



Pavilion of the Republic of Uzbekistan
at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity

Curated by Studio KO
20 May – 26 November 2023

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Foreword

by Gayane Umerova, Executive Director of the Art and Culture Development Foundation of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Learning from traditional materials, forms, and techniques offers an opportunity to recover forgotten knowledges and bring back ideas and approaches that can help address some of the pressing problems we are facing today.

A key element of Uzbekistan's architectural heritage, traditional Uzbek bricks play a central role in our national pavilion this year. Bricks are both a universal and archaic material, and they have been used in building construction in Uzbekistan for centuries. They are known for their durability and can last for centuries, making them a great choice for long-lasting building projects.

The theme announced by curator Lesley Lokko, *The Laboratory of the Future*, envisions the Biennale Architettura 2023 as a kind of workshop, a laboratory where participants and the audience imagine what the future can hold. In response to this theme, we decided to look into our past to seek a vision for our shared future. This year, we address different horizons of Uzbekistan's architectural heritage as a potential tool to envision the future and a key element to challenge the dominant concept of modernity.

Called *Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity*, the pavilion is a major collaborative effort. It brings together a diverse group of curators, researchers, craftsmen, and artists to explore the ruins of the qalas, the ancient fortresses of the Karakalpakstan and the heritage of the Khorezm civilization.

We are delighted to have chosen French-Moroccan architecture office Studio KO as the curators of our national pavilion. Studio KO has established a strong relationship with the ACDF in Tashkent, having been entrusted with two major projects that beautifully blend contemporary design with a profound respect for Uzbekistan's heritage. Their transformation of a 1912 diesel station into the future Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA), the country's first contemporary art centre, exemplifies their ability to breathe new life into historic structures while preserving their essence. Furthermore, the Mahalla Artist Residencies (MAH) project showcases Studio KO's dedication to fostering creativity and education, modernity and tradition, within the context of Uzbekistan's rich cultural fabric.

Their vision for *The Laboratory of the Future* aligns perfectly with curator Lesley Lokko's theme, inviting participants and the audience to imagine the future while remaining deeply rooted in the nation's architectural and cultural heritage. Their expertise, combined with their sensitivity to Uzbekistan's unique context, promises an inspiring exploration of the future through the lens of our past, ultimately constructing a compelling narrative for the Uzbekistan National Pavilion.

As proposed by the curators, *Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity* – this year's pavilion – is a collaborative and collective endeavour. While Studio KO brings a wealth of international experience and architectural prowess to the pavilion, the students and professors of the Ajou University in Tashkent contribute with a profound comprehension of Uzbekistan's architectural legacy. Artists Abdulvahid Bukhoriy, El Mehdi Azzam, Emine Gdze Sevim and Miza Mucciarelli add their unique perspectives, thereby enriching the multidimensional aspects of this research-oriented project.

To deepen our understanding of these ancient fortresses we have also collaborated with one of the leading experts on the archaeology of qalas, Dr Irina Arzhantseva who wrote a book on Sergei Tolstov's expeditions exploring the ruins of qalas in the twentieth century. The groundbreaking work of Tolstov was one of the first scientific studies of qalas and their place in Uzbekistan's rich history. He documented the architecture and engineering of the qalas in great detail and also collected artefacts from the surrounding areas.

The scope and depth of Dr Arzhantseva's knowledge help us to approach the qalas and the traditional techniques used in their construction with scientific accuracy. Her research also provides valuable insight into the relationship between the qalas and the surrounding communities, and how these structures have shaped the region's identity over time.

As we look towards the future, our ancient heritage can help us to rethink the current trajectory of global development and the role that architecture plays in shaping our collective destiny. By examining the architectural remains of past societies, we can gain insight into the values, beliefs, and technologies that shaped their worlds. This in turn can inform our own design choices and decision-making as we work to build a better and more sustainable future.

Press release

The Art and Culture Development Foundation of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ACDF) announces the title of the Uzbekistan National Pavilion at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. The Uzbekistan National Pavilion, entitled *Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity*, is curated by the architectural firm Studio KO. The curatorial team will include Karl Fournier, Olivier Marty, Jean-Baptiste Carisé, Sophia Bengebara.

In response to the theme of the 18th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, *The Laboratory of the Future*, the Uzbekistan National Pavilion entitled *Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity* addresses different horizons of Uzbekistan’s architectural heritage as a potential tool to envision the future and a key element to challenge the concept of modernity.

Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity is a research-based project which will be centred around the ruins of the **qalas**, ancient fortresses of the **Karakalpakstan**, heritage of the **Khorezm civilization**, and the multiple possibilities that earth offers to build, especially the bricks. Bricks, both a universal and archaic material, are the building block of Uzbek architecture.

Together with the architectural students and professors of the **Ajou University in Tashkent**, and associated artists, **Studio KO** will explore the materiality of bricks, soil, and clay. Through this **collaboration** combining theoretical work experimentation with the students and a reinterpretation of the modes of brick fabrication, its techniques of construction and its types of finishes, the spatial proposal of the Pavilion will emerge.

Certain bricks in the installation will be glazed by Uzbek artist and ceramics master **Abdulahid Bukhoriy**, one of the few craftsmen to master the nearly lost Blue Bukhara ceramics technique.

“Uzbekistan is a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, and its ancient qalas (fortresses) and traditional craftsmanship are an important part of this legacy. The qalas, which are found throughout the country, are an enduring symbol of the resilience and strength of the Uzbek people, and are a testament to the country's long and varied history. By promoting their significance at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, we can help to raise awareness of the importance of cultural heritage preservation and encourage others to join us in this effort”.

— **Saida Mirziyoyeva**, Head of the Communications and Information Policy Section of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

“As we look towards the future, our ancient heritage can help us to rethink the trajectory of humanity and the role that architecture plays in shaping our collective destiny. By examining the architectural remains of past societies, we can gain insight into the values, beliefs, and technologies that shaped their worlds. This in turn can inform our own design choices and decision-making as we work to build a better future. Traditional Uzbek bricks made using centuries-old techniques are durable, sustainable, and beautiful. Manufactured from natural materials, they are still sturdy and can last millennia, making them a good choice for long-lasting building projects.”

— **Gayane Umerova**, Executive Director of the Art and Culture Development Foundation of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity

The project

Our response to the theme of the 18th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, *The Laboratory of the Future*, can be read as an encounter of different horizons, allowing us to take a cross look at the Uzbek architectural heritage, to delve into its past in order to find the necessary tools for the elaboration of tomorrow's world. Unbuild together the modernity, by questioning the notion of archaism.

Participation is above all collaborative, placing the human being at the center of our approach. Through the exchanges between us and architectural students of Ajou University in Tashkent, craftsmen and associated artists, a collective proposal will emerge, leaving a place for the unexpected.

The associated artists all have a poetic role accompanying our approach. A film in the core of the architectural installation by El Mehdi Azzam, diffusing its significance and emotion. A reduced model made by Miza Mucciarelli, as a mental comprehension of the lived experience. A photographic work by Emine Gözde Sevim, a sensitive eye of a shared experience.

It is about giving ourselves theoretical and practical tools to achieve this. From the ruins of the ancient qalas to the multiple possibilities that earth offers to build, especially the brick. From the mythical figure of the labyrinth to the constructed reality. As many elements to be reinterpreted in order to create a sensitive and poetic architectural proposal, reflecting a truly contemporary and contextual practice.

Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity

The curators

Studio KO

Since meeting at the Beaux-Arts school of Architecture in Paris and the subsequent creation of their studio in 2000, Karl Fournier and Olivier Marty have applied their elementary assertion to every scale of their projects.

Based in Paris and Marrakech, Studio KO creates contemporary public and residential architecture all over the world, inspired by the intelligence of places.

Not confined to a grammar of styles or any systematic methods, the studio is defined by an attitude. An esteem for nature and existing cultures, the audacity of the broad aesthetic differences, an attention to craftsmanship and local skills, a permanent search for the rugged. For an architecture of oxymoron. Radical and archaic. An architecture with a sensibility that, from the foundations to the signature scent, reveals, without arrogance, its uniqueness and mystery.

Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity

The associated artists

Abdulahid Bukhoriy

Artist, Ceramics Master

In 1977, Abdulvahid Bukhoriy was born in Bukhara. As a young student, he learned his first lessons in ceramics from the renowned folk ceramics craftsman Babayev from Uba village in Vabkent Region and Master A. I. Narzullayev of the Gizhduvan School of Ceramics. The renowned ceramics master Fazil Mirzayev taught him the fundamentals of both modern and traditional Uzbek ceramics, and he later graduated from the ceramics faculty of the School of Arts named after P. P. Benkov. Abdulvakhid was able to choose his career thanks to his familiarity with the ceramic creations of well-known artists and the curriculum of local Uzbek schools. Since then, he has started to consider what will happen to and how to bring back the Blue Ceramics of Bukhara, which have been forgotten for more than a century and have ceased to exist.

El Mehdi Azzam

Author, filmmaker

After studying engineering and physical sciences, El Mehdi Azzam turned to cinema which he studied first in Morocco then in France. As a director, his films have been awarded in several festivals (Grand Prix in San Sebastian, Prix Jeune Public in Cinémed, Prix SACD, Prix Canal+...). He has collaborated with Studio KO on three creative films: Almost KO, 'E', Tentative désespérée pour définir la patrie. Currently, he is preparing a PhD at the Jean Jaurès University in Toulouse, around the aesthetic impact of Artificial Intelligence on cinematographic language.

Miza Mucciarelli

Architect, sculptor and model maker

Born in Brescia, Miza Mucciarelli graduated from the Polytechnic School of Milan in 2001. The same year, she moved to Paris to manage the model laboratory at Dominique Perrault Architecture. She worked on the restoration of the archives and creation of new models, then set up the Perrault retrospective at the Centre Pompidou. In 2009, she founded her own studio, Atelier Misto, dedicated to architectural models that ally craftsmanship to the choice of precious materials : marbles, onyx and other rare stones, resins mixed with special woods, glass and metals. Constantly experimenting, researching and combining new techniques and materials to achieve her personal aesthetic, Miza conceives her models as sculptures reflecting the essence of spaces and associated sensitive experiences. She lectured both at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratif (ENSAD) and FEMIS film school in Paris until 2015.

Emine Gödze Sevim

Photographer

Born in Istanbul, Emine Gödze Sevim is an artist acclaimed for her narratives about lives amidst historic shifts. Her work focuses on individuals' experiences in globally newsworthy moments in an attempt to create "alternative" visual narratives of history. She graduated from Bard College in 2008. Her works to date have been exhibited, published and recognized by awards and grants internationally. She is the author of "Embed in Egypt" (Kehrer Verlag, 2015) and is the first, and to date the only grantee of Turkish origin of the coveted Magnum Foundation Fund. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity

The research partners

Ajou University in Tashkent (AUT) was established in 2020 in cooperation with Ajou University (Republic of Korea).

Ajou University graduates make splendid careers at organizations whose activities relate to Engineering, IT, Medical Sciences, Business, and International Studies.

Ajou University is widely recognized for its innovative international programs and strong support for international students and has collaborative partnerships with over 322 universities in 65 countries.

Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity

The two workshops

The *Unbuild Together: Archaism vs. Modernity* workshops in Uzbekistan focused on exploring the tension between archaism and modernity in architecture. Led by Studio KO, the workshops provided architecture students of the Ajou University in Tashkent with opportunities to study traditional brick architecture and ancient qalas ruins, and to use materiality as a means of ideation.

1) The first workshop, *Archaism vs. Modernity*, centered on the spatiality of architecture and the cultural heritage of ancient qalas in Karakalpakstan. The students embarked on a field trip to witness the ruins firsthand, considering them both as a testimony of the past and as the future of modernity. The theme of contextuality was explored, as the students delved into Jean Nouvel's Louisiana Manifesto and discussed the potential and limits of contextualism in architecture.

2) The second workshop, *Brick, from clay to wall*, focused on the materiality of bricks, with a particular focus on the secular structures such as trading buildings and caravanserais that played a significant role in international trade along the Great Silk Road. Led by Studio KO, the students from Ajou University in Tashkent observed traditional construction techniques and innovations, such as the use of kiln-dried bricks, the decorative use of bricks in architecture in Bukhara, and the mastery of brick glazing at the ceramic workshop of the artist Abdulvahid Bukhoriy.

The students were encouraged to use all types of representation to embrace the rich and varied possibilities of materiality and to find their own voice in the symphony of form and substance. Beginning with an emphasis on understanding scale, the workshop proceeded with building and photographing Nikolai brick creations with the guidance of Studio KO and Miza Mucciarelli. From the base of carved wood, to the buildings of prints, to the patterns of bricks, the students immersed themselves in the tactile and sensory experiences of selecting and manipulating different materials, exploring specificities such as textures, transparencies, and colors. The students' ideas and explorations became a part of the spatial proposal of the Uzbekistan National Pavilion.

ACDF

The Art and Culture Development Foundation under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, founded in 2017 by the decree of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, fosters international cooperation and promotes the culture of Uzbekistan on the international stage. It showcases national heritage by initiating projects in the fine arts, architecture, literature, theater, music, craft, design and dance.

The mission of the Foundation is to create an inclusive and accessible environment in the country's cultural institutions, to contribute to the renovation of museums, and to develop cultural patronage and professional training for the arts and culture sector.

Practical information

The 18th International Architecture Exhibition, titled *The Laboratory of the Future*, will be open to the public **from Saturday May 20 to Sunday November 26, 2023**; it will be curated by Lesley Lokko and organised by La Biennale di Venezia. The **pre-opening** will take place on **May 18 and 19**, the awards ceremony and inauguration will be held on Saturday 20 May 2023.

Uzbekistan National Pavilion
Biennale Architettura 2023
Venice, Arsenale (Quarta Tesa)

Opening hours from 20 May to 30 September:
11 am - 7 pm (last admission 6:45 pm)

Until 30 September (Arsenale venue only):
on Fridays and Saturdays extended opening until 8 pm (last admission: 7:45 pm)

Opening hours from 1 October to 26 November: 10 am – 6 pm

Closed on Mondays

Extraordinary openings: Monday 22 May, 14 August, 4 September, 16 October, 30 October, 20 November 2023.

Instagram: [@uzbekistan_national_pavilion](https://www.instagram.com/uzbekistan_national_pavilion)

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