

Pan-African Biennale 2026

Equatorial Guinea, LAUGE

Manifesto text

In Equatorial Guinea, most family houses are not built through a single authorial gesture. They emerge through accumulated decisions, family responsibilities, technical improvisations, the phased availability of resources, seasonal pauses, negotiations with builders, and the gradual adaptation of spaces to changing household circumstances. Construction often unfolds over time, as a living process rather than a closed project. In our practice, we recognize this condition not as a lack of architecture, but as the result of combined forms of knowledge.

But these forms of making rarely enter architectural discourse as legitimate knowledge.

The most widely disseminated conception of architecture, rooted in its etymological lineage, has long been tethered to the figure of the architect as master creator. Within this paradigm, construction is organized through stratified knowledge: a social technology that produces hierarchies of expertise, authority, and power.

Architecture, in this sense, is traversed by European modernity, repeatedly presented as humanity's inevitable and desirable destiny, allocating "modernity" and "complexity" to some societies while rendering others "primitive" and "simple." Within this framework, distinctions such as art versus craft or literature versus orality have historically legitimized certain forms of knowledge while disqualifying others. As a result, what is recognized as "knowledge" is placed at the center, and with it the architect becomes the privileged mediator through whom meaning and form are authorized as architecture.

The Biennale's theme, *Shifting the Center*, is a call to remove Europe from the center and to place Africa at the center. It emerges from a historical necessity to confront colonial domination, echoing Ousmane Sembène's assertion 'I am the sun', a declaration of presence, agency, and visibility against imposed marginality. Yet this reactive stance, while essential, also reproduces part of the logic of power it seeks to oppose: the logic of centrality itself.

Yet beyond territorial centrality, there exist other centralized structures that remain largely unquestioned. Architecture itself is one of them.

Over time, the popularized figure of the architect has come to occupy an increasingly dominant position. Far from being neutral, this **centrality** has often contributed to a progressive loss of affect, generating distance between bodies and the built environment and between people and nature.

Architecture, instead of fostering proximity, care, and belonging, has too frequently reinforced separation, between those who design and those who inhabit, between form and life, between desire and lived reality.

For this reason, **we oppose centrality not only as a geopolitical condition, but as a structural logic.** We question the very frameworks that sustain centrality: the concentration of authorship, the hierarchy of knowledge, and the extraction of value from human aspirations. We reject the capitalization of human desires when it disconnects people from their habitats, transforming ways of living into commodities rather than shared conditions of existence.

We refuse to deprive humanity of its bond with its environment. On the contrary, we seek to defend a practice that continuously reconnects bodies with the spaces they inhabit, a practice rooted in proximity, care, and mutual aid.

We call for the historical reparation of Africa's place in the global order. We affirm a position that breaks with the power structures inherited from extractive colonialism, both economic and human, and that also challenges the neocolonial structures perpetuated today through globalization.

We therefore propose a structural shift that goes beyond shifting the center. **We propose questioning centrality itself.**

Dismantling the center.

We propose moving away from centralized structures and toward relational frameworks in which Equatorial Guinea and Africa are not peripheral territories, but active producers of knowledge, spatial practice, and architectural thought.

This also means challenging the architect as the unquestioned center of architecture and opening the discipline to a more expansive perspective, one nourished and sustained through networks of interdependence. Within these configurations, the collective, culture, care, and shared responsibility are not peripheral values, but the very fabric that sustains architectural practice. It is from this position that the architect is understood as a node within an interrelational structure through which we build, both materially and immaterially.

From Equatorial Guinea, we do not position ourselves as master authors, but rather as editors within a network: anticipating technical contingencies before they become constraints, identifying relations, clarifying intentions, giving form to existing knowledge, and helping different voices, materials, economies, and desires enter into dialogue.

From this position, as architects and as nodes within this web, we facilitate spaces for collective thought and creation. We understand architecture as a collective, open and evolving process. We cultivate sensitivity as a critical tool. We choose to accompany rather than impose, to listen rather than prescribe, and to build practices that emerge from shared processes rather than from singular authority.

In this sense, **African architecture departs from a notion that reflects the way this knowledge has historically been exercised on the continent: as a system of relationships and networks through which the environment is transformed in response to human aspirations.**

The architect and architecture themselves form part of this interrelational web, just as it constitutes the meaning we assign to what architecture ought to be.

Architecture, in this sense, becomes less a product than a relationship that unfolds over time, adapts to life, and is collectively sustained through care, negotiation, and coexistence.

May 2026