



BEZALEL ACADEMY OF ARTS AND DESIGN, JERUSALEM

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Press Release

Japanese architecture firm, SANAA, in collaboration with the Israeli firm Nir Kutz Architects, has been chosen to design the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design's new campus in Jerusalem's city center.

Bezalel Academy's Board of Directors has accepted the Search Committee's recommendation for the design of the new Bezalel campus in Jerusalem's Russian compound. The Search Committee chaired by Hertzal Habas, Chairman of the Board of Governors at Bezalel, included Professor Hanoach Gutfreund, a past president of Hebrew University; Architect Orna Angel, member of Bezalel's Board of Governors; Yuval Yasky, head of the Bezalel Academy's Architecture Department; and Professor Arnon Zuckerman, President of the Bezalel Academy. The Search Committee made its recommendation to the Board of Directors for a collaboration of the Japanese architecture firm, SANAA (Sejima & Nishizawa and Associates) and the Israeli firm, Nir Kutz Architects.

Studio SANAA, winner of the Pritzker Architecture Prize 2010, is considered one of the most innovative and creative architecture firms worldwide. Its leading architects – Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa – are key figures in the contemporary architectural discourse. Buildings they have designed include the Rolex Learning Center in Lausanne - an academic center that has acquired status as an architectural pearl, as well as the New Museum of Contemporary Art in Manhattan. Sejima was also chosen to be the architecture curator at the recent Venice Biennale.

The decision to change architects stemmed from various considerations; the primary reason was a change in the municipality guidelines that lead to considerable changes in planning. The Bezalel Academy concluded that relations with Studyo, the German firm originally chosen for the project, left little room for progress. Due to prior experience and in light of the changes to the project, the Academy came to the conclusion that it was necessary to choose a new architecture firm based on its professional capabilities and proven prior experience, a firm that would be able to handle such a large and complex project. Both the time constraints as well as the circumstantial changes led to a reevaluation of the design for the new campus.

Bezalel is exploring the possibility of building a somewhat smaller building in the Russian compound while using historic buildings in the area, thus creating a genuine urban change in the city center.

Already over the past couple of years, in proximity to the Russian Compound, Bezalel at Yafo 23, has housed the Masters of Urban Design program, continuing education programs and a Bezalel gallery space. This coming November it will also house the new Masters degree program in Policy & Theory of the Arts.

Professor Arnon Zuckerman, President of the Bezalel Academy said: "SANAA is a highly reputable firm and I am confident that together with Nir Kutz Architects they will provide the best results for a project of this caliber and complexity. Designing an art academy in the heart of Jerusalem is a wonderful challenge and I am curious – as no doubt many others are – to see the results."