



The first National Pavilion of Pakistan debuts at the 16th Venice Biennale of Architecture with an exhibition under the title of 'The Fold'

The pavilion's design takes its inspiration from the physical and social dimensions of the open spaces embedded within the densely-populated informal settlements that characterize the urban fabric of Karachi, Pakistan's largest and most populated city.

- Staged by *Antidote Art & Design* and *Coalesce Design Studio*
- Curated by Sami Chohan with design team: Bilal Kapadia, Durreshahwar Alvi, Mustafa Mehdi, Salman Jawed and Zeba Asad
- Located at the Levante section of the Gardens of Marinaressa, along Riva dei Sette Martiri



The urban fabric of Karachi: a composition of formal and informal development patterns



Informal settlements of Karachi: confined open spaces



Informal settlements of Karachi: avenues of life and vitality

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Venice, Italy

Pakistan takes to the world stage in May revealing its first-ever National Pavilion for the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, under exhibition title 'The Fold'.

Located in the Asian continent, Pakistan occupies a vital geopolitical location at the intersections of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. It includes a 650-mile long coastline along the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman in the South, while sharing borders with Afghanistan, India, Iran and China. It is also the sixth-most populous country in the world with an ethnically and linguistically diverse population of 197 million people and an equally diverse geography.

The National Pavilion of Pakistan team

Presenting Pakistan's architectural design prowess to the international community are *Coalesce Design Studio*, a Karachi-based multidisciplinary design practice, and *Antidote Art & Design*, a Dubai-based platform that serves the careers of emerging and mid-career visual artists and designers, with the generous support of *GAA Foundation*, a Dutch non-profit organization that aims to heighten awareness about the more philosophical themes in contemporary art, architecture, and culture.

"It is a huge honor for Antidote to be part of this prestigious event. Although Antidote is a UAE-based entity, coming from Pakistan myself this project is very close to my heart," said Najeh Zimmermann, co-founder of *Antidote Art & Design*. *"For Pakistan to be placed on the most renowned and the most global of architecture platforms, Venice Biennale, is a huge milestone for the nation and will resound so positively within its design and architecture community."*

Uniting to form the design and curatorial team of the national exhibition project is a team of six individuals: Architects Salman Jawed, Mustafa Mehdi and Bilal Kapadia of *Coalesce Design Studio*; Assistant Professor Durreshahwar Alvi of Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVS) and fourth-year architecture student, Zeba Asad; with Head of the Department of Architecture at IVS, Assistant Professor Sami Chohan, appointed Curator by Architect Asad I. Khan, Chairperson of the Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners and Commissioner of Pakistan's national participation.

Inside the National Pavilion of Pakistan; the narrative behind 'The Fold'

The curatorial and design team explored this year's theme of Venice Biennale, *FREESPACE*, within the context of Karachi, Pakistan's largest and most populated city.

Standing tall as the country's premier industrial and financial center, Karachi continues to draw people from all over Pakistan in search of employment opportunities and improved livelihoods. Moreover, the city is also home to a large number of immigrants from near-by countries facing regional conflicts and economic deprivation. This influx has seen Karachi grow from a city of about one million inhabitants in 1950 into an ethnically and linguistically diverse metropolis of over 20 million today.

It has also seen the city expand rapidly and almost irrepressibly into an urban fabric revealing both regulated and unregulated development patterns, with over 60 per cent of its population residing within informal settlements. Resulting from a widening gap between demand and supply of housing, many of these settlements have now largely densified, surfacing a number of issues in the process, one of which is the severe contraction and disappearance of open spaces for communal sociability. In fact, the only open spaces that remain are the narrow corridors trapped between layers and layers of buildings, receiving only fractured light, and occasionally opening into slightly wider pockets of space.

However, in spite of their confined physical conditions, these sparsely open spaces remain full of life and vitality, not only functioning as thoroughfares, but serving as vibrant arenas for interaction, dissemination of information, exchange of ideas, and even play. In ways that appear almost inconceivable, these spaces make enough room for everyone, displaying an incredible sense of

community. In absence of customary parks and playgrounds, they remain free for all, considerately shared by those residing around and along them.

It is precisely the physical and social dimensions of the sparsely open spaces within the many informal settlements of Karachi that inform the design of the Pakistan Pavilion: a confined visual and spatial experience that relies on mutual understanding to unfold into a liberating one. Articulated as *The Fold* and layered with ideas of limitation, interdependency and adaptability, the Pavilion invites visitors to assemble, coordinate, and activate the space in harmony.

Curator of the Pakistan Pavilion, Sami Chohan says: *“The Fold will be the first-ever Pavilion of Pakistan at the prestigious International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. It takes inspiration from the tangible and intangible qualities of open spaces embedded within the numerous informal settlements of Karachi, Pakistan’s largest and most populated city. Despite confined physical conditions, these spaces remain full of life and vitality, making enough room for everyone through an overwhelming sense of community that builds and thrives on consensus. Layered with ideas of limitation and interdependence, our proposal echoes these qualities, inviting visitors to comprehend FREESPACE as a consequence of unity, mutuality and harmony.”*

Coinciding with the National Pavilion of Pakistan, *Coalesce Design Studio*, in partnership with Antidote Art & Design, also exhibits its work under VENICE DESIGN, the largest international design exhibition running alongside La Biennale di Venezia. Organised by the GAA Foundation - supporters of Pakistan’s entry into the Biennale - the third edition of VENICE DESIGN will be held at the European Cultural Centre and will show design from 50 international creators from 30 different countries and of various cultural backgrounds.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The National Pavilion of Pakistan will be located in the Levante section of the Gardens of Marinaressa along Riva dei Sette Martiri from May 26 to November 25, 2018. Press preview: May 25.

For all press requests including interviews with the curator and design team, please contact Ciara Phillips Ciara@theotherpr.com | +971 55650 7431 (Dubai)

ABOUT THE ORGANISERS:

Antidote Art & Design

Antidote is an art & design platform based in Dubai that represents talented artists and designers, both emerging and mid-career, from around the world, with a special focus on the Middle East and South East Asia. Antidote nurtures and supports the careers of its artists and designers by guiding them to appropriate residencies, special programs and biennale placement.

Antidote’s unique features including its nomadic nature and dual portfolio of art and design allow it to inhabit alternative venues and to create innovative spaces and exhibitions, pushing the permeable boundary between art & design.

Antidote also works in the capacity of art and design consultants and manages small to large-scale creative projects from conception and production to installation for private clients or the commercial sector. In the brief lapse of just a couple of years since its foundation, Antidote has already achieved an impressive trajectory. Antidote art & design represents Coalesce Design Studio internationally.

www.antidotedxb.com

Coalesce Design Studio

Coalesce Design Studio is a Karachi-based multi-disciplinary design practice driven by the aim to consider and push past traditions in ways to deliver cutting-edge contemporary yet culturally sensitive designs. Comprising young architects and designers, it aims to venture beyond innovation, into a place where pushing boundaries is standard. Defined as “amalgamation”, Coalesce Design Studio relies on a myriad of honed skills to produce work that aspires change in the perception of design. It focuses on developing dynamic works of architectural, interior, product and graphic design; whereby their goal is not only to be recognized locally, but lauded internationally.

www.coalesce.pk

ABOUT THE DESIGN AND CURATORIAL TEAM

The National Pavilion of Pakistan is curated by Sami Chohan with design team: Bilal Kapadia, Durr Shahwar Alvi, Mustafa Mehdi, Salman Jawed and Zeba Asad (*from top left to bottom right*)



Bilal Kapadia | Year of Birth: 1984 | Place of Birth: Karachi, Pakistan

Bilal Kapadia graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture Degree from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2008. He is an architect, an entrepreneur and managing partner at the Coalesce Design Studio, a multi-disciplinary design practice where, besides working on interior and architecture projects, he heads the design research and development department while also managing the manufacturing of product design. One of his architectural projects at the Studio, Kapadia Residence in Karachi, has received both national and international mention for its contemporary, yet culturally sensitive design. Its windward façade provides shade from the sun, allows the breeze to permeate, and ensures privacy from the street.

Durr Shahwar Alvi | Year of Birth: 1984 | Place of Birth: Karachi, Pakistan

Durr Shahwar Alvi is an architect, academic and researcher who received her Bachelor of Architecture Degree from the National College of Arts in 2008. In 2015, she obtained her Master’s Degree in Urban Management and

Development from Erasmus University in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Currently, she serves as Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi. Her interests lie in comprehending architecture design as a problem-solving activity, and the city as a complex system drawing understanding from natural living systems. Besides teaching, she currently pursues research to document and understand the existing land management, development systems and bio-diversity of Karachi.

Mustafa Mehdi | Year of Birth: 1983 | Place of Birth: Karachi, Pakistan

Mustafa Mehdi graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture Degree from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2008. In 2009, he co-founded Coalesce Design Studio before joining ASA (Pvt.) Ltd., one of the premier architecture and interior design practices in the country. In 2012, he became a permanent member of Coalesce Design Studio, now firmly established as a multidisciplinary design practice that goes beyond form and function. There, he specializes in interior, product and industrial design, helping Coalesce create an entire market for locally manufactured product and industrial design products in the country. Mehdi and his team combine tradition and technology to evolve a local yet contemporary design identity.

Salman Jawed | Year of Birth: 1985 | Place of Birth: Karachi, Pakistan

Salman Jawed graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture Degree from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2008. In 2009, he co-founded Coalesce Design Studio, a multi-disciplinary design practice in Karachi. Defined as *amalgamation*, Coalesce has announced itself both locally and internationally. His interest in teaching also keeps him engaged in academia on a visiting basis. Having taught in the Visual Studies Department of the University of Karachi, he currently serves as adjunct faculty in the Department of Architecture, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. As curator, he has participated in the Dubai Design Week in 2015, London Design Biennale in 2016 and Khat-Alchemy Festival in 2017.

Sami Chohan | Year of Birth: 1983 | Place of Birth: Karachi, Pakistan

Sami Chohan graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture Degree from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2007. In 2011, he obtained a Master's Degree in Interior-Architectural Design from the Stuttgart Technology University of Applied Sciences in Germany, during which time he also spent a semester at the Istanbul Technical University in Turkey. His growing interest in architectural education and research led him to pursue a career in academia upon his return to Pakistan. He currently serves as Assistant Professor in the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, where he also heads the Department of Architecture. He is also co-founder of the Architectural Design Research Lab (ADRL) which operates within the Department and takes a research-driven, user-centric and context-sensitive approach to projects within the fields of architecture and urban design.

Zeba Asad | Year of Birth: 1993 | Place of Birth: Karachi, Pakistan

Zeba Asad is currently pursuing her Bachelor of Architecture Degree from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi. Her growing interest in architecture, passion for learning, and appetite for exploration has led her to travel around Europe in 2017, where she visited 18 cities in 11 countries. Alongside her studies, Zeba is also an entrepreneur proudly managing a paper-craft business at Paper Sentiments since 2013. She is currently interning at Coalesce Design Studio, a multi-disciplinary design practice based in Karachi.

ABOUT VENICE BIENNALE OF ARCHITECTURE

The Venice Foundation, one of the world's most prestigious cultural institutions held its first international architecture exhibition in 1980. Since then, the Venice Biennale of Architecture has evolved to become one of the most highly regarded and eagerly anticipated events of its kind.

The Artistic Directors designated by the Venice Foundation for the 2018 edition, Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara (Grafton Architects), have chosen *Freespace* as theme for the 16th International Architecture Exhibition. They have invited participants from every national pavilion to bring to Venice their *Freespace*, so "together we may reveal the diversity, specificity and continuity in architecture based on people, place, time, history, to sustain the culture and relevance of architecture on this dynamic planet".

www.labiennale.org