

Faith in the City: The Mosque in the Contemporary Urban West

10-11 November 2010

The Architecture Foundation, in partnership with Openvizor and Arts Council England's Arts and Islam programme, present a two-day exploration of the ways in which religious buildings—in particular the mosque—shape, and are shaped by, the public life of contemporary western cities. The programme will launch with a presentation by SOMA principal Michel Abboud, architectural design consultant for New York City's highly debated Park51 Community Centre.

Through a constructive dialogue with key thinkers that will tackle issues of contemporary vs traditional design, the changing role of religious buildings and the plural demands of urban communities, *Faith in the City* will explore the context of current debates around the construction of new mosques in European and American cities, and suggest alternative ways in which architecture can give form to faith and might aid in navigating the dynamics between ideologies and communities, private practice and the public communication of belief.

Switzerland, 29 November 2009: In a public referendum 57.5% of participating voters approve the **ban of minarets in Switzerland**, with only four of the 26 Swiss provinces opposing the initiative. Backed by the majority Swiss People's Party (SVP)'s claim that minarets are a sign of Islamization, supporters of the ban – now Swiss law - claim that minarets represent the growth of an ideology and legal system which is incompatible with secular European democracy. International response expressed concern at this breaching of human rights. French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner referred to the decision as "scandalous," whilst the Vatican denounced the ban as an infringement of religious freedom.

New York, 11 September 2010: Thousands of people march through New York City on the ninth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, demonstrating both for and against **Park51: a proposed Islamic Centre** two blocks away from the **former site of the World Trade Centre**, and dubbed the "Ground Zero mosque" by the media and the group *Stop Islamization of America*. Radical Dutch politician Geert Wilders, who has publicly stated that Islam is comparable with Fascism, addressed one demonstration calling for an end to the plans, whilst President Obama called for unity, saying: "It was not a religion that attacked us that September day. It was al-Qaeda."

These events demonstrate how architecture's political and social role has become a renewed site of contest. Using such examples of the challenges facing contemporary religious buildings as a catalyst for further debate, *Faith in the City* aims to further the discussion of the social, spatial, political and symbolic role of faith buildings in Europe and the USA, through a close exploration of the mosque's changing role in the "Western" world. Examples of how religious minorities have previously spatially integrated themselves within European cities, best design practice for urban faith buildings, and the future of pluralism in Europe will all be debated.

The symposium's keynote lecture will be delivered by **Michel Abboud, principal of SOMA**, and architectural consultant for New York's **Park51 Islamic Cultural Centre**, who will present his practice's designs for the highly contested Manhattan cultural project, outlining the context, design, programme and the social and political landscape that is necessarily negotiated within this sensitive design process. Abboud will be in conversation with **Ziauddin Sardar**, writer, broadcaster, cultural critic and author, *Why do People Hate America?* (2002).

"This project has been the cause of so much controversy and debate in the US and in the world that listening very carefully to all sides and all opinions has become one of our main concerns as architects and as New Yorkers. Our main goal with our proposal has always been to promote unification and interconnectivity among the many faiths and religions that constitute the social network of our city. The over-mediatization of the project caused by its programme and its location has unfortunately promoted a socio-political split that has placed the architectural product at the center of this controversy. For many, the architecture is the solution to the socio-political debate."

- Michel Abboud, SOMA

In addition, architects, activists, academics and artists will present case studies of recent mosque buildings from across Europe – alongside historic precedents and possible future scenarios – in a day of discussion at The Architecture Foundation in central London.

The international range of contributors will include: **Foreign Architects Switzerland**, the provocative platform behind the post-minaret-ban ideas competition for an Islamic Centre in Zurich; **Ali Mangera, MYAA**, architects of the experimental, un-built and highly contested **Abbey Mills Mosque**, originally due to be located near the East London's Olympic site; **Ergün Erkoçu**, architect of the **Polder Mosque** concept, author of *The Mosque. Political, Architectural and Social*

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Transformations; and **Lukas Feireiss**, curator, writer, artist and editor of *Closer To God: Religious Architecture and Sacred Spaces* and *Beyond Architecture: Imaginative Buildings and Fictional Cities*. Further participants continue to be confirmed.

Programme

Keynote Lecture: Faith in the City: The Mosque in the Contemporary Urban West

Wednesday 10 November, 7.00pm

Rich Mix, 35 - 47 Bethnal Green Road, London, E1 6LA

Tickets: £8 Full Price / £6 AF Members

www.architecturefoundation.org.uk

Michel Abboud, architect and Principal SOMA, Architectural design consultants for New York's Park51 Community Centre
Chaired by **Ziauddin Sardar**, writer, broadcaster, cultural critic and Visiting Professor, School of Arts, City University, London.

Symposium: Faith in the City: The Mosque in the Contemporary Urban West

Thursday 11 November, 2.00 – 6.00pm

The Architecture Foundation Project Space, Ground Floor East, 136-148 Tooley St, London, SE1 2TU

Tickets: £9 Full Price / £7 AF Members

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With contributors including:

Michel Abboud, architect and Principal SOMA

Ergün Erkoçu, architect, author, and Creative Director, Concept 0031

Foreign Architects Switzerland, a platform for alternative ideas, projects, and people

Lukas Feireiss, curator, writer, artist and editor, Studio Lukas Feireiss

Alen Jasarevic, architect and founder, Jasarevic Architekten

Ali Mangera, architect and founder, Mangera Yvars Architects

Ziauddin Sardar, writer, broadcaster, cultural critic

Notes to editors:

A limited number of interviews with SOMA principal Michel Abboud, Architectural Design consultant for New York's Park51 Community Centre and other participants are available upon request, subject to discussion.

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The Architecture Foundation

Founded in 1991 as the UK's first independent architecture centre, The Architecture Foundation is a non-profit agency for contemporary architecture, urbanism and culture. We cultivate new talent and new ideas. Through our diverse programmes we facilitate international and interdisciplinary exchange, stimulate critical engagement amongst professionals, policy makers and a broad public, and shape the quality of the built environment. We are independent, agile, inclusive and influential. Central to our activities is the belief that architecture enriches lives.

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Arts and Islam

Arts and Islam is organised by Arts Council England. It uses informed debate and interventions to explore the issues between artistic practice, religious belief and contemporary society.

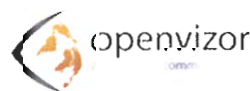
www.artsandislam.com

Openvizer

Openvizer is an international organisation and platform supporting arts and cultural collaboration and practice development across borders, cultures and disciplines.

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