

The Pritzker Architecture Prize

Rafael Moneo 1996 Laureate Acceptance Speech

Thank you. What can be said after such kind words, after all these words of praise from friends whom I have loved and respected during so many years. I am touched. I am overwhelmed because I don't know why, but for some reason my fate has become entwined with the city of Los Angeles. I am waiting for the next four or five years to see why this has occurred, and to find out what fate was looking for in bringing Los Angeles into my life and what fate was asking me to do here.

I am indeed quite touched by both Jay Pritzker and Carter Brown, and Richard Meier, because of this present [referring to the marble block of the Getty that Meier has just presented to him] that will indeed hold memories for me of this unforgettable day. But I don't want to extend myself too much. My feelings are probably evident. Let me read what I have prepared. I will try to brief.

I would like to tell all those who are here, witnesses of my happiness, how profoundly I am touched by feelings of gratitude and joy. I owe my happiness to architecture; to the activity that I have dedicated the best part of my life. And I should start today by saying directly how much I love architecture. It has taught me to look at the world seeking to understand why animals, tools, plants, mountains, the clothes we wear and naturally the buildings, appear to us in their specific forms.

Learning about the reasons behind the form helps the architect to produce his work, the buildings which ultimately constitute the background where men and women live. The opportunity to create the reality which surrounds us is the greatest privilege that we as architects enjoy. I am immensely grateful to architecture for allowing me to see the world through its eyes.

After declaring my love and my respect for architecture tonight, I would like to remind you what Alberti, one of the greatest architects and theoreticians in history thought about architecture. For him, architecture had to provide beauty as well as satisfy necessity. These, indeed, are two objectives which architecture used to accomplish and that today are, let us say it plainly, often forgotten.

Beauty is not today familiar in an architectural vocabulary. Architects seem to be absorbed by the idea that architecture is simply the reflection of a culture at a specific time. So many architects now seek to manifest motion instead of stability, the ephemeral instead of the perpetual, the fragmented instead of the whole and the fictitious instead of the real. Even the city which could be considered the most valuable contribution that architecture has made to humankind is today endangered by the dispersion brought by new means of communication and transportation. The increasingly familiar concept of "virtual reality" speaks about a new idea of reality that has little to do with the real world architecture helped to shape throughout history.

Years ago, Luis Barragán, asked for beauty in his address to an audience as this one of today when celebrating the second Pritzker prize. I quote: "The invincible difficulty that the philosophers have in defining the meaning of this word, beauty, is unequivocal proof of its ineffable mystery. Human life, deprived of beauty, is not worthy of being called so."

I understand and I share Barragán's difficulties in defining beauty. Obviously, it does not mean to me that architecture is fixed to an immutable canon. It means rather to believe that the buildings are able to be masters of themselves. Aristotle spoke of pleasure when talking about beauty. Augustin was looking for truth. When the building enjoys being itself, both concepts are still pertinent and then pleasure and truth engender the feeling of plenitude that seems to me to be felt when we are close to something that emanates beauty.

Architecture is not today so simply connected to necessity as it was in the past. Once upon a time buildings were close to the idea of tools that helped men and women to survive in the rigorous, natural world. Necessity was the great architectural ally that united appropriateness both to the accomplishment of the programs and the use of building techniques. Even more, in the past the act

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of building implied the manipulation of the most elaborate techniques. Today, these techniques have become trivialized gestures with the help often of remote and sophisticated industries.

The fact that we live in a society where the rights of an individual prevail has had a tremendous influence in architecture. Architecture seems to be the ultimate expression of the individual's freedom. This has brought today's architecture so close to the arbitrary that it seems to have lost the specific condition it enjoyed until now. And while I am aware that form is not the result of a set of deterministic factors and that men and women have always been the ultimate masters of form, I, indeed long for the times when necessity was inevitably connected with architecture.

Why am I taken by this reflection about architecture tonight? I think that I know why it happened. I declared and I tried to explain how much I love architecture. I am aware of what doing architecture means today. I indeed resist the idea that architecture is different from what it used to be. By recognizing that architecture still could and should include in its agenda the concepts of beauty and necessity, I am expressing my most profound wish that architecture possess a long life ahead.

I realize that buildings have changed and even the profession of architects is today quite different from what it used to be, and yet architecture, as it was once understood, remains. The fact that those attributes of beauty and necessity still are pertinent would be the proof. I would not like that to be simply the expression of my desire, but the result of this everlasting way of looking at the world that architecture has provided throughout history.

It is time now time to express openly all my gratitude. I would like to start with all the people who taught me to love architecture; those builders whose work constitutes the world I love so profoundly.

Those who were my teachers and fellow students at the School of Architecture of Madrid where I spent those early years of learning and to those architects in whose offices I worked. Those schools where I taught, Barcelona and especially to the Graduate School of Design of Harvard, where I still enjoy the contact with those who work to become architects; those who were my clients, and all those who worked in my office throughout so many years. Without their generosity and faith, it wouldn't have been possible to sustain my career.

And above all, I would like to manifest my recognition to my family. My mother, Teresa, and my sister, who shares the same name, are here tonight. I deeply regret the loss of my father, Rafael, who helped me with the decision to become an architect and who so attentively followed my career, and the loss also of my brother, Mariano, a civil engineer with whom I worked together on some of my most beloved projects.

I feel an infinite gratitude to my wife, Belen Feduchi and our daughters Belen, Teresa and Clara Matilde. My wife, who comes from a family of architects, has helped me with her acute advice dictated by the love we share for architecture. She and my daughters always accepted this condition of an architect's life today, which is that of a nomad. Without their general support, I couldn't have done my work and I wouldn't be here tonight.

I would like to thank too, The Getty Foundation for providing such a magnificent place for today's ceremony. It has allowed all of us to foresee what this remarkable complex will be when finished and without a doubt, it can be said we see here the new standards for museums and cultural institutions in the century to come.

Obviously, I feel the most profound gratitude towards the members of the jury whom I respect so much and whose decision I receive with a mixture of immense joy and deep sense of responsibility. I am thrilled thinking that my work deserves such recognition and that my name will be together with those others who have been awarded with the Pritzker and whom I admire so profoundly.

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And last, but not least, my gratitude is addressed to the Pritzker family. If I have said I love architecture, I would like to extend my love to all those who share the respect I feel towards this discipline. The Pritzker family has wanted their name to be associated with this prize that works above all to honor architecture. I don't know a better endeavor, and it deserves all of my recognition and all my sympathy. I want to declare that publicly. In so doing, I end my words tonight. Thank you very much.

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