

Lord Palumbo 2006 Laureate Paolo Mendes da Rocha Ceremony Speech

Prime Minister, Mr Governor, Mr Mayor, Cindy and Tom Pritzker, distinguished guests,

This is a very special event in the history of the Pritzker Prize for Architecture. Not only does it mark the 28th presentation of this annual Award, but it is the first time that it has been held in Turkey; and where better than in the privileged and sumptuous setting of the Dolmabahçe Palace, the home of the Founder of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Ataturk, who lived and died here. We are enormously grateful to you, Prime Minister, for making this historic building available to us for this evening's presentation.

This year's Laureate, Paulo Mendes da Rocha, continues the distinguished contribution of Brazil to the pantheon of modern architecture. Beginning with Lucio da Costa and Oscar Niemeyer—the latter, incidentally, a winner of the Pritzker Prize in 1988—they have been brilliantly succeeded by such architects as Lina Bo Bardi, the landscape architect, Robert Burle Marx, and, of course, Paulo Mendes da Rocha himself. Brazil today is as it has always been, a place of energy and innovation both through the continuing work of the Masters, and the current younger generation of Architects.

Paulo Mendes da Rocha opened his studio in 1955, and still practises in his atelier today. He has undertaken works that range from private houses to large urban plans with many commissions in between, the majority being public, cultural, or institutional buildings, such as the Brazilian Pavilion at Expo'70 in Osaka, Japan; the Brazilian Museum of Sculpture, and the Patriarch Plaza in Sao Paulo.

The work of Paulo Mendes da Rocha is an unambiguous expression of confidence in the modern project for Brazil, underpinned by an unshakeable optimism and vision for the future. It is based upon technical know-how, and conceptual intensity. From his father, an engineer, he developed a passion for technically correct solutions, and an exacting, rigorous approach. If the works of Oscar Niemeyer are remarkable for their exuberant and expressive qualities, and as striking forms in the landscape, those of Paulo Mendes da Rocha are remarkable for the pursuit of greater rationality, and their striking dialogue with the landscape. Indeed, he has said that 'Architecture is, first and foremost, geography'. And again, 'Architecture is the transformation of nature, a total fusion of science, art, and technology in a sublime statement of human dignity and intelligence'. And then, most tellingly, he has also said 'One does not need a large quantity of resources. Seven musical notes can produce a symphony, 25 letters make up all the words of Shakespeare or Garcia Lorca. An architect must know and understand the resources of building, just as much as a poet must understand words'.

I think of Paulo Mendes da Rocha as a poet practising architecture. He is, in every way, a worthy recipient of this year's Pritzker Prize.

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For more information, please contact:

Eunice Kim
Director of Communications
The Pritzker Architecture Prize
Tel: +1 240 401 5649
Email: eunicekim@pritzkerprize.com