



Evaluation of the Design Criteria of Women Architects in the Aga Khan Award

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Abstract

The Aga Khan Architecture Awards have played a significant role in the field of architecture by prioritizing projects that benefit society and promote sustainability. However, considering the male-dominated architectural environment in the Middle East, further examination of the contributions of female architects who have received this award constitutes the primary area of concern for this study. This research aims to examine the projects for which female architects have received the Aga Khan Architecture Award, their design approaches, prominent features, and the nature of the awards. Additionally, it examines the architects' countries, educational backgrounds, and economic conditions to assess their contributions to the spaces and cities they inhabit. The main aim of the study is to reveal the impact of award-winning projects led by female architects in the Middle East on cities and communities, while also raising awareness of gender representation in architecture by highlighting women's achievements within a traditionally male-dominated professional context. In this study, six projects were selected from among those that won or were shortlisted for the Aga Khan Architecture Awards, featuring women as the sole authors. These projects were systematically evaluated based on the criteria of contextual connectivity, community engagement, cultural sensitivity, and provided amenities, as established by Moscatelli, Raffa, and Ulusoy Shipstone. It aims to highlight and make visible the achievements and awards of women in the architectural world. By doing so, it seeks to encourage and present role models for other women in the architecture field.

1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture is not only a discipline that produces space; it also contributes to the construction of social memory, identity, and cultural continuity. However, among the creators of this powerful field, women have long been underrepresented [1,2,3]. In the social and cultural context, particularly within Islamic geography, the role of women in architectural production has been limited; their visibility has only begun to increase in recent years [4,5]. This has resulted in women's contributions to architectural history and professional practice being insufficiently documented and critically evaluated. In this context, the Aga Khan Awards for Architecture have become an essential platform for women architects to gain visibility by rewarding projects that highlight not only aesthetic and technical achievements but also the social function of architecture. Emphasizing local context, environmental awareness, and social contribution, this award also allows women architects to stand out with their original designs and projects that create socio-cultural impact.

In the literature, concepts such as locality, tradition, and cultural identity have been explored through architectural evaluations in the context of the Aga Khan Architecture Awards [6, 7, 8]. Additionally, research on the visibility of women architects, their professional practices, and gender-based inequalities has made significant contributions to understanding social transformations in the architectural environment [9, 10]. This article, unlike the aforementioned literature, aims to evaluate the projects of women architects recognized by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture within the framework of four fundamental design

criteria: contextual integrity, cultural sensitivity, social inclusion, and spatial affordances. This will reveal the design approaches adopted by women architects in their award-winning projects, highlighting their contributions to architecture and contributing to the literature on how women's perspectives are reflected in design within the context of the Aga Khan Awards.

2. AGA KHAN ARCHITECTURE AWARDS AND WOMEN ARCHITECTS

2.1. Aga Khan Architecture Awards

Conceived as a critical response to the universalist and reductionist paradigms of modernism, which have marginalized notions of place, identity, and cultural context within architectural discourse, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture was established by Karim Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community, with the explicit aim of reasserting the cultural, social, and environmental dimensions of architecture in the Islamic world [11,12]. Conferred triennially upon projects selected from among built works realized across the Islamic geography, the award advances a multidimensional evaluative framework that considers architectural excellence in conjunction with social, economic, technical, and environmental criteria [12]. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture actively promotes the creative engagement with local materials and craftsmanship, the integration of climatic conditions and natural environmental data into the design process, and architectural solutions that address the functional, cultural, and spiritual needs of users, thereby facilitating the reinterpretation of local identity through a contemporary architectural vocabulary [11]. Positioned outside Western-centric architectural paradigms and foregrounding the concepts of “region” and “identity,” the award program is widely regarded as a significant institutional framework with the capacity to shape architectural production within the Islamic world while reinforcing cultural continuity [12].

2.2. The Role of Women in the Field of Architecture

Although architecture has historically been a male-dominated profession, this perception has gradually been challenged by the increasing number of female architects. However, women continue to face obstacles at various stages within the architectural field. Research indicates that many women who start architectural education drop out before completing their degrees. The primary reasons for this include the physically demanding nature of the profession and the pressures of a male-dominated culture on women [2]. In 2013, 43% of the 25,958 students enrolled in architecture programs in the United States were women. However, within the ARE (Architect Registration Examination) process required to gain professional licensure, by 2018, only 39% of those who completed the exam were women [13]. This indicates an approximate 4% decline in the representation of female architects during the transition from education to professional practice [14]. For those who complete their education, the next barrier emerges during the transition into professional life. Despite the rising number of female graduates each year, the proportion of women actively working in the sector lags. The difference between the proportion of female architecture graduates and the proportion of women registered with professional architectural associations has been identified as 26% in the UK, 30% in Australia, 24% in Canada, 39% in the USA, and 27% in Turkey [15]. Unequal pay policies, inflexible working hours incompatible with family life, the marginalization of women within the profession, and male-dominated work environments are the primary factors deterring women from pursuing a career in architecture [3]. Many women in the field have only been able to establish a presence through association with a male colleague or their spouses, which has limited their professional visibility [16]. Even for women who remain in the profession, advancing in their careers is as tricky as entering the field in the first place. Female architects earn up to 60% less than their male counterparts, and their professional development is systematically hindered. Gender-based attitudes, lack of in-company support, and harassment pose significant barriers to their advancement [17]. Twenty-four percent of female architects have been subjected to unwanted sexual advances in the workplace. Fifty-three percent have experienced insults, prejudice, or demeaning jokes at work, while 41% have faced bullying [18]. In a 2018 survey of 1,500 individuals in the United Kingdom, one in seven women (approximately 14%) reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace within the past 12 months, and more than half indicated that they had encountered discrimination [19]. Historically, the visibility of female architects has also been restricted. Their contributions have been underdocumented, underpreserved, and often overshadowed by those of their male colleagues [4]. These findings demonstrate that gender inequalities in the profession and architectural

historiography have constrained women in architecture. It has been demonstrated through studies that women's ways of experiencing space have been systematically overlooked by male-dominated narratives, whereas these experiences suggest that spatial history could be written in alternative forms [5].

Alternative forms of knowledge can also be found in partial histories, in the sense that Donna Haraway addressed in her discussion on "situated knowledge". Partial histories by different authors – beyond scientific, objective accounts of history (which are mostly Western-oriented) – should also be considered to construct a comprehensive understanding of architectural knowledge. They have partial knowledge of groups defined as minorities, such as women or architects from non-European or American backgrounds. Traveling architects can also be seen as contributors of partial accounts of critical evaluation and understanding of diverse ideas from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds [20].

The changing structure of architecture throughout history has led to the invisibility of women's roles and contributions in the profession. This has led to the inadequacy of women's experiences and achievements in historiography [21].

2.3. Research on Aga Khan Architecture Awards and Women Architects

A literature review was conducted on the studies conducted between 2023 and 2025 within the scope of the Aga Khan Architecture Awards and the topic of women architects. The review aimed to emphasize the study's originality on the place and contributions of women architects in the Aga Khan Architecture Awards.

Aga Khan Architecture Awards

In recent years, a growing body of scholarship has examined the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA) through various conceptual lenses, including traditionalism, locality, cultural identity, and sustainability. These studies, while diverse in scope, collectively reflect the Award's role in shaping architectural discourse across regional and global contexts. To better understand the thematic directions and methodological approaches of this literature, several key contributions can be highlighted.

Aygin (2023) examined the notions of traditionalism and locality within the context of contemporary housing, under the heading of the AKAA. Drawing on field reports and jury statements of selected housing projects, the study evaluated how traditionalism was addressed [22]. Building on the discussion of locality, Kuyrukçu and Özkan (2023) further explored the relationship between place, locality, and technology through the framework of critical regionalism. By analyzing the contextual integration of award-winning buildings, their study identified place-specific design criteria that shaped recognition, while also assessing the role of technology [23].

Expanding the focus beyond locality, Elakad (2023) investigated the contributions of the AKAA to Turkish vernacular architecture. Concentrating on the Mediterranean, Central Anatolia, Aegean, and Marmara regions, the study combined theory, literature, and comparative analysis to emphasize how regional practices were promoted and sustained [6]. Similarly, Salkhı Khasraghı and Mehan (2023) focus on cultural dimensions, highlighting how evaluation systems within the Award have assessed cultural identity while also addressing the influence of global architectural trends and globalization [7].

Most recently, Mohammadjavad (2024) adopted a broader perspective by deriving keywords from AKAA texts and reports to trace shifts in emphasis within the Award's history. The study categorized these keywords to construct narratives around key themes such as "cultural identity," "regionalism," "innovation and sustainability," and "community self-sufficiency development," thereby illuminating the evolving priorities of the AKAA [8].

Women Architects

The literature on the role and visibility of women in architecture highlights both historical contributions and contemporary challenges, while also reflecting on design decisions. Recent studies examine not only the professional experiences of women architects in diverse contexts but also address broader issues such as gender inequality, visibility, and cultural recognition within the discipline. These studies highlight how women architects shape architectural discourse and enrich understandings of gender in architecture.

Demir (2023) evaluated the impact of female architects on the built environment in Bursa, focusing on their contributions to the city's urban and architectural development through interviews with practitioners [9]. Expanding this perspective to broader social dynamics, Büyükbayram (2023) examined the contributions of women's movements in Turkey and worldwide to increasing the visibility of women in architecture [10]. Along similar lines, Büyükbayram and Bayraktar (2023) discussed the role of women architects in the design process, highlighting both their achievements and the challenges they continue to face in gaining recognition [24]. The theme of visibility and gender inequality is further emphasized by Erel (2024), who examined women's experiences on construction sites, underlining the persistence of gender-based problems while offering suggestions for positive change [25]. In a more historical context, İgüs (2023) explored the figure of Leyla Asım Turgut to contribute to the discourse on womanhood and architecture, analyzing gender relations among architects in Turkey during the 1940s and 1950s [26]. Complementing this, Öztürk and Salman (2023) also focused on Turgut's life story and architectural work, providing a detailed biographical account [27]. Expanding the scope beyond Turkey, Bektaş (2024) investigated the role of women in Japanese spaces, examining their contributions to modernization and the reinterpretation of traditional architecture. This study highlighted the significance of gender equality and diversity in shaping contemporary architectural practices [28].

Finally, Moscatelli, Raffa, Ulusoy, and Shipstone (2023) investigated how the participation of women architects in urban planning and design in Gulf countries has enhanced inclusivity and strengthened cultural identity. By establishing specific design criteria, the study compared two cases and then applied the same criteria through a case study with students. In this way, it provided an insight into the design approach of women architects [29].

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employed the document analysis method, a qualitative research technique, and a literature review was conducted. The study first identified projects by women architects participating in the Aga Khan Architecture Awards, and then determined the design criteria to be used for the proposals.

3.1. Case Studies Selection

The projects were identified through the project finder on the official Aga Khan Awards for Architecture website [30]. Since the inception of the awards, 199 projects, both awarded and shortlisted, for the 2020-2022 cycle have been examined in detail. Among the 199 projects, primarily those with women as the sole authors in the design group (designers and architecture offices) were identified. The projects were considered without distinction between shortlists and award groups, and a total of ten projects were identified. These are: *Restoration of the Amiriya Complex- Selma Al- Radi*; *Preservation of Sacred and Collective Oasis Sites/Issy Valley Improvement- Salima Naji*; *Rehabilitation of Nagaur Fort- Minakshi Jain*; *Bait Ur Rouf Mosque- Marina Tabassum*; *Flying Saucer Rehabilitation, Al Mureijah Art Spaces - Mona El Mousfy*; *Revitalization of Muharraq- Noura Al Sayeh*; *Thread: Artist Residency and Cultural Centre- Toshiko Mori Architects*; *Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs- Zaha Hadid Architects*.

Within the scope of this study, only one project by each architect has been examined. Among the two award-winning projects of Mona El Mousfy, the *Al Mureijah Art Spaces* (2013) project has been selected. The primary reason for this choice lies in the project's ability to merge the historical fabric with contemporary art, while offering a broader scope of social interaction in the production of public space. Among the two different projects of Salima Naji, the *Issy Valley Improvement* project was preferred due to its more recent date and its prominent approach to landscape restoration in harmony with nature. The award-

winning *Revitalisation of Muharraq* project was excluded from the scope due to its complex structure, and Noura El Sayeh being the architect of only a single building within the complex (a heritage house). Similarly, the *Restoration of the Amiriya Complex* by Selma El-Radi was omitted, as El-Radi did not have formal architectural education. Following these filtering criteria, the number of projects examined within the scope of the study was reduced to six. The projects selected for analysis are as follows: *Issy Valley Improvement* – Salima Naji; *Rehabilitation of Nagaur Fort* – Minakshi Jain; *Bait Ur Rouf Mosque* – Marina Tabassum; *Al Mureijah Art Spaces* – Mona El Mousfy; *Thread: Artist Residency and Cultural Centre* – Toshiko Mori Architects; and *Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs* – Zaha Hadid Architects.

3.2. Determination of Design Criteria

The determination of evaluation and design criteria was based on the statement published on the official website of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture: “In the selection process, emphasis is placed on architecture that not only meets the physical, social, and economic needs of people but also stimulates and responds to their cultural expectations. Particular attention is given to building projects that use local resources and appropriate technology in innovative ways, as well as to projects likely to inspire similar work elsewhere.” [30]. An examination of the awarded projects similarly shows that the jury tends to select designs that respond to diverse user needs and prioritize cultural and contextual relevance. Additionally, Doğan Hasol, a Turkish architect and academic who served on the 2001 jury, states that the jury members focused on three main criteria. He lists these as follows:

1. The needs of disadvantaged groups in relation to social housing and communal buildings, addressed through architecture for society;
2. Efforts directed toward the preservation and revitalization of historically and culturally significant structures and/or urban fabric, which play a striking role in contemporary societies;
3. Achievements and innovations in contemporary architecture and environmental design that stem from the need to formulate appropriate responses to climate, available resources, and cultural traditions [31].

An evaluation of these criteria indicates that cultural and natural resources, climate sensitivity, and the importance of creating new opportunities for communities are emphasized. During the literature review conducted by the authors, the criteria defined in the article by Moscatelli, Raffa, and Shipstone (2023)—namely contextual connection, community engagement, cultural sensitivity, and the choice of amenities—were found to align with the evaluation framework of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. Both the statements on the award’s official website and the points highlighted by Doğan Hasol converge around cultural sensitivity, contextual connection, community involvement, and the provision of facilities. Given this conceptual alignment, the contribution of these criteria and their explanations to the evaluation of the projects examined in this study was recognized, and the authors deemed the use of the requirements identified by Moscatelli, Raffa, and Shipstone (2023) appropriate.

3.2.1. Design Criteria and Their Scope

- a) Contextual Connection: For inclusive urban design, the project must possess socio-ecological contextual relevance; it should ensure integration with the urban environment, be sensitive to local resources and climatic conditions, and provide spatial solutions within a sustainable development perspective [29].
- b) Cultural Sensitivity: The project should reflect the cultural identity of communities within public spaces and embrace diverse traditions. Furthermore, the design must incorporate local cultural elements and preserve collective memory [29].
- c) Community Engagement: The project should secure the active participation of the community, while also encouraging the involvement of residents and women in urban design processes [29].

d) **Choice of Amenities:** The project should provide a range of facilities for cultural events and community activities, and design public spaces to be accessible to individuals of all ages and genders [29].

It was observed that the priorities articulated in the descriptions of the criteria and those emphasized in the definition of the award process were aligned. Furthermore, considering that the influence of these criteria was expected to be strongly reflected in the projects, it was decided to adopt four of them as the evaluation criteria for the projects within the scope of the study.

As a result of these stages in the project analyses, information about the designers was first provided, followed by evaluations conducted within the framework of the established criteria, which were subsequently tabulated. In the discussion section, all evaluations were consolidated and interpreted. In the conclusion section, the significance of the study was highlighted, and its contribution to the field was articulated. The stages of this process are schematically illustrated in Figure 1.

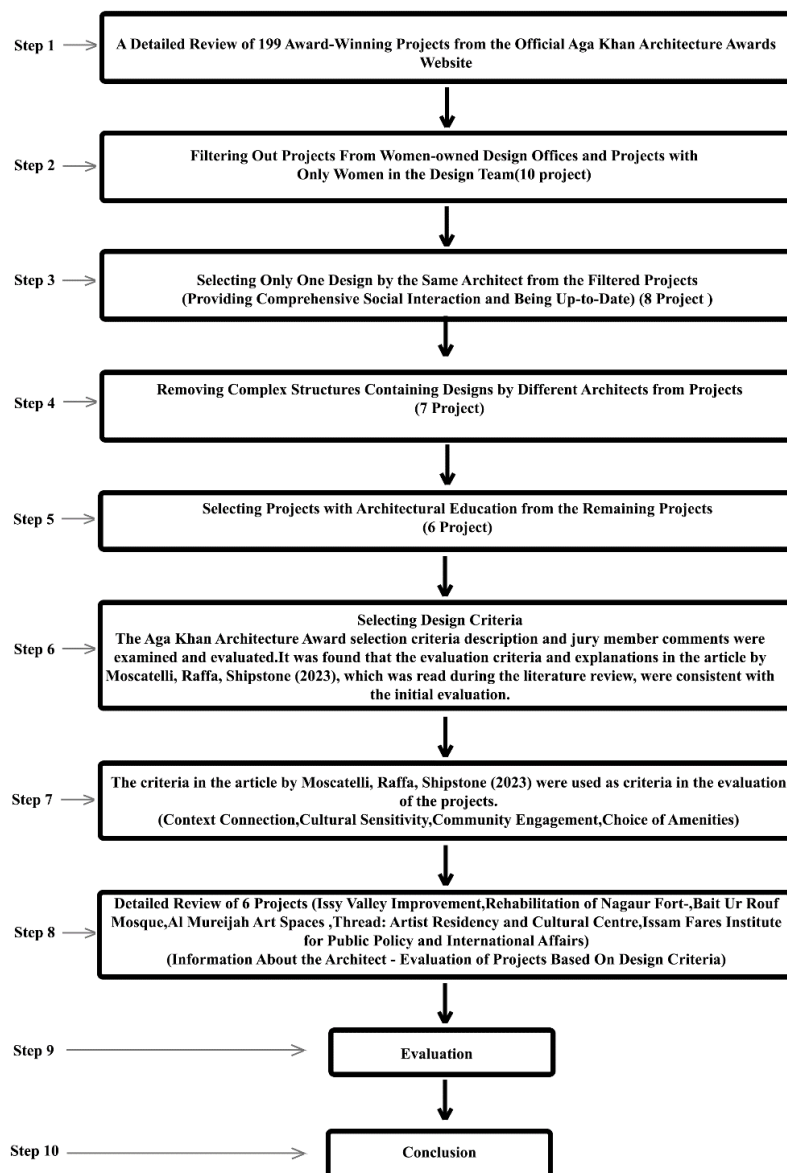


Figure 1. Steps of Study

4. SELECTED WOMEN ARCHITECTS AND THEIR PROJECTS

4.1. Issy Valley Improvement- Salima Naji (Fas, 2020)

Salima Naji was born in 1971 in Rabat, Morocco. She completed her architectural education at the Paris-La Villette School of Architecture and earned a PhD in anthropology from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. Salima Naji's architectural approach centers on the human-environment relationship, prioritizing sustainability and innovative solutions grounded in local knowledge. She has received several prestigious awards, including the Holcim Award for Sustainable Development (2011), the Moroccan Architects Honor Award (2007), and the Medal of Merit (2019), as well as the EDF Foundation “Young Architects 2004” Award. She was shortlisted for the Aga Khan Architecture Awards with two projects: *Preservation of Sacred and Communal Oasis Areas* (2013) and the *Issy Valley Improvement Project* (2022). Her contributions to sustainability are also evident in her published works. She is the author of *The Ksar of Assa* (2013), *Greniers Collectifs de l'Atlas* (2006), and *Architectures of the Common Good: For an Ethic of Preservation* (2019). In 2017, she was awarded the title of Chevalier of Arts and Letters [32]. The *Issy Valley Improvement Project* is an environmental rehabilitation project by Salima Naji in the Ait Mansour (Issy) Valley on the southern slopes of the Anti-Atlas Mountains in Morocco [33] (Figure 2). While the project aimed to enhance the quality of life for the local population by conserving the natural environment, it also sought to develop rural tourism in the region.

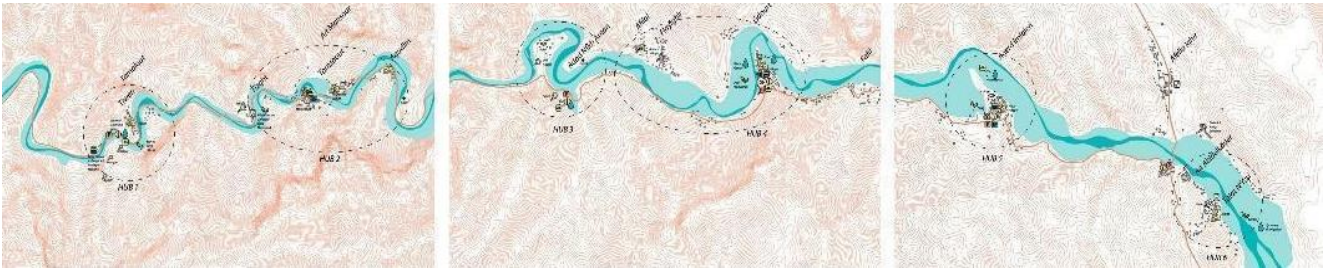


Figure 2. *Designed Walking Trail – Map View [34]*

The Issy Valley Improvement Project strongly connects with its context, revitalizing a deserted geography that retains traces of traditional life. The walking trail was designed in harmony with the natural topography and shaped to blend with the landscape. The project integrates cultural sensitivity with provided amenities by preserving traditional lifestyles. Local materials, such as stone, adobe, and wood, were reinterpreted through a contemporary architectural language, resulting in a design that respects the site's memory and is suitable for flexible use (Figure 3). Community participation was a key element in the project, creating a 14-kilometer walking path connecting all the region's houses. Small bridges, rest and seating areas, water points, and shaded areas were built along the trail. Constructed by workers from the local community of approximately 2,500 residents, the project fostered a sense of ownership among locals, making them not only users but also producers of the development [34].



Figure 3. *Examples of Traditional Material Use and Integration of Water Elements in Design [34]*

4.2. Rehabilitation of Nagaur Fort- Minakshi Jain (India, 2007-2009)

Minakshi Jain (March 23, 1943 – June 14, 2023) (India) completed her architectural education in Baroda and earned her master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania. A student of Louis Kahn during her

graduate studies, Jain described her experience with him by saying, "My relationship with Kahn taught me that integrity is essential in your work, and if you are passionate about what you do, everything else becomes easier." She received numerous prestigious awards, including the UNESCO Award for Excellence, the Kitply Award for Conservation, and the Hari Om Award for Low-Cost Housing. Jain co-authored books such as *Mud Architecture of the Indian Desert*, *Fort of Nagaur*, and *Indian City in the Arid West*. She served as an academic at CEPT University (Ahmedabad, India) and was involved in the design of many residential and institutional buildings. Renowned as one of India's leading architects in conservation and restoration, Jain was the chief architect of the Rehabilitation of Nagaur Fort project, which received the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Award and was listed for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture [35].

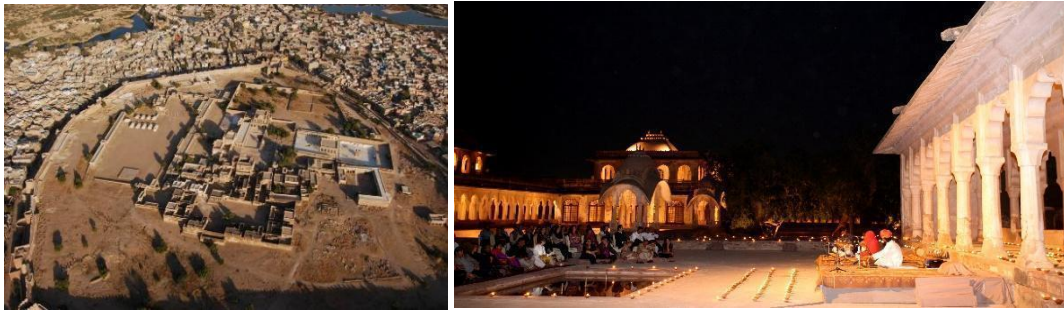


Figure 4. Rehabilitation of Nagaur Fort General Appearance(a) and Sufi Music Festival(b) [36]

Ahhichatragarh Fort is located in the heart of the ancient city of Nagaur, one of the earliest Muslim fortifications in Northern India [36]. Initially built in the early 12th century and subsequently modified numerous times over the following centuries, the fort displays a blend of Rajput and Mughal architectural elements. Over time, many structures were integrated into the site, transforming it into a complex architectural ensemble. The fort complex includes a palace, temples, a mosque, and smaller buildings (Figure 4a). It also features inner courtyards, landscaped gardens, and various open spaces. Additionally, the structure contains fountains and water reservoirs due to its location in a desert region and its historical exposure to prolonged sieges. These water features provided essential storage and helped create a microclimate effect to mitigate the intense heat [37]. Each building within the complex—each with its own distinct architectural character—was restored based on the principle of minimum intervention and maximum preservation of the original, combining traditional and modern techniques [38]. Materials such as khatu stone, limestone, kody (shell plaster), gud (jaggery), and guggal, which were initially used in the construction, were employed in the repair process. Due to the decline of many traditional construction techniques over the years, a new generation of craftsmen and artisans was trained in using authentic materials and traditional methods. Modern materials such as stainless steel rods and cement were used sparingly to enhance structural strength and accelerate construction. New drainage lines were established for the water system, and electrical wiring was integrated underground to avoid disrupting the historical integrity of the original structures [37]. These features show that Naji's design serves the cultural sensitivity criterion. The place, which has become one of the most important open spaces in the region, has interior and exterior spaces that provide opportunities for public activities. In addition to serving as a museum, the structure, which hosts a Sufi music festival, has become a meeting point for users (Figure 4b). Before-and-after photographs of the restoration, illustrating the preservation and adaptive reuse of the historical fabric (Figure 5). The use of traditional techniques and the revival of history helped revive the community's sense of identity and fostered a greater sense of unity. In addition, the re-teaching of conventional methods and the training provided ensured that the artisans who used these techniques were integrated into society, thus paving the way for the transfer of knowledge to future generations [37] and allowing the project to be evaluated within the framework of the community participation criterion.

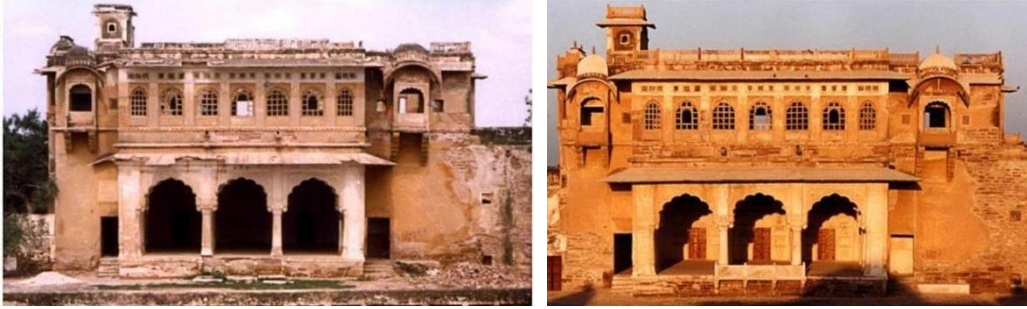


Figure 5. Bhakht Singh Mahal, before and after restoration [36]

4.3. Bait Ur Rouf Mosque- Marina Tabassum (Bangladesh, 2012)

Marina Tabassum was born in 1969 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She graduated from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology with a degree in architecture in 1994. Marina Tabassum completed the design of the Bait Ur Rouf Mosque in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2012. Tabassum, who studied architecture in Bangladesh and is one of the few female architects in the country, brought the project to life on land donated by her grandmother with the support of the local people. The building, which won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2016, was designed with a simple approach that emphasizes natural light and ventilation, without incorporating elements such as domes and minarets typically found in traditional mosque architecture [39]. The building draws inspiration from the mosques of the Bengal Sultanate period, while reinterpreting this heritage in a contemporary language. The 13-degree difference between the qibla direction and the plot orientation is addressed by a cylindrical prayer volume positioned within a square-plan structure. This design utilizes both orientation and the use of light as architectural elements. Daylight is controlled thanks to the light courtyards and openings on the roof, and the spirituality of the space is supported by the patterns formed on the ground [40]. The column-free prayer area is supported by eight peripheral columns. The high base protects the mosque from floods and creates a boundary between the city and the sacred space [39]. The qibla direction is determined by a light slit opened in the brick wall; thus, distracting views from outside are blocked, and focus is provided on prayer [40]. With its spatial simplicity, use of natural materials, and egalitarian interior layout, this mosque provides not only a place of worship but also a peaceful haven in the city, serving as a spatial expression of social solidarity and spirituality [41] (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Bait Ur Rouf Mosque General Appearance [39]

Bait Ur Rouf Mosque stands out among the four design criteria, especially in terms of “Context Connection” [41]. The design of the building was developed in a way that was sensitive to the climatic, physical, and social characteristics of the location; the local architectural heritage was interpreted with a contemporary approach. The simple yet strong architectural language, inspired by Bangladesh's traditional brick construction techniques and the Sultanate-era mosques, has been seamlessly integrated with the region's cultural identity. The orientation of the building, the angular difference between the qibla and the plot, has been resolved as an architectural element; the use of natural light has become a fundamental tool in determining the direction and establishing the spiritual atmosphere. This contextual integrity has been reinforced formally and with spatial possibilities. While the column-free prayer area rises on eight

peripheral columns, daylight is controlled thanks to the light courtyards and roof openings, and the spiritual atmosphere is provided by the light patterns formed on the ground [40] (Figure 7). The positioning of the structure on a high plinth offers physical protection against floods. It creates spatial awareness by creating a symbolic threshold between the urban fabric and the sacred space. The same plinth also provides socialization and waiting areas for users, supporting the structure to be a place of worship and a social meeting place [39]. Marina Tabassum's approach, which emphasizes the use of local materials and craftsmanship, demonstrates that the structure establishes a strong relationship with its context, both structurally and culturally [40]. Spatial simplicity, egalitarian interior order, and a deep relationship established with the natural environment make the mosque not only functional but also a meaningful public structure integrated with the place, revealing that the contextual connection Criterion dominates the project [41].



Figure 7. Bait Ur Rouf Mosque Interior Appearance [39]

4.4. Al Mureijah Art Spaces - Mona El Mousfy (BAE, 2013)

Al Mureijah Art Spaces was designed by architect Mona El Mousfy in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, and completed in 2013 [42]. Mona El Mousfy, who received her architecture education in France, has attracted attention with the cultural and public projects she has implemented in the United Arab Emirates [43]. Standing out with her sensitive relationship with the historical environment and her contemporary architectural approach, El Mousfy's project, which won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, aims to transform the historical Al Mureijah Neighborhood into a modern art space under the leadership of the Sharjah Art Foundation [42]. Within the scope of the project, El Mousfy has combined clusters of buildings bearing traces of the past with new functions while preserving the traditional Gulf architecture. She has created art galleries, open courtyards, meeting areas, and multifunctional spaces that host social events [43] (Figure 8). This transformation has contributed to both the preservation of cultural heritage and the city's revitalization around creative industries [44].



Figure 8. Al Mureijah Art Spaces General Appearance and Site Plan [42]

Among the four design criteria, Al Mureijah Art Spaces stands out especially with its “Cultural Sensitivity” aspect. Instead of disrupting the traditional building typology of stone, plaster, and adobe, Al Mousfy has preserved it, creating a spatial continuity that is intertwined with contemporary art. The original plan, schemes, and narrow street texture of the building have been preserved; galleries, courtyards, and shaded transition spaces that meet the needs of today's users have been skillfully placed within this historical

texture. The project has preserved Sharjah's historical identity without compromising it through contemporary usage forms [42]. Spatial opportunities transform this cultural sensitivity into spatial experience. Thanks to narrow streets, intimate courtyards, and permeable boundaries, visitors become an integral part of the neighborhood fabric, both physically and emotionally. The balance of open and closed spaces provides permeability between exhibition areas and daily life, offering an intimate, accessible, and welcoming environment for visitors [43] (Figure 9). The project balanced contemporary architecture and local identity by treating the traditional urban fabric as an active stage rather than a background [42]. In this context, Al Mureijah Art Spaces stands out as an exemplary conservation and re-functioning project within the scope of cultural sensitivity criteria [44].



Figure 9. Al Mureijah Art Spaces General Appearance [42]

4.5. Thread: Artist Residency and Cultural Centre-Toshiko Mori Architects (Senegal, 2014)

Toshiko Mori was born in 1951 in Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan. She studied architecture at the Cooper Union Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture and received an honorary master's degree from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. She is a founding partner of Architect PLLC and currently serves as the Robert P. Hubbard Professor in the Practice of Architecture at Harvard GSD. Between 2002 and 2008, she served as chair of the Department of Architecture. Since 2020, she has served as the Vice President for Architecture at the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Mori has received several prestigious awards, including the Architectural Record's Women in Architecture Design Leader Award, the Isamu Noguchi Award, the 2023 Philip Hanson Hiss Award, and the 2024 Asia Society's Asia Arts Game Changer Award. She has been included in *Architectural Digest's* annual AD100 list since 2014 and was inducted into its Hall of Fame in 2023. She was also named an A-List Titan by *Elle Decor* [45].

The project was realized in collaboration with the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation and American Friends of Le Korsa. Designed in 2013 and completed in 2014, the 1,048 m² (11,285 ft²) building was created as a volunteer project by Toshiko Mori. The design earned her the AIA New York Chapter Award and was selected for the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale [46]. The project offers performance space, educational, artistic, and musical workshops for the local community, as well as an artist residency program. The parametrically designed roof forms several inner courtyards and shaded areas within the building itself (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Exterior View of the Building [47]

The project demonstrates a strong contextual connection by integrating traditional textures to create a new regional urban component. It also acts as a hub connecting existing social structures. Due to the region's dry climate and water scarcity, the sloped roof was designed to collect and store rainwater, addressing local environmental needs (Figure 11a). From a cultural sensitivity perspective, considering the area's diverse ethnic groups, the project serves as a shared cultural platform. Local craftsmanship has further integrated the building into the community's identity. The building offers multifunctional spaces and spatial solutions tailored to meet community needs, supporting a range of flexible uses. It functions as both an artist's residence and a space for education, recreation, and social interaction shared by artists and villagers. The project supports community participation and offers spaces that contribute to both artistic and everyday life (Figure 11b).

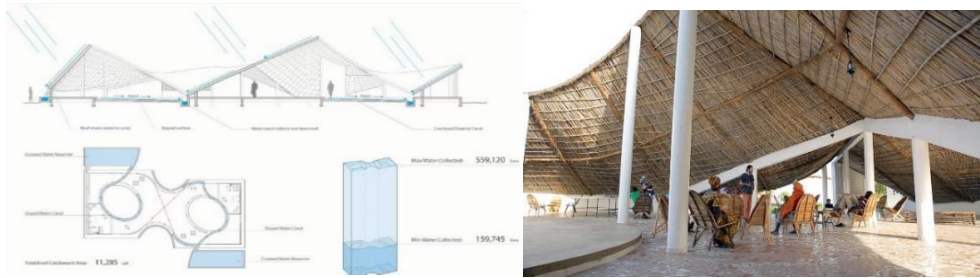


Figure 11. Roof Water Collection System(a) [48], Cultural Activities in the Building(b) [47]

4.6. Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs-Zaha Hadid Architects (Lebanon,2007-2009)

After studying mathematics at the American University of Beirut, Zaha Hadid (1950–2016) from Baghdad completed her architectural education at the Architectural Association (AA) in London. In 1979, she founded Zaha Hadid Architects and taught at the Architectural Association until 1987. She also served as a guest lecturer at universities worldwide, including Columbia, Harvard, Yale, and the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Recognized as one of the pioneering architects of the 21st century, Hadid combined imagination with materials and construction techniques to create unique works [49]. In 2004, she became the first female architect to receive the Pritzker Architecture Prize, and several of her award-winning designs have been realized in international competitions [50]. Included in Forbes' list of the world's most powerful women, Zaha's contributions to the field of architecture have been honored with prestigious awards from professional, academic, and civic institutions worldwide [49]. In the year of her passing, 2016, she was also awarded the Aga Khan Award for Architecture for the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs building.



Figure 12. Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs General view [51]

Zaha Hadid, who had also studied at the same university, won the invited competition to host a modern think tank on the green central campus of the American University of Beirut. The building is located on the university's campus in Beirut, Lebanon, on a 7,000 m² plot with a construction area of 2,000 m². While the project creates new public spaces, it also preserves the landscape, a key element of the campus master plan. In the design, IFI (Issam Fares Institute) units are positioned on a 21-meter-long cantilever extending from the main building, thereby reducing the building's footprint (Figure 12). From the perspective of contextual integration, the building's massing and volumetric distribution are in harmony with the site's topography

[51]. Additionally, the preservation of ficus and cypress trees on the campus and their incorporation as an integral part of the design, the way it establishes connections between the central wooded area, the Mediterranean, and the central plain, as well as the elevated cantilever form that minimizes intervention to the existing landscape, all highlight the project's strong contextual relationship [52] (Figure 13a). When examined within the scope of cultural sensitivity criteria, it is evident that the building establishes a traditional material relationship with Lebanon by utilizing the region's expertise and tradition of using in-situ concrete [53] (Figure 13b). The design of IFI represents the university's role as a connector between researchers and the global community. The campus's double-height entrance courtyard invites the community inside through numerous connections, and the building's routes, links, and intersections create spaces for interaction between students and visitors [52] (Figure 13c). The neutral spaces that have been created support community engagement by bringing together people with different ideas. The entrance beneath the cantilevered part of the building functions as a semi-open terrace, creating a new urban space for the university and offering new opportunities for users.



Figure 13. The intersection of the ramp and roads between the trees(a), General view of the structure(b), The space formed under the console(c) [51]

5. EVALUATION

The study reveals that within the framework of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, the proportion of projects in which women appear as sole authors is considerably low. It has been identified that the architects of the awarded buildings were generally above middle age at the time of receiving the award, and that a number of them had completed their education abroad, particularly in the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Furthermore, as indicated by the conducted research and as presented in Table 1, half of the projects authored by women were included in the 2014–2016 award cycle, during which two of these projects received awards, while the others were shortlisted. Although the 'Issy Valley Improvement' and 'Thread: Artist Residency and Cultural Centre' projects contributed across all four categories, they were only shortlisted, whereas the 'Built Ur Rouf Mosque' project, despite contributing in only one category, received the award. This indicates that the award evaluation process is influenced not only by the predetermined criteria but also by additional architectural and contextual values. The projects are located across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Those situated in Africa were found to fulfill all of the identified design criteria, offering substantial contributions that prioritize social benefit and community impact. In contrast, the projects in Asia were observed to reflect a broader architectural diversity, with different design criteria being emphasized; these projects establish a balanced relationship between adherence to traditional heritage and the adoption of contemporary architectural approaches. When evaluated in terms of design criteria, all of the examined buildings highlight cultural sensitivity, context connection, and community engagement as predominant aspects. Each project incorporates distinct design decisions that foreground particular criteria, and these decisions are considered reflections of the originality inherent in women's design approaches. Moreover, the works of women architects are characterized by approaches that integrate local identity, social structures, and environmental conditions. Inclusivity also emerges as a significant concept in these designs, as the envisioning of new spaces where individuals from all segments of society can find their place, along with user-oriented spatial configurations, reflects the design sensibility of women. Their design sensitivities, originality of thought, and architectural decisions distinguish women architects within the framework of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. (Table 1)

Table 1. Projects examined within the scope of the study

Project Name	Project Architect	Project Location	Award Cycle	Award Statüs	Contextual Connection Contribution	Community Engagement Contribution	Cultural Sensitivity Contribution	Choice of Amenities Contribution
Issy Valley Improvement	Salima Naji	Morocco	2020-2022	Shortlisted	x	x	x	x
Rehabilitation Of Nagaur Fort	Minakshi Jain	India	2007-2009	Shortlisted	-	x	x	-
Built Ur Rouf Mosque	Marina Tabassum	Bangladesh	2014-2016	Award Recipient	x	-	-	-
Al Mureijah Art Spaces	Mona El Mousfy	BAE	2017-2019	Shortlisted	-	-	x	-
Thread: Artist Residency And Cultural Centre	Toshiko Mori	Senegal	2014-2016	Shortlisted	x	x	x	x
Issam Fares Institute For Public Policy And International Affair	Zaha Hadid Architects	Beirut	2014-2016	Award Recipient	x	x	x	x

6. CONCLUSION

This research presents findings on the significance of women's place in the field of architecture. Within the scope of the study, projects by women architects who received or were shortlisted for the award were identified and evaluated based on previously defined design criteria. Although the findings show certain parallels with studies that address the gender perspective in architecture, they also demonstrate that women architects, in particular, emphasize user-oriented approaches as well as cultural and social sensitivities.

The evaluation of the findings related to design decisions indicates that women designers adopt a strong design approach that considers architecture not merely as a field of physical production, but through its social and cultural dimensions. This approach is reflected in design decisions that emphasize the relationship between space and the user, support social interaction through public spaces, and prioritize social benefit. The findings reveal that women architects stand out through user-oriented spatial configurations, public space designs that enhance social interaction, and design approaches that prioritize social benefit. In the production of space, women architects attract attention not only through original design solutions but also through projects that generate social and cultural impact. The sensitivity observed throughout the design and production processes contributes to the distinctive character of these projects within the professional field. This approach is of critical importance for the discipline of architecture, not only in terms of representation, but also in terms of enriching the spatial experience.

In conclusion, this study examines the projects authored by women within the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and highlights the design criteria they adopt, thereby revealing the significant contributions of women to the realm of space and the city. While highlighting the creative and inclusive potential of the gender perspective, the study also offers qualities that can contribute to future research at both theoretical and practical levels. The study is expected to serve as a basis for future research on the position of women in national and international award platforms, the right of women architects to equal representation, the differences in design sensibilities between men and women, and the design contributions of women architects to the field of architecture. In this context, the study provides a foundation for future research that will examine the reflections of the gender perspective in architectural production across different scales and contexts.

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