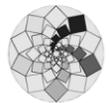


CALLING ALL VISIONARY DESIGNERS: ENTER ACSF'S \$10,000 INTERNATIONAL DESIGN COMPETITION



ACSF Architecture, Culture,
and Spirituality Forum

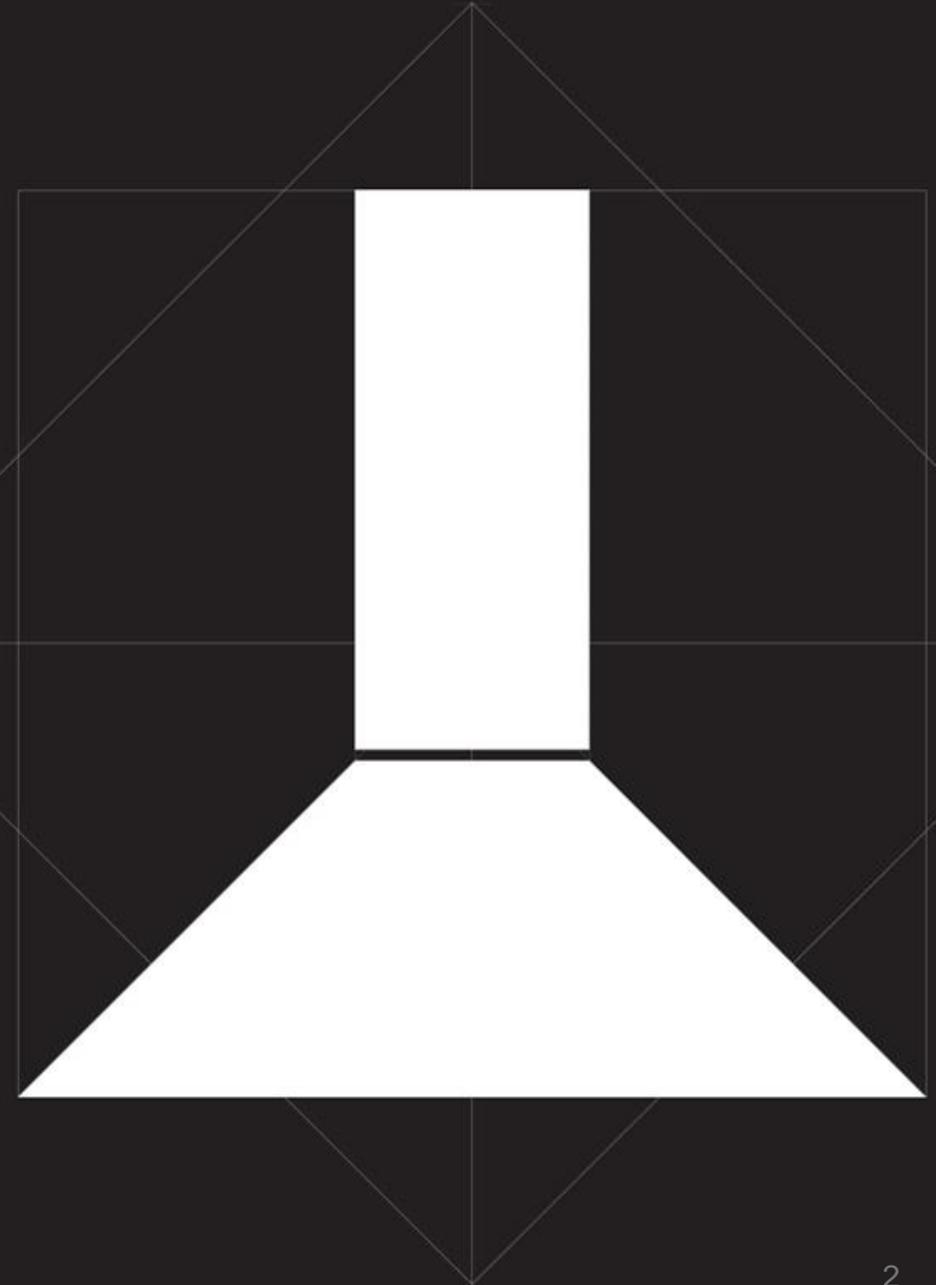
The Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Forum (ACSF) in Partnership with 2A Architecture and Art Magazine

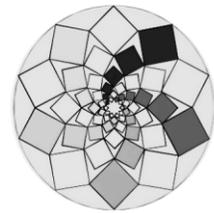


TRANSCENDENT DESIGN AND THE SPACE IN-BETWEEN

International Design Competition

Register by September 27, 2025
Submit by October 27, 2025





ACSF



The Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Forum (ACSF) in
Partnership with 2A Architecture and Art Magazine

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“A great building must begin with the unmeasurable, must go through measurable means when it is being designed and, in the end, must be unmeasurable.”

~ Louis I. Kahn ~

Introduction

Our Vision Of a Better World obliges us to encompass a deep comprehension of the critical historical impacts that have affected the world in modern times. Those causal forces have radically transformed the world, which today has brought the whole earth and humankind to the brink of untold ecological, social, and psychological disaster.

For the survival of the whole of nature and the well-being of humanity, we are obliged to lay the foundations for a renewed awareness of the realities and purpose of existence to transform into a civilization that will replace the dehumanized world that is now disintegrating and disappearing before our very eyes.

The built environment's lengthy history as a communicative and affective media portends its enduring capacity to serve the highest ideals and address the most vexing problems. Indeed, the built environment was often believed to provide portentous places for personal improvement and, by extension, the evolution of culture.

It still has that promise and potential.

Competition Theme

TRANSCENDENT DESIGN AND THE SPACE IN-BETWEEN

Through this international design competition, we seek an alternative path to this dead end - a vision of organic exuberance, human delight and flourishing that lies waiting in the paradigm of **“Transcendent Design and the Space In-Between.”**

“Transcendence Design” is the spatial embodiment of reality beyond the tangible. It seeks to manifest the unseen, inviting us into a realm of heightened awareness where space becomes a bridge between the material and ineffable (metaphysical, spiritual), prompting reflection, awe, or connection to something greater than oneself.

“The Space In-Between” is a familiar concept to many cultures and philosophies — in Buddhism, Sunyata is the voidness that constitutes ultimate reality, in Sufism, the Barzakh is the liminal world of the creative Imagination, in Japanese, Ma is the gap or interval that exists between objects, situations, or relationships, in Depth Psychology, self-realization is seen to take place within a liminal space. Therefore, it is more than simply other functional spaces, more than a physical boundary or threshold — **“The Space In-Between”** is an invitation to explore the experience of **“Transcendence.”**

Competition Conditions

The Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Forum (ACSF) has been exploring just such a path for over two decades. ACSF, with its international community of scholars and practitioners in both Western and Eastern cultures, upholds that the design and experience of the built environment can assist the spiritual development of humanity in the service of addressing the world's most pressing problems.

On the fifth anniversary of the completion of extensive multi-cultural research on this subject, we launched the **ACSF Declaration of Transcendent Human Habitat**.

As an integral part of the competition conditions, we invite design submissions of unbuilt theoretical and conceptual projects that align with the ACSF Declaration of Transcendent Human Habitat and foster human and planetary flourishing, spiritual growth, and the experience of the transcendent within a sustainable environment for present and future generations.

Declaration Principles

Projects should align with the following **ACSF Declaration Principles:**

We profess a worldview that our tangible and intangible universe has a spiritual dimension, and that this ineffable realm is central to pursuing, finding, appreciating, and supporting life's meanings. This spiritual dimension is conceived as an order in the universe that is transcendent in terms of being beyond us at all levels and posited as the ultimate source from which all beings rise, depend on, and return to.

We recognize the **three principles** of **contemplation**, **compassion**, and **moderation** as the perennial and complementary core values and intentions common to the spiritual practice of many world traditions that can serve as pillars to cultivate human spirituality in the process of envisioning, planning, designing, and realizing the built environment. The *Contemplative* principle aligns our inner, private self with the spiritually transcendent through a profound, personal sense of unity, while *Compassion* cultivates our empathy for the other and *Moderation* invokes self-restraint to foster a sustainable future existence.

Criteria

The following seven interconnected and interdependent criteria are proposed for effectively engaging and steering public policy, development practice, urban planning, architectural design, and their implementation toward spirituality-inspired and nurturing built environments at scales ranging from the dwelling unit to the cluster, neighborhood, community, city, and region:

- 1 Cultural Consciousness** inspires an integral respect for the diversity of cultural heritages and generates a spiritual sense of identity and belonging.
- 2 Participation** empowers personal and communal engagement for democratic and inclusive decision making regarding built environments.
- 3 Environmental Adaptation** fosters human habitats to be realized in spiritual and material harmony with nature, the cosmos and energy income of the earth.
- 4 Justice** ensures ethical and legal means by which equity and spiritual freedom can be achieved.
- 5 Ecotechnology** cultivates the innovative integration and realization of sustainable, urban systems of goods and services within healthy ecosystems and flows.
- 6 Essential Simplicity** nurtures a moral and aesthetic economy of means to achieve spiritual vitality and beauty in architecture and the built environment.
- 7 Beauty** cultivates the qualities of a thing or person to give pleasure to the senses by the harmonious order and unity of its parts that exalts the mind or spirit toward the Good, True and Absolute.

Open Competition

Eligibles Project Types: Architecture
Urban Design
Landscape Architecture

- All designs should evidence spiritual and transcendent approaches to the design of built environments that align with the Declaration Principles and Criteria.
- Projects should be conceptual and unbuilt.
- They should be designed for spiritual, religious or secular functions, at any scale.
- Submissions should be located in real sites or within existing buildings or spaces.
- They can be designed by individuals or teams who are the sole authors of the work.
- Your ability to communicate effectively will leave a lasting impact on your audience.
- Effectively communicating involves not only delivering a message but also resonating with the experiences, values, and emotions of those listening and participating.

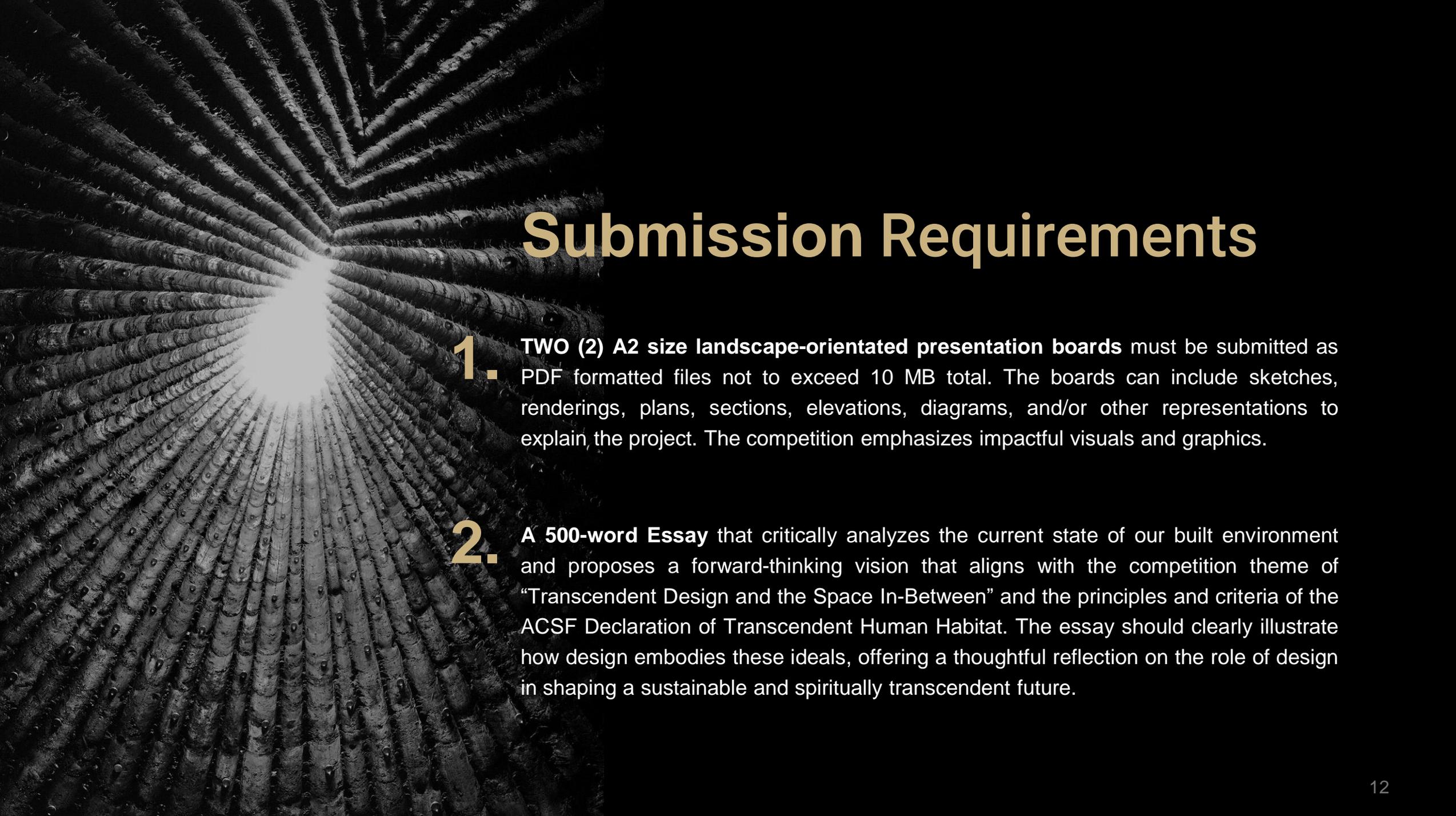
Essay Question Prompts

1 What, in your opinion, are the critical historical impacts and causal forces that have affected the world in modern times? How does your design address them?

3 How does your design engage with metaphysical, mythic, symbolic, imaginal, ontological, or metaphoric levels of meaning?

2 What is your vision for the future of life on Earth? How does your design fulfil that vision?

4 Describe any notable personal experiences of participating in this design competition. Have you noticed any changes in how you would now approach your work moving forward?



Submission Requirements

- 1.** **TWO (2) A2 size landscape-orientated presentation boards** must be submitted as PDF formatted files not to exceed 10 MB total. The boards can include sketches, renderings, plans, sections, elevations, diagrams, and/or other representations to explain the project. The competition emphasizes impactful visuals and graphics.
- 2.** **A 500-word Essay** that critically analyzes the current state of our built environment and proposes a forward-thinking vision that aligns with the competition theme of “Transcendent Design and the Space In-Between” and the principles and criteria of the ACSF Declaration of Transcendent Human Habitat. The essay should clearly illustrate how design embodies these ideals, offering a thoughtful reflection on the role of design in shaping a sustainable and spiritually transcendent future.

Schedule

Competition Announcement:	June 1, 2025
Registration and Q&A End:	September 27, 2025
Design & Essay Submission + Fee Ends :	October 27, 2025
Jury Review & Announcement:	December 22, 2025
Award Ceremony & Symposium:	February 6-8, 2026



Closing date for Questions & Answers (Q/A): **September 27, 2025**

Venue

The Awards Program and Ceremony will be hosted by the **Canadian University of Dubai (CUD) in Dubai, UAE from February 6 to 8, 2026.**

International Jury

It is an honor to have a distinguished panel of esteemed international experts for this competition. Their diverse expertise and global perspectives bring valuable insight to the selection process, ensuring a fair and inspiring evaluation of the submissions.



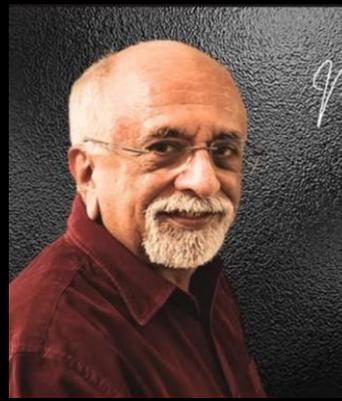
Hasan-Uddin Khan
United States

Prof. Hasan-Uddin Khan is an architect, writer, and educator. He graduated from the Architectural Association in London. Khan played a pivotal role in establishing the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and served as Editor-in-Chief of *Mimar: Architecture in Development*. He has taught at institutions including MIT, UC Berkeley, and Roger Williams University, where he became Distinguished Professor of the Architecture & Historic Preservation.



D. Fairchild Ruggles
United States

Dr. Ruggles is an American historian specializing in Islamic art and architecture. She holds the Presidential Humanities and Social Science Endowed Chair in Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her research examines the medieval landscape of Islamic Spain and South Asia and the complex interrelationship of Islamic culture with Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism. Dr. Ruggles has authored award-winning books, including *Gardens and Landscape*, and *Sites Unseen: Landscape and Vision*.



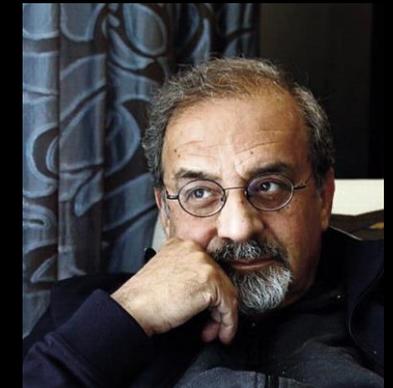
Prem Chandavarkar
India

Prem Chandavarkar is a prominent Indian architect and writer. He is the Managing Partner of CnT Architects, an award-winning and widely published architectural practice based in Bengaluru, India, with a history dating back across generations to being Bengaluru's first architectural firm. He earned his architectural degrees in New Delhi, and the University of Oregon. Chandavarkar is a former Executive Director of the Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design & Technology in Bengaluru, and a former Board of ACSF.



Sumaya Dabbagh
United Arab Emirates

Sumaya Dabbagh is a prominent Saudi architect educated in the UK, who founded Dabbagh Architects in Dubai in 2008. Her work emphasizes cultural identity, memory, and belonging, evident in projects like the Mleiha Archaeological Centre and the Gargash Mosque. Dabbagh served as Chair of the RIBA Gulf Chapter from 2015 to 2019 and has been recognized with awards such as "Principal of the Year" at the Middle East Architect Awards.



Rasem Badran
Jordan

Rasem Badran is a renowned architect blending modern design Islamic heritage. He founded Dar Al-Omran in 1981 and has completed significant projects like the Grand Mosque of Riyadh, Al-Bujairi Development KSA, and the Abu Dhabi Courts Complex. Badran received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1995 and the Tamayouz Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019, recognizing his contributions to modern Islamic architecture.

Jury Selection Criteria

- All entries will be reviewed by a jury composed of internationally recognized individuals.
- The best entries will be selected by considering how they embody the following main two items expressed by the submission's alignment with most or all its seven interconnected and interdependent criteria:
 1. Competition Theme **“Transcendent Design and the Space In-Between”**
 2. The Declaration's principles of **Contemplation, Moderation, and Compassion**

Prizes

Monetary Awards

The total prize fund:
\$10,000 USD

3 Winners & 4 Honorable Mentions
Quality Trophies & Citations

1st Prize
\$5,000 USD

2nd Prize
\$3,000 USD

3rd Prize
\$2,000 USD

4 Honorable Mentions

Global Promotion: The award-winning projects will be documented and widely promoted through 2A Media and Magazine, the ACSF website, and various other channels.

Registration & Submission

1. Registration is free. Interested Applicants must register for the competition before **September 27, 2025**.

2. Submission and Payment: Due **October 27, 2025**

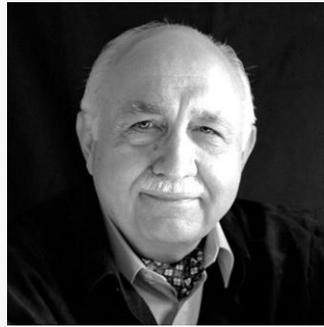
- Participants from Global North: **\$80.00 USD**

(USA, Canada, United Kingdom, nations of the European Union, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Australia, & New Zealand):

- Students & participants from all other countries: **\$20.00 USD**

Organizing Committee

Competition Conceptualized by The Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Forum (ACSF) Team



Nader Ardalan
ACSF Board Member
United States

Nader is a senior practicing Architect, theorist and President of Ardalan Assoc. He holds a Master of Architecture from the GSD at Harvard University, and a Bachelors of Architecture from Carnegie-Mellon University. He has been a Visiting Critic at Harvard, Yale, MIT, and Tehran University; Co-author of the "Sense of Unity" & "Gulf Sustainable Urbanism" books. He also has been a founding member of the Steering Committee of one of the most prestigious Aga Khan Award in architecture.



Nevine Nasser
ACSF Board Member
United Kingdom

Dr. Nasser is a practicing architect and academic scholar exploring the intersection between sacred space and spiritual experience. She holds a PhD in Islamic sacred architecture from the King's School of Traditional Arts, a Master of Architecture in Sustainable architecture from CAT at the University of East London and completed her architectural degree at Cairo University. Her work explores relationships between creative and spiritual practice, both collaboratively and individually.



Nesrine Mansour
ACSF Board Member
United States

Dr. Mansour, is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Colorado Boulder. She specializes in the intersection of architecture, digital media, and sacred spaces, with a focus on AI and Virtual Reality. A research fellow at Princeton's Center for Theological Inquiry (2020/21), she has published widely across disciplines. She co-chaired the 14th ACSF Symposium (Istanbul, 2024) and currently working on an edited book *Religion and AI: Theoretical and Empirical Approaches*.



Nooshin Esmaeili
ACSF Board Member
Canada

Nooshin is a registered architect, sessional instructor, and PhD candidate at the University of Calgary in Canada. Her research explores the spatial poetics of architecture, its existential qualities, and the link between Persian architecture, Sufism (Hidden & Manifest), and self-transcendence. Bridging Design, Architecture, environmental psychology & neuro-architecture, Nooshin's research examines how the built environment shapes overall human flourishing.

2A Magazine Team



Mahsa Masoudi
Deputy Editor, 2A Magazine
Iran

Mahsa is a practicing architect and scene designer, working across architecture and interdisciplinary projects. She holds a Master of Architecture from Pennsylvania State University and studied Scenic Design at UNCSCA as a Fletcher Fellow. She also explored Asian architecture at Sogang University in Seoul. Mahsa previously worked at Richard Meier & Partners in New York and now teaches at Iran University of Art, while co-founding StudioSe, an architecture and design practice based in Tehran.



Ahmad Zohadi
Founder, 2A Magazine
United Arab Emirates

Ahmad is a visionary leader and the Founder & Director of the UNESCO Club of Architecture & Art. His ideas encompass global missions in architecture, culture, and advanced theoretical research in multimedia fields, including filmmaking. As the Founder of 2A Magazine, he envisions it as more than just a specialized art and architectural media platform—he sees it as a global amplifier that elevates the voices of architects and artists, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and innovation globally.

The organizing committee would like to acknowledge Thomas Berry, Julio Bermudez, and Hakan Ashaboğlu for their valuable support and contributions.

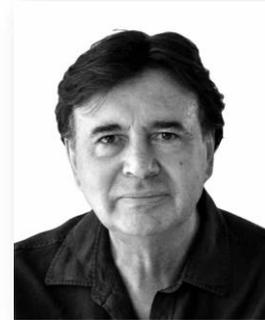
Advisory Group



Massimo Imparato

Dean - Canadian University of Dubai (CUD)

Professor Massimo Imparato is the Dean of the School of Architecture and Interior Design at Canadian University Dubai (CUD). He holds a Master's Degree with Honors in Architecture & Post Graduate Certificate in Art and Design from the University of Hertfordshire. He is a Former Faculty member for Environmental Representation course at Milan Politecnica and Proficient in Urban Design, having practiced with renowned architect Giancarlo De Carlo. He is a Registered architect with the Chamber of the Architects of La Spezia, Italy, Associate Fellow of the Chartered Society of Designers UK, Member of the Society for the Circular Economy, Member of Global Ambassadors for Sustainability & Chair of Cumulus Association working group FINDER and Editorial correspondent for China.



Dr. Constantin Spiridonidis

Canadian University of Dubai (CUD)

Dr. Constantin is a distinguished academic in the field of architecture and urban planning, currently serving as the Chair of Architecture in the School of Architecture and Design at CUD, UAE. He holds a PhD in Architecture from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, UK1. He is also an Architect, having studied at the University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and an Urban Planner, with studies from the University of Paris VIII, France. He is the author of: Learning for the Future: New Priorities of Schools of Architecture in the Era of Uncertainty; "Navigating the Nexus of Relevance in Doctoral Research in Architecture" (2024). His work often addresses the intersection of technology, pedagogy, and architectural practice, reflecting his expertise in shaping the future of architectural education.



Sandra Woodall

Royal Institute of British Architects . Chartered Practice

Sandra FRIBA, is Design Director of tangram MENA, Founder of tangram TERRA and a passionate environmentalist, architect, urbanist, researcher, lecturer, and mentor, who has lived and worked in the UAE for almost 30 years. She is a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), and the Academy of Urbanism (AOU). She is an award-winning designer who leads tangram's MENA region studio who were recognized as "2019 MENA Architecture Firm of the Year".



Bakhti More

Manipal Academy of Higher Education

Dr. More is a Chairperson at the School of Design & Architecture, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) Dubai Campus. She has pursued doctoral studies at the School of Built Environment, University of Salford, Manchester, UK, with research on 'Urban planning, neighborhoods, and social cohesiveness: a socio-cultural study of expatriate residents in Dubai. Her edited Book on 'Emergent Technologies: New Media and Urban Life' explores the underlying dynamics of emerging technologies.

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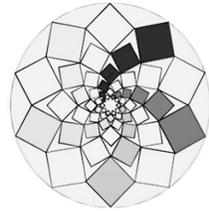
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