

INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS

Progress is hostage to innovation. Incremental improvements on past forms or solutions seldom respond to the needs of tomorrow. They do not possess the liberating contribution that innovative concepts can make in rethinking the content of our evolving world. Innovation requires breaks with convention that are seldom born in perfection. In their enactment, new concepts often fall short of their ambition precisely because they are untried. But this in no way undermines the value of innovative concepts in themselves, for through the risk of implementing a new idea, a better world might be possible. Innovators are risk takers who challenge us to rethink what we have long taken for granted. They must be recognised for their contributions, which are arguably far more important than just another well-functioning building.

To this end, the Master Jury identified four projects whose innovations deserve to be recognised with an award, even if their execution is frequently far from perfect. For the Muslim world today, indeed the entire world, the creative leaps of imagination, the daring to think what is unthinkable within the confines of conventional wisdom, provide us with avenues of possibility to reinterpret past experience in the creation of future environments.

The Mosque of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara is a direct challenge to the iconography and siting of mosques in Turkey. The mosque is modestly integrated with the parliament complex rather than aggrandised, and the minaret is simply abstracted from two squat balconies and echoed by a tree. The qibla wall is open to a meditative garden, reminding us that Muslims can pray anywhere. This challenge to the inherited conventional iconography of the mosque opens an important door for architects to provide new symbolism in the built expression of mosques.

The Alliance Franco-Sénégalaise in Kaolack, Senegal, raises important questions about the role of ornament in the age of media. It reintroduces ornament as 'text', which users of the building endow with their own references and connotations. Rather than imitating or illustrating traditional symbolic forms, this project attempts to transform these signs into a new kind of architectural text that is at once aesthetic, ornamental and symbolic. Here architecture is transformed from a background and receptacle for ornament and imagery to being the figural ornament itself at a time when we are being bombarded by images in the all pervasive media.

The re-forestation of the Middle East Technical University campus in Ankara is innovative in the scale and boldness of vision required to redress the impact of urbanism on ecology and nature. The vast scope of the project – the planting of 33 million trees over several decades, patient restoration of more than 250 species of fauna and 150 species of flora and the reintegration of wilderness into the fibre of a growing metropolis – pioneers new relationships between cities and nature in this era of growing urbanisation.

As a counterpoint to the macro-scale of the Middle East Technical University re-forestation project, the landscaping of the Jakarta airport shows the potential of new relations with nature in even the most functional High Tech spaces. By landscaping the air side of the terminal, as well as the land side, the project challenges architects to search for a proper balance between landscaping, nature and built form.

Each of these four innovative projects opens avenues for further research and essential service to the community concerned with the built form and our evolving environment.