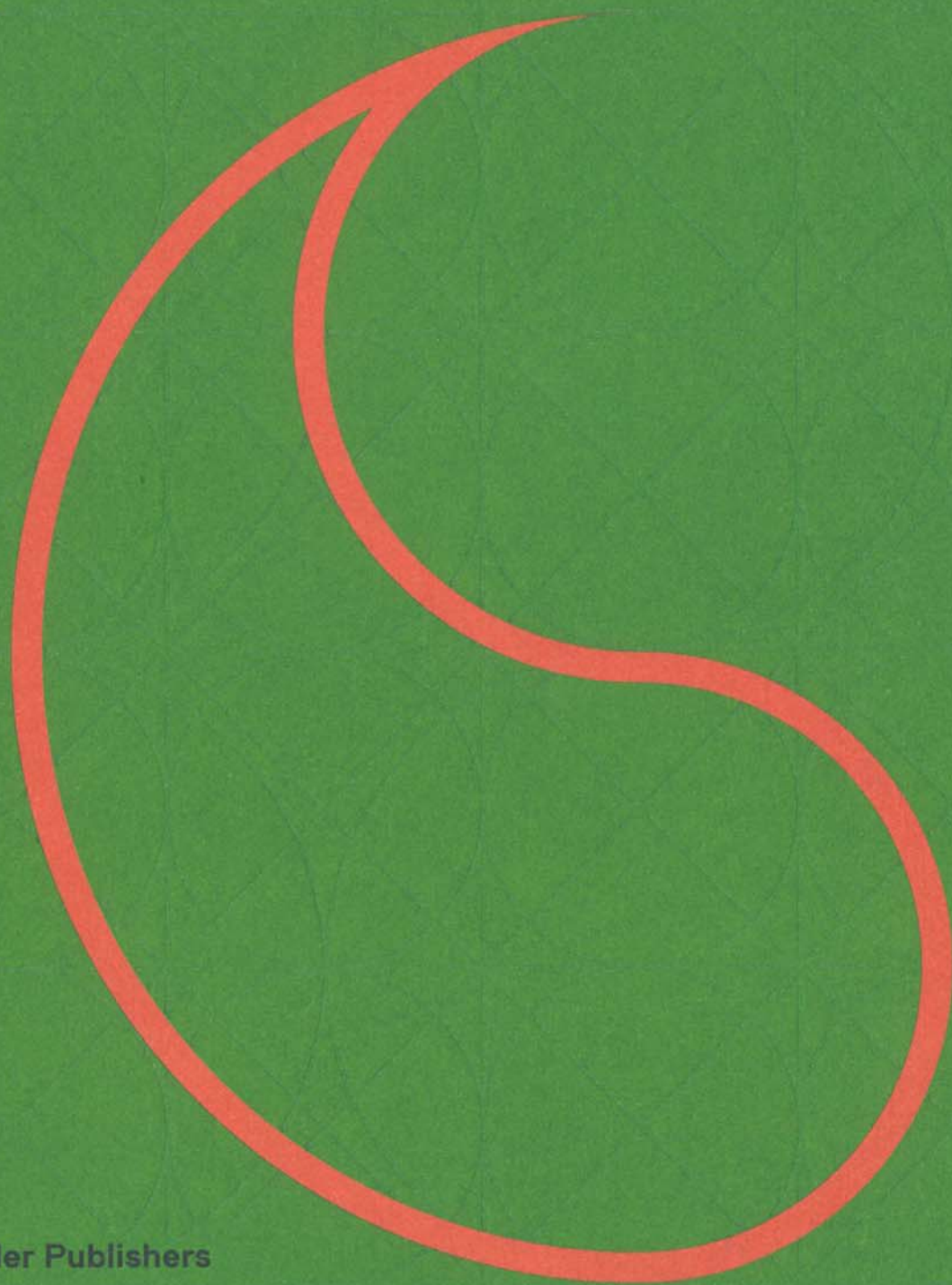


ARCHITECTURE IS LIFE

Edited by Mohsen Mostafavi



Lars Müller Publishers



AGA KHAN AWARD
FOR ARCHITECTURE

6 PREFACE

Farrokh Derakhshani

9 THE ARCHITECTURE OF LIFE

Mohsen Mostafavi

26 STEERING COMMITTEE BRIEF

29 REPORT OF THE MASTER JURY

34 THE PARTICULAR AND THE UNIVERSAL

Mahmood Mamdani

42 GEOGRAPHY AND ARCHITECTURE

David Adjaye

46 INNOVATION AND JUDGEMENT

Toshiko Mori

50 THE AWARD AND CHINA

Wang Shu

51 ENDLESS INVENTIVENESS

Shahzia Sikander

CRAFT

54 PRESERVATION OF THE MBARU NIANG

Wae Rebo Village, Flores Island, Indonesia

64 KANTANA FILM AND ANIMATION INSTITUTE

Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

74 MAPUNGBWE INTERPRETATION CENTRE

Limpopo Province, South Africa

83 BUILDING CRAFTS IN THE MODERN WORLD

Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj

CONSERVATION

90 PRESERVATION OF SACRED AND COLLECTIVE OASIS SITES

Guelmim Region, Morocco

100 RESTORATION OF THULA FORT

Yemen

110 REVITALISATION OF BIRZEIT HISTORIC CENTRE 2013 AWARD RECIPIENT

Palestine

126 REHABILITATION OF NAGAU FORT

Rajasthan, India

DWELLING

138 APARTMENT NO. 1

Mahallat, Iran

148 THE MET TOWER

Bangkok, Thailand

INFRASTRUCTURE

162 REHABILITATION OF TABRIZ BAZAAR 2013 AWARD RECIPIENT

Iran

180 RABAT-SALÉ URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT 2013 AWARD RECIPIENT

Morocco

198 ISLAMIC CEMETERY 2013 AWARD RECIPIENT

Altach, Austria

216 SALAM CENTRE FOR CARDIAC SURGERY 2013 AWARD RECIPIENT

Khartoum, Sudan

233 PLACENESS AND WELL-BEING, THROUGH THE LENS OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Hanif Kara

INSTITUTION

240 LYCÉE FRANÇAIS CHARLES DE GAULLE

Damascus, Syria

250 MOHAMMED VI FOOTBALL ACADEMY

Salé, Morocco

260 MUSEUM OF HANDCRAFT PAPER

Gaoligong, Yunnan, China

RESILIENCE

272 UMUBANO PRIMARY SCHOOL

Kigali, Rwanda

282 POST-TSUNAMI HOUSING

Kirinda, Sri Lanka

292 MARIA GRAZIA CUTULI PRIMARY SCHOOL

Khushrud Village, Herat, Afghanistan

302 RECONSTRUCTION OF NAHR EL-BARED REFUGEE CAMP

Akkar, Lebanon

316 ON LANDSCAPE

Michel Desvigne

320 TURKISH ARCHITECTURE TODAY!

Hashim Sarkis in conversation with Han Tümerterkin and Murat Tabanlıoğlu

331 REDEFINING THE BUILT PROJECT

Mohammad al-Asad

339 FROM PUBLIC SPACE TO PUBLIC SPHERE

Homi K. Bhabha

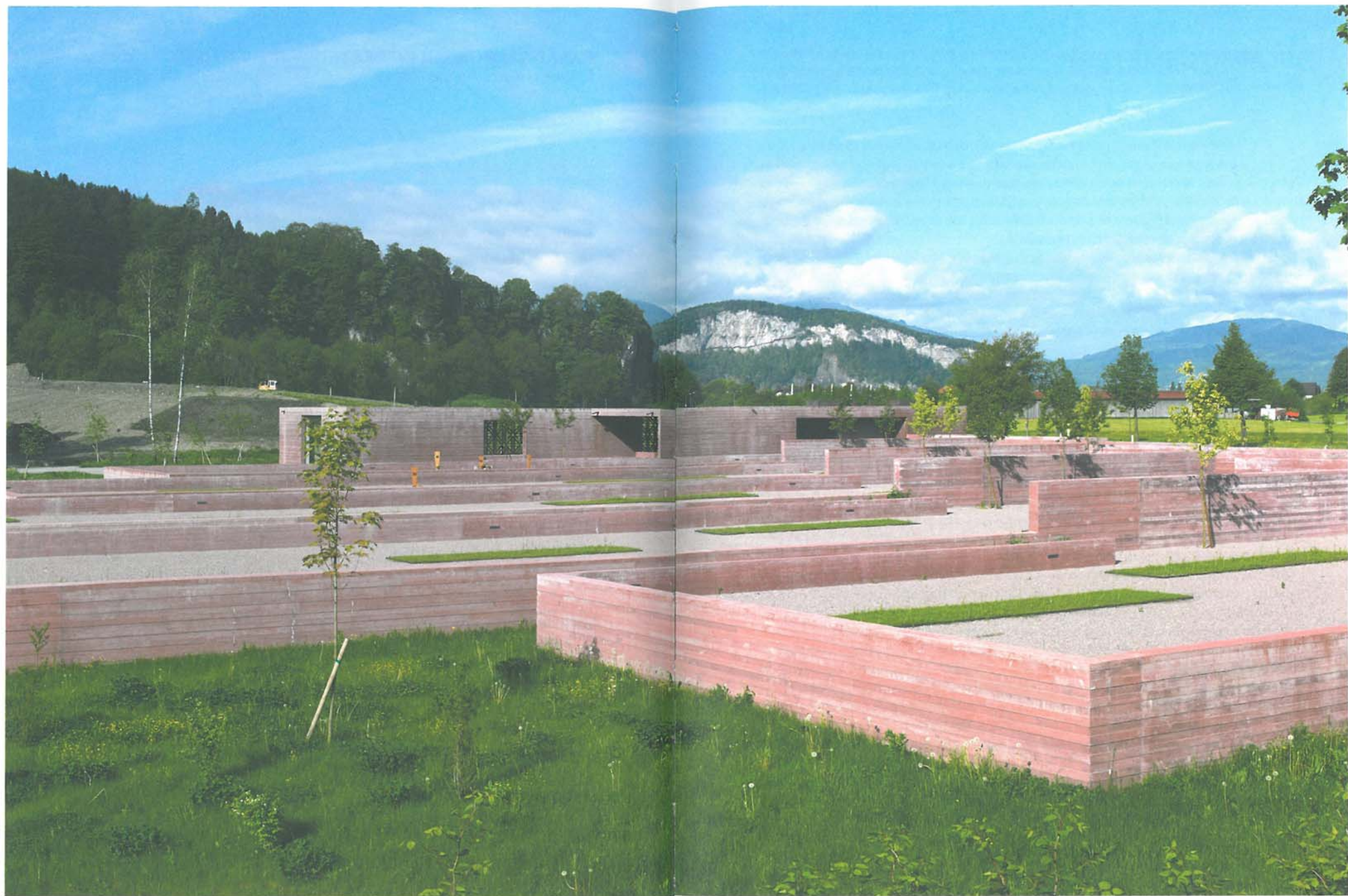
346 2013 Award Steering Committee

2013 Award Master Jury

347 2013 Award On-Site Reviewers

348 Award Recipients 1980–2013

350 Acknowledgements



ISLAMIC CEMETERY

Altach, Austria

Vorarlberg state in western Austria is home to a thriving Muslim community that counts for 10% of the local population, constituting the second largest religious group after the Catholic faith. This Muslim community came to the industrialised state of Vorarlberg for a variety of reasons: in the 1960s, Turkish migrant workers being the predominant group; in the 1990s, Bosnian Muslims who sought refuge in Austria during the Yugoslav wars; and in the last two decades, immigrants from Chechnya, from various North African countries and from South-East Asia. In 2012, Austria celebrated the 100th jubilee of its "Islamic law", issued in 1912 following the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This law recognised Sunni (Hanafi) Muslims as a religious community and guaranteed them the same religious rights as those of the Empire's other recognised religions. Though the Islamic community in Austria has had a long history, only recently have burials according to the Islamic rite become possible. The Islamic Cemetery in Altach is the first constructed in the Austrian state of Vorarlberg, and the second to be constructed in Austria (the first was built in Vienna in 2008). And, in contrast to the cemetery in Vienna, which serves only the city, it is open to Muslims of all Islamic denominations from all of Vorarlberg's 96 municipalities, so crossing municipal boundaries and giving them equal rights to be buried according to Islamic rituals. Prior to this, Muslims – especially first and second generation – used to send their dead back to their countries of origin (a long, costly and bureaucratically complex process) or opt for burial in extensions of existing cemeteries – such as Vienna, Linz, Innsbruck, Graz and so on – but without full Islamic burial rites. However, by the 1990s, people wanted to stay in Vorarlberg: they had been born here, had married here, had had children here, and so naturally also wanted to be buried here. Highly indicative on many levels of the shifting relationship between Muslim immigrants and the dominant society in their adopted country were the words spoken by the president of the Austrian Islamic Religious Community during the 2012 inaugural ceremony of Altach's Islamic Cemetery: "Homeland is the place where we would like to find our final resting place".

The initial idea for an Islamic cemetery was born in autumn 2003, then followed by years of participatory discussions between Islamic communities and immigrant associations in Vorarlberg on the one hand and the Vorarlberg Association of Municipalities on the other (since cemeteries fall under the jurisdiction of local authorities), culminating in 2008 with the Association buying an 8500-square-metre plot of land that the municipality of Altach had voluntarily proposed for the construction of an Islamic cemetery. The site

stands on the local road between the villages of Hohenems and Götzis among rolling green meadows dotted with traditional and contemporary timber architecture, surrounded by spruce forests clothing the mountain faces of the Alps.

Local architect Bernardo Bader was selected after an invited competition to design the building and the site. He was assisted by a community group knowledgeable about the construction of Islamic cemeteries, and by Vorarlberg imams on matters of ritual. Inspired by notions of the primordial garden, a lattice-like system of red concrete walls of varying heights and patterned by formwork delineates five distinct, staggered, grave fields oriented towards Mecca and a rectangular one-storey building in a simple but monumental design. The overall concept features an ingeniously laid out, open plan: towards the road, higher walls provide a feeling of enclosure; towards the mountains, walls are lower and embedded in the ground; everywhere, though, they are broken and interrupted, encouraging a continuous flow of space and dialogue with the surrounding landscape.

The tripartite division, visible on the monumentally "plain" entrance elevation of the Cemetery, gives little indication of the functional spaces within: in the "blind" entrance section, a top-lit mortuary and washroom for the dead and other less used service areas; a covered, half-open gathering area for larger numbers at the centre of the structure – signalled on the exterior by a wooden latticework screen of strong geometric patterns (an abstract reference to both Islamic design and traditional local woodcraft) – that leads directly onto an open patio connecting with the grave fields outside; and a prayer hall in the other "blind" end that has a large window on the short side facing Mecca. In the prayer hall, faced in white-stained wood, Azra Akšamija, a Bosnian-born Austrian Muslim architect and artist, working in close collaboration with Bader, designed the *qibla* wall of three stainless-steel mesh curtains that hang parallel at different distances to the end wall. Hung with an array of wooden shingles, placed more or less densely with some bearing Kufic calligraphic script that spell out the words "Allah" and "Mohammed", these curtains act as screens breaking up the light in dramatic patterns while also referencing the wood shingle walls of local architectural tradition. Throughout, the work was executed by local craftsmen.

The subtle simplicity of the Cemetery's design and its interaction with its natural surroundings provide a calm and dignified place for spiritual contemplation, burial and mourning. Architecturally, it offers a new, culturally sensitive aesthetic that is both Islamic and Alpine. This pioneering project has successfully responded to an immigrant community's desire to find a final resting place in its adopted homeland, triggering interest in other Austrian states to create similar facilities.

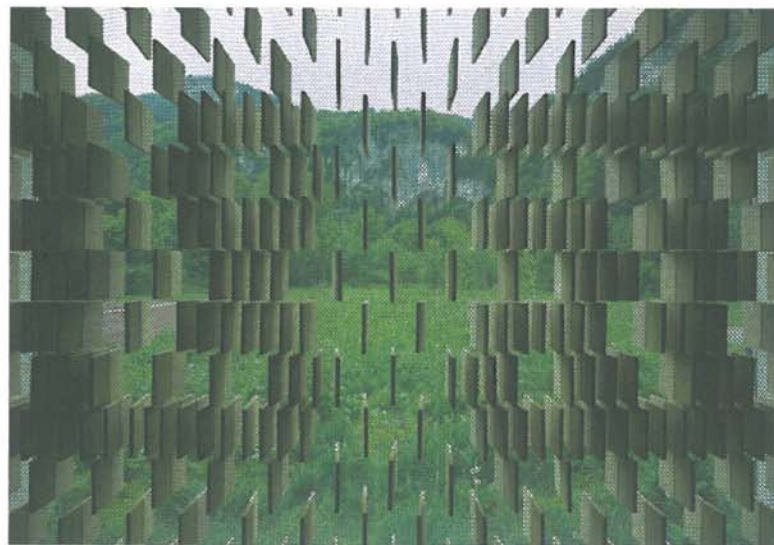
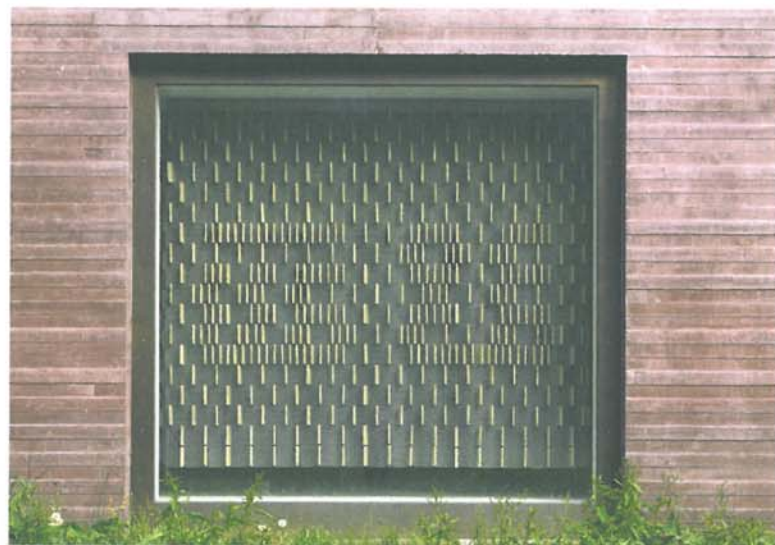


JURY CITATION

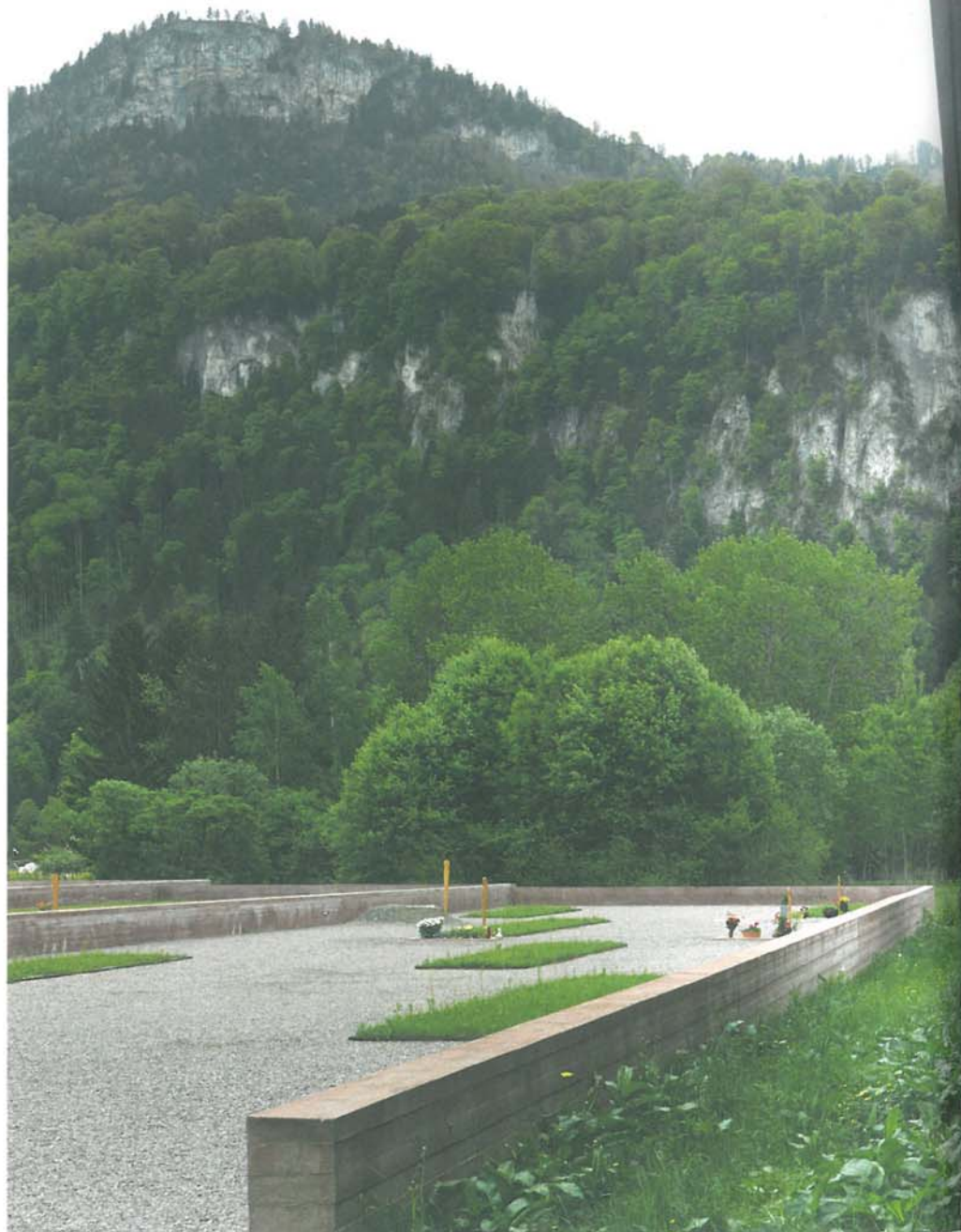
The Islamic Cemetery, in its restrained and measured expression, belies a complex cultural negotiation. In the context of its host environment, it presents a symbolically charged site as a place of resolve. The project brought together a multi-faith, multi-ethnic group of actors to realise the wish of an immigrant community seeking to create a space that fulfils their spiritual aspirations and, at the same time, responds to the context of their adopted country with a culturally sensitive design and aesthetic.

Simple in expression and poetic in form, it not only engages the natural landscape in an intelligent manner but also suspends any notion of declaration. While emphasising spiritual pluralism, the Cemetery also provides the final destination for a minority group in a dominant society.





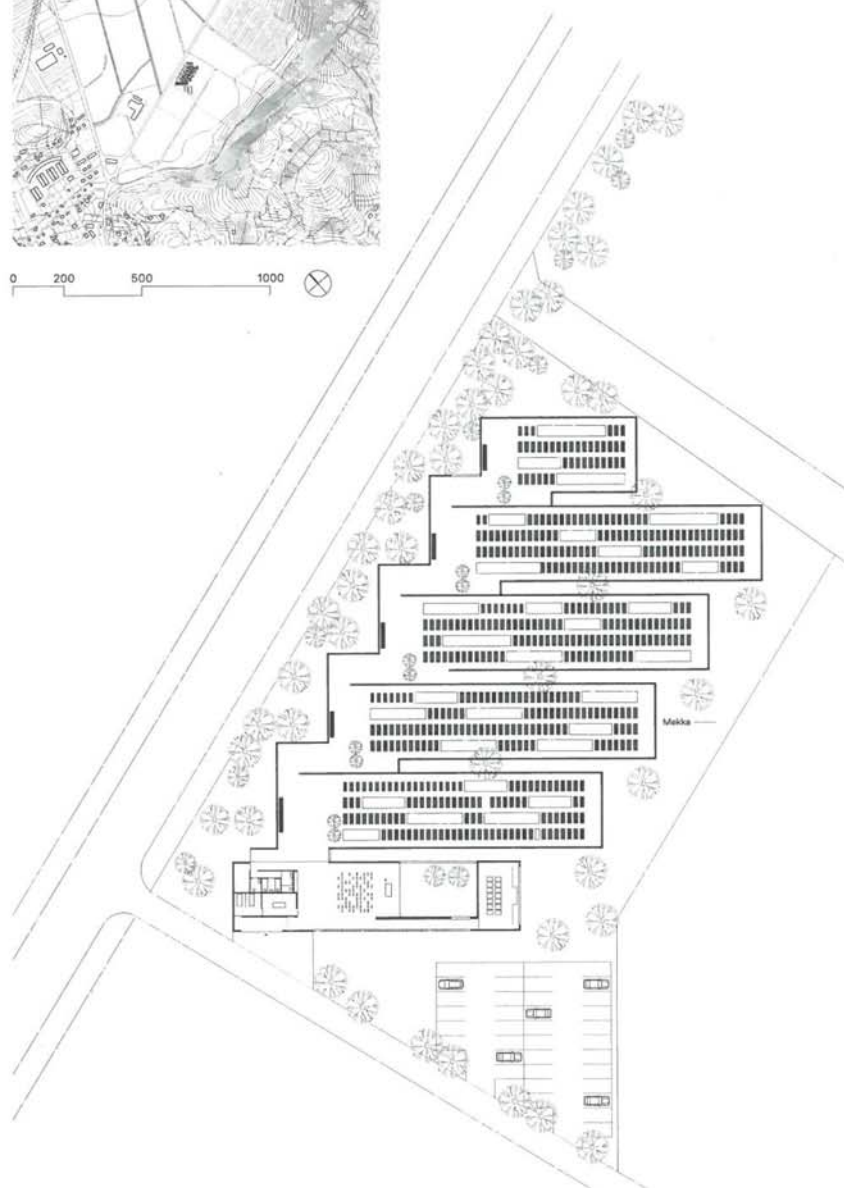








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ISLAMIC CEMETERY

Altach, Austria

CLIENT

Municipality of Altach, Altach, Austria:
Gottfried Brändle, Mayor of Altach, Austria

ARCHITECT

Bernardo Bader, Dornbirn, Austria

CONSULTANTS

Eva Grabherr, director of Okay.zusammen
leben/Advice Centre for Immigration and
Integration, Dornbirn, Austria

Vorarlberg Association of Municipalities,
Dornbirn, Austria

Attila Dincer, leader of the initiatory group
"Islamic Cemetery", Dornbirn, Austria

ARTIST

Azra Akšamija, Boston, USA

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Merz Kley Partner ZT GmbH, Dornbirn, Austria:
Gordian Kley, partner

SITE SUPERVISOR

Thomas Marte, Dornbirn, Austria

CRAFTSMEN

Association for the Preservation of the Bosnian
Kilim, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

PROJECT DATA

Site area: 8415 m²
Built area: 468 m²
Cost: 2,983,000 USD
Commission: June 2008
Design: January 2008–December 2011
Construction: March 2010–December 2011
Occupancy: December 2011

BERNARDO BADER

Bernardo Bader is an architect from Krumbach, the Austrian region of Bregenzerwald, currently with an office in Dornbirn, Austria. He studied architecture at the Innsbruck Technical University and, after receiving his engineering degree (Dipl. Ing.) in 2001, he founded his own architectural office. His work investigates how architecture can be embedded in regional building culture, based on local architectural grammar. His projects bear witness to the excellence of handcraft, deep attention to tectonic detail and sensitivity to the local context. Bader is a member of the Advisory Design Commissions as well as the Advisory Committee for Urban Contemplation in the Vorarlberg region. Since 2012, he has held a lecturing position at the University of Liechtenstein in Vaduz. He has received a number of prestigious awards, including the Weissenhof Architectural Furtherance Prize 2007 for young architects in Stuttgart, Germany, the Constructive – Liechtenstein Prize for sustainable building in 2011, the Piranesi Award 2013, and numerous local timber construction awards, as well as clients' awards. His work was nominated for the DETAIL Prize 2012 and the Mies van der Rohe Award 2013.

WEBSITE

www.bernardobader.com