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Pan-African Biennale and Center for Architecture to Launch Open Access Archive of African Architecture

With support from the Mellon Foundation, the archive will make the architecture of Africa and its diasporas freely accessible worldwide.

New York, NY, November 12, 2026 — The Pan-African Biennale (PAB) and the Center for Architecture have launched the development of an open access digital archive, supported by the Mellon Foundation. Despite the early establishment of architecture schools in South Africa in 1921 and in Kumasi, Ghana, in 1957, there are currently no Pan-African archives focused on architecture with representation from all 54 African nations and beyond. The archive will share research, publications, and architecture from Africa and its global diasporas.

The project responds to an imbalance in architectural history, seeking to build a lasting, accessible digital footprint that preserves the continent's built environment, creative knowledge systems, and identity. The archive will democratize access to African and diasporic architectural knowledge and approaches Pan-Africanism in its fullest sense, representing projects and work from the continent of Africa, as well as the worlds it has shaped elsewhere, including the Caribbean and Brazil.

Curated by the Pan-African Biennale, which realized its inaugural edition in Nairobi in 2026, the archive's editorial perspective differentiates it from many archives. High-resolution documentation will be paired with commissioned essays, poems, and criticism, and over time the platform will grow into oral histories, interviews, and site soundscapes recorded with architects and communities. The archive is built for students and the public to explore, for architects and historians to contribute to, and for policymakers and investors to find the expertise already working on the ground.

Early participants in the archive work across architecture, design, craft, and spatial storytelling, but their work speaks to something broader than any single discipline: how people build, remember, and imagine their worlds. Work from Pan-African Biennale exhibitors will help to launch the archive, including that of: Maissa Architectures (Gabon), Bled El Abar Collective (Tunisia), RAAS Architects (Ethiopia), Moralo Designs (Botswana), Nicolas Patience Basabose (Democratic Republic of Congo), Sylvain Bobossi-Bizon (Central African Republic), and Mokhethi Gerard Rampeta (Lesotho). Together, the participants carry a spectrum of histories, knowledge systems, and traditions that will find a permanent home in the archive.

"African architecture has been studied, photographed and filed elsewhere, by others, for too long," said Omar Degan, Founder and Executive Director of the Pan-African Biennale. "This archive reverses that. What Africa produces, on the continent and across its diasporas, stays open, is written from within, and is read on our terms. That is what shifting the center means in practice."

"Through this partnership with the Pan-African Biennale, the Center for Architecture has an opportunity to help preserve and share an extraordinary body of architectural knowledge while creating new opportunities for learning, research, and dialogue across borders," said Jesse Lazar, Assoc. AIA, Executive Director, AIA New York and the Center for Architecture. "We are proud to support a project that will broaden our understanding of the built environment and ensure that the voices, ideas, and contributions shaping architecture across Africa and its diasporas are more fully represented in the global conversation."

The Pan-African Biennale will lead the archive's curatorial and editorial direction, with the Center for Architecture providing the project's institutional framework and administration. The archive will develop through 2028, when the two organizations will present a related exhibition at the Center for Architecture, accompanied by a publication and a series of roundtables and workshops engaging directly with the archive's holdings.

Opening in Spring 2028, the exhibition will feature projects from the Pan-African Biennale, rooted in local contexts, materials, and cultural narratives. Developed with the intent to tour, the exhibition will offer a platform for audiences to engage with and celebrate African architecture, inviting visitors to consider how architecture intersects with history, identity, culture, sustainability, and community life across the African continent. While the exhibition will be of interest to architects, designers, and students, it will position African architecture not as a specialized discipline but as a lens through which to understand contemporary social, cultural, and environmental issues.

About the Pan-African Biennale
The Pan-African Biennale is the first continent-wide biennale for architecture and the built environment in Africa. Founded by architect and curator Omar Degan, it brings together Africa within Africa and Africa outside the geographies of Africa, bridging the continent with the rest of the world in one conversation and placing Africa at the center of the global discourse on architecture. Its inaugural edition took place in Nairobi in September 2026.
panafricanbiennale.org

About the Center for Architecture
The Center for Architecture, inaugurated in 2003 as one of the American Institute of Architects (AIA)'s first cultural institutions, engages local and international audiences with the value, impact, and wonder of architecture. Located in the heart of Greenwich Village, the Center for Architecture is also the home of the American Institute of Architects New York (AIANY), which cultivates an open, adept, and future-forward architectural community. Together, we advance the value and practice of architecture to promote just and sustainable communities.

Through exhibitions, public programs, educational initiatives, and our Archtober festival and platform, the Center for Architecture brings together architects, designers, students, and the public to foster collaboration within the design community while creating accessible opportunities for the public to experience and learn about architecture. Whether you're an industry professional, a curious visitor, or a student exploring the field, the Center for Architecture offers a space for connection, creativity, and critical conversation—empowering

everyone to engage with the transformative power of architecture. centerforarchitecture.org

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