

leoh Ming Pei **1983 Laureate** **Ceremony Acceptance Speech**

It is a great honor to be here tonight to receive the 1983 International Pritzker Architecture Prize. I take particular pleasure in thanking those who conceived the prize, those who have administered it, and the distinguished jurors who have seen fit to select me as this year's recipient.

During the preparation of the exhibits here, it was reassuring to observe that quite a number of our projects actually led to finished buildings. Especially vivid in my mind were the many social, economic, political as well as esthetic constraints that architects have had to consider in the shaping of their work. You may be amused to know, although it was not amusing to me at the time, that a house I designed for a friend in Cambridge in the early forties was denied a mortgage because it looked modern. In this sense I belong to that generation of American architects who built upon the pioneering perceptions of the modern movement, with an unwavering conviction in its significant achievements in the fields of art, technology and design. I am keenly aware of the many banalities built in its name over the years. Nevertheless, I believe in the continuity of this tradition for it is by no means a relic of the past but a living force that animates and informs the present.

Only in this way can we develop and refine an architectural language, responsive to today's values and allow for a variety of expressions in both style and substance. How else can we hope to build a coherent physical environment for our cities, towns and neighborhoods?

Italy's Siena and America's Savannah, Georgian London and Neoclassical Paris are but of few of the more conspicuous examples. I believe that architecture is a pragmatic art. To become art it must be built on a foundation of necessity. Freedom of expression, for me, consists in moving within a measured range that I assign to each of my undertakings. How instructive it is to remember Leonardo da Vinci's counsel that "strength is born of constraint and dies in freedom."

The chase for the new, from the singular perspective of style, has too often resulted in only the arbitrariness of whim, the disorder of caprice. It is easy to say that the art of architecture is everything, but how difficult it is to introduce the conscious intervention of an artistic imagination without straying from the context of life.

It is this fragility, this preciousness that elevates and distinguishes this art form. It is this enfolding context that challenges us to transform planning and building opportunities into the exalted realm of architecture. Architects by design investigate the play of volumes in light, explore the mysteries of movement in space, examine the measure that is scale and proportion, and above all, they search for that special quality that is the spirit of the place as no building exists alone.

leoh Ming Pei, 1983 Laureate (continued)

The practice of architecture is a collective enterprise, with many individuals of various disciplines and talents working closely together. And from the commissioning to the completion of a project, there are also the many individuals for whom architects work, whose contribution to quality is frequently as crucial as that of the architect. So I accept this prize for all who have worked with me in this unique undertaking. Let us all be attentive to new ideas, to advancing means, to dawning needs, to impetuses of change so that we may achieve, beyond architectural originality, a harmony of spirit in the service of man.

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