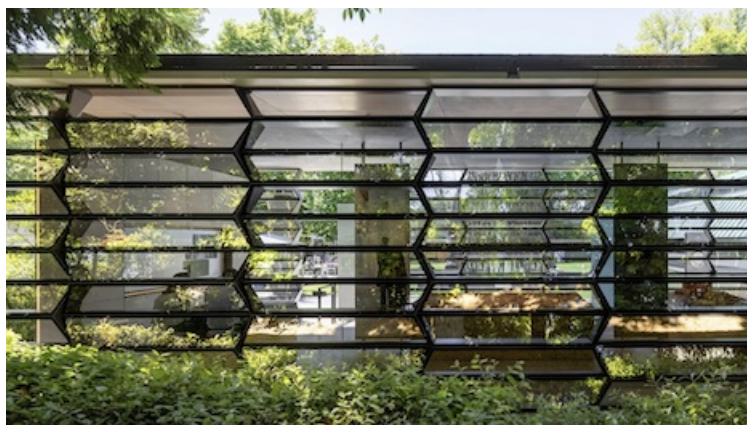


SUSTAINABILITY

Rolex envisions equitable futures through eco-conscious lens

June 9, 2023



Partnering again with the International Architecture Exhibition, Swiss watchmaker Rolex is assisting participants in building a decarbonized and decolonized world ahead. Image credit: Rolex

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

Swiss watchmaker Rolex is showing support for a biennial event.

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The luxury brand is the Exclusive Partner and Official Timepiece of the International Architecture Exhibition, lending design know-how to this year's theme, "The Laboratory of the Future." Through Nov. 21, 2023, Rolex and a slew of world-renowned, diverse architects are uncovering the possibilities that sustainable building practices and layouts present for a more just road ahead.

"We need a new spatial contract," said Hashim Sarkis, dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT, in a statement.

"In the context of widening political divides and growing economic inequalities, we call on architects to imagine spaces in which we can generously live together."

Decolonized and decarbonized

Every other year, architects from around the world gather to create solutions and art for different regions of the world.

Since 2014, Rolex has partnered with them in this effort, providing design codes and mentoring at the International Architecture Exhibition. This year, it is taking place in Venice, within the historic buildings of the Arsenale and the Forte Marghera, as well as the Rolex Pavilion.

The Rolex Pavilion at the [#BiennaleArchitettura2023](#) demonstrates how the design of our watches inspires the company's architectural universe. We support the premier architectural forum for new ideas, which this year focuses on Africa. More <https://t.co/gmzYLZg7wP>
[#Perpetual](#) pic.twitter.com/faCGQqz47J

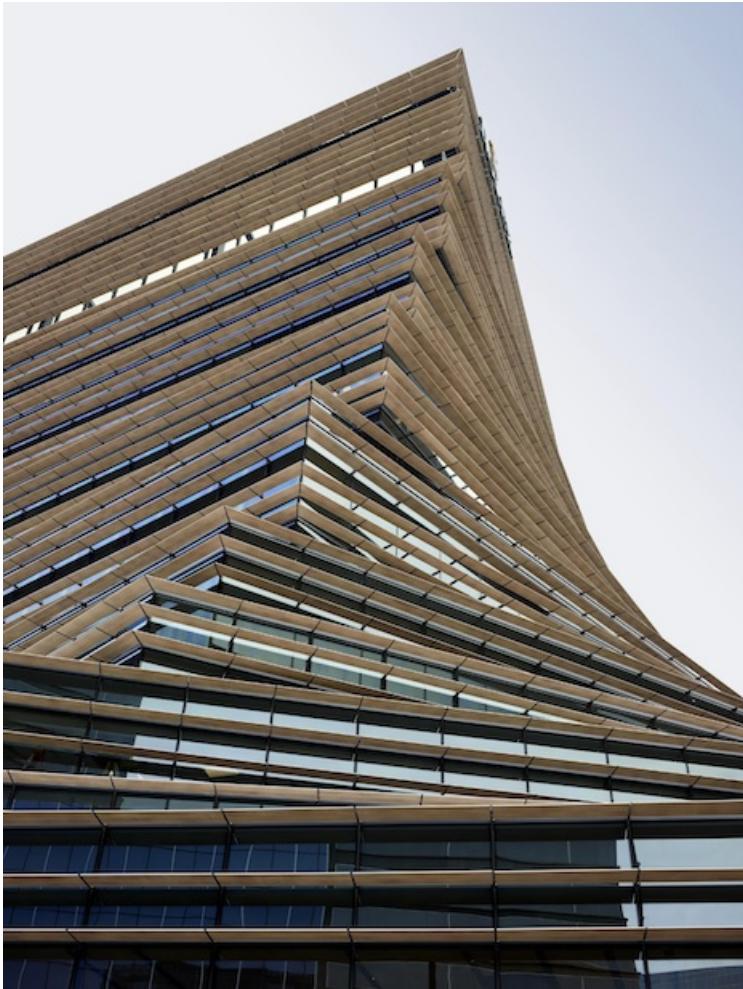
For the first time ever, those participating were asked to focus their work on the continent of Africa.

Ghanaian-Scottish academic and educator Lesley Lokko, the curator, specified that the ideas of decolonization, carbon neutrality, and social and physical sustainability should specifically be used to critique current living structures.

"Africa is the laboratory of the future," said Ms. Lokko, in a statement.

"We envisage our exhibition as a laboratory where architects and practitioners across an expanded field of creative disciplines draw out examples from their contemporary practices that chart a path for the audience."

Through many perspectives, a holistic look is revealed of society's current trajectory and what it could be with the help of architecturally green solutions, such as urban vegetation and biophilic design.



Rolex already taps into the world of biophilic art on multiple fronts, including through the work of Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, who created the brand's building in Dallas. Image credit: Rolex

Through exhibits, more than 250,000 visitors can see the work of 61 individuals, representation increasing with every year. In 2023, the number of participants from Asia, Latin America and Africa has especially grown, with over half of them hailing from Africa and the Diaspora.

To keep the public interacting with their ideas, Rolex is fronting a six-month event series called "Carnival" until the end of the exhibition, consisting of lectures, performances, panel discussions and cinema.

An on-site brand pavilion, constructed after Rolex watch bezels, also presents touch points for visitors to delve into the company's relationship with the field through three sections of displays.

One of them is grounded in Rolex's use of materials. Marble, stucco, glass and travertine all mainly manufactured nearby star in films showing the crafting process that house artisans undertake.



Within its pavilion, Rolex illustrates how its watchmaking designs and techniques can be used in eco-friendly architecture. Image credit: Rolex

The sensory-focused space embraces experiential retail, beloved by Gen Zers and millennials, making it particularly of note since half of all visitors were under the age of 26 at the 2022 exhibition.

Two other sections outline the collaborative work between Rolex and architects, such as that sprung from the Protg Arts Initiative, a 20-year initiative whereby Rolex grants up-and-coming talents access to established designers.

Most recently, Rolex paired Sir David Adjaye and Mariam Issoufou Kamara, whose project is deeply engrained in the 2023 International Architecture Exhibition.

The duo is planning a cultural center for Niamey, the capital city of Niger, using local techniques and materials in a meditation on intersectional environmentalism in action.



Ms. Kamara is bringing together cultural preservation and urban cooling in a feat that supports the idea that traditional knowledge and climate action can go hand in hand. Image credit: Rolex

"In a desert city they worried about green spaces and places they could go for peace; and if it's green, it is probably cooler too," said Ms. Kamara, in a statement.

"They also wanted a place that would reflect local traditions," she said. "Working through this project with David has allowed me to trust my design instinct more.

"This has allowed me to confirm my voice and not apologize for it."

The maison takes on intersectional environmentalism on many occasions, from uplifting Nepali women climbers ([see story](#)) to in-depth studies in Africa's human-inhabited remote ecosystems ([see story](#)). Since its founding, the watchmaker has propelled nature-facing efforts forward.

This time, Rolex's design capabilities are fueling the green engagement.

Building up luxury

Rolex is not the only brand within the luxury sector to have tapped into the power of architecture in consumer-facing activations.

Italian fashion brand Prada recently hosted the "Frames: Materials in Flux," symposium, exploring waste and circular design ([see story](#)), while British department store Fortnum & Mason just opened "The Wavery," a biophilic cocktail bar in London's retail location ([see story](#)).



Rolex joins a slew of other luxury brands across categories that see the value in bringing architecture into consumer engagement. Image credit: Rolex

However, Rolex's involvement in this latest event stands apart in its scale, extended timeline and depth to which the brand is exploring the field, weaving itself throughout, whether it is in the physical look of the host buildings or by presenting nature-derived designs for those looking to make the world more livable.

In the end, it seems that Rolex is communicating to the world that its concepts can shape both watches and, perhaps more importantly, a transition to an ethical future.

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