

Sverre Fehn **1997 Laureate** **Ceremony Acceptance Speech**

I am standing here tonight feeling honored and grateful to receive the most important prize in our society of architecture. All my gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Pritzker and the members of The Hyatt Foundation.

It is characteristic that the Pritzker Prize is an American award. It is an example of a society which has the generosity to let architectural freedom be born.

And this museum by Frank Gehry expresses the instant of freedom, having preserved the genius idea of the sketches. And by this process, it has liberated itself from history. Thank you, Gehry.

I want to express my gratitude to all of you, collaborators—clients, friends, and family who are present here in Bilbao to share with me this important event. And I thank especially Henrik Hille, who has worked out with me my latest projects.

I am very pleased for the place chosen for this celebration, Spain, where the big constructions hide in the shadow of the bullfight. My wife often tells me that I must have been Spanish in my early life, so I feel at home.

I will now present some fragments from my life as an architect. Within himself, every man is an architect. His first step towards architecture is his walk through nature.

He cuts a path like writing on the surface of the earth. The crushing of grass and brushwood is an interference with nature, a simple definition of man's culture. His path is a sign to follow. And through this initial movement, he requires the movements of others. This is a most elementary form of a composition.

The globe is divided in longitude and latitude degrees. And each crossing point has its certain climate, its certain plants and winds. As an architect, you have to try to understand the difference of life in each point. Independent of these geographical points, the human thoughts float like clouds over the surface of Earth, and architecture is brought to life in the duel between nature and the irrational.

My nearly fifty-years-long journey into the world of architecture I started by winning a competition for a museum at Lillehammer, together with Geir Grung, just after having finished the architectural studies in Oslo. I took an advice from Jorn Utzon of going to Morocco to study so-called primitive architecture.

I would like to read some words I put down during this winter in Africa: "Traveling south today to Morocco to study primitive rural architecture is not a journey of exploration to discover things. On the contrary, you recognize. Frank Lloyd Wright's houses in Taliesin must seem like these, in disperse and with the same roughness in the structure of the material, and Mies van der Rohe's walls, with the same character of infinity. And here you find Le Corbusier's poem about the terrace and the roof in the modern town plan."

This discovery became for me a tool to penetrate more deeply into understanding of modern architecture. The architecture works within a timeless space. Its signature is Anonymous.

Sverre Fehn, 1997 Laureate (continued)

In the year 1953, I got a French scholarship which gave me the possibility to work without salary in the office of Jean Prouvé in Paris. I visited frequently the office of Le Corbusier in Rue de Sevre 36. At this time, I also experienced the atmosphere of the CIAM in its last period. And I remember Le Corbusier raising his left hand to say goodbye to the Organization and all of us, in the corridor of the old UNESCO building.

My most important journey was perhaps into the past, in the confrontation with the Middle Age, when I built a museum among the ruins of the Bishops' Fortress at Hamar. I realized, when working out this project, that only by manifestation of the present, you can make the past speak. If you try to run after it, you will never reach it.

But the great museum is the globe itself. In the surface of the earth, the lost objects are preserved. The sea and the sand are the great masters of conservation and make the journey into eternity so slow that we still find in these patterns the key to the birth of our culture.

I miss, actually, John Hejduk here today. His writing and drawings have meant a lot to me.

I would like to end with some words I wrote in a book about the construction Security, built in Oslo: "John Hejduk has created a world where the boundaries are erased. The architecture floats in the universe, extending from the cut of the surgeon's scalpel into the inner organ of a human body, to his own cut through the veil of invisibility into the vast landscape where the site is cleared for 'The Cemetery of the Ashes of Thought'."

Thank you.

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