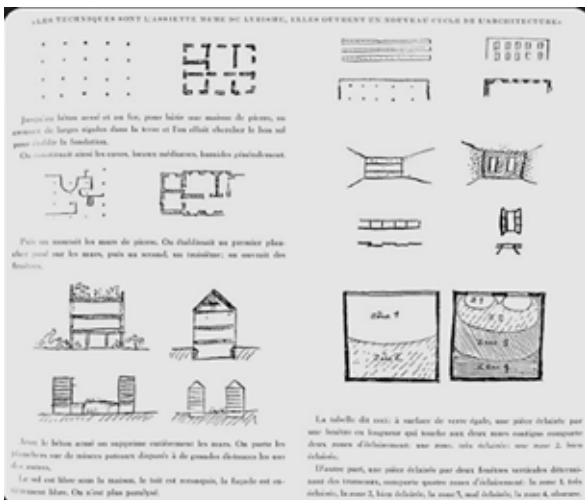
**B**runo Taut articulated this aspiration in 1918, asserting that architecture was «the direct carrier of spiritual forces, moulder of the sensibilities of the general public, which today are slumbering and tomorrow will awake. Only a complete revolution in the spiritual realm will create this. Architecture.»(6)

As a key figure within this movement, Taut exemplifies how perceptions and ideologies evolved from the early years of the First World War to the emergence of National Socialism. Let's contextualize the relationship between the expressionist and modern auras through a comparative analysis of influential manifestos, such as Le Corbusier's Five Points of Architecture and Taut's earlier writings on Alpine architecture, particularly his 1917 work, «Five Chapters of Alpine Architecture.»

1- Pilotis 2- The free designing of the ground plan 3- The free design of the facade 4- The horizontal window, 5- Roof gardens

on a flat roof can serve a domestic purpose while providing essential protection to the concrete roof, Le Corbusier Five Points of Architecture 1926 (7).

1- Crystal House, 2- Architecture of the Mountains, 3- Alpine Building, 4- Building on the Earth's Crust, 5- Astral Building. Bruno Taut, Five Chapter of Alpine Architecture, 1917 (8).



Le Corbusier s Five Points of Architecture, 1926

**I**n this comparison, which is not the first that comes to mind because the more direct comparison would be the five points Bruno Taut gave in 1929, it becomes evident how the First World War redirected many visionary ideas and absorbed them into modern ideology, leaving hopes and imaginations to mass construction, as he emphasizes in his fifth point, “repetition is desirable.”(9) Let us go back to 1917, at the cusp of war, when architects and artists envisioned a new world not simply as a way to make life easier, but as a demand for a new understanding of life on Earth. Let us briefly compare these two sets of five points: Taut’s chapters all return to the earth and beyond, whereas for Le Corbusier, even in his first point, the pilotis constitute a withdrawal from the ground and, as Bruno Latour calls it, a “planet exit.”(10) For me, the first point of Le Corbusier is the summary of all, because the moment one leaves the ground, all spatial dependency is gone; even when he reaches the roof, he strongly states that the connection to the sky is abandoned, so that one preserves only the illusion of contact with nature itself, the “roof garden.” In contrast, Taut’s manifestos are an injection into the earth and an establishment of a new spiritual connection with the sky.

For Expressionist artists and architects, the return to nature differed significantly from that of their Romantic predecessors. Unlike painters such as Caspar David Friedrich, the Expressionists rejected reality as it appeared; this is particularly evident in cinema.<sup>(11)</sup> For them, nature was only a point of departure. There was no clear division between the intensity of human imagination and natural artifices; the two became unified. Like their modernist contemporaries, they admired technology, as seen, for example, in films such as *Metropolis* (12), Bruno Taut's *Glass Pavilion* (13), and the science-fiction narratives of Paul Scheerbart.<sup>(14)</sup> Yet, in contrast to modern artists, the boundary between what is real and what is not became highly blurred. Even their designs were often strongly inspired by natural forms. Although German Expressionism was critical of reality and the brutal consequences of modern life, the boundary between its identity and that of modernism was not entirely clear. Many figures within the movement became crucial participants in a more pragmatic intellectual current, such as the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), making it difficult at times to distinguish them as a wholly independent group. After the First World War, numerous visionary architects and artists altered their trajectory toward mass construction, and what they came to identify with was no longer the original intention of their work. The urgent demand for housing and the immediate problems facing postwar Germany compelled these groups to abandon many of their earlier visionary ideas.

This situation became even more problematic after the Nazi regime came to power. Their conception of the “new human” overlapped in certain respects with the transcendental aspirations of Expressionist thought, which made these ideas appear, at least superficially, adjacent to aspects of fascist ideology. Initially, the regime was not uniformly opposed to Expressionist painters, even though Expressionist painters were later included in the infamous Degenerate Art exhibition.<sup>(15)</sup> These contradictory dimensions of German Expressionism and its historical tendencies cast uncertainty over the movement's legacy until the 1970s, when postmodern thinkers revisited it as a productive and significant historical moment.

In her scholarly article “The Untimeliness of German Expressionism,” Vivian Liska examines how this artistic movement continues to offer insights into shifting paradigms and how it can cultivate critical awareness in contemporary society through artistic responses.<sup>(16)</sup> She draws on Hannah Arendt's concept of the parallelogram of forces: the notion that, within a seamless temporal continuum, the introduction of a diagonal and a dynamic vector can generate a new understanding that emerges without interruption from the past to the future, as Liska explains, “to make room for a present that carries along the past like the strange dreams of the night that hue the morning without laying claim to the coming day.”<sup>(17)</sup> Thus, one might argue that, even if the Expressionist movement did not produce a fully developed new ontological framework, its divergence from rapidly transforming modern conditions created a critical interval that enabled a return to history—not as a repository of fixed events and symbols, as seen in *Jugendstil* or the *Secession* movements, but rather as a moment for interrogating the very notion of the “new.”

Now by returning to the Kafka anecdote introduced at the outset and employing the cat as an analogy for the manner in which postwar events undermined the Expressionist movement—stripping it of its visionary force and aligning it with ideas adjacent to fascism—it is instructive to interpret the retreat from the traumas of war and modernity as the final chamber in the narrative or, following Arendt, as the concept of the “Gap,” or “the things that are no longer and by the things that are not yet.”<sup>(18)</sup> This perspective underscores a disposition toward metabolizing fear and cultivating heightened awareness of it, rather than toward forcefully imposing a determined future, as the narrative's final turn.

Examined the role of cultural production during a period marked by moral decline and pervasive warfare in Europe. An analysis of the historical trajectory of manifestos suggests that their proliferation correlates with episodes of socio-political instability. For example, hyperinflation in Weimar Germany, the intensification of social injustices, and the First World War itself catalyzed a surge of avant-garde movements, including German Expressionism, Modernism, Dadaism, and Russian Constructivism. These movements functioned both as critical responses to prevailing social conditions and as proactive attempts to envisage alternative futures.

Following the Second World War, a phase of economic prosperity across many European and Western nations contributed to a diminished demand for radical ideological expression. During this period, the polemical intensity characteristic of earlier avant-garde and postwar discourses receded, while the capacity for direct intervention in shaping the built environment appeared to narrow alongside rapid technological advancement and institutional consolidation. Concurrently, even as contemporary Europe seeks to sustain its cultural identity, other regions are undergoing transformations that call for new visual imaginaries and modes of identification. An imperative therefore emerges to reconceptualize urban space, to reassess the role of the artist, and to reconsider the significance of performance, design, and spatial practice within these shifting contexts. In this respect, early twentieth-century Europe remains a salient reference point for rethinking such trajectories within a broader framework of cultural and spatial renewal.

### Names mentioned in the context:

1. Franz Kafka, "Eine kleine Fabel," c. 1920.
2. Peter Eisenman, *The Lateness of Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2020).
3. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 1940.
4. Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, *Are We Human? Notes on an Archaeology of Design* (Zürich: Lars Müller, 2016).
5. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1935.
6. Bruno Taut, *Architecture Program*, 1918.
7. Le Corbusier, "Five Points of a New Architecture," 1926.
8. Bruno Taut, *Alpine Architektur*, 1917.
9. Bruno Taut, *Die neue Wohnung*, 1929.
10. Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).
11. Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (London: Reaktion, 1990).
12. *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang (1927).
13. Iain Boyd Whyte, *Bruno Taut and the Architecture of Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
14. Paul Scheerbart, *Glass Architecture*, 1914.
15. Stephanie Barron, *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1991).
16. Vivian Liska, "The Untimeliness of German Expressionism," *New German Critique*.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking, 1961).

### Biographical Register:

- Hannah Arendt (1917–1980) — German-American political theorist known for analyses of totalitarianism, temporality, and historical consciousness.
- Stephanie Barron (1948–) — American art historian and curator specializing in modern European avant-garde movements.
- Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) — German philosopher and cultural critic associated with critical theory and media aesthetics.
- Beatriz Colomina (1952–) — Architectural historian whose work examines modern architecture through media, sexuality, and technology.
- Peter Eisenman (1932–) — American architect and theorist noted for deconstructivist architecture and philosophical approaches to form.
- Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) — German Romantic painter renowned for symbolic landscapes exploring spirituality and subjectivity.
- Franz Kafka (1883–1924) — Modernist writer whose works explore alienation, authority, and existential anxiety.
- Paul Klee (1879–1940) — Swiss-German artist associated with Expressionism, Surrealism, and Bauhaus pedagogy.
- Fritz Lang (1890–1976) — Austrian-German filmmaker known for pioneering Expressionist cinema such as *Metropolis*.
- Bruno Latour (1947–2022) — French philosopher and sociologist known for actor-network theory and critiques of modernity.
- Le Corbusier (1887–1965) — Swiss-French architect who formulated key doctrines of modern architecture, including the Five Points.
- Vivian Liska (1950–) — Literary scholar whose work focuses on German modernism, Jewish thought, and literary temporality.
- Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915) — German writer whose visionary texts influenced Expressionist architectural utopianism.
- Bruno Taut (1880–1938) — German Expressionist architect and theorist known for visionary glass architecture and Alpine projects.
- Mark Wigley (1956–) — Architectural theorist recognized for scholarship on deconstruction, modernism, and architectural discourse.

## Farzad Akhavan

After completing his studies at Azad University of Tehran and the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main, he pursued an interdisciplinary approach to architecture, collaborating with both artists and architects on projects for institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others.

Since 2014, he has maintained an independent practice while simultaneously teaching and lecturing in Europe and the United States. His artistic work has been exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy of Art in Edinburgh, the Berlin Planetarium, and various other venues.

As a stage designer, he has worked with several leading theatres and cultural institutions in Berlin, including the Berlin Academy of Arts, Radialsystem, and the Maxim Gorki Theater, among others.

He has taught and lectured on architecture in both Germany and the United States, with appointments and invitations at institutions such as Humboldt University of Berlin, the University of Applied Sciences Erfurt (FH Erfurt), and Oklahoma State University.



# The architecture of Kambiz Arami

biography and works

**A**rami was born in September 1949 in Tehran. After completing his primary and secondary education, he entered the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning at the National University of Iran in 1967. He received his master's degree in 1974 and, over half a century of professional activity, succeeded in contributing valuable projects to the country's engineering community.

He began working as a designer at Semka Consulting Engineers in 1975 and continued at Akam Consulting Company from 1975 to 1977. He then worked as a designer at Archen Consulting Engineers from 1977 to 1978 and again from 1983 to 1985. After some time, he continued his career as the CEO of Archen Consulting Engineers. Arami was also actively involved from 1978 to 1983 as the senior designer and head of the industrial architecture department at the Iranian International Engineering Company (IRITEC). He has also been active in architectural competitions and has won first place in several of them.

**In an interview with the Research and Interview Group in September 2019, Arami stated that the professors of that era played a significant role in shaping his way of thinking and the future of his profession, saying:**

"...Dr. Olia, Habibi, Jahanara, Samiei, and many others who taught during that golden era of Iranian education were truly knowledgeable and humble. In addition to teaching architecture, they taught anthropology, sociology, and psychology in the best possible way. I believe that one of the reasons for the success of students from the 1940s to the 1950s in the architectural community was the presence of those prominent and well-educated professors."

**Arami explains his interest in painting as follows:**

"...I read a lot during my school days, and I still do today. One of my favorite books was *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. In the 1960s, after Hemingway's tragic death, I was deeply affected by the event and painted his portrait."



Ernest Hemingway portrait

**competitions (First place) :**

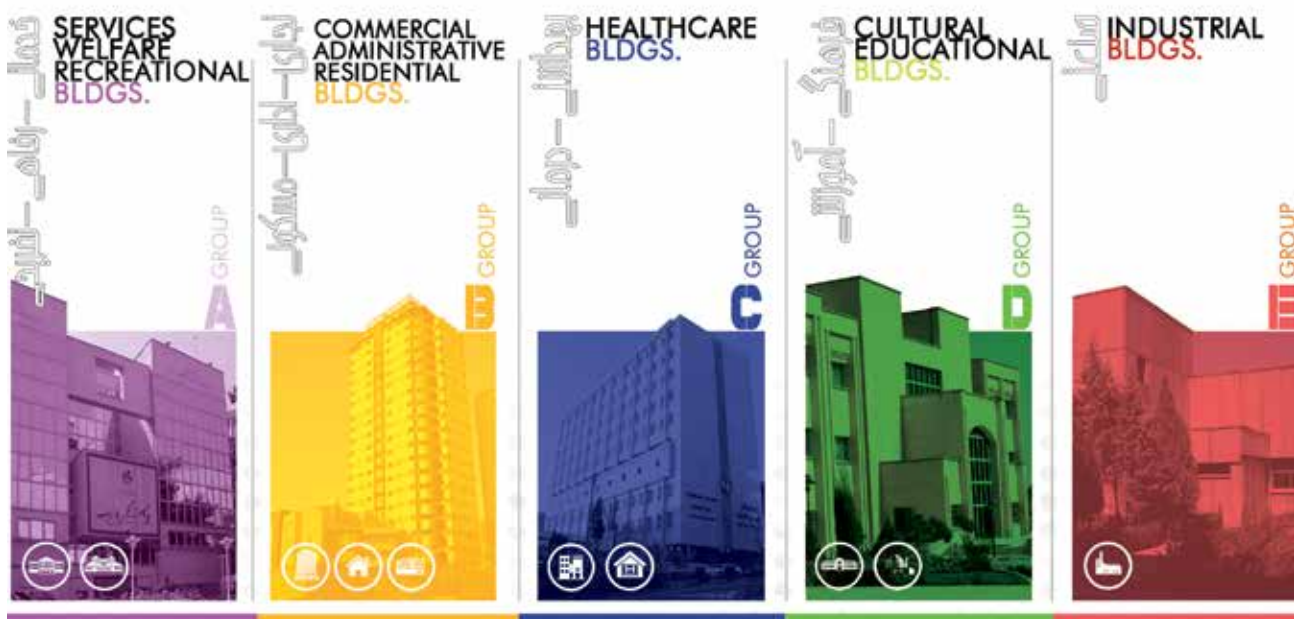
- Pars Electric Commercial, Administrative & Cultural Complex - 1988.
- Amol Social Security First Class Branch Building - 1990.
- Saba Residential, Commercial & Administrative Complex - 1995.
- Samen Al-Hajj Seminary Higher Education Complex - Tabriz - 2014.

**projects :**

- Faculty of Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences - 1985.
- Noor Mosque, Fatemi Square, Tehran - 1985.
- Buildings of the Department of Literature & Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad - 1989.
- Sarvo (Bano) Cultural Center, Saei Park, Tehran - 1991.
- Faculty of Electrical and Electronics, Tabriz University - 1992.
- Pars Electric Sirjan Television Factory - 1993.
- Exir Pharmaceutical Factory, Boroujerd - 1994.
- Indoor Aquatics Complex, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad - 1996.
- Zanbaq Farmanieh Residential Tower, Tehran - 1998.
- Saveh Gray Cement Factory - 2002.
- Tehran Stock Exchange & Securities Organization - 2005
- Bandar Abbas High-Rise Residential Complex - 2006.
- Urmia University Faculty of Arts - 2009.
- Urmia University of Technology Master Plan - 2009.
- Saba Commercial & Administrative Complex, Tehran - 2015.



Faculty of Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences - 1985



“When I entered the Faculty of Architecture in Iran in 1967, in addition to our technical and engineering courses, we also had design and sculpture courses. Design was taught by Professor Setrak Nazarian, and sculpture was taught by Professor Emma Abrahamian (RIP).”

“Sometimes we would go to Evin (near the faculty) with the late Dr. Nazarian to draw and paint. Perhaps one of the most important reasons for my strong inclination toward painting was the presence of these two late masters.”



**D**uring an oral history conversation in September 2019 with the Research and Interview Group, Kambiz Arami spoke about the advantages of the continuity of the educational system before the revolution:

“...Projects in the Faculty of Architecture were carried out in different ateliers. The projects assigned by the teachers were sometimes individual and sometimes group projects. During the review sessions, all the work was displayed on the table, and all students were informed about each other’s work. For this reason, education took on a holistic form. An important factor in our intellectual development and growth during that era was the close relationship between students and professors, which led to better management of the faculty and the educational process.”

Another important aspect of the educational system at that time, particularly in our Faculty, was the development of the ability to express ideas through hand drawing. This skill took two forms: drawing from a model or from nature, and imaginative drawing without a model, while still observing proportions. Despite the growth and advancement of technology, hand drawing continues to hold great importance because of the organic and neural connection between the hand and the subconscious mind.

He added: “... The main difference between the Faculty of Fine Arts (University of Tehran) and the Faculty of Architecture (National University) was the practicality and imagination of the students’ designs. Our professors were graduates from Italy, while those at the Faculty of Fine Arts were from France. During the review sessions, our professors not only examined the plans but also asked questions about how they would be implemented. For these reasons, and considering the construction technology of the time, most of the heads of consulting office studios were graduates of the Faculty of Architecture at the National University. In addition, due to the practical nature of student projects, many students from the second year onwards were employed as interns in architectural offices and, after some time, were even hired full-time.”



Samen Al-Hajj Seminary Higher Education Complex - Tabriz - 1985



Qazvin Governorate - 2013



Zanbaq Residential Tower, Tehran - 1998

Tehran Bank Tejarat - 1985



Exir Pharmaceutical Factory  
Boroujerd - 1994



Bird Garden, Lavizan Park, Tehran - 2013

Negin Residential Complex, Tehran - 2006





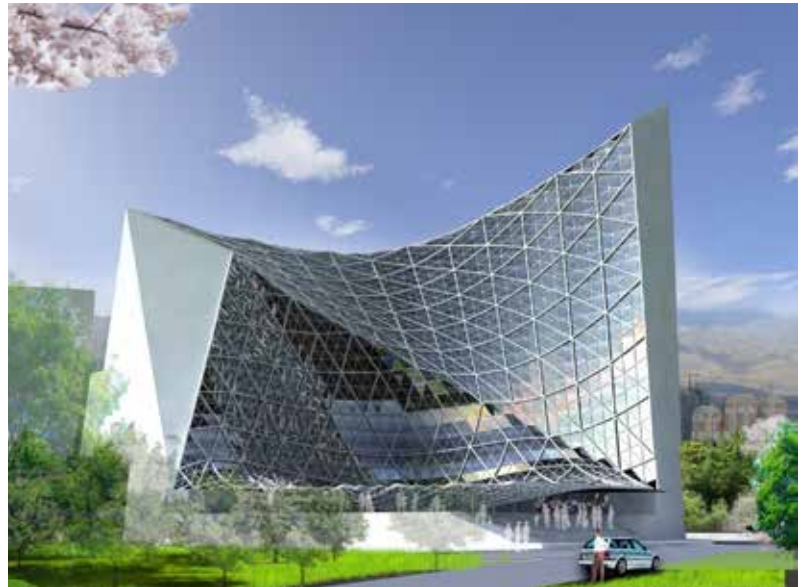
Faculty of Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences - 1985



Saveh Gray Cement Factory, Tehran - 2007

Private Villa, Zibadasht

Saba Residential, Commercial and Administrative Complex, Tehran - 2015



Musalla, Tabriz - 1998





Reconstruction of residential & government buildings, Bam - 2004

Amiran Cliff Hotel - Lorestan - Under Construction



Tehran Stock Exchange & Securities Organization - 2005

Samen Al-Hajj Seminary Higher Education Complex - Tabriz - 2015



**I**n the third volume of the collection *Thoughts of Contemporary Architects in 2013*, Arami explains more about how he entered the professional world:

After graduating and working at «Semka Consulting Engineers» and working on the Guilan Wood and Paper Project in 1976, I joined «Akam Consulting Company». This company was a subsidiary of Akam Construction Industries, which was active in almost all fields of construction.

The companies «Akam Beton», «Akam Felez», «Akam Choob», «Zamineh», etc. were considered subsidiaries of this organization. In this company, I met Dr. Markar Grigoryan, who had received her PhD in Structural Engineering from the University of Manchester, England, and was the dean of the Faculty of Structural Engineering at Ariyamehr University of Technology (currently Sharif), which she herself founded, and was also the CEO of «Akam Consulting». This friendship continued until his death in December 2024. During this time, we worked together on many projects, and I always enjoyed working with him.

In late 1976, Akam Construction Industries Group limited its activities, laid off its staff, and Akam Consulting was dissolved. At this time, I was introduced to Kourosh Farzami by Markar. Meeting Farzami was the beginning of a major transformation in my professional life. From late 1976 to the summer of 1978, I worked at «Archen Consulting Engineers» with Kourosh Farzami, one of the country's most renowned and prolific architects.

In early 1979, Markar was the CEO of «Iran International Engineering Company» (IRITEC) and asked me to go to IRITEC and activate the architecture department of that company. Kourosh Farzami did not agree with my going, but after I insisted, he said that perhaps this experience was necessary. Thus, I went to IRITEC. Most of the company's projects were related to the steel industry and some kind of industrial projects. Considering this, I launched the industrial architecture department of the company and worked and studied in the field of industrial building architecture until 1983.

Given my experience in different companies and acquaintance with experts, I was able to create a good and cohesive group. We planned to study industrial architecture in leading countries. Our goal was to value this foreign sector of architecture in our country and to link industrial buildings with architecture.

We tried to make industrial project managers and employers understand that a suitable environment resulting from thoughtful and attractive architecture improves work efficiency and increases the lifespan of buildings. Fortunately, the results of our efforts were successful, and good projects from that era were remembered. Parts of the «Mobarakeh Steel Factory», industrial and semi-industrial buildings of the «Golgohar iron» ore mines were such projects. We also designed a town for the «Eastern Alborz Coal Company» in Shahrood, which was a complete urban complex including residential, commercial, administrative, recreational and cultural.

After the Iranian Revolution, when the country's industries were not yet organized, there were opportunities to work in other fields. In 1979, we designed another town in Salarieh, Qom, which turned out to be a good project and is now being referred to as a successful example in ensuring the welfare of citizens in various aspects.

In 1983, due to management changes, the working environment at IRITEC was not suitable and I eventually resigned. After that, I worked independently for two years in an office I had founded called «Kambiz Arami and Associates». The result of this period is several residential projects and the Noor Mosque in Fatemi Square, Tehran.

In 1985, Engineer Farzami asked me to come to his office (Archen Consulting Engineers) to discuss some issues. He was not satisfied with the working conditions and told me about his plan to go to America and see his children who were studying. He also wanted the office to remain active, so he asked me to help him with the matter for the next two years and eventually take over the management of the office.

It wasn't an easy decision to make. After working in my office for a long time, I was settled in and happy with my situation, but Farzami was a very dear friend to whom it was not easy to say no. After struggling with myself for a while, I felt that I had to do it at this point. I accepted and the next work period began.

One of the projects we worked on before he immigrated to the United States was the «Lorestan Pharmaceutical Factory», which was renamed «Exir». This project was a good example of the reconciliation of architecture and industry. At the opening ceremony in 1991, the president and heads of a number of countries asked several times whether the design of this project was done by Iranian experts. Then, managers and experts from the prominent pharmaceutical companies «Hoechst and Bayer», who had come to Iran to visit the factory and grant a license to manufacture some drugs, stated that the specifications and architecture of this factory were beyond the existing factories in their own country.

Since 1985, after Kourosh Farzami emigrated, I have been working as the CEO of «Archen Consulting Engineers» and have been able to manage many projects in various fields.



The main entrance of the University of Tehran was built in 1967-1966 based on a design by Kourosh Farzami, founder of Archen Consulting Engineers and a student at the time at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran. The structure was designed by Simon Sarkisian and completed by an Iranian company called Armeh Company. The university's entrance is about 8.7 meters high. The width of each of its two openings is 7.9 meters. It was registered on November 1999 under number 2445 in the list of national monuments of Iran.

Houshang Seyhoun, a professor of architecture and former dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran, who is known as a pioneer of modern Iranian architecture, said in relation to this project, which has become a higher education institution in Iran and is considered one of the finest works of modern Iranian architecture:

This building, which is constructed of exposed reinforced concrete, with the pillars rising from side to side, is a symbol of freedom and liberty. If you look at this structure from a distance, the pillars that are close together at the top show an open space resembling an Iranian broken arch, which indicates the use of authentic Iranian architectural elements in this modern work.

The designer himself says about this work, «The University is a safe place, this side is different from the other side. I used the open wings above the university to express this meaning, this is the feeling I had when designing this entrance.»

**I**n another part of this conversation, Kambiz Arami explains the importance of cultural and territorial identity as follows:

Unfortunately, we have a discontinuous history during which the transfer of power has always occurred by force. Therefore, we have tried to base our reason for existence on the negation of the past and, in fact, the negation of our identity. This issue has caused us serious harm in terms of culture and civic progress.

In European countries, America, and some developed and developing Asian countries, changes are systematic, and the past is linked to the present and future, and various issues continue, and the essence of this continuity is progress, which is a reflection of the past.

We have a rich culture and profound literature, and through the language of art, poetry, irony, and metaphor, it has become its current form, having been polished over thousands of years of history and passing through historical turning points. We have a special place in poetry and literature that reflects our identity and culture. But in architecture, this language has not been optimized and updated except in a few works. Based on this belief, my professional endeavor is to understand Iranian identity, concepts, meanings, forms, symbols, and metaphors from the layers of artifacts left over from ancient Iran and express them in architecture with a new language.

The first step to achieving this understanding is knowledge. During college, one of the programs was student trips and visits to different cities and their important monuments. Through research, photography, sketching, discussions with professors, and architectural analysis of buildings, the necessary understanding was sought. By repeating this, the feel of Iranian spaces became more tangible and remained in the mind, and its influence was evident when designing projects.

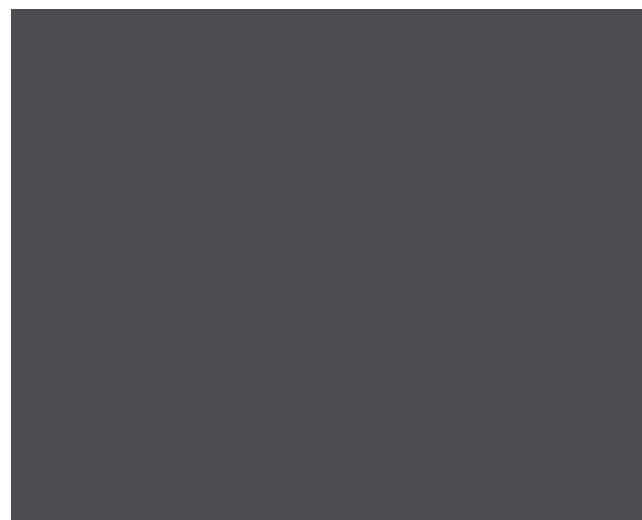
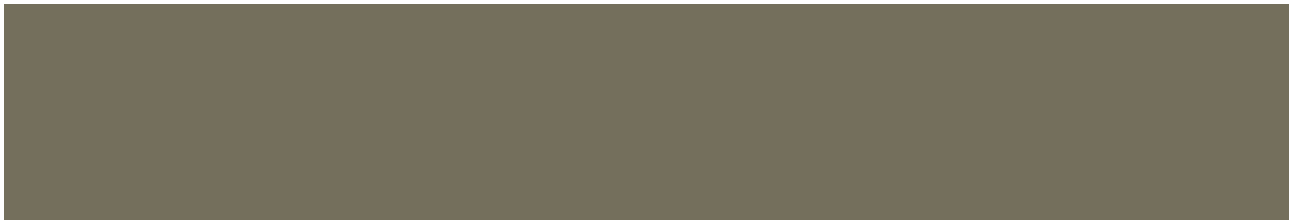
These programs are very rare in today's colleges, and students focus more on theory. In our time, work on projects was done in studios and group workshops. Each professor had a studio and students from different courses worked with him. The lower-year students helped the upper-year students, and the upper-year students guided the lower-year students.

I believe that we must first understand the past architecture of our country well. By being in that space, we can feel it, become familiar with its spirituality and how it functions between the individual, family, or community, and analyze and examine how it responds to the climate. Let's discuss everything repeatedly so that the spirit of Iranian architecture can sink deep into the minds of architects and the identity of Iranian architecture can be revealed in their works. Not by simply imitating past forms, but by breathing the spirit of Iranian spaces into architecture. Forms belong to their time, but concepts transcend time, and understanding and using them appropriately can restore the lost identity to our architecture.

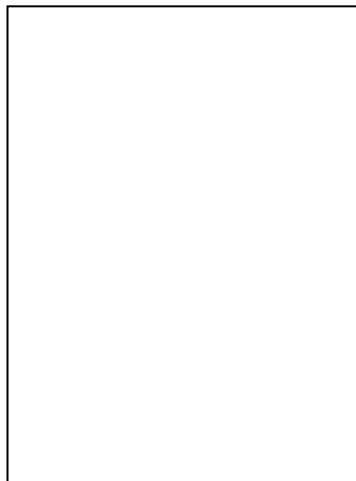
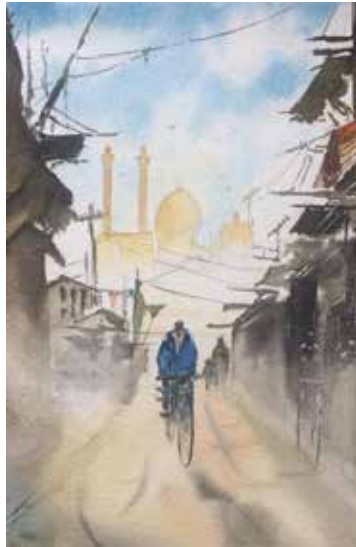
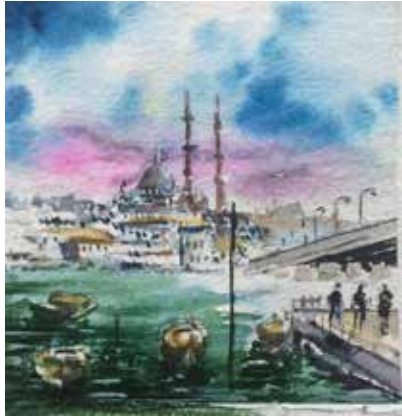
**K**ambiz Arami also has valuable works in the art of painting. He follows the Realist style, and his watercolor paintings are particularly striking. During an artistic interview with the Research and Interview Group in the spring of 2021, Arami explained one of the reasons for his interest in watercolor painting:

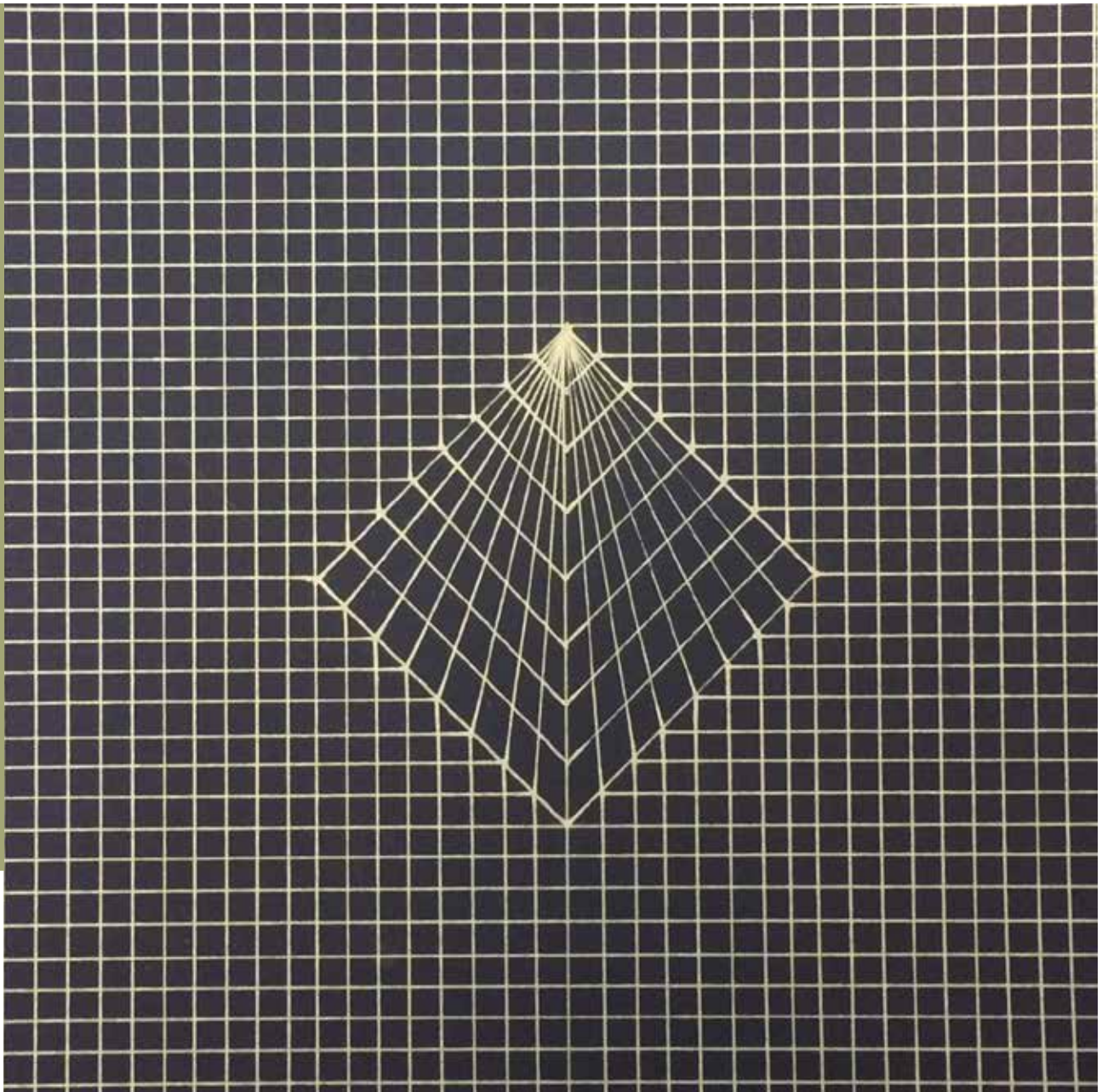
“...A few years after graduating, I went to Germany for family reasons. During my time there, I became interested in watercolor painting and met a local painter from Cologne named Fayet, with whom I worked for a while. After returning to Iran, I participated in several group exhibitions. I liked watercolor because of its transparency. It doesn't lie. If something goes wrong, it can only be modified once. That's why it requires courage...”

*Arami creates his artwork not for economic reasons but out of love. He enjoys giving his paintings as gifts to friends and colleagues.*









#### **Names mentioned in the interview:**

- Hosseinali Olia, born in 1933 in Shiraz, PhD in Architecture from the University of Rome, Professor of the Faculty of Architecture at the National University.
- Behrouz Habibi, born in 1935 in Tehran, PhD in Architecture from the University of Venice, Professor of the Faculty of Architecture at the National University.
- Masoud Jahanara (1997-1922) from Isfahan, PhD in Architecture from the University of Rome, professor at the Faculty and one of the founders of the National University of Iran in 1959.
- Kamran Samiei (?-?) from Tehran, PhD in Architecture from the University of Rome, professor at the Faculty of Architecture of the National University.
- Setrak Nazarian, born in 1948, Isfahan, BA in Design from the University of Fine Arts in Venice, restoration expert and professor at the Faculty of Architecture at the National University.
- Emma Abrahamian, (1919-?), from Isfahan, PhD in Sculpture from Bozar University, professor at the Faculty of Architecture at the National University.
- Ernest Hemingway (1901-1979), American, writer, novelist and journalist.

## **References**

*Architect Archives*  
*Archen Consulting Engineers*  
*Research and Interview Group Archives*  
*Art dialogue film and photos: Red Leaf Studio*



# Where is Iran, Who is Iranian? part two

Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi  
M.S. Culture researcher

Assistants: Elnaz Najafi – Behnam Abootorabian

Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi is active and thoughtful in various fields. He is from the generation of pre-revolutionary graduates whose interest in cinema, photography, and poetry. Perhaps this was why he entered the television industry in the first days after the revolution and, for years as one of the senior managers, tried to address his concerns in the cultural-national arena by promoting this segment of society.

From the very beginning of his presence in the cultural and artistic arena, he has shown his commitment and belonging to Iran and his Iranian-ness. In the artistic arena, he took charge of organizing the state of cinema, theater, and the theatrical space of the country and succeeded in introducing the Iranian-ness of cinema to other countries by systematizing this group of society. Beheshti gave meaning to the slogan of independence and freedom in the artistic and cultural arena of the country. During the 1960s to 1980s, Iranian cinematographic and artistic products gained a special place in the artistic and professional communities of the world, and the world bowed down to the culture and art of the new Iran.

In his opinion, Iranian art has achieved more success than its architecture. Although he has a degree in architecture, he does not have many works. A residential complex in Shahinshahr, Isfahan, and a house in Isfahan are his entire activities in this field. According to him, if he had worked in the field of architecture, he would have perhaps followed the same path that he has taken in the cultural-artistic field. He would have implemented the same slogan of independence and freedom in the architecture of the country.

The discussion of modernity in various fields was one of his concerns during his time at the highest level of the country's management and it never changed. Commitment to preserving the culture and thought of Iran and Iranians is the main principle that he introduced in all his works, including publications and academy trainings in universities across the country, and in many others, he has presented valuable solutions for preserving the identity and culture of Iran and Iranians. According to him, Iran is a special land with a great geographical diversity and ancient traditions that distinguish it from other lands. The book «Where is Iran, Who is Iranian» deals with the essence of culture and movement within its framework. Beheshti believes that culture is a comprehensive and historical thing from earth to heaven and controls the life of human society. In addition to culture, he considers competence to be effective in the development of thought and knowledge. Habituation gives us a unified understanding of the surrounding environment. Due to the connection between us and the environment, habituation makes us aware of the slightest change in the environment. This distinction between being domesticated and undomesticated causes undomesticated people to become aware of the flow after losses and functional impairments, which are no longer useful. Perhaps this is the reason for the constant surprise of officials and managers who do not have a proper understanding of the issue and, after an incident or anomaly occurs, speak of «national determination» or «cooperation of all agencies» to resolve and resolve the problem. The book «Where is Iran, Who is Iranian?», in line with the ideas of Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti, examines and describes in detail the discussion of culture in global societies and the impact of competence in returning to the territorial culture (Iran of the Land). What will be presented are two other of the seven chapters of the book, including: Cultur Definitions and Redefining culture.

In the fourth section of the book, the author talks about culture and its various definitions in authoritative published texts:

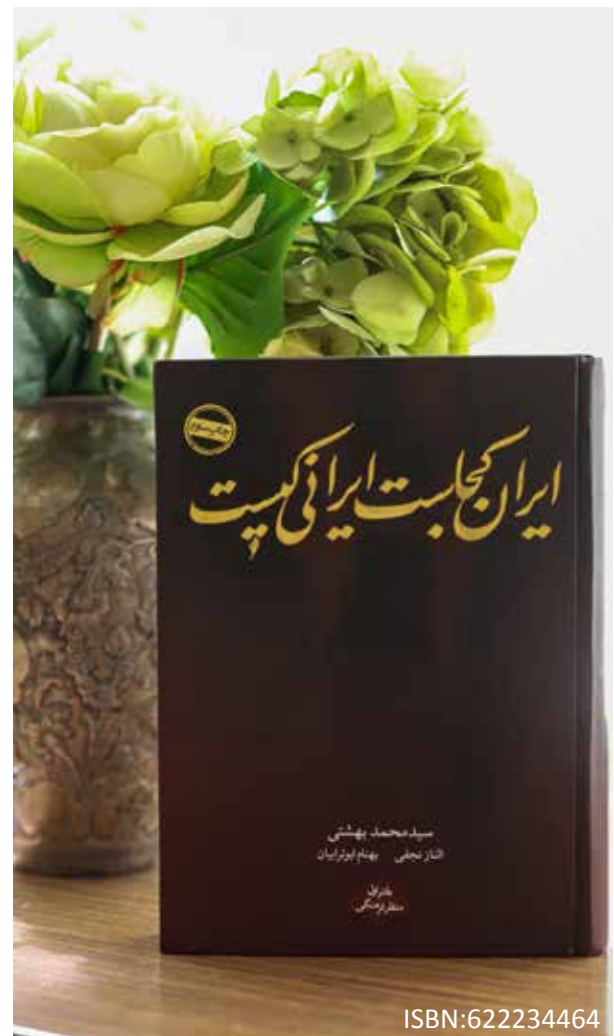
## Cultur Definitions

**C**ulture in modern Persian has meanings that have been imposed on it over time. Although the word is not found in texts older than Pahlavi, its roots can be traced back to the Avestan language, where it is equivalent to progress on the path and also to learning; in other words, culture probably referred to the kind of learning that occurs during education three thousand years ago.

Culture has been common in the same sense in Pahlavi texts as well. In Persian poetry and literature after Islam, the semantic scope of this word gradually expanded, but its exact meaning became unclear. No dictionary from this period has come down to us that explains the meaning of the word culture.

This word is included in some later Persian dictionaries, such as Sahah al-Farah or Makar Jamali, to mean politeness and wisdom.

However, most dictionary definitions of culture were left by Persian-speaking Indians; they found the motivation to compile a Persian dictionary at the same time as the Safavid era, and perhaps as a result of extensive interaction with the West, and coincidentally chose the word culture (dictionary) for the title of their works.



**It could be said that the title of academy in Iran is hidden due to the historical background of culture and how it is defined in ancient texts. Mohammad Beheshti further explains:**

**T**he title «Farhangestan», which was proposed at the end of 1934 and the first Pahlavi period at the suggestion of the late Mohammad Ali Foroughi, was actually chosen under the influence of the same perspective that the Persian-speaking people of India had while compiling their dictionaries; The word «Academy» originally meant «school», but at this time it came to refer to an institution whose task was to suggest equivalents for new Western words and terms or common Arabic terms.

**Continuing with the definitions of culture and the ways of expressing the concept of culture from the words of other experts:**

**I**n such a situation, sociologists, anthropologists, and managers, when dealing with the issues and problems of Iranian society, usually resort to four methods where they are faced with this concept and are forced to define it:

- 1) Confining oneself to common, general, and obvious meanings of the same vague concept
- 2) Enumerating a wide range of examples and concepts under the title of culture
- 3) Formally examining the uses of the word culture in Persian poetic and prose literature
- 4) Attempting to generalize the concept of culture to culture.

In recent years, the increase in the number of works from all four categories above indicates a general concern for understanding Iranian culture. The works of the first group usually do not go beyond describing the behavioral abnormalities of contemporary Iranian society and, with unsound arguments, try to generalize the results of this analysis to the entire geography and history of Iran. As a result, it unintentionally identifies Iranian culture with a set of vices such as opportunism, lying, heroism, individualism, necromancy, and lawlessness.

The main shortcoming of the efforts of the second group is that they end up with a comprehensive but non-obstructive definition of culture from which many unrelated concepts can also be inferred. The works of the third group only seek to evoke past meanings and often fail to reach a single conclusion from mentioning all those seemingly scattered concepts.

Their study is valuable because it clears the dust from forgotten meanings, but it generally does not establish a relationship between the new and old understanding of culture. The fourth group also often uses the implicit justification that the meaning of culture has expanded considerably in the West but remained limited in Iran.

But in Iran it has remained limited, and since «culture» has long been an abandoned term in Persian, the definition of this term has been limited to translating and examining the diverse opinions of Western scholars. In such works, the implicit reference to Persian poetry and literature is intended to provide evidence in support of Western opinions, and nothing more.



**Beheshti describes the concept of culture and its enigmatic nature in Western culture as follows:**

**T**he term culture is derived from the Latin word «cultura» meaning to kill, to nurture, to care for. Cultura comes from the ancient root «culo» and, unlike many Latin words that are borrowed from Greek, is directly connected to the root of the so-called Indo-European language.

Cultura means both «to become» or «to walk» and «to settle.» In Rome, Cicero, a famous orator of the first century BC, first borrowed the term from «agriculture» (agriculture) and used it as a metaphor for the «education» of the human spirit.

As in Persian, «Cultivation» is used both in the sense of cultivating and maintaining plants and agriculture, and in the sense of raising people. This term became relatively abandoned after the fall of the Roman Empire. But it continued to exist in compounds such as «agriculture» or «horticulture.» The word «culture» itself was also sometimes used in Old English to mean agriculture or as a laudatory adjective applied to a specific individual.

**Continuing with the concept of «culture», the author of the book expresses the idea of culture from the perspective of ancient Europe:**

**I**t seems that in Europe, the belief in self-founded and universal wisdom of the 17th century had narrowed the way to understanding the impact of history on human reason and thought, and no one expected anything from the science of history other than verifying the facts of historical documents and evidence; as a result, the impact of culture on human life and thought was addressed very late. In fact, the new view of rationality was a unifying view that did not take into account the diversity of people and societies, which is influenced by their backgrounds and living in distinct natural environments. Obviously, as long as history is not relevant as a factor influencing thought, there will be no room for talking about cultural diversity.



**Considering the summary of the above, the importance of culture from the author's perspective should not be overlooked:**

**T**he emergence of the field of environmental history and the like was also a product of the frightening shocks of World War II, and led to the establishment of emerging schools of thought such as postcolonialism, which modified the idea of the unity and superiority of European civilization to accept that other peoples of the world also have «cultures.» Thanks to Kroeber's efforts, who in her book *Culture: A Critical Rereading of Concepts and Definitions* has collected many of the theoretical efforts of the decade after World War II into descriptive, historical, normative, psychological, and other categories, we can study the products of this transformation.

After the war, the United States, due to its immigrant-friendly nature, quickly embraced the new concept of culture and strengthened its attention to it from an anthropological perspective. From then on, the concept of «culture» increasingly entered the field of English-speaking anthropology, leading to the emergence of «cultural» anthropology, in parallel with biological anthropology, to scientifically explain the cultural diversity of human societies.

The emphasis on the importance of meaning and interpretation has spread to the definition of «culture» in the last half century, as in other areas of the Western humanities. From this perspective, culture is that which gives meaning to reality, that is, through it we know how to interpret the events of our world and how to react to each one. American Clifford Geertz is among the anthropologists who take an interpretive approach to defining culture. He writes: I agree with Max Weber, who believed that man is an animal suspended in self-woven threads. I consider culture to be those threads, the laws of which cannot be analyzed and understood through empirical knowledge, but can be sought for through interpretation and interpretation.

Over the past few decades, some cultural historians, influenced by Clifford Geertz, have sought to find the meaning of actions and events in the culture of a society. This approach is based on the assumption that culture determines how people think about their actions and how others interpret them.

It is worth noting that the recent attitude in the Western world's thinking space is like a protest sentence that has, of course, been strengthened over time, but does not yet have the strength and support to become the mainstream and guiding trend on a regional and global scale. In other words, its design is like a critical movement that emerged as a result of the emergence of abnormal complications of the mainstream and with the intention of correcting it. For this reason, approaches to «culture», especially interpretative ones, still do not have a proper place in fundamental international decisions and planning.

**Culture in the Iranian world, but from the author's perspective, is expressed in a different way:**

**T**he form of the word «culture» is not found in the Avesta and the writings we have from Old Persian, but it is similar to it in works from the Sassanid era and even Pahlavi texts, which were written after the arrival of Islam in Iran.

In the book of the defense of Minuy, it is stated that culture is one of the things that, along with art, no one can steal it, synonymous with the education of the wise and the good, and deferred to wisdom, along with the knowledge and expertise of the universe and education. When Minuy asks Dana, "How can one seek the maintenance and comfort of the body?", one of the things he mentions is the effort in "culturing" and is synonymous with the effort in the way of education.

Finally, where he introduces the Mazdaist religion as the culture of cultures and the source of knowledge and discernment, one can almost understand what he means. In another example, he considers wisdom to be the fruit of culture, which adorns in vastness, supports in difficulty, supports in calamity, and is useful in and through straits:

Be diligent in the culture of seeking culture. What a culture of knowledge, wisdom, and computer wisdom, the guide to both worlds.

With such a rich history, it is not surprising that in modern Persian literature, both poetry and prose, culture finds a meaning synonymous with wisdom. At the same time, in Persian dictionaries, culture is one of the meanings of «gem», which originally referred to pearls, which are, in other words, the product of the cultivation of oysters.

The word «culture» was also used in agriculture and digging aqueducts for a long time, as it was used to refer to a tree branch that «lay dormant in the ground and then sprout from another place to plant seedlings in another place.» Or a term such as «mouth of culture» that was applied to the symbol of a qanat indicates that «culture» was also another name for a water carrier.

**With the different concepts of «culture» in ancient times and different civilizations, the characteristics of «culture» are of particular importance after understanding its concept. Mohammad Beheshti expands the characteristics of culture in relation to competence and other virtues of culture as follows:**

**I**n the ancient's view, culture is a broad concept that encompasses concepts such as competence, worldview, maturity, experience, seriousness, tact, and the like. In other words, describing someone as «educated» requires meeting certain conditions, the description of which can be found in Persian poetry and prose texts.

First of all, competence is essential, because a person can only recognize the hidden forces of a field when he is familiar with it. The more complex the field is and the more difficult it is to solve, the greater the importance of harmony and interaction with the environment. Harmony that lasts for a long time creates «competence.» competence gives a person an identity and a certain order to his relations with the world. Interaction with different environments creates different characteristics in people, which is why everyone feels attached to their homeland.

Culture is not brought about in a day or two or a year or two, but is achieved over time. In this sense, culture is mixed with the cold and hot of taste and maturity, and is contrasted with youth and immaturity.

One of the traits that can accompany aging is «worldliness.» Worldliness broadens a person's perspective and increases their ability to recognize and discover. Although worldliness is loosely understood to mean hard work, it is essentially an experience that comes from traveling to different parts of the world and observing the diversity of interactions between societies and their environments. Obviously, the more connected a person or society is to the larger world, the closer they will be to culture.

Culture was sometimes used to mean «seriousness,» and the essence of a person was introduced as his seriousness. First and foremost, seriousness is synonymous with knowing value, measure, and weight, and it means having internal measures and standards with which one can weigh and weigh matters, to distinguish the good from the bad, and the valuable from the cheap.

**From the author's point of view, different societies' perception of culture depends heavily on geography and the natural environment of life:**

**E**vidence shows that Iranian thinkers also paid attention to the distinguishing factors of ethnic groups and societies influenced by history and geography, although they did not include it under a specific term. For example, the thinkers of the Brotherhood of the Safa have discussed in detail the developments that occur in the civilizations and nations of each region due to natural factors. Even culture, in the sense of the different ways of life of societies, which are the product of historical thought and experiences belonging to their specific geographical area, has left its mark on Farabi's views. In Abu Rayhan's view, man and the environment are completely interconnected, and the periods, states, and developments of human society are completely consistent with its global and natural environment.

Biruni has also considered the relationship between great natural changes and the periods of human history, and the rise and fall, low and high destinies of different nations.

### Mohammad Beheshti believes that we need to seek a new definition for «culture»:

Some contemporary Iranian scholars may believe that referring to ancient meanings of culture to define and explain the concepts that «culture» seeks to explain is a clear mistake. In their opinion, the use of this term as a synonym for culture does not allow us to transfer the meanings of culture to «culture» or vice versa. Although this concern is not misplaced. However, accepting such passivity requires ignoring several realities: first, the dynamism of language, which is always open to new concepts and is enriched through interaction and exchange. Second, «culture» seeks to express something human, and this prevents us from limiting it to a specific cultural sphere.

Meanwhile, an etymological reflection on the word «culture» leads us to believe that the Romans borrowed this concept as a result of direct interaction with their eastern lands. In other words, the common essence that led Westerners to borrow «culture» from the ancient root «kulo» meaning to settle, cultivate, and garden is the same thing that led Iranians to use culture in multiple meanings regarding plants, aqueducts, and humans.

Furthermore, it cannot be denied that equating culture with culture in the contemporary period is the result of enlightenment and attention to the historical life of both words, and therefore, one should not turn one's back on all its previous meanings. Finally, it is not only «culture» that has been employed in the contemporary period to express a new meaning that is slightly different from the previous one.

Overall, examining the category of culture, both in the world of modern Western thought and in the world of Iranian thought, showed that we are dealing with a simple and fluid topic. The multitude of answers to the question, «What is culture?» and the ongoing global effort to reach the most accurate answer show that the process of solving the problem is not yet over, and as a result, efforts to participate in it are not only not objectionable, but necessary. Meanwhile, the essential differences in the origins of culture and tradition also increase the need to address such an issue.

Iranian society, like other societies, has long struggled to resolve the consequences of this transformation, but has not yet been able to overcome it. Some contemporary Iranian thinkers consider the return of fish to water to be impossible and even reprehensible, and believe that change must be accepted and they decree that lungs replace gills, that is, they give up their cystic nature.

Their intention in this change is to fully adapt to the context that modern civilization demands. Another group, in response to the first group, insists on pretending that the fish is still in the water. In other words, the fear of facing new requirements has led them to deny any change, and this has even caused some of them to move in a direction opposite to reaching a solution. A century of efforts by the first group to deny the context and attempt to change it by adopting the manifestations of a new civilization have shown that such a desire is practically unattainable. On the other hand, the insistence on denying the profound changes in the world by adopting solutions such as isolation and self-isolation, trying to preserve the manifestations of past life, or fighting and conflicting with the global order has only made the knot of the problem more blurred.



### To achieve new definition of culture, with respect for history, the author continues:

In order to provide a definition of culture, we will try not to neglect the ancients' understanding of this concept, but at the same time, it is obvious that in this way we will also benefit from the possibilities provided by intellectual developments and modern reasoning tools to make the meaning of the ancestors clear and transparent, and more importantly, up-to-date. The attempt to define culture in these discussions is not out of hobby or mere curiosity, but rather out of thirst. In other words, encountering the underlying issues and finding a solution has driven us to strive to understand culture. We believe that this effort is like the effort of the thirsty man in the Masnavi, who, although a wall has been erected between him and the water, every action will bring us one step closer to the water.

**The author of the book understands the difficulty of arriving at a correct conceptual understanding and interpretation of culture. For this reason, he tries to define the boundaries of the discussion and the main questions about culture and then correctly express and interpret the concept of culture:**

**I**t is not possible to define a simple concept such as culture in one sentence unless the main boundaries of the discussion are clarified by asking critical questions. Therefore, before presenting any definition, it is better to first address a few key questions and examine them.

One of the important concerns that every question about who and where you are hides within is explaining the differences between human societies. Even in the era of globalization, Japanese, Russians, Argentines, and Eskimos differ greatly in the most everyday and minor aspects of life; from habits related to food, clothing, speech, and socializing to beliefs and inclinations towards different religions, and so on. It is as if, at the same time that a unifying factor transforms a group of people into a society, it also distinguishes that society from other societies. We will call this factor culture for now, in order to clarify its relevance to the definitions we have previously had of culture.

Culture is an integral part of human social life. If it were not necessary, it would certainly not have lasted for thousands of years and spread across the globe.

if we consider culture to be a matter of convention, it means that it can be invalidated as easily as it is established. In this case, the question arises: why, when we address the shortcomings and problems of a society, are we unable to change that culture simply by establishing and applying a few laws and conventions? Why do those who speak out against a trait such as courtesy among Iranians continue to be involuntarily courteous, or despite praising frankness and condemning concealment, do they still subconsciously avoid displaying their lives openly in front of foreigners?

Of course, the authenticity of culture does not mean its rigidity and immutability, nor does it mean its resistance to the status and prestige of humans. There are many authentic things that are alive, and through the perseverance and effort of developing societies, language is among these things. Many believe that language is conventional because it is changed and transformed by speakers; however, reflection on the mechanism of language shows that any situation and convention that does not follow the nature of the language will not be accepted by the language and will not be sustainable.

In this sense, culture is also an original thing; precisely in the sense that it exists outside of human conventions and will, and is alive due to its deep roots in history, growing and developing through the conscious decisions of wise men or the unwritten agreements of the people of that culture, such as bonds that are acceptable if they are in accordance with the nature of the culture. And it will even be effective in this development, otherwise it will become subordinate to the vital mechanism of culture and be forgotten.

Since culture is a simple and abstract thing, it is not easy to recognize its laws through experience and study. However, since the truth of culture flows in all aspects of life, its emergence and manifestation in all manifestations in proportion to the capacity of that manifestation causes the manifestation of aspects of the laws governing culture, and in this way provides an opportunity for self-knowledge. The historical nature of culture prevents individuals from voluntarily and legally being able to interfere with its laws, but social actions on a medium- and long-term scale have an implicit effect on the laws of culture, as they cause the acquisition and expansion of the conditions for the emergence of knowledge and change its quality. So while culture has a profound effect on people's lives with its laws, individuals also have subtle long-term effects on the laws of culture through their cultural way of living and the way they solve problems.

Every culture experiences ups and downs throughout history; sometimes it is more vibrant and sometimes less vibrant, sometimes it is thriving and productive, and sometimes it is just alive. There are many cultures that, despite their hardships, were unable to survive a crisis and therefore did not continue.



Beheshti expresses the relationship between civilization and culture and its definitions as follows:

The most comprehensive manifestation of culture is civilization. This comprehensiveness has also caused many to consider culture and civilization to be the same. However, there have been many human societies that were civilized but did not have civilization, but none of them can be considered devoid of culture. Unlike civilization, culture does not have multiple beginnings and ends. The depth of culture's presence in society is such that its light will not be extinguished unless all the people of that culture are destroyed or their land is abandoned. A land like Europe witnessed the rise and fall of Greek, Roman, medieval, Renaissance, and modern civilizations, but the culture of living in the European environment is constantly evolving; sometimes more vibrant, sometimes less so. Similarly, the culture of living in the Iranian environment did not end with the Aryans, Islam, or modernism and become a different culture, but rather underwent a transformation.

Whatever the culture of one land guarantees absolute good for them, another culture will be ineffective for them. Just like the effort of a fish to breathe on land or the effort of a human being to breathe in the depths of water; it may be possible, but not only does it not lead to happiness, but it also jeopardizes survival. But can one consider the advantage of having lungs or gills as superior or inferior? Certainly, for a fish, lungs are essential and benefiting from them is considered an advantage, and for a human, the advantage of lungs is mandatory. In other words, the only way for any society to be happy is to benefit from its own culture, and comparing cultures based on superiority or inferiority is a comparison of differences.

In fact, comparing two cultures is only useful when we look at the differences positively; like a skilled violinist who understands the limitations and advantages of his instrument and skill. He never judges a pianist for his weakness in drawing the violin bow, but rather realizes that by harmonizing these differences, a more pleasing and enchanting harmony can be achieved.

Knowledge of a subject such as culture, which surrounds us, is not possible except through familiarity and competence. If knowledge is a voluntary and acquired matter, understanding is existential and contingent. We possess knowledge but become subject to understanding. Understanding is not conditioned by maintaining the independence of the knowing subject from the object of recognition, but rather depends on the dissolution of one into the other. Therefore, to study a culture, one must first of all belong to that culture. The subject of this book is who is an Iranian and where is Iran. Since we were born and raised in this context and are immersed in this culture, we have the necessary conditions to understand it. But when we talk about other cultures and cultural natures, it is naturally all from the perspective of alienation from them and through a narrow lens of comparison; this requirement arises from the demands of the crisis-ridden and pathological conditions of the contemporary era, which, of course, does not only affect our culture, but is almost global, and apparently there is no escape from it.

According to the ancient Tehrani belief, whenever Damavand has a cap of clouds on its head, rain is imminent in Tehran. This belief was something that the people of this region had understood and experienced due to their long history of settlement. Beyond the test, they had the opportunity to convey the essence of this perception to future generations in the form of narratives. Contact with this level of narrative unconsciously imbued the people of Tehran with this knowledge, so that as soon as they saw the cap on Damavand, they became «informed» about the future weather conditions.



# Redefining culture

**In the fifth section of the book, Mohammad Beheshti talks about redefining culture:**

**I**n the process of cultural development, both society and the environment are involved. In other words, culture is not the result of mere reasoning, but rather knowledge that has been accumulated through «interaction» with the environment, and what all the inhabitants of a territory share in this knowledge is their interaction with a single environment. What transforms culture from a limited experience in a specific time and place into «knowledge» is its historical development. But an understanding of this definition is not possible unless its terms, namely «knowledge,» «history,» «society,» «environment,» and «interaction,» are properly understood.

Unlike literacy, knowledge is not concrete and is not added to the individual; a person becomes knowledgeable, not the owner. This knowledge means that a person does not feel a distance between himself and his knowledge, and he may not realize that he is knowledgeable. However, usually a person feels a distance from his literacy and should try to apply his literacy correctly at appropriate times. Knowledge is more about «being» than «knowing»; in other words, knowledge is a position, like being a mother or father, being a woman or a man, and being in love.

Possessing knowledge of any scale of one's environment makes one a citizen of that scale; thus, everyone becomes a citizen of a house, a neighborhood, a city, and a land. However, knowledge is enriched not only in interaction with a scale itself, but also in interaction with that scale beyond that scale, and it is this aspect of knowledge that continues to be useful when one leaves that scale and goes to other environments.

When we speak of «culture,» we generally mean knowledge on a territorial scale; that is, knowledge that is common to all the inhabitants of a given land due to living in a single land and distinguishes them from the inhabitants of other lands. Knowledge on this scale carries the secrets of preserving the survival and achieving the prosperity of the society in that environment; this knowledge is the same experiences that emerged while interacting with the land and has been enriched and refined through continuous use. In the absence of this knowledge, the society will be deprived of its wealth or will waste it. Conversely, if all wealth is lost but knowledge remains, the deprivations will be compensated. In this respect, knowledge is the most important source of life and the main wealth of the people of the land for living in their environment.

**Referring to the issue of «knowledge» in defining culture, Mohammad Beheshti considers the role of history and narrative important in achieving knowledge:**

**A**wareness and mastery of knowledge through the study of history, especially in times when society has forgotten who it is, should be considered among the most important duties of the educated and wise. It is the duty of the historian to provide a comprehensive and documented account of those situations to the educated and wise. But this does not mean denying the usefulness of history to the general public. The general public gains knowledge through living contact with history. However, the general way of reminding the public is not through studying history, but through contact with narratives drawn from history that have been expressed in an effective manner by scholars and wise men. What a person experiences when confronted with a historical narrative and becomes part of their being is learning from it. Knowledge that has passed through the shell of the past and is conveyed by the historical narrative.

**Continuing the discussion of «knowledge,» the way to achieve knowledge, from the author's perspective, has special conditions:**

**C**ontact and familiarity with narratives throughout life continuously transmits knowledge to members of society; this means that all members of society have knowledge, but it does not mean that all members of society “benefit” from knowledge to the same extent. Having knowledge and benefiting from it are different. Every human being is a member of a context and, by virtue of this Competence, has knowledge. In this sense, «having knowledge» is imperative, general, and involuntary. Everyone in the same cultural world into which they are born acquires knowledge in their natural life.

The best example to understand the meaning is the way one learns one's native language; one does not go to school to learn one's native language and one does not learn one's native language by studying. But he understands the meaning of numerous words well without paying attention to their roots and pronounces sentences correctly without understanding the rules of language. In the course of life, when the child simultaneously encounters warmth and cold, light and darkness, fear and joy, he expresses these meanings in the form of words with the help of his/her mother.

**Continuing the discussion of “knowledge” the author of the book believes that utilizing the capacities of every wise person is a matter of education:**

**A**ll those who are born and live in an environment are more or less endowed with culture, but they do not benefit from their culture until they are educated. That is, the seed planted in their being does not come from potential to action. Discipline: The least benefit is achieved with “discipline.” Discipline is not intended to fully benefit society from its wealth of knowledge, but without it, society will be deprived of knowledge.

The distinction between discipline and upbringing is its generality; every society needs discipline. The family, school, society, and even religion have a disciplinary duty towards their members.

**People whose knowledge is cultivated, educated, and then attains wisdom:**

**A**n educated person is someone who develops his knowledge with the help of a mentor. All cultural manifestations, both material and semantic, have been created by educated people; in various fields of art, science, and technology, it is the educated who expand the boundaries and improve what is available to make it better. The compilation and compilation of knowledge in any field, including astronomy, mathematics, agriculture, calligraphy, painting, mineralogy, cooking, spices, and medicine, is usually the responsibility of the educated. Relying on tradition and in conquered territories, the educated bring the knowledge of talents from potential to action.

Because of their relationship with wisdom, sages play an important role in education; education on the scale of guiding the entire culture. Despite the hardships and difficulties that a society has faced throughout its historical life, sages are able to draw a clear horizon for it and create a believable narrative of the possibility of victory for it. The wise are like gardeners to the tree of culture; although the tree survives the winter without a gardener and blooms anew in the spring, it is not possible to reveal the full potential of the tree of culture without the gardener. Especially in times of crisis, the need for a gardener becomes more apparent, and without a gardener, the tree’s survival may be as endangered as the severity of the crisis.

In the absence of the productive presence of the educated and wise, a literacy or skill that is incompatible with the tree of culture may be acquired from elsewhere, without being able to survive and flourish in the host land. Such literacy can be called «deserted literacy»; a literacy that is separated from its origin and context and is unable to take root in the host context. Such literacy expires after a short time and there is no choice but to throw it away; like a flower planted in a pot that does not take root and withers after a while and must be replaced by another flower. Skill (technology) will also degenerate into blind imitation if it does not find a close relationship with its own context.

**Since every benefit also comes with disadvantages, the author of the book points out and explains the pests of knowledge and its impact on culture:**

**T**he consistency and durability of knowledge is conditioned by interaction with the environment, and consequently, anything that interferes with the interaction of society with the environment causes the plague of knowledge. That which affects the interaction with the environment first disrupts education and then discipline, and the deeper it becomes, the more it fundamentally destroys the relationship between man and the environment. We know this threatening and disruptive factor under the general title of «crisis.» Crisis at the material, natural, and human levels can also jeopardize knowledge, but to disrupt progress, the crisis must reach a point where any contact between humans and the environment is destroyed, and this happens especially when the crisis has affected the narrative level of the environment.

If the disruption in enjoyment and the emergence of cultural ills continue, the crisis may penetrate from the natural and human levels to the semantic level. A crisis in semantic construction is the most serious type of crisis. This occurs when a society, for whatever reason, loses touch with its narratives. If in normal times, familiarity with the environment, thanks to the cultivation of the educated, kept society «aware» of knowledge and, in fact, «wise,» in times of crisis when the educated do not innovate narratives in any field, society’s level of contact with insight and character is minimized or disrupted.

In younger cultures, crises can destroy a culture more quickly; but no matter how long a culture has endured, its death does not occur overnight. Forgetfulness has a cure, and its cure is reminder. This happens when misunderstandings about the recent past are somehow resolved and renewal begins with the recent past. In such situations, only the wise are able to eliminate these misunderstandings, because their connection with culture is not through forms, but rather they have an existential contact with culture. Therefore, they are able to avoid being bound by the obsolescence of forms or alien, contradictory, and false narratives, and to discern the essence of culture beyond it. This is precisely why wise people are even able to integrate foreign cultural manifestations into the essence of their own culture and derive new achievements from this synthesis that all members of society can benefit from.

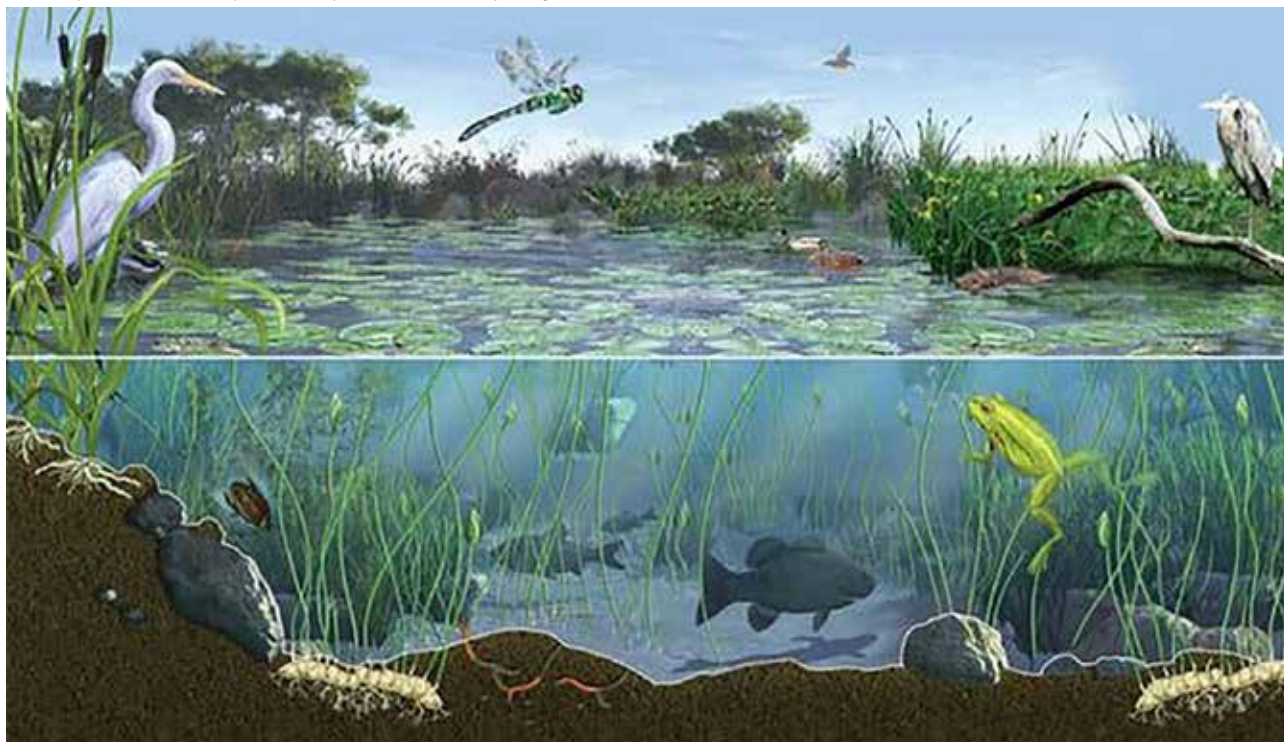
**The results of the discussions so far indicate that what can explain the behaviors of a society is not the separate study of culture. Mohammad Beheshti explains the reasons for this in order to clarify the context of «who» the people are and «where» the land is:**

**I**n fact, it is the combination of «knowledge» and «environment» that creates a «context» necessary for understanding the fate of society. The meaning of the environment is the «where» of a land in all its levels and aspects. The meaning of knowledge is the «who» of the people of the environment. In order to survive, human society is forced to live in the environment and benefit from its gifts. The environment refers to all those things that surround society and that society lives with, in, through, and under its influence.

In recent centuries, the reflection of naturalists and biologists on the mechanisms of nature has shown that what we call the environment, regardless of the existence of humans, enjoys integrity, order, and balance. This order was called an «ecosystem» or a «natural» system, which, in short, has the following characteristics:

- (1) It has components.
- (2) These components are interconnected, not disparate.
- (3) The components are compatible with each other.
- (4) Every ecosystem has a balance that ensures its continued existence.
- (5) All components interact with each other to maintain a balance for the continuation of life.
- (6) The system at any scale tends to act economically; that is, it wants to spend the least amount of money to accomplish its mission in the best way possible.
- (7) All these components form a single «whole» that exhibits specific and coherent behavior in different situations.

An ecosystem or natural system at any scale is inherently integrated, harmonious, and balanced.



Nature has its own order, and no matter how powerful a human being becomes, he cannot ignore or deviate from this mechanism. He has no choice but to accept the order of nature with all its characteristics, including climatic and geographical characteristics, and resource limitations. No matter how much the development and advancement of life causes humans to distance themselves from the earth, sky, mountains, valleys, or rivers and live in environments they have created themselves, such as megacities, it does not diminish the impact of nature and its laws on human life. No matter how much human interference and occupation in nature builds high walls to protect humans and changes natural equations, reduces the power of some and increases the impact of others, because it is in the heart of nature and relies on what nature has provided, it is still subject to natural rules and regulations.

Every path that human takes to control the environment to create a stable and favorable environment for life originates from his knowledge. In other words, human intervention in nature is not a neutral and uniform intervention and depends greatly on the mediation of knowledge.

Human society is no exception to this rule, because by interfering with nature, it creates an «artificial environment» in it, and in fact, it has partially disrupted the order of the natural system. The entry of this component has two states: the artificial environment is either bound by the balance of nature and is consequently accepted by it as a harmonious member; or it does not submit to the balance of nature and is recognized by nature as a heterogeneous and disruptive member. These two states will bring two qualities of balance to the artificial environment.

**Nature and the environment, in balance and interaction with human societies, from the author's perspective, have different effects on life:**

**O**ften, the balance of the environment is in harmony with the balance of nature; that is, human society expands its living space according to the dynamics of nature and its balance, and in other words, it accepts membership in the balance of nature. This alignment causes the environment to be a constituent of nature and nature a constituent of the environment. The result of this is the «stable balance» of the environment. Life in some natural systems is not possible based on the balance of nature, and humans, by adhering to the principle of «membership in the balance of nature,» cannot provide themselves with the maximum living conditions. In other words, in such environments, humans, if they are bound by the balance of nature, are forced to make do with the limited possibilities that the environment provides.

In such environments, some communities are forced to act in spite of the balance of nature in order to expand their livelihoods. When the balance of the environment is incompatible with the balance of nature, or in other words, the requirements of the environment do not match the requirements of nature, the result is an «unstable balance» of the environment.

**The variables affecting balance and interaction, whether from a strengthening or weakening perspective, are debatable. Mohammad Beheshti has a thought-provoking perspective on this issue:**

**D**epending on the scale of the environment, factors affecting balance can be categorized into two groups: the first group is the variables that constitute the balance of nature, such as the change of seasons or day and night, and the second group is the variables that disrupt the balance of nature, such as earthquakes or the collision of celestial bodies with the Earth. If the environmental balance is unstable, many of the variables that constitute the balance of nature can disrupt the mechanism of the environment and, consequently, become threatening. An environment that has an unstable balance itself acts as a disruptive variable in the natural ecosystem; that is, it provokes its reaction. In other words, the heaviest cost to maintain an «unstable equilibrium» is the price paid by nature's response to repel the artificial environment as a disruptive factor.

«Interaction,» as the word itself suggests, means a two-way communication such as trade. In the present discussion of culture, on one side is the interaction of the environment with all its levels, which affects the life of society, and on the other side is society, which occupies the environment in order to create a balance consistent with its survival or well-being. Of course, the contribution of both sides of the interaction is not always equal; sometimes the degree of influence of a sub-system may be greater than its susceptibility, and sometimes vice versa. But the influence is continuous; that is, each occupation of the environment by society causes a series of changes in the environment that inevitably affect the life of the society.

**The variables affecting balance and interaction, whether from a strengthening or weakening perspective, are From Mohammad Beheshti's perspective, interaction has various states and types that affect human knowledge and insight in relation to the environment and can be a factor in the stability or crisis of human societies:**

**T**he historical interaction of the inhabitants of each scale of the environment with the interior of that scale, which has taken place in order to meet its most basic biological needs, has over time created a kind of knowledge that is useful for living in the same place (place or context), and it can be called «knowledge stopped in place.» Knowledge that is fixed in place means having «insight and character,» «knowledge and method,» «literacy and skill» that is specific to one's own field; The nobility of each environment encompasses all the requirements and limitations that are essential for living in that environment, and it is this understanding that creates a sense of enlightenment in the familiar environment that is absent in other places. Non-stationary knowledge in a place means having «insight and character,» «knowledge and method,» and «literacy and skill» that, although acquired with a focus on one's own context, is not limited to that. This aspect of knowledge allows members of society to quickly become enlightened in any new environment and adjust their relationships with it.

The more extensive and long-standing historical interactions a society has, the richer its knowledge of non-stop space will be. Culture in the sense of «knowledge fixed in place» is what all societies possess, but culture in the sense of «knowledge not fixed in place» may emerge or not form at all, depending on the historical interactions of each society with other societies.

**The age and continuity of interaction, from the author's perspective, affects the competence or incompetence of the residents of that community. Beheshti continues the discussion on this issue as follows:**

**C**ompetence is not born in one year or two years, not even one generation or two generations. A long-term interaction is necessary to transform the environment into a «place» and the inhabitants into «people» of it. In lands where the interaction of society with the environment is not long, the connection between the two is weak; in that case, it is difficult to speak of competence. At the beginning of interaction, society's understanding of the cognitive environment is incomplete, and there are many knots that remain untied and puzzles that have not been resolved.

A long period of time is needed for this knowledge to lead to a comprehensive understanding of the environment. As the association ages, knowledge of the environment tends to move from the general to the detailed. The longer the interaction, the more it reveals the secrets of the environment and gives the person the opportunity to find appropriate answers to them. In other words, when a society acquires a unique «who» as a result of long-term interaction with a specific environment, this personality does not change when people migrate from that environment to another place, but rather persists for generations.



The history of external interactions confronts societies with steep slopes that cannot be crossed without the effective role of all scales. It is this «coexistence» that causes each scale, based on its knowledge and advantages, to accept a unique role in relation to others that the others cannot fulfill. The older this age is, the more each scale fits into its role and, accordingly, creates a distinct “who” for that society. The age of a society’s interaction with its environment will lead to a wealth of knowledge provided that that interaction continues. The condition for the continuity of knowledge is the continuity of interaction with the environment; the continuity of internal interactions is essential for the preservation of knowledge that is fixed in place. The continuity of external interactions will ensure the continuity of knowledge that is not fixed in place. The interruption of internal interactions usually occurs in the wake of crises. These crises are sometimes related to the material aspect of the environment and sometimes to semantics. In the natural order, the emergence of «threat and crisis-causing obstacles» or «feedback» may jeopardize the continuity of life or even make it unlivable. Thus, it causes massive migrations, or at least changes the environment so much that life in it is not possible with prior knowledge. Thus, over time, fundamental changes in knowledge arise.

Disruption in external interactions also occurs in the wake of a crisis (threat or feedback barriers). A crisis in the material realm, whether natural or human, usually targets social bonds; meaning that in times of crisis, “society” is divided from a single, cohesive entity into parts. The more severe the crisis, the more society breaks down into smaller units. This means the interruption of external interactions and the isolation of each part, which requires each part to think about continuing to survive on its own. The result of the interruption of external interactions at any scale is a disruption in “knowledge that is not stopped in place.” In this case, each scale inevitably stops interacting with others in order to expand its life table and is content with maintaining survival in minimal conditions.

Based on his knowledge, man begins to occupy the natural environment and creates an artificial environment for himself. This artificial environment, whatever its quality, is affected by the balance of the natural system, whether he likes it or not.



**The age and continuity of interaction, from the author's perspective, affects the competence or incompetence of In the final section of the book's fifth discourse, the intensity of internal and external interactions and its impact on territorial integrity are explained:**

**T**he intensity of internal interactions is determined by the demands of the environment, on the one hand, and the needs of society, on the other. At any scale, the more complex and intricate the biological puzzles, the more intense the interaction required to solve them. For example, when it is not easy to find the most vital resources, such as water or fertile soil, more intense human interaction with the natural environment becomes necessary in order to find more subtle solutions for survival.

The intensity of extraterritorial interactions varies in different periods and is affected by a diverse range of factors. Even the intensity of extraterritorial interactions is not equal for the parties to the interaction. In other words, two territories that interact with each other do not share and play the same role in the interaction; it is possible that one side of the interaction is passive and susceptible, while the other side is influential, and this is relevant in both the material and semantic structure.

The scope of internal interactions in the material realm may contract or expand, because scales do not have fixed boundaries. During a period of prosperity, the boundaries of a village may reach the widest possible extent in order to utilize the minimal biological capacity around it, but after a crisis, they may contract and settle for the minimum. The same is true of «land.» The territory of lands in the material realm is also subject to the course of events; sometimes it expands to the point where China joins Iran and India, and sometimes it reaches the smallest possible limits. In any case, at any time, the borders of the land have clear limits for its inhabitants.

The scope of semantic interactions is also largely influenced by the age of the interactions; in other words, developments in this scope arise over time and also disappear over time. Long-standing interactions affect the semantic field of the parties' environment to such an extent that even with the cessation of material interactions, their memory cannot be erased. In other words, long-standing interactions in any domain affect knowledge, and assuming these interactions are interrupted, this knowledge does not simply undergo transformation or decay.

For example, the interaction of the Chinese with the Chinese Plain has a long history and this interaction has never been interrupted. As a result, the foundation of Chinese culture is very strong. Consequently, we can be sure that after this, no material or semantic problem in their environment will be able to defeat them, except for the feedback obstacles resulting from their forgetfulness and incompetence towards the Chinese environment. The same is true of India. In contrast, there have been civilizations such as the Khmer at Angkor in Cambodia that did not survive due to changing environmental conditions. The vast scope, antiquity, and continuity of external interactions enrich the knowledge that is not stagnant in a place and strengthen the "cultural digestion." The richer the knowledge that is not fixed in a place, the more fluid, flexible, and self-sufficient the culture is in its manifestations, because it is able to adapt to the new environment and play a role as a member of it. As a result, the existence of such a culture is not limited to borders and does not remain dependent on and confined to the cage of material manifestations for its expression.

## **Seyed Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi**

**H**e , born on 27 February 1952. Studied Architecture at Shahid Beheshti university of Iran. Master of Architecture and Planning in 1981.

He was the first head of Cultural Heritage, Handcrafts and Tourism Organization, being appointed on September 1997 by Mohammad Khatami and held the office until June 2003.

He was also head of the FAJR International Film Festival and Farabi Cinema Foundation. Between 1984 to 1994.

Beheshti is the Head of the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Art Academy Since 1998.

Note: for sources and references, Refer to the book



# From Purity to Release: Painting in the Realm of Geometry

Zubin Amiri, architect and painter

**G**eometric abstraction stands among the foundational movements of twentieth century modern art. a trajectory in which the artwork withdraws from the representation of nature and visual narrative, and instead concentrates on structure, proportion, rhythm, and geometric order. In this approach, geometry is neither decorative nor merely a vehicle for personal expression; it operates as a self-sufficient language of meaning one in which line, plane, and spatial relationships replace depiction, and structure becomes the core of artistic thought.

In Iran, the conditions for engaging with geometric abstraction existed long before its formal articulation in Western modernism, embedded within visual traditions and architecture. The geometric systems governing spatial production in Iranian architecture, alongside the underlying logic present across other arts, established geometry as a mode of thinking. With the emergence of modern art in Iran during the 1950s and 1960s, artists such as Mohsen Vaziri Moghaddam and Massoud Arabshahi pursued investigations into structure, sign, and formal reduction where geometry functioned not as a tool of form-making, but as the underlying ground of artistic organization.

In this sense, geometric abstraction in Iran is not the importation of a model, but the continuation and transformation of structural forces within another domain.

Geometry is the infrastructure of visual thought in art. a fundamental truth that often remains overlooked.

Art history is typically narrated through names, periods, and classifications frameworks designed to interpret and organize works. Yet what frequently remains concealed beneath these narratives is a shared intellectual structure from which many artistic movements emerge. For me, geometry has always been the most essential and compelling dimension of art not as a formal instrument, but as a pre-linguistic field: a point of origin without an imaginable end.

My encounter with this sense of infinity emerged through academic training and engagement with theoretical sources—where the foundations of artistic creation begin with the “point” and continue through the “line.” Yet before any transition to a subsequent stage could occur, this trajectory itself transformed into an endless inquiry one that did not resolve, but instead condensed into a fundamental question that still persists:

**Can one move beyond the line, or is the line itself the threshold that summons thought into space?**

**A**s noted, reliance on predefined categories and classifications often redirects understanding away from underlying thought and toward labeling and formal distinctions. Within such frameworks, attention is placed on the visible outcomes of works rather than on the intellectual substratum from which they emerge. Abstraction is therefore often interpreted as a subjective rupture from representation, while minimalism is reduced to an act of formal reduction whereas their shared origin, geometry, remains largely unexamined as their conceptual foundation.

**From this perspective, one might say:**

geometry is the mother of abstraction and the father of minimalism not as a poetic gesture, but as a precise description of their conceptual ground. Where form is released from the obligation of representation and returns to its fundamental structure, the artwork ceases to narrate the external world and instead becomes a site in which thought takes place.

In Iranian art, geometry before being recognized as a formal language has carried an intellectual order; one structurally present in architecture, ornamentation, calligraphy, and even music. Within this tradition, it has not functioned as a means of embellishment, but as a way of understanding the world. My own engagement with this discipline emerges from such a lineage a tradition in which pattern is not intended for repetition, but for thinking through space.

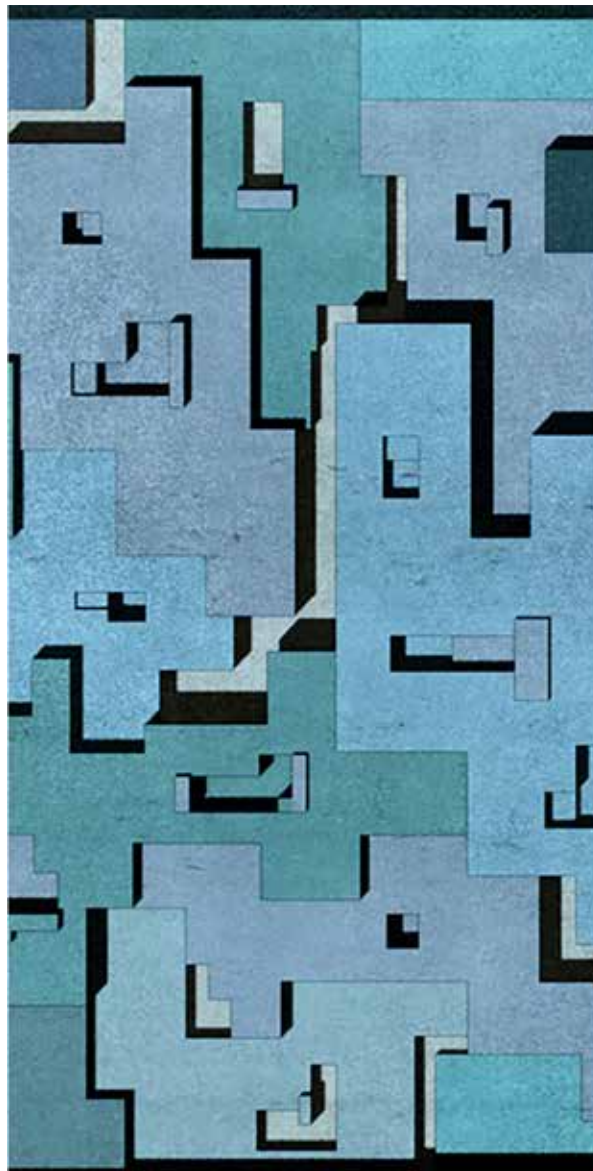
If Life Were Just Line | 2018



In my paintings, geometric order operates as the dominant language one that distances itself from the imitation of nature and from historical narration, returning instead to the fundamental structures of form. What emerges in these works is not the depiction of an external reality, but a process unfolding within the work itself. Painting, for me, is not confined to a subject; it is an event capable of generating a spectrum of experiences, imaginations, and further acts of creation. Here, line, plane, and spatial depth are encountered prior to the stabilization of meaning.

The recurrence of forms and structures in these works does not constitute the reproduction of a fixed figure. Each return carries variation, subtly shifting the trajectory of perception. Rather than stabilizing meaning, this process reconstructs spatial experience. Along this path, imitation gradually dissolves—not as an ideological stance, but as a form of fidelity: fidelity to oneself, and to what one truly believes.

These paintings do not seek to remain as images or frames confined to a closed surface; they unfold within an ongoing process of formation. The work is not an endpoint, but a phase within becoming. In this unfolding, the mind is invited both to pause and to move, and the viewer enters into a direct encounter with the internal logic of the work. In such an encounter, art offers neither ready-made answers nor imposed comfort; instead, it sustains the possibility of thinking.



Hell freezes over | 2024

**O**n the role of geometry in his work, Zubin Amiri writes:  
Geometry, in my work, is neither a remnant of the past nor a play with form;  
it is a field of forces—  
where abstraction takes shape,  
where minimalism finds the conditions to emerge,  
and where thought occurs before it is named.

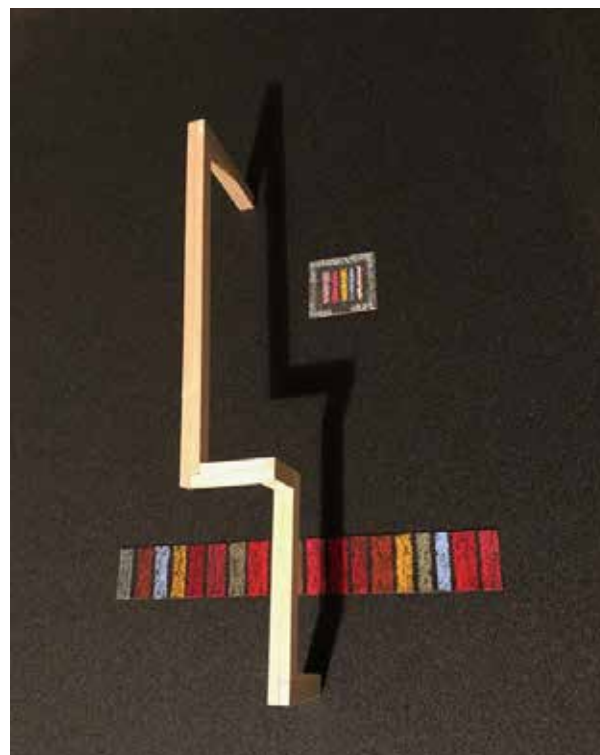
The understanding of minimalism cannot be confined to personal experience or to contemporary Western art; it is rooted in deeper cultural and intellectual traditions. From this perspective, traces of a minimalist mode of expression can be identified long before its modern formulation.

Within Iranian cultural tradition, prior to minimalism being defined as an artistic movement, it already existed in one of the oldest forms of condensed expression: the do-beyti—a brief, distilled, and elevated structure that advances meaning not through explanation, but through omission and silence. In this form, what remains unsaid carries as much weight as what is spoken. This mode of expression is not the result of simplification, but of density—a gradual unfolding of meaning that invites the viewer into participation.

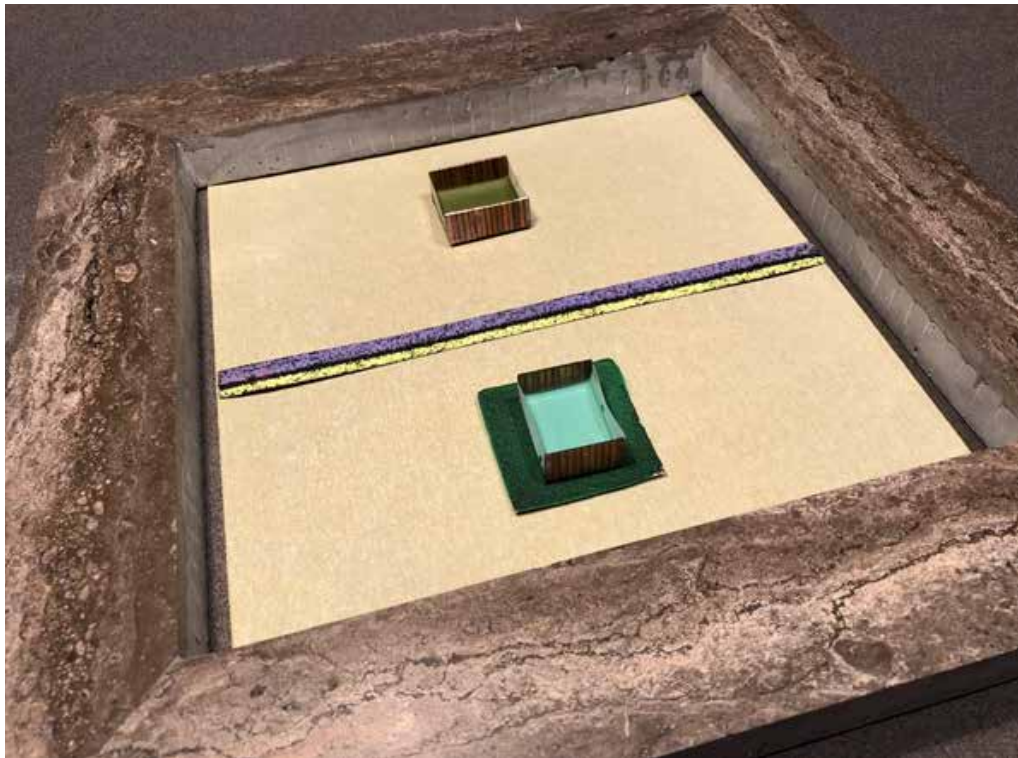
Perhaps it is here that one begins to understand: minimalism, before being a style, is a way of thinking and seeing. And geometry is not a static foundation, but an active field within which this way of seeing comes into being.



Landing the cell | 2017



Means of identity | 2017



Here and There | 2017

#### Names mentioned in the content:

- Mohsen Vaziri Moghaddam (1923–2018)

One of the most influential figures in modern Iranian art, Mohsen Vaziri Moghaddam played a key role in the evolution of contemporary painting in Iran. With a progressive approach, he guided Iranian painting toward abstract and structural expression, contributing significantly to the establishment of modern art discourse in the country. Through his book *Drawing Method*, he also left a lasting legacy in the teaching of the fundamentals of visual arts.

- Massoud Arabshahi (1935–2019)

A prominent figure in modern Iranian art, Massoud Arabshahi transformed geometric abstraction into a shared language between painting and architecture. Through the creation of relief works for interior and urban spaces, as well as architectural façades, he extended his practice beyond the canvas into the scale of space itself. In his work, geometric structure and rhythm are not ornamental, but serve as the fundamental framework for organizing both space and meaning.

## Zubin Amiri

**Z**ubin Amiri is an Iranian artist, architect, and writer. He studied architecture at Shahid Beheshti University in the 1990s and is currently based in the United Arab Emirates. His approach is grounded in moving beyond preconceptions and avoiding predetermined patterns. For him, the path of creation is not the result of external imposition, but rather emerges from an inner process of discovery.

Continuity in making and a persistent search for a personal language have been central to shaping his intellectual and professional world. Amiri has held three solo exhibitions of painting at Golestan Gallery, Hoor Gallery in Tehran, and Basement Gallery in Dubai, and has also participated in several group exhibitions in Dubai. In 2008, he curated the exhibition “Road Collection: Photograph Works of Abbas Kiarostami (2016–1997)” in Dubai.

In 2025, he published the book “Eco-Formed”, which explores a sustainable design approach across different scales—from furniture and products to architectural and urban spaces—focusing on the use of single-material systems. The book is available through Amazon.



# Baruas House - rooms for being

Reza Farashi PhD

## ARCHITECTURE

**T**he «Baruas House» with an area of 220 sq. m. located in Hashtrud city, East Azerbaijan province (North West of Iran).

The main idea of the project was presented according to the client's needs. A clear demarcation between public and private spaces maintains its continuity and fluidity. Accordingly, the architect defined and arranged all the project spaces around itself by designing a «central three-dimensional box» as the organizing element and core. This box connects interior spaces like a centralized joint while maintaining movement and visual fluidity.

In other words, there is a connection between the core and the spaces around it, a dialogue between rigidity and transparency, a vision between solitude and gathering, a trade-off between function and feeling.

Along the central three-dimensional box, inviting gaps connect the living room, dining room, and family areas while providing services. In the vertical direction of the building, two protruding voids are seen, creating meaningful openings, adding spatial depth and diverse sequences to the experience of living in the house.

The central three-dimensional box defines the entrance to the house and connects the outer courtyard to the inner courtyard within the void. In the volumetric section of the building, this connection creates two three-dimensional voids. These two spaces create a beautiful visual connection between the interior spaces, as the interior walls do not extend from the ground floor to the main ceiling. Thus, despite the limited land, the dynamics of the interior space, continuity, and integration of the interior spaces are well introduced.

The overall form and geometry of the building, inspired by six systematic rectangular squares, continues as a pattern in the plan, facade, and even in the rhythm of the roof. The two void spaces in the building, while creating spatial openness, provide simultaneous access to several interior spaces to the outdoors.

**The Baroas house is full of open, closed and semi-open spaces; a place to experience diversity, light, silence and life.**

**A house whose rooms are not just designed for sleeping, but for living — rooms for “being.”**

Baruas is the old name of the castle or fortress of Zahhak. Azhadhak Fortress or Zahhak Fortress (Zahhak) or Narin Qala or Fanaspa with a historical background of more than 2000 years is located 20 kilometers southeast of Hashtrud County in East Azerbaijan Province in Iran. The local name of this historical place is Narin Qala.

The Zahhak Fortress was first studied by a German archaeological team in 1971. The remains of the semi-cylindrical towers called the fortress gates and the covering of the walls, which are made of rectangular stones, indicate that the structure dates back to the Sassanid period. However, the pottery found indicates the sixth and seventh centuries AH. This building was used until the Ismaili period.

The antiquity of the Zahak Fortress dates back to the Parthian and Sassanid periods, and it has been mentioned in history by various names, including Zahak Fortress, Azhdahak Fortress, Qiz Qaleh-e-Si, Dash Qaleh-e-Si, Baruas, Rui-Dej, and Qaleh-e-Gui.





The structure has different elevation levels. This led to one of the levels being considered as the main roof level and the other levels being implemented relative to it. Implementing levels or ceilings of different heights means that either a column must be formed and concreted in one step, anticipating all the beams that will be connected to it later, or the concreting operation must be divided into smaller, more detailed sections.

In order to define the main level and the secondary levels, it was necessary to concentrate the seismic performance of the structure on the main level and separate the secondary levels from the main seismic performance while providing resistance and load-bearing capacity. Accordingly, the adopted solution was to implement the height difference between the secondary levels and the main level in the form of a steel structure. Predicting this part from the beginning, placing the plates buried in the concrete, and then implementing the steel structure on the concrete structure were among the important challenges for the implementation team.

## STRUCTURE

## SPECIFICATION

**Client:** Hadi Ghahramanpour, Parisa Mohammadnejad.

**Contractor:** Mehdi Ghahramanpour.

**Project completion date:** Summer 2026.

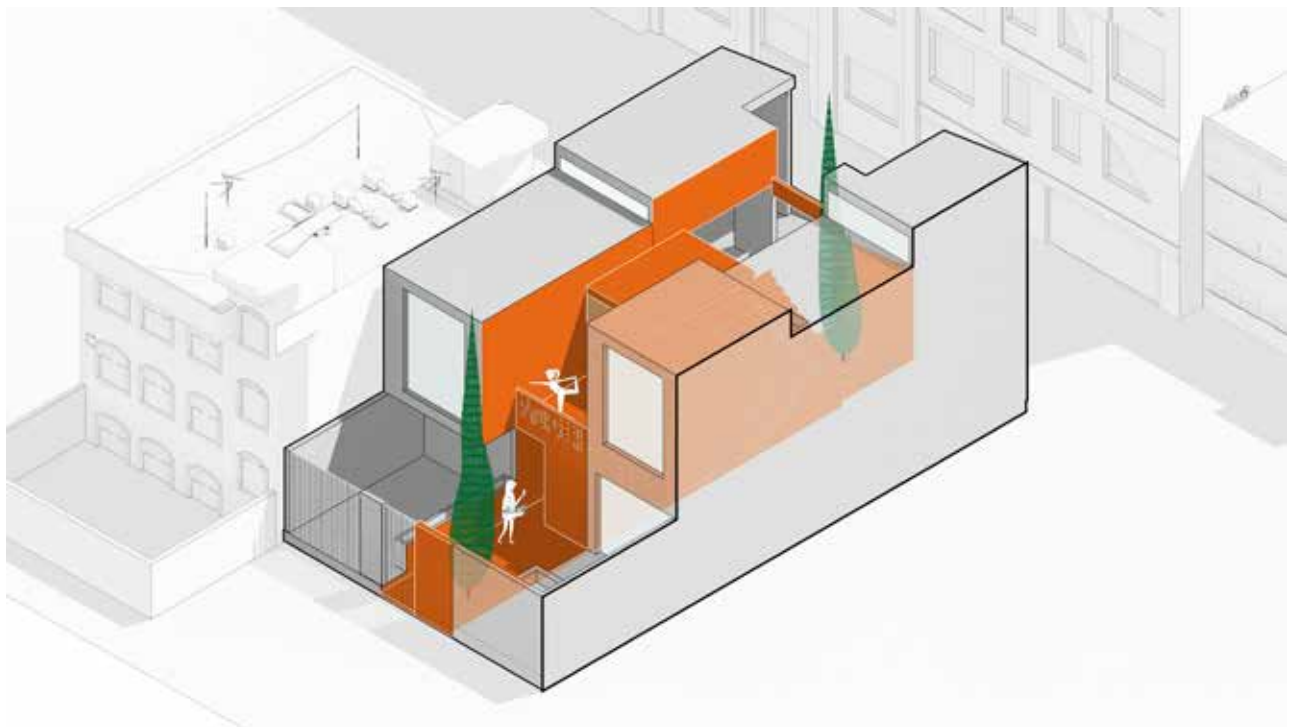
**Architect:** Reza Farashi.

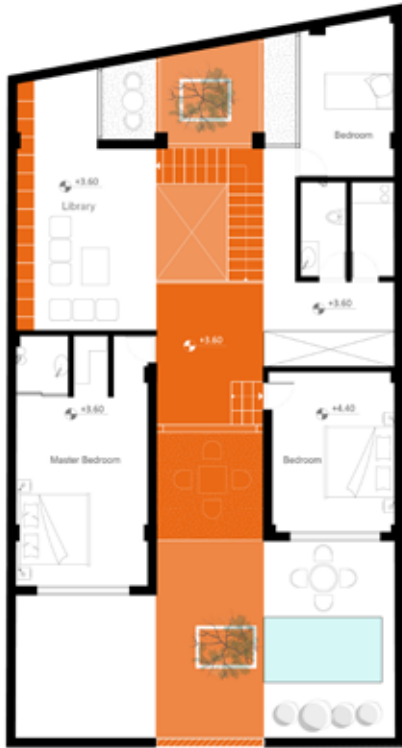
**Associate:** Alireza Shiripour.

**Structure:** Mohsen Varmazyari.

**Rendering and Presentation:** Peyman Nozari.

**Graphic and Drawing:** Shadi Bitaraf.





First Floor



Ground Floor



Section - View





# Aga Khan Award for Architecture

part two  
Winners of 2025

## Prologue

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture is given every three years to projects that set new standards of excellence in architecture, planning practices, historic preservation, and landscape architecture. Needless to say, agreeing to what defines “new standards of excellence” might well consume a jury’s entire meeting time and so the Steering Committee offers this document to the Master Jury to aid in framing their deliberations and discussions of the projects under consideration for this cycle. The Aga Khan Award has a distinct advantage over other design awards in that the process includes on-site reviews of the finalist projects, thereby enabling jury members to experience and evaluate the works in context, rather than judging them on image or reputation. The visits also permit a more profound understanding of a project’s programme, process, and client and community engagement. Finally, these reviews permit a “proof of concept” consideration, given that the success of the effort can be measured by experiencing the project as well as communicating with the project’s beneficiaries, as well as its clients.

Given the role of the on-site reviews, the Award has consistently addressed issues of context and process, with an eye to projects that reimagine processes and empower new constituents. While it may be easier to locate such impacts in projects that are community-based in their origin and modest in their means and execution, the Master Jury evaluate every project in terms of how it reimagines or rearranges economic and social realities, technologies, materials, ecologies, politics, communal opportunities, and even financing. This cycle’s submissions include more cultural projects than office facilities and private residences.



His Highness The Rahim Aga Khan: Chairman  
Portrait: © Aga Khan Development Network / Guillaume Bonn

David Basulto   Yacouba Konaté   Mun Summ Wong   Hassan Radoine   Kabage Karanja



Noura Al Sayeh-Holtrop   Yvonne Farrell   Azra Aksamija   Lucia Allais

### Master JURY

photos: © Aga Khan Trust for Culture / Geraldo Pestalozzi



Meisa Batayneh



Souleymane Bachir Diagne



Sarah M. Whitin



Gülrü Necipoglu



Lesley Lokko



Hashim Sarkis

### STEERING COMMITTEE

Portraits: © Aga Khan Trust for Culture / Justin Knight

# Winners of Aga Khan Award for Architecture - 2025

## Bangladesh

- **Khudi Bari**, in various locations, by Marina Tabassum Architects – a replicable solution built with bamboo and steel for displaced communities affected by climatic and geographic changes. The Jury recognised the project's deep ecological framing, contributing to the global advancement of bamboo as a material.

## China

- **West Wusutu Village Community Centre**, in Hohhot, by Inner Mongolian Grand Architecture Design Co., Ltd – a Centre built from reclaimed bricks that provides social and cultural spaces for residents and artists, while addressing the cultural needs of the local multi-ethnic community, including Hui Muslims. The Jury noted that the project generates a valuable shared and inclusive communal microcosm within a rural human macrocosm.

## Egypt

- **Revitalization of Historic Esna by Takween Integrated Community Development** – a project that addresses cultural tourism challenges through physical interventions, socioeconomic initiatives and innovative urban strategies, transforming a neglected site into a prospering historic city. The Jury acknowledged the ways the project is stimulating a historic urban metabolism to cope with the contemporary challenge of improving human conditions.

## Iran

- **Majara Residence and Community Redevelopment**, in Hormuz Island, by ZAV Architects – a colorful complex whose domes reflect the rainbow island's ochre-rich soils, providing sustainable accommodations for tourists who visit the unique landscape of Hormuz Island. The Jury described the project as a vibrant archipelago of varying programmes that serve to incrementally build an alternative tourism economy.

- **Jahad Metro Plaza**, in Tehran, by KA Architecture Studio – a once dilapidated station transformed into a vibrant urban node for pedestrians. The Jury highlighted the use of local handmade brick as strengthening the connection with Iran's rich architectural heritage, while its warm subtle texture emphasizes the station's status as a new urban monument.

## Pakistan

- **Vision Pakistan**, in Islamabad, by DB Studios – a multistory facility boasting joyful facades inspired by Pakistani and Arab craft, while housing a charity that aims to empower disadvantaged youth through vocational training. The Jury noted that the building not only contains a new type of education, but is full of light, spatially interesting and economically efficient.

## Palestine

- **Wonder Cabinet**, in Bethlehem, by AAU Anastas – a multipurpose, non-profit exhibition and production space built with the input of local artisans and contractors, to become a key hub for craft, design, innovation and learning. The Jury found that the building provides a model for an architecture of connection, rooted in contemporary expressions of national identity, and asserts the importance of cultural production as a means of resistance.





BANGLADESH

Khudi Bari



CHINA

West Wusutu Village Community Centre



Wonder Cabinet

PALESTINE



EGYPT

Revitalization of Historic Esna by Takween Integrated Community Development



Vision Pakistan

PAKISTAN



IRAN

Majara Residence & Community Redevelopment



jahad metro plaza

IRAN

**K**<sup>hudi Bari</sup>  
**V**<sup>arious locations, Bangladesh</sup>

**B**angladesh's chars are a landscape of constantly shifting rivers and sandbars with a population of people living in a permanent state of precarity. Aggravated by climate change, the annual monsoons and river erosion bring frequent floods that destroy homes and livelihoods. In 2018, a self-initiated research project by Marina Tabassum Architects (MTA) into land rights led them to these agrarian communities, and sparked the idea of creating a flexible, affordable, self-build housing solution adapted to their needs. And so the Khudi Bari – Bengali for “Little House” – was born, through extensive consultation with char community members.

Its simple, space-frame structure using chevron-braced bamboo is joined together with specially designed steel connectors fabricated in a Dhaka foundry that has a long working association with the architects. The upper storey, essential to ensure storage and sleeping space even during floods, has front and rear openings for cross ventilation. The roof is of corrugated tin produced in Chittagong chosen by the community in preference over thatch, for its durability and reusability. Wood-framed panels are provided for the upper facade, while the lower walls are left to the owner-users' initiative: from grasses or sticks to jute fabric or salvaged corrugated metal sheets. Allocated by the communities themselves to those in greatest need, the basic Khudi Bari kits cost the equivalent of only us450\$ – a fraction of the roughly us2,500s starting price of commonly available wooden prefabricated houses already being produced in Dhaka.

Ongoing monitoring assesses the structures' performance over time, and MTA established the non-profit Foundation for Architecture and Community Equity (FACE) to facilitate their take-up. By early 2025, over seventy-eight structures had been erected at various locations. Owners attest that they fulfil their promise of being buildable within three days and dismantlable within three hours. Some have already withstood several cycles of flooding and/or removal to new sites.



MTA have also successfully scaled up the modular system to create several strikingly and thoughtfully designed women-led or women-oriented facilities in Bangladesh's vast Rohingya refugee camps, whose predominantly Muslim communities have fled persecution in neighbouring Myanmar.

Fast-growing and abundantly available across Bangladesh, the bamboo is treated in the char communities by soaking in water for twenty-four hours. In the Rohingya camps, it is treated with borax and boric acid to protect against fungal decay and insect infestation, in a special facility created by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

©Aga Khan Trust for Culture / City Syntax «F. M. Faruque Abdullah Shawon, H. M. Fozla Rabby Apurbo»

The Khudi Bari project has been granted the Award for developing a flexible system that addresses global challenges with vernacular solutions, reframed through a contemporary lens to evolve and scale up so as to deliver a wider, regional impact.

Based on a module of elementary geometry, its rationalisation – paired with the adaptation of vernacular bamboo techniques – puts humanity before aesthetics, and it is humble enough to allow for an open- source use that enables communities to build and localise by themselves. Its easy and rapid deployment and disassembly provide an engaging solution for the nomadic condition of the climate-displaced communities in the flood-plains of Bangladesh, for whom it was first designed, already impacting the lives of hundreds of families.

As it grows into larger-scale communal projects, the Khudi Bari maintains the simplicity of its structure while still delivering grace and beauty, reminding us that design for survival doesn't exclude architectural quality. Thanks to the flexibility and open-endedness of its geometry, the design allows for the individual module to scale from a single shelter into collective communal buildings, widening its impact from personal dignity to social infrastructure, in the form of classrooms, community kitchens, and humanitarian aid centres.

The project has a deep ecological framing, contributing to the global advancement of bamboo as a material. A living, regenerative resource widely available across the Bamboo Belt in the Global South, it is increasingly being adopted as perception changes from that of a precarious material to a viable, scalable, sustainable solution, delivering value that goes beyond style.

Clear and powerful architectural ideas have the possibility to reach and inspire others worldwide, but then have to be downloaded into specific contexts to be built with local resources. Ideas can and should go global, but materials need to stay local.

The Khudi Bari project is profoundly optimistic, as it reframes the role that architecture can and should play in times of difficult global realities – as a hopeful, actionable, and human-centred solution that is grounded and systemic.



# West Wusutu Village Community Centre Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, China

The long-standing presence of China's Hui Muslim community around the Inner Mongolian capital Hohhot is evidenced by its early seventeenth-century Great Mosque – one of eleven mosques in the city. However, West Wusutu Village, adjacent to Hohhot and officially recognized as an exemplary «Ethnic Minority Characteristic Village» of pluralistic coexistence, has long lacked public spaces such as a community centre or a mosque, capable of accommodating the everyday life of its multi-ethnic community within reasonable walking distance. Many of the village's working-age natives migrate to the city. Conversely, its abundant apricot blossoms and mountain scenery have long brought a regular influx of visiting artists.

A government rural revitalisation initiative initiated in 2018 saw several vacant vernacular buildings transformed into premises for artists, while others were demolished. Among the architects involved was Zhang Pengju, whose rapport with residents made him the natural choice when they secured permission for a cultural and social space to be built on the site of a former Buddhist temple. Villagers and artists together raised the necessary funds. The project took just seven months from design to completion, coming in below even the modest budget that had been set. Instrumental in its low cost was the approach of building it almost entirely of bricks salvaged from the earlier demolitions.

A neighbourhood café and restaurant opens directly onto the side street. The rest of the facilities are accessed via a narrow entrance corridor that leads straight into the off-centre circular courtyard. Forming the heart of the plan's sophisticated geometry, its sunken central area can be turned into a temporary pool through a mechanism to block the rainwater drainage channel. From the courtyard, visitor circulation is fluid throughout, with no solid divisions between spaces. Yet, it is choreographed in such a way that outsiders coming for cultural events or art exhibitions are unlikely to disturb the locals' communal activities – mahjong or cards for the older generation, pottery for the youth.



Breaking into the courtyard's circular shape, a staircase leads to a roof terrace where seating steps invite social gathering, and from which people can watch performances in the courtyard below. This is also a place for children's play, and the forms of the four ventilation towers – which are connected to an underground cooling system – make this open space fun and intriguing, as well as signalling the centre's presence from a distance.

The centre has already boosted the local economy by attracting more tourists and sparking the opening of new guesthouses and restaurants.

©Aga Khan Trust for Culture / Dou Yujun «photographer»

## JURY CITATION

**T**he West Wusutu Village Community Centre shifts the paradigm of contemporary architectural design beyond object-based and aesthetic end-results, orienting it towards translating users' daily community needs into a well-conceived architectural vehicle. The dynamics of this project significantly enhance social interaction, cultural experience, and environmental resilience. Thus, by integrating diverse users and embracing a high multifunctional articulation through its fluid spaces, the centre has generated a valuable shared and inclusive communal microcosm within a rural human macrocosm.

The project's architectural performance is based around integrating multiple communal activities not through rigid functional and confined spaces, but rather through a permeating circular courtyard at its core. Beyond its tangible form, this courtyard orchestrates continuous circulation and orientation to different, openly linked rooms. With a ramp linking the ground level and the rooftop as a continuous public space, the architectural ensemble ingeniously rethinks notions of public and private spaces as well as rigid level boundaries.

Accordingly, it demonstrates how sensitive and sensible design can be in a rural open environment, by encapsulating villagers' communal interactions in a compact physical envelope to generate inclusiveness, resilience, sustainability, and well-being. The project pursues a spatial-articulation strategy which has been painstakingly translated via a material form, yet being careful not to fall into a dichotomy of space versus function.

In addition to its highly optimised form, the structure presents a transcendent, impactful landmark in the village's landscape. The architecture takes advantage of the beauty of its natural environs, with its views towards the Daqing Mountains, while remaining anchored to the site by surviving trees as a marker for villagers' collective memory.

In terms of tectonics and feasibility, the West Wusutu Village Community Centre embraces a clear, non-alienating geometry where horizontal and vertical permeability are exemplary. Whereas the cooling towers enhance the overall aesthetics of the envelope, they also link the ventilation systems to enhance passive performance. In addition, the large-scale reuse of bricks conveys a critical message of sustainability – especially in a rural context, where nature is predominant.



# RE

Evitalisation of Historic Esna  
Esna, Egypt

**L**ocated by the Nile about 60 kilometres south of Luxor, Esna is best known for its temple devoted to the ram-headed Ancient Egyptian creator god Khnum. The small city's dense and richly layered urban fabric from the Graeco-Roman, Coptic, Islamic/Fatimid, and Mamluk-Ottoman periods through to nineteenth- and twentieth-century vernacular domestic architecture – testifies to millennia as a commercial and cultural hub. Yet its entire historic core had been earmarked by the government for demolition, left dangerously fragile through decay since a river barrage built in the 1990s had caused a 95 per cent reduction in the cruise-ship tourism on which it had come to depend.

Egypt's national planning body invited the Cairo-based urban development company Takween, experienced in participatory upgrading, to offer an alternative vision. The strategy they devised to save this precious living heritage site is one of understated yet transformative urban acupuncture: small interventions in the living urban tissue, combining cultural sustainability with inclusive economic development.

The initial phase, titled *Rediscovering Esna's Cultural Heritage Assets (RECHA)*, received USAID funding – a first for an Egyptian-led cultural heritage initiative. It focused on restoring and/or adaptively reusing some twenty key historic structures, employing the region's traditional techniques – from mud brick to lime plastering, terracotta tiles, and fine wood-carving – and using salvaged materials wherever possible. Among these structures are the *Wakalat al-Geddawi* – an eighteenth-century caravanserai that had been closed to the public since 1951 – and the vast *Qisariyya Market*, with its 144 shops, frequented by locals and visitors alike. The Temple of Khnum was also upgraded, improving accessibility and public services to the site that is sunken some 10 metres below today's ground level.

A second phase, *Value Investment in Sustainable Integrated Tourism in Esna (VISIT-Esna)*, went on to establish a broader socio-economic urban revitalisation framework by developing small and micro businesses alongside tourism services and cultural branding. Two of the new businesses are entirely female-led – the *Okra kitchen restaurant*, serving distinctive local dishes that visitors will not find in other parts of Egypt, and a *woodworking workshop* – empowering many women who previously had no paid employment.



A model of bottom-up sustainable development, the project has reversed Esna's decline and created hundreds of lasting jobs for locals, revitalising age-old crafts and passing them on to a new generation. Since its launch, visitor numbers have tripled.

©Aga Khan Trust for Culture / Ahmed Salem «photographer

The initiative to revitalise historic Esna goes beyond the usual limits of an urban conservation project that is formally framed in advance and instead presents a bottom-up strategy through an inclusive, socially structured programme to gradually improve the heritage environment. Hence, residents play a major role in maintaining the urban synergy through its living heritage, sparking sustainable regenerative momentum in what had become dilapidated built fabric.

By restoring or reusing buildings – commercial, residential, and spiritual – the project is stimulating a whole historic urban metabolism to cope with the contemporary challenge of improving human conditions and working infrastructure for craftspeople. Its community-driven initiatives are a catalyst for upgrading the local economy through small and micro enterprises. Accordingly, the project echoes local techne and know-how through innovative small and accumulative results to actively generate the conservation of the urban core, the city’s identity, cultural dynamism, and economic resilience.

In doing so, the project clearly shifts the paradigm of urban conservation to another level, prioritising the role of residents’ collective intelligence in transforming their challenging and derelict built environment. Rather than only addressing monuments and other tangible historic fabric, the focus is also on intangible cultural capital as leverage to revitalise both the material and immaterial dimensions.

The key gain from the revitalisation of historic Esna is how it reactivates historic spaces through incremental and accumulative actions to synergise the social, cultural, environmental, and economic potentials through the community’s ingenuity. Thus, it introduces social innovation as a creative tool for urban upgrading, such as the Okra women-run initiative for gender inclusion and local economic growth.

With its highly participative approach towards urban heritage conservation, the project became the first “conservation plan” for a non-monumental urban area to be approved by the Government of Egypt. Unprecedented in its combination of adaptive reuse with community empowerment while stimulating the local economy, it could bring balance to Egypt’s otherwise more formal heritage conservation strategies and policies.”



**A**fifth of global oil supplies are shipped via the Strait of Hormuz. Long plagued by the political and military tensions that come with such a strategic position, Hormuz Island's population of under 6,000 people were living mainly from fishing and illegal goods trafficking. Recognising its potential for eco-tourism, in 2008 a group of Iranian artists led by Ali Rezvani launched an annual "Soil Carpet" land-art event on the island using natural ochres from its spectacularly colourful mountains and valleys. Unfortunately, this did not bring the hoped-for economic boost, tending only to attract day-trippers and backpackers due to the basic nature of available accommodations.

Seeking a more structured strategy, they turned to the Tehrani artistic producer Ehsan Rasoulof, who brought a multidisciplinary team of experts on board, including ZAV Architects. The new approach, also known as "Presence in Hormuz", began with gradual small interventions of architecture and urbanism, to empower the community to develop organically.

So as to encourage interaction between islanders and outsiders, the Rong Cultural Centre was then built next to the dock where tourists arrive. It is formed of two domes – one containing a café serving south-Iranian dishes, the other a visitor centre – connected by a strip of stepped seating as a social gathering place or vantage spot for open-air cultural activities. The construction technique, known as "superadobe", involved layering bags filled with local earth, sand, and a little cement for cohesion, here reinforced with steel and covered in a weather-resistant, cement-based finish. Labour-intensive but with low material cost, it is a method that favours employment opportunities and was executed by locals trained on the job.

The same construction method was used to create the initiative's largest element, the Majara Residence: a gateless complex comprising 200 domes of varying sizes, their shapes recalling both the mountains and the local vernacular water storage structures. Their colours, too, echo the landscapes – although with artificial paint, avoiding overuse of natural resources. Interconnected in clusters with pathways meandering around and over them, they host accommodations for up to seventy-five guests and ten artist residencies, plus service spaces and open-to-all functions from restaurants and art/craft retail to a worship space and a public library.



Still ongoing, the project now includes Typeless, a plain, flexible hub used mainly for activities related to monitoring the overall initiative's impact, and Ozar, an old boat fragment transformed into a mobile film projection facility amongst new elements.

## JURY CITATION

Set within a breathtaking geological context that dates back millions of years, these projects on Hormuz Island, Iran, are framed in relation to a vast mountain range typified by colourful mineral and salt deposits. So, while being intricately geo-referenced to the site, they are meaningfully embedded within the social and cultural fabric of the land.

The project can be understood as a vibrant and colourful archipelago of varying programmes that serve to incrementally define a truly alternative model for tourism in this context and beyond. Following on from its first new structure – the simple viewing and interpretation organisation called Rong Cultural Centre – the Majara Residence presents an offer within a growing global industry. Choosing not to follow a hyper-luxurious and resource-demanding typology, it leans instead towards a pluralist and inclusive framework that counters excess and becomes part of a community-driven evolutionary process of growth.

Predominantly built using a sandbag “superadobe” structural system, alongside more conventional building processes, the project exploits knowledge systems that leverage both local and wider global expertise, realised with the community. It complements the remoteness of Hormuz with a comprehensive off-grid suite of solutions that reduce pressure on the island’s limited energy and water resources.

As well as the new structures, which include the “Typeless” building used largely for activities related to monitoring the scheme’s impact, the ongoing urban acupuncture interventions in the town of Hormuz are another key strength of the initiative.

While the Majara Residence project has won many awards and has received worldwide attention on social media, what has tended to remain unsaid until now is how it sits at the intersection between geology, community life, and tourism – an industry which can be so destructively globalising. In its deep sensitivity to context, this project exemplifies how architecture can become a formidable force of optimism and rigorous resolve to shift the social, cultural, and material pendulum.



Jahad Metro Plaza  
Tehran, Iran

Unchecked, car-oriented urban expansion in the four decades since the Iranian Revolution had seriously diminished Tehran's liveability, and the role that public spaces have played in past political demonstrations had fed the authorities' reluctance to invest in them. Aiming to foster a "pedestrian-oriented city" through multiple small-scale interventions, a group of urban specialists, together with members of the previous municipal administration, embarked on a project titled "Meydangah" to identify and activate underused spaces that could be made into vibrant urban nodes. One of the 100 sites that they pinpointed was Jahad Metro Plaza. They sought out young architecture practices for the commissions – in this case KA Architecture Studio, led by Mohammad Khavarian.

The original idea was simply to redesign the pavement in front of the metro entrance, but the architects successfully argued the case for a more impactful intervention that also involved replacing the entrance building. Located at the intersection of Valiasr Street, which runs north-south through the city's historic core, Dr Fatemi Street and Ghazali Street, with its buildings dating back to 1980s urban planning initiatives, the triangular site offered a prime location for a structure that would resonate with its cultural and historical setting.

An assembly of interlocking barrel vaults, both monumental and welcoming, has transformed the metro entrance into an all-weather social hub that buffers traffic noise. In a series of indoor or outdoor spaces that offer varying levels of intimacy, people can take a restful pause, gather to chat, or listen to street musicians. Differences in vault heights make the building permeable to both air and light, while establishing strong visual and functional connections across the site levels.

Construction was completed economically in just seven months, using a modular steel-mesh framework on which traditional bricks, handmade in the primary contractor's local workshop, were applied – a familiar technique requiring no specialist skills. Subtle variations in the brickwork reference Iran's history of geometric brick patterning. For resistance to vandalism, there are no loose furnishings, and lighting is embedded in ceilings and walls.



The plaza in front is organised for street vendors, including Afghan immigrants who previously operated illegally and can now continue to work in a safe, officially approved setting.

© Aga Khan Trust for Culture / Deed Studio «photographer»

## JURY C I T A T I O N

**W**ith 159 stations and a length of over 250 kilometres, the Tehran Metro is one of the most extensive in the world, carrying millions of passengers every day. As critical urban infrastructure, the functionality and appeal of the Metro are central concerns for the municipality, the client for this project.

The redevelopment of the station entrance transformed a once conventional and modest access point into an open public space: a plaza that encourages passage, encounters and events. Unlike the former structure, which closed off stairways at ground level, the new design opens the station to the sky and neighbourhood, converting former stair areas into a pedestrian zone with direct street access and improving accessibility.

The wide facade enhances ventilation and provides a welcoming space for public interaction, informal commerce and urban life, acknowledging the need of metro passengers for space beyond transit.

The project's architecture is characterised by its striking volume and integration of vaults, arches and circular forms, which reference Iran's rich civilisational heritage. The use of brick further strengthens this historical connection, and its warm, subtle texture emphasises the station's status as a new urban monument. At the same time, the station blends in with its contemporary surroundings, standing out among the newer buildings that frame the site.

This renewed identity imbues the station with energy and distinction, establishing it as a landmark within the neighbourhood and the wider city. Its strategic location further enhances its potential to become embedded in the collective memory of Tehran's residents and visitors.

Aesthetically, the design draws upon Iranian architectural traditions. Daylight penetrates through large openings in the ceiling, illuminating the interior and improving the station's environmental quality. The widened entrance brings in light and air, creating a sense of openness and flow.

Through its subtle strength, attention to heritage and craft, and its aim to revive pedestrian space and social interaction, the project exemplifies the role of architecture in shaping public spaces as living dialogues between history, people and ideas.



Vision Pakistan  
Islamabad, Pakistan

Moved by the plight of non-literate young men let down by the system and subject to depression, violence, and/or drug abuse, Rushda Tariq Qureshi decided to devote her zakat donations (tithing) to helping turn lives around through training in tailoring. Relatives and friends joined her, and with their pooled resources she established the Vision Pakistan initiative.

After fifteen years operating in rented office spaces, she was able to commission this custom-designed facility in Ghauri Town, a post2000- development about 10 kilometres from Islamabad. Alongside the vocational training, its holistic year-long programme supplies meals, teaches literacy, and uses daily chores to instil skills for social independence such as critical thinking, time management, cleanliness, and tolerance, while also encouraging a peace-focused understanding of Islam.

Qureshi's chosen architect was Mohammad Saifullah Siddiqui, who had designed her family home. Together they swiftly agreed on an efficient plan to house five flexible classrooms, a dining room, recreation spaces, management offices, exhibition areas, two shops, and a rooftop prayer area with a student-maintained kitchen garden. The shops offer students the chance to take their first commercial orders, and some spaces can be rented out, for financial sustainability. The structural system – in-situ concrete frame with brick infill – is seismic-resistant. A triple-height staircase atrium, with a tall anchor tree and other greenery, unifies the spaces and, along with operable windows, helps drive passive ventilation.

Although Qureshi first suggested Pakistan's historic brick architecture as stylistic inspiration, Siddiqui drew primarily from Islamabad's 1960s modernism. The facades are a layered grid. Pierced window screens (jaalis) lend privacy and an element of joy. Repeated in the stairwell, these screens were locally made and powder-coated in colours that reference neighbourhood vernacular features. Each pattern is symbolic: the blue jaalis, of Islam; the green ones, of Islamabad's modernist buildings; the yellow rattan-like ones, of craft; and the plain-weave red ones, of the school itself.



The care in detailing is exceptional for such a low-cost project. The grid continues inside through fine strips of marble inlaid in the hard-wearing terrazzo flooring, and the entrance steps have marble trim – all locally donated offcuts. Even the ceiling-mounted electrical conduits align with the same grid.

With forty to fifty male students aged sixteen to thirty-five benefiting from the school each year, Qureshi hopes to extend her initiative's reach by building a women's facility on an adjacent empty site.

© Aga Khan Trust for Culture / Usman Saqib Zuberi «photographer»

## JURY CITATION

**T**wo people – one an experienced educator, the other a young practising architect – work together and invent a new wellspring of respect, a new skills training centre, a place where young people feel that they matter, where not-yet-discovered talents will be trained and encouraged.

The educator, Rushda Tariq Qureshi, had a vision: to educate, to involve the youth, and to form a community where students will feel useful and valued.

The architect, Mohammad Saifullah Siddiqui of DB Studios, was trusted with the task of understanding Rushda's vision. Together they transformed a plot of land close to public transport and invented a building that would not only contain a new type of education, but be full of light, spatially interesting, economically efficient, and highly distinct.

The six-storey building's two lowest floors, with their future-proofing storefronts, are designed to relate to the major street. Arranged across the storeys above, the cared-for, plant-filled classrooms and prayer hall interlink and are visually connected through the -10metre-high atrium. Students can see each other, benefiting from being able to observe each other's training and progress, aware that they are part of a caring community. The roof-level dining area and kitchen provide precious opportunities for further personal development beyond the vocational programme.

The life within this three-dimensional cube is held by strategically important environmental values: good natural light, cross ventilation, solar protection, low maintenance costs, and robust materials.

The architectural expression of this new building is provided by its concrete screen, held in front of the two street facades. This applied grid of 9 squares high and 10 squares long both protects the interior and expresses this contemporary building to the city. It does this by reinterpreting the familiar and historic jaalis, metal screens, both in various geometric patterns and in different colours. This combination of interpreting history to provide a visually controlled, yet joyful facade gives this building an easily recognisable and distinct surface



**W**onder Cabinet  
Bethlehem, Palestine

**E**xploring and promoting new forms of making based on Palestine's rich but threatened heritage of both craft and industrial production, the Wonder Cabinet is a non-profit cultural and educational platform established and designed by local architects Elias and Yousef Anastas. Despite being known primarily for their work in stone, they here sought material anonymity by using a simple, rough-finished concrete grid frame. Glazed, extensively openable front and rear facades, along with a largely open-plan interior with just a few glass partitions, ensure transparency throughout and natural climate control through airflow. The focus is entirely on the making, as a means to support fulfilling livelihoods that sustain Palestinians' presence here in the West Bank, and on the landscape setting.

Nestled into a hillside at the edge of Bethlehem – a city that previously lacked any dedicated contemporary arts venue – the building looks out over the Al-Karkafeh Valley. Its views towards the Jordanian mountains on the horizon are interrupted by an Israeli settlement on a once-forested hilltop in the near distance.

A giant mural by the artists Somnath Bhatt and Ayed Arafeh adorns its west elevation. The street facade gives access to the upper level, housing a café and a shop showcasing locally made products. Between the two, a diagonal void that cuts through and connects all three levels draws the gaze downwards, offering a sweeping perspective of the multiple activities taking place inside, and on to the valley beyond.

The architects' studio and several other open offices are also accommodated on the upper floor. The mezzanine below hosts a production area, artist workstations, a radio station, and a restaurant. The lower level mainly houses a performance and production space, with facilities for various craft activities, from wood- and metalworking to casting, textiles, and photography. An outdoor patio offers a relaxed spot for socialising or informal meetings.



The only enclosed areas of the rear facade are the masonry-walled sound studio and the metal-fronted staircase bay, which has two conical protruding porthole windows. Crafted by Mohammad Husni, who specialises in steelwork for factory silos, these windows are angled to frame particular parts of the surrounding landscape. Furniture, lighting, and other details are likewise made by local artisans, including the prominent rooftop installation by Bishara al-Hadweh, of staggered stainless-steel letters spelling out “WONDER CABINET” that gently spin – weather-vane-like – on tailor-made ball-bearing mechanisms.

© Aga Khan Trust for Culture / Mikaela Burstow «photographer»

## JURY CITATION

Initiated by the architects to fill a gap in the cultural offerings for youth in the city, this project expands the agency of architects to the roles of client, designer, cultural practitioner, and activist.

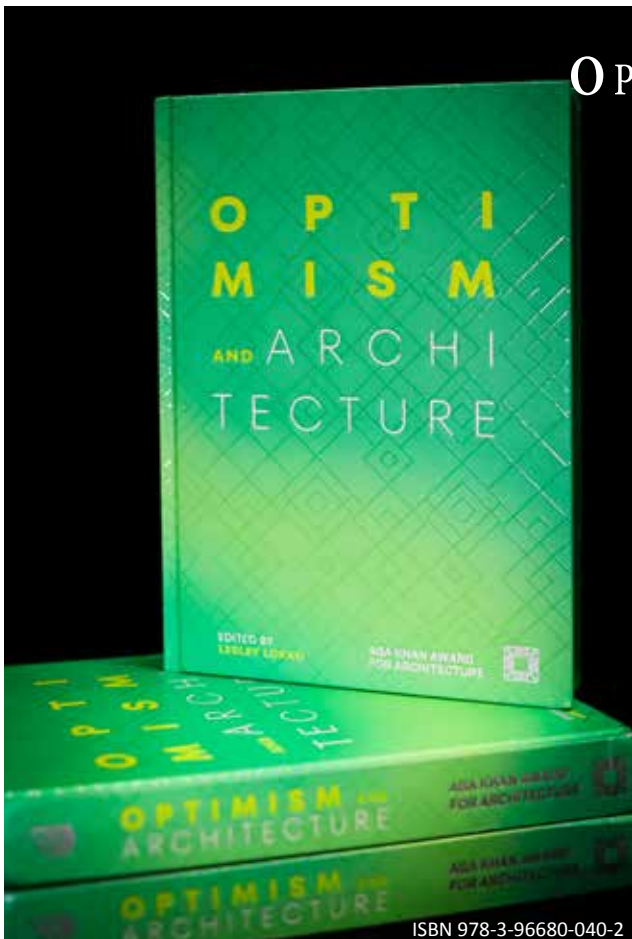
Designed as an open, flexible, and transparent beacon of cultural production and resilience in the Al- Karkafeh Valley, the spatial organisation of the building facilitates exchange, dialogue, and community- building. With a mixed programme of artists' studios, production spaces, a radio station, a restaurant, and the architects' offices spread over different platforms, the cross-sectional void traversing its three floors encourages physical and visual connections, both within the building and towards the surrounding landscape.

Borrowing from the contemporary language of the concrete frame construction prevalent in Bethlehem and its environs, the project demonstrates that spatial complexity and richness can be achieved through the judicious application of standardised construction methods and minimal material use. The concrete grid becomes an inhabited infrastructure of cultural production as well as a domestic monument – anonymous in its expression and scale, yet monumental in its impact. The building manages to both blend in with the other buildings in the city through its architectural expression and stand out through its transparency as an open and welcoming gesture in the landscape. Its bare concrete frame is complemented by locally produced artisanal elements such as the spinning signage, portholes, and murals that celebrate contemporary Palestinian production.

Firmly nestled within a deeply charged setting, the Wonder Cabinet offers new horizons: reintroducing making, music, wonder, and joy in the city. By imagining both the cultural institution and the physical structure that hosts it, the architects have created a building that transcends its immediate political context, providing a model for an architecture of connection that is rooted in contemporary expressions of national identity and asserts the importance of cultural production as a means of resistance.



# OPTIMISM and ARCHITECTURE



**T**he volume *Optimism and Architecture* presents the awarded and shortlisted projects for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2025. The book explores the myriad ways in which optimism and hope are fundamentally linked to better design outcomes, highlighting architecture's capacity to serve as a catalyst for pluralism, social transformation, cultural dialogue, and climate-responsive design. Unpublished material offers deep insights into the broad social, political, and cultural contexts that shape our built environments. The publication sheds light on the extensive jury and in-depth review processes for which the Award is renowned. Through essays and conversations, this volume examines how architecture can reinvigorate tradition through thoughtful innovation, connect local practices with global conversations, touch the earth lightly yet profoundly, and create inclusive spaces where diverse cultures and histories converge. Architecture is considered not only as a physical structure but also as a cultural practice that shapes public life, sparks social engagement, and reimagines heritage and identity in a rapidly changing world. This publication provides an optimistic and vivid portrait of contemporary architecture's role in fostering more inclusive and interconnected futures.

**This book was prepared and compiled with the contribution of:**

Azra Aksamija, Lucia Allais, David Basulto, Farrokh Derakhshani, Yvonne Farrell, Hanif Kara, Yacouba Konate, Lesley Lokko, Raafat Majzoub, Deen Sharp, and Cristina Steingraber.



photos: © Aga Khan Trust for Culture / Geraldo Pestalozzi

**Master JURY and STEERING COMMITTEE**

This monograph was conceived by **Farrokh Derakhshani, Nadia Simeon, Lesly Lokko** on behalf of the Steering Committee of the 2025 Aga Khan Award for Architecture, in collaboration with **Cristina Staingraber**.

-Project descriptions were assembled by **Abigail Grater**, based on reports prepared by the 2025 On-site Project Reviewers.

-Documentation materials were compiled and reviewed by **Isabelle Griffiths, Lobna Montasser, Nina Saouter, and Nadia Simeon**.

-**Editor:** Lesley Lokko

-**Co-editor:** Cristina Staingraber

-**Project Management:** Isabelle Griffiths, Nadia Simeon, Cristina Staingraber

-**Assistant Project Management:** Lisa Luksch, Silke Martini

-**Copyediting:** Dawn Michelle d'Atri, Abigail Grater

-**Image Editing:** Julia Wagner

-**Graphic Design:** Julia Wagner, grafikanstalt

-**Reproductions:** Optische Werke Hamburg GbR, Germany

-**Production:** Sonja Broderdrop

-**Printing and Bindigb:** DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg GmbH, Altenburg, Germany

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Published by  
 ArchiTangle GmbH  
 Meierottostrasse 1  
 10719 Berlin  
 Germany

www.architangle.com



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Research & Interview Group

# Englisb