



Kamran Ghba, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, 1977
 above: With its idiosyncratic exterior – influenced by Iranian wind towers – the museum fuses the traditional with the modern. It was designed and founded by artist and architect Kamran Ghba as a series of interconnected galleries spiralling downwards underground.



and architects from across the empire to create magnificent structures, demonstrating a global rather than a local approach to architecture. In building Persepolis in the 6th century BC, wood was brought from Lebanon and India and stone carved from Greece. During times of weak central governments, builders and artists would migrate to neighbouring empires and offer their architectural knowhow and services. Today, because of political conditions and nationalistic attitudes, there is a desire to appropriate this common heritage as a source of pride from a local rather than a global perspective.²

Since the late 19th century, the long-established processes of shaping the built environment have changed along with other aspects of life in Iran. The country has moved from a traditional society to a modern state, like most countries in the region, especially Turkey and Egypt. They have been moving forward on parallel tracks towards 'modernisation', each at its own speed depending on the political, economic and social reality of its recent history. I prefer the term 'modernisation' rather than 'Westernisation', which is used by many scholars, as people from many continents were active contributors to this process of thinking, and this thrust of ideas did not necessarily always flow from West to East or from North to South. The speed of change accelerated between the two World Wars with more exchanges and interactions between the different parts of the world. In terms of building and urban

interventions, this can be seen in the introduction of stylistic movements of the time, from Neoclassicism, Modernism, contextual architecture, and so on. The cities of Alexandria, Cairo, Baghdad and Beirut at the beginning of the 20th century were competing with European cities of the epoch in introducing a modern lifestyle and modern buildings. These were places of experimentation and laboratories for new ideas in architecture and urban design. Foreign architects, building in all of these cities, which at the time were at their peak, were translating the aspirations of local people or implementing the colonial will of the ruling power.

New developments in the construction industry and progress in building technology that spread around the globe were major elements in globalising the built environment. Villas of the 1950s, inspired by American and European architecture, could be seen in the affluent neighbourhoods of Beirut, Alexandria, Istanbul and Tehran. Banks, hospitals, office and apartment buildings followed the same patterns. The Istanbul Hilton by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) and Sedad Hakki Eldem, built in 1955, and the Tehran Royal Hilton by Ghial, Sadegh & Foroughi, built in 1962, set new 'modern' standards in public buildings.

The similarities in creativity in these countries can also be seen in other disciplines such as literature, art and film. For example, Iranian, Egyptian and Turkish Neo-realist films of the

the different parts of the world. In terms of building and urban