

32° East Arts Centre Kampala, Republic of Uganda

32° East Arts Centre – Kampala’s first purpose-built community arts space and the new home of 32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust – is now officially open following a launch on 23 March 2023. The arts centre provides an inspiring, nurturing, productive space for Kampala’s artist community and visitors to work, socialise, gather and exchange ideas. The rammed earth and earth brick building, which will be delivered in two phases, has been designed by London-based architecture practice New Makers Bureau, in collaboration with Kampala-based multidisciplinary design and build firm Localworks. The client, 32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust, is a not-for-profit promoting East African artists and contemporary art.

The launch marks completion of phase one, which has been seven years in the making and has included on-site consultation with the 32° East artist community throughout. Phase one comprises four artist studios, a library (the only specialist art library in Uganda), restrooms, and a flexible café, which will function as an interim gallery and workspace until phase two completes. The flexibly designed, fully accessible building is sited on a slope and arranged around a shaded, step-free courtyard, which creates a visual connection between all spaces, as well as an amenity space for social gathering and overspill space for the making and display of larger works. The second phase, due to complete at the end of 2024, includes a gallery with mezzanine, four artist guest rooms, two artist studios, offices, kiosks and a walled courtyard garden.

Sited in Kabalagala, a central district of Kampala, the arts centre will serve as a welcoming and inclusive hub for the contemporary artist community in Uganda, providing three-month residencies, alongside rented studios and a gallery. It will be a dynamic space, providing a diverse set of experiences that engage different audiences and give them opportunities to interact with artists and the art scene in the region. It is also hoped that the project will ensure the financial stability of 32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust, through income generating spaces designed in phase two, including the operational café, kiosks and rented studios. The project envisages a self-sustaining village or campus of symbiotic uses.

The new arts centre is a radical departure from 32° East’s former home, which was a campus of four shipping containers. The single-storey, low carbon building is hyper-local. Following key principles of the circular economy, it is constructed from materials already on the site: two redundant buildings above ground and the ground itself.

The building is made from rammed earth and earth bricks composed of the rich, red-coloured earth that has been extracted directly from the site and sifted and pressed into blocks. Kampala-based Localworks – the region’s expert on earth construction – led the process, operating as the main contractor.

The design takes its cues from the built environment and atmosphere of Kampala, for example in its lintels from concrete cast against corrugated metal – a ubiquitous local material. The building foundations are made from a solid local sandstone. Local eucalyptus timber has been used for the rammed earth formwork and then reused to make the roof shingles. Demolition materials have been reused for fill and as aggregate.

Located on the equator, the light conditions in Kampala are extreme so minimising solar gain and creating shaded and cool spaces are a design priority. The building incorporates strategies to temper the intensity of the sun, with the use of slim polycarbonate rooflights for natural daylighting, shutters prioritised over glazed windows, a sweeping roof to provide shade to the courtyard and a bespoke textured open brick ‘hit and miss’ in the façade to create dappled light.

Working to a restricted budget, the project team has managed to restrict carbon in the project’s whole life and activities (construction, use and decommissioning), and avoid mechanical systems for ventilation and cooling through the use of passive techniques, which will also reduce running and maintenance costs.

A series of strata in the elevations references the steep topography of the site: a solid local sandstone base with rammed earth above, and then textured brick mediating between walls and roof. Expressive roof forms have been designed to float above the building; the large roof overhangs which provide shade also protect the earth walls below from heavy rain. Horizontal tile details to the rammed earth walls provide further protection. The roof pitch sets at an angle across the plan – lifting up to the highest point to create a clear entrance to the building and give the individual elements direction. This simple twist creates a gentle curve in the roof trusses and a dynamic ceiling in the main space.

The arts centre can be accessed by vehicle or foot and is adjacent to a large local green space and residential areas. New Makers Bureau has designed built-in seating on the perimeter of the courtyard to encourage impromptu social moments and pauses, and window seats are strategically positioned inside to offer views over the nearby green space.

Phase one of the building has been funded by the Sigrid Rausing Trust, Outset Contemporary Art Fund, The African Arts Trust, Arts Collaboratory, Mercedes Vilardell, Linda Mutesi, Shayna Robinson, Susan Rosenberg and John Lazar, Allison and Geoff Ng, Veghte Family, with in-kind support from Roofings Group, who provided materials, and New Makers Bureau, who worked on a pro-bono basis.

Teesa Bahana, Director, 32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust, said:

"This project has been a labour of love for so many of those involved. It is a joy to be a part of something that transforms the arts landscape in East Africa, and a physical reminder of the power of community and collaboration across borders. As the first contemporary art centre built for this purpose, 32° East aims to be a home for artists and creative communities to dream freely, create without limitations, and imagine new possibilities for how we live and work together".

Felix Holland, Director-Principal Architect, Localworks, said:

"This project is a great example of the ambition to build radically local; of real, meaningful collaboration; and of emphasising process over product. The visionary leadership of 32°East and the design skills of New Makers Bureau combined perfectly with the technical expertise of Localworks to create a building that will make a real impact on Kampala's cultural scene."

James Hampton, Founding Director, New Makers Bureau, said:

"32° East Arts Centre has been such a pivotal project and learning experience for the practice. It's been exciting to work in Uganda as part of a whole new community. Equally important, it's given us the freedom to explore what makes New Makers Bureau tick, working in a highly collaborative, communal and engaging way, and where climate-focused design is imperative. We've worked on a pro-bono basis to help bring the shared vision for the new arts centre into being and the project has rewarded our studio on so many levels, providing opportunity to develop an integrated approach to working with natural resources."

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Notes to editors

Client: 32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust
Client contact: Teesa Bahana
Location: Plot 212, Block 245, Kiuliriza, Kampala, Uganda
Site area: 470m²
Gross internal area: 160m²
Value: \$1,035,000 (£860,000), \$350,000 (£290,675) for Phase 1
Date of appointment: 2016
Start on site: July 2021
Official opening: 23 March 2023 (phase 1)
Phase 2 completion: end 2024
Design team: James Hampton, Laura Keay, New Makers Bureau
Project architect: James Hampton
Local architect, structural engineer, cost consultant, M&E engineer: Felix Holland, Localworks
Main contractor: Localworks
Photographs: © Tim Latim and © New Makers Bureau

New Makers Bureau

New Makers Bureau is a London based architecture practice founded by James Hampton in 2020. The practice makes imaginative low energy contextual architecture with a particular focus on embodied carbon. In addition to 32° East Arts Centre the practice is nearing completion of two projects in London: Downton Avenue and Durnsford Avenue, examples of low embodied carbon schemes utilising circular economy principles and reclaimed or recycled materials. Current projects include an off-grid low embodied carbon home in the Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Wood Street Mews, a development of six low embodied carbon and low energy-in-use mews houses and a community café in Walthamstow.

newmakersbureau.com

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Localworks

Localworks is a multi-disciplinary design and build collaborative, based in Uganda, that specialises in the design and realisation of ecological architecture in East Africa. Practical and resourceful in research, sensitive and imaginative in design, professional and hands-on in realisation, our portfolio features award-winning eco-architecture such as the Mustardseed Junior School and Our Lady of Victoria Monastery.

localworks.ug

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32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust

32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust is an independent non-profit organisation, established in 2011, focused on the creation and exploration of contemporary art in Uganda. Their programme offers local and international artists in residence one-on-one sessions for critique and professional development, workshops for practical skills and regular talks and social engagement projects, working with public audiences.

ugandanartstrust.org

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