His Highness the Aga Khan on the projects recognized by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture

by NANOWISDOMS ARCHIVE

Philip Jodidio: Many of the projects selected for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture have put an emphasis on the well-being of people. Is the Award not more about the well-being of people than it is about architecture in the sense usually used by the professional community, particularly in the West?

Aga Khan: Yes, I think that is correct. The Award was born out of concern for the quality of life, rather than just the professional dynamics of architecture as it has been known in the Western world. In fact, we saw that as a moral obligation. Had we restricted this notion only to parts of the developing world which were “architectured”, we would have been dealing with five per cent of the buildings.

The vast majority of buildings in the developing world are not “architectured” buildings in the sense of the Western profession. That does not mean that quality buildings do not happen. They happen through a whole series of different processes, and not just the architectural process. The inherited knowledge of builders is remarkable. There is a whole body of inherited knowledge in developing countries, and in the Islamic world in particular, which is not driven by Western definitions of architecture.

When the Award started, the question arose about whether we were talking about that small window of “architectured” buildings in this enormous environment or whether we were talking about the whole process of change of that environment? This was an issue that was debated extensively by people involved with the Award, in the Steering Committee in particular.

Very early on there was consensus that the Age Khan Award could not be just for “architectured” buildings, it had to be an award for quality buildings no matter what the process of their creation. We were looking at bringing those processes on board and enhancing them, rather than saying there is a divide between the professionally trained
architect and the builder who comes out of a traditional society, who is a fantastic artist, but who may not have all the technical niceties of the modern architect. The Award was very definitely an initiative to recognise the processes of building quality.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 interview with Philip Jodidio, 'The Process of Change' (London, United Kingdom)

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