

The Pritzker Architecture Prize

Rafael Moneo 1996 Laureate Biography

José Rafael Moneo was born in the small town of Tudela, Navarra, Spain in May of 1937. His mother, Teresa, was the daughter of a magistrate from Aragón. His father, Rafael, whose family roots were in Tudela, worked there all his life as an industrial engineer. He has a sister, Teresa, who studied philosophy and literature. His late brother, Mariano, studied engineering. Moneo confesses that as he grew up, he was first attracted to philosophy and painting; he did not have a clear calling to be an architect, but attributes his inclination toward architecture to his father's interest in the subject. It was with some difficulty that he left his close family ties in 1954 to go to Madrid to study architecture.

He obtained his architectural degree in 1961 from the Madrid University School of Architecture. He credits his professor of the history of architecture, Leopoldo Torres Balbás with influencing him greatly. While still a student, he worked with architect Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oiza, saying "I wanted to become an architect in the same fashion as Oiza with all of the enthusiasm professed by him in his work." When Moneo completed his degree, he went to Hellebaeck, Denmark to work with Jørn Utzon, "whom I saw," says Moneo, "as the legitimate heir of the masters of the heroic period." Utzon was working on the design of the Sydney Opera House in Australia. Before returning to Spain in 1962, Moneo says, "I traveled around the Scandinavian countries where I was lucky enough to be received by Alvar Aalto in Helsinki."

Once back in Madrid, Moneo won a contest to cover one of the architect spaces at the Academy of Spain in Rome, Italy. He was able to combine his trip to Rome with a honeymoon with his new bride, Belén Feduchi, daughter of architect Luis Feduchi. "It was wonderful," says Moneo, "to be in Rome with her, a person who shared my enthusiasm for architecture without being an architect." Under a two year fellowship, he stayed on at the Spanish Academy in Rome, a period that he calls "fundamental to my career. It allowed me to study, travel, visit schools, get to know Zevi, Tafuri, Portoghesi, and others, but more than anything, to gain a knowledge of that great city produced a great impact in my education as an architect. Life at the academy allowed us to establish great friendships with musicians, painters and sculptors."

Upon their return to Madrid in 1965, they settled in a house-studio in the Madrid neighborhood of El Viso and were blessed with their first daughter, Belén. That same year, he received his first important commission to design the Diestre Factory in Zaragoza. The following year, he began teaching at the Madrid University School of Architecture, as well as publishing articles on architecture. During those years there, he actively participated in gatherings of architects which they called "Little Congresses" that were attended by the most active Spanish architects. Among them were Carlos de Miguel, Oiza, Molezún, Corrales, Garcia de Paredes, etc. from Madrid, and Oriol Bohigas, Federico Correa, Tusquets, Clotet, Bonet, etc from Barcelona. Foreign architects attended as well, including Alvaro Siza of Portugal, Aldo Rossi of Italy, (both of whom later were Pritzker Laureates), as well as Peter Eisenman of the United States and Gregotti. Of these gatherings, Moneo says, "a new phase of architectural life in Spain was initiated."

In 1968, he received his second important commission, the Urumea Project, an apartment building in San Sebastián. It was also the year of the birth of his second daughter, Teresa. A third daughter, Clara Matilde, would be born in 1975.

He describes the period in his own words: "Life in schools during those years was hard; the student agitation of 1968, and the political unrest during the last years of Franco, contributed to making academic activity precarious. It was a battle trying to make students understand architecture as interesting, but gradually the environment changed. It was during this time that with a group of architects, I founded the magazine *Arquitectura Bis*, where many of my writings were published."

In 1974, he received his first commission for a work in Madrid, the Bankinter Office Building, which was accomplished in collaboration with Ramón Bescós. Shortly thereafter, he was commissioned to design the City Hall for Logroño. "These two works would allow me to clearly express by architectural

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vision," says Moneo. In 1976, Moneo was invited to the United States to be a visiting fellow for a year at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies and to teach at the Cooper Union School of Architecture, both in New York City. "The experience for the whole family was profound libraries, expositions, conferences, concerts and certainly marked our lives."

When they moved back to Madrid, they became totally absorbed in life there. His wife, Belén Feduchi played an important role in activities related to their founding of B.D. Madrid, a company dedicated to the design and promotion of contemporary furniture.

It was during this same period, the late seventies and early eighties, that he became a visiting professor at the schools of architecture of both Princeton and Harvard Universities, as well as the University of Lausanne, Switzerland.

In 1980 he became a chaired professor at the School of Architecture in Madrid for five years. At that time, he received the commission for the Museum of Roman Art at Mérida. Two years later, the Previsión Española Building at Seville would become his project as well.

In 1984, Moneo was named chairman of the architecture department of the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, a position he held until 1990. He and his family moved to Cambridge where they lived for five years.

During that tenure, Moneo delivered the Gropius Lecture in 1990, in which he discussed his views on American architecture. One of his tenets was, "It is not possible today to put forward a single definition of architecture. Today's understanding of the concept of architecture, as probably happens with the concept of painting or sculpture, includes what architecture was before, but embraces also many other marginal and not-so-marginal attempts to react architecturally to different circumstances," which led him to explore the concepts of necessity and contingency in architecture. He pointed out that a circumstance when architecture is needed is in the city, "where architecture used to manifest all its splendor, where the discipline is still urgently needed." While lamenting the fact that those who care about architecture have been greatly reduced, he indicated hope that their ranks could be enlarged.

In an earlier Kenzo Tange Lecture at Harvard, Moneo spoke of architecture as having lost the importance it had in society of the past, saying, "Victor Hugo said that books had killed cathedral architecture; it wasn't entirely true then, but it seems we could say today that mass media communication has reduced architecture's relevance." In effect, he is pointing to the fact that architecture is no longer vital "as the reservoir of symbolic communication" nor even "in the most pragmatic point of view that identifies it with cities and housing." He looks forward to a time of understanding the "immense pleasure that the actual production of architecture, the construction of buildings, offers." He encourages his students to become "makers of buildings."

Once built, he insists that the buildings are neither "the outcome of a process nor the materialization of a drawing" definitely not the exclusive property of the architect. "Once completed," he continued, "buildings take on a life of their own. Of all the figurative or plastic arts, architecture is probably the one in which the distance between the artist and his work is the greatest ... architecture implies the distance so that in the end the work remains alone, self-supported ... a work of architecture, if successful, may efface the architect."

While at Harvard, he traveled to Spain nearly every month to develop the Atocha Railway Station project which he won in competition almost simultaneously with his university appointment. He says, "The years at Harvard were intense, particularly for someone like me who has dedicated so much of his professional life to teaching. And there was an additional reward, the commission for the Davis Art Museum at Wellesley College." Although he would have liked to prolong his stay at Harvard, the preparations for the celebration of Spain '92 brought new projects to his studio: the San Pablo Airport

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at Seville; the remodeling of the Villahermosa Palace to house the Thyssen-Bornemisza art collection; and the Diagonal Building in Barcelona, the latter being a collaboration with Manuel de Sola-Morales.

Back in Spain in 1990, with all of these projects in work, he moved his studio from his home to a separate building some 500 feet away. Two more projects were won in competition: the Kursaal Concert Hall and Cultural Center at San Sebastián and the Museums of Art and Architecture in Stockholm, both of which are currently under construction. During these years, his late brother, joined the firm providing structural calculations for the many projects. He now has a total of 15 young architects working in his studio with five others at the various project sites.

His ties to Harvard continue in the form of his being named as the Josep Lluís Sert Professor in 1991, teaching there for two weeks each spring semester.

Moneo's teaching activities have extended to numerous symposia and lectures delivered at, among other institutions in the United States, the Universities of Chicago, Columbia, Princeton, Yale, Tulane, Rhode Island School of Design; in England at the Architectural Association School and the Royal Institute of Architects in London, and the Cambridge University School of Architecture; in Japan at Nihon University; the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Austria; the Royal Academy in Copenhagen, Denmark; the Louvre Museum in Paris, France; and Pontificia University of Chile in Santiago.

In tandem, Moneo has developed an extensive body of work as architectural critic and theoretician. His collected writings will in the future be published in Italy in the U.S. The majority of the texts gathered in these volumes were first published in *Oppositions* and *Lotus* magazines, and *Arquitectura Bis*.

Recent exhibitions of the architect's work have taken place at The Art Institute of Chicago, Oct. 1992 *Building in a New Spain: Contemporary Spanish Architecture*; The Museo Cantonale d'Arte, Lugano, Switzerland, Sept. 1992 *Art Museums and Architecture*; Ministerio de Obras Públicas y Transportes, Madrid, Oct. 1992 *Ten Years of Spanish Architecture 1980-1990*; at the Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, May 1994 *Museums and Architecture*. A monographic exhibition of the architect's work from the start of his career was held in 1993 at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste of Vienna *Rafael Moneo, Building in the City*. Other exhibits that same year include *Rafael Moneo, Buildings and Projects 1976-1992* at the Architekturmuseum in Basel, Switzerland; *Buildings and Projects 1973-1993* at the Arkitekturmuseet in Stockholm, Sweden; and in 1994 at the Museum of Finnish Architecture, Helsinki, Finland.

Among the architect's other works in Spain not already mentioned are the following: the central offices of the Bank of Spain, Jaén (1982-88); Projects in Madrid include the Architectural Association of Tarragona building (1983-92). In Palma de Mallorca (1987-1992), the Pilar & Joan Miró Foundation; in Barcelona the Refectory of the Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe (1991-94).

In his writings, Moneo uses the Miró Foundation to illustrate a point about how important the site is to architecture. "My new construction tries to respect the wishes of Joan Miró," he explains, "who wanted to give Palma de Mallorca a place where young artists could work as well as study his work through the paintings that were still in the family's hands. The site already had the old estate house as well as another house, and a studio built by Josep Luis Sert in the mid-1950s. Unfortunately, since that time, the surrounding properties were built with high-rises, spoiling the view, and literally besieging the Miró property. I decided my new building should not be tall but should react energetically against the world built around it. The gallery, a key piece in the new construction, is something of a military fortress defending itself from the encroaching enemies. Sharp and intense, the volume ignores its surroundings, or better still, answers with rage the hostile buildings that have worn down the previously beautiful slope. Views are centered exclusively on the Sert Studio, the Miró house and hills. Further the roof of the gallery is transformed into a pond, which allows us to think that it is still possible to recover the presence of the sea. Moreover, the water of the pond enhances the distance between the site and the neighborhood."

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Moneo continues, "Architecture belongs to the site. Architecture should be appropriate which means it should recognize in some way the attributes of the site. To understand what these attributes are, to hear how they manifest themselves, should be the architect's first move when starting to think about a building."

Other projects (not already mentioned) under construction include the Barcelona Concert Hall (begun in 1990), Don Benito Cultural Center in Badajoz (begun in 1995), the addition to the Town Hall of Murcia (begun in 1995).

Among the projects Moneo's studio has currently in the design phase are the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Texas (commissioned 1992), the Potsdammer Platz Hotel & Office Building in Berlin (commissioned 1993).

During 1992 Rafael Moneo was awarded the Gold Medal for Achievement in the Fine Arts by the Spanish Government, and was honored as Doctorate Honoris Causa by Leuven University in February of 1993. In May 1993 Rafael Moneo received the Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize in Architecture by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and in June 1993 the Prince of Viana Prize by the Government of the Province of Navarra (Spain). In November 1993 he was awarded the 1993 Schock Prize in the Visual Arts by the Schock Foundation and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. In April 1994 he received a Laurea ad Honorem from the School of Architecture of Venice.

Moneo is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Accademia di San Luca di Roma. He is an Honorary Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and the Royal Institute of British Architects.

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