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“THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK AND THE LEGACY EMILIO AMBASZ FOUNDATION (LEAF): LAUNCH OF THE AMBASZ-MoMA ANNUAL PRIZE AND OF A NEW LECTURE SERIES. TEN-YEAR AGREEMENT ANNOUNCED.” - PRESS RELEASE

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) of New York and the Legacy Emilio Ambasz Foundation (LEAF) have announced an agreement establishing two new global cultural initiatives connected to the world of Architecture.

The commitment, lasting ten years and renewable, provides for the establishment of the **“Ambasz-MoMA Annual Prize for ‘Nature Reconciled Architecture’”** and the **“Ambasz-MoMA Annual Lecture on ‘Architecture as Poetry.’”**

The agreement arises thanks to the generous and significant donation from LEAF and is part of the activities of the **Emilio Ambasz Institute for the Joint Study of the Built and the Natural Environment (EA/RI)**, the research institute dedicated to the study of the interaction between architecture and nature founded at the end of 2020 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

THE PRIZES

“The Ambasz-MoMA Annual Prize for ‘Nature Reconciled Architecture’”



The **Ambasz-MoMA Annual Prize for “Nature Reconciled Architecture”** will celebrate each year a built work that exemplarily embodies the idea of an architecture capable of **reconciling** the natural environment with the built one: a direct tribute to the design spirit of Emilio **Ambasz**, universally considered a **precursor** of “green architecture,” and a natural extension of the mission of the Ambasz Institute.

Pioneer and highly refined interpreter of a message of reconciliation between the natural realm and the artificial world, **Emilio Ambasz** has inspired entire generations of architects with his philosophy summarized in the formula ***Green over the Grey*** (which also became the title of a film dedicated to him), through works that remain at the center of debate, poetics, and international design discourse.

Emilio Ambasz states:

“Every building is an intrusion into the vegetal realm and a challenge to nature: we must conceive an architecture that stands as the embodiment of a pact of reconciliation between nature and construction, designing buildings so intrinsically connected to the surrounding environment that they cannot disentangle themselves from one another. It is an ethical obligation: to demonstrate that another future is possible. To affirm a different model of life so as not to perpetuate the present.”

Each year the Prize will be awarded **through two distinct recognitions.**



One prize will be awarded to an architect or a design team for a built project completed within 30 years prior to the date of selection and consistent with the aims and philosophy of the Ambasz Institute, namely the deep and indispensable dialogue between nature and architecture.

The second recognition will be attributed to the client or clients of the winning project; the amount will not be paid directly to them, but to a nonprofit organization whose exclusive purpose will be to plant trees in their name and in their honour, at a site distinct and separate from the awarded building: a gesture both symbolic and concrete, linking the recognition to a tangible environmental action.

The financial value of the Prizes reflects the cultural ambition of the initiative.

The Prize will award a total of \$200,000 annually for the first 5 years (\$250,000 for the following 5 years): for the first five years each prize (to the designer and to the client) will have a value of \$100,000, which will increase to \$125,000 for the following five years of the program.

The winners will be selected by a jury composed of the Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at MoMA, curators from the Department of Architecture and Design, the Director of the Ambasz Institute, and two eminent external members chosen by the Museum, who will rotate periodically.

Each autumn, the Prizes will be celebrated at the Ambasz-MoMA Annual Prize Ceremony at the Museum of Modern Art in New



York—such as in the **Titus 1 Theater** or an equivalent space—open to the public and enriched by remarks from curators, the winners, and a brief lecture delivered by one of the external members of the jury.

The Legacy Emilio Ambasz Foundation will be the **primary sponsor** of the initiative, while the Ambasz Institute will serve as its **primary organizer**.

“Ambasz-MoMA Annual Lecture on ‘Architecture as Poetry’”

The second cultural pillar of the agreement is the establishment of the **“Ambasz-MoMA Annual Lecture on ‘Architecture as Poetry,’”** which will begin in **spring 2028** and continue for **nine years**.

Funded by the LEAF gift payment, the initiative consists of a public program organized by MoMA’s Department of Architecture and Design that invites internationally renowned architects, artists, and scholars to explore the poetic dimension of architecture and its impact on the lives of communities.

This initiative is added to the three-year program of the **“Emilio Ambasz Annual Lecture ‘Architecture as Poetry’”** at **Columbia University in New York**, which debuted in April 2025 with Kengo Kuma and which in April 2026 foresees the participation of Steven Holl.

Refined bearer of a mystical and poetic vision of his work, for **Ambasz** an architectural project is a set of rituals that, like fairy



tales, gathers and gives form to deep and universal emotions and feelings.

“I consider architecture as the search for a spiritual dwelling” he states. “An architect can be the guardian of the desert of man-made cities, or the magician who creates eternal forms. The context in which the architect is called to operate may change, but the task remains the same: to give poetic form to the pragmatic. If an architectural work does not touch the heart, it is just another building.”

Speakers in the **Ambasz-MoMA Annual Lecture series** will be selected by the curators of MoMA’s Department of Architecture and Design and will explore the ways in which architecture uniquely enriches communities and everyday life, promoting a vision of architectural and design practice as a form of poetry.

The lectures, like the Prize ceremonies, will take place inside the Museum—at the **Titus 1 Theater** or an equivalent space. The Legacy Emilio Ambasz Foundation will be the **primary sponsor** of the Lecture Series.

The activities of the Prize and the Lectures will be supported by **two new full-time positions**: a **Project Manager** to manage the Ambasz-MoMA Prize Program and the Ambasz-MoMA Lecture Series; and a **full-time Department Assistant** for the Ambasz Institute and its Director.



These positions will be funded by LEAF within the **Emilio Ambasz Institute for the Joint Study of the Built and the Natural Environment (EA/RI)**.

Overall, this multi-year agreement **strengthens** MoMA's role as an **international center** for research and advanced reflection on contemporary **architecture** and, at the same time, consolidates and projects into the future the **intellectual and cultural legacy of Emilio Ambasz** through a system of prizes, lectures, and public initiatives that interweave architecture, nature, and social and environmental responsibility.

About the Emilio Ambasz Institute for the Joint Study of the Built and the Natural Environment (EA/RI)

The **Emilio Ambasz Institute for the Joint Study of the Built and the Natural Environment (EA/RI)** is a research institute founded in 2020 by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and funded by the Legacy Emilio Ambasz Foundation (LEAF).

Based within MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design, in the museum complex in Midtown Manhattan, the institute is dedicated to the study of the interaction between architecture and nature, with the goal of promoting an ecological rebalancing between the built environment and the natural environment.

Through activities of research, debate, and design at different scales—from buildings to cities, from landscapes to objects—the Institute serves as an international platform for scholars, architects,



and artists engaged in the ecological transition, while also contributing to redefining the role of museums in promoting sustainable practices and in debating the future of the built environment.

In September 2023, the Ambasz Institute presented at MoMA the exhibition *“Emerging Ecologies: Architecture and the Rise of Environmentalism,”* the first museum survey of works (150) examining the relationship between architecture and the environmental movement in the United States.

About Emilio Ambasz and MoMA of NY

The deep and multifaceted relationship between **Emilio Ambasz** and the **Museum of Modern Art in New York** spans more than fifty years. As Curator of Design for the Department of Architecture and Design from **1969 to 1976**, he organized a series of groundbreaking exhibitions, including *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* (1972); *The Architecture of Luis Barragán* (1974); and *The Taxi Project: Realistic Solutions for Today* (1976), and edited the publications accompanying them.

As a pioneering architect and industrial designer, Ambasz is represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York with **more than twenty works**, and he has been the subject of the exhibitions *Emilio Ambasz/Steven Holl: Architecture* (1989) and *In-Depth: The House of Spiritual Retreat by Emilio Ambasz* (2005–2006).

His work has also appeared in many other installations, including *The Changing of the Avant-Garde: Visionary Architectural Drawings*



from the Howard Gilman Collection (2002–2003) and 9 + 1 Ways of Being Political: 50 Years of Political Stances in Architecture and Urban Design (2012–2013).

The significant gift represented by the creation of the Emilio Ambasz Institute at MoMA was preceded by many contributions. For more than forty years MoMA and MoMA PS1 have benefited from the continuous patronage of Emilio Ambasz for the Joint Study of the Built and the Natural Environment.

Since 1978 Ambasz has been a member of MoMA's International Council, and from 2002 to 2006 he served on the Board of Directors of MoMA PS1.

Through the International Council he has supported many important initiatives, including the International Council Endowment for Exhibitions and Publications. Ambasz has also supported individual programs, such as the 2015 exhibition *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955–1980*.

<https://www.ambazsmuseum.com/>

<https://www.moma.org/research/ambasz/>

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