

Alvaro Siza

It is still hard for me to believe that I have been this year's recipient of the Pritzker Prize, the prestigious award from The Hyatt Foundation already given to some of the architects I admire most. The aim of an architectural prize is supposed to be, above all, that of supporting and celebrating perfection. I have yet not been able to reach perfection.

I remember a talk that took place many years ago with my friend Fernando Tavora, my teacher at the school of Porto. In it he mentioned his perplexity at the imperfections of the Brunelleschi cupola when seen from a certain angle.

He expressed first a certain disappointment, which was followed by a feeling of understanding, of discovery, of plenitude.

I am not, however, referring to the dissatisfaction of an artist, which is a feeling that is often with me. I am referring to concrete and material imperfections: cracks on walls, a certain discomfort, irregular stuccoes, or bent woods, in sum, the rigor that has not been attained.

On the other hand, I am referring to the lack of sensitivity that either hampers or despises the search for beauty, be it the beauty of harmony or contrast.

The professional life of architects is nowadays affected not only by those imperfections, but also by difficulties or impossibilities in the making of architecture.

I always felt professionally divided between the hard and difficult challenge to answer the needs of the greatest number of persons on the one hand; and the attraction for single opportunities (which are apparently closer to the viability of architecture).

In the end both hypotheses complement each other, being indispensable to one another.

The various circumstances that surround architectural commissions, with their stigmas of specialization led me until recently to project above all—in a fragmentary way—the urban tissue made of apparently banal elements that shape the majority of the area of any city or territory.

This is far from being a modest task: it aims at re-encountering the lost spontaneity, the joy of spontaneity and of difference; the uninhibited and collective competence to find or model the place for exceptional urban episodes.

I dream of the moment in which such an intimate and collective need will not be dependent on a degree in architecture.

At the moment, and not only in my country, the need and the way to add quality to things that are banal and repetitive—as a condition to enhance the beauty of the city and of its monuments—is facing profound transformations, that, perhaps at the moment, are quite painful, but which are essentially more than promising, fascinating and creative transformation beyond apparent frontiers: —neither high technology nor the sound knowledge of craftsmen—the old support to architectural creation—but an in-between situation in which we must be involved; —a situation of death and rebirth under a form which we nervously exploit, questioning and dipping into the real.

I want to express that the Pritzker Prize gives my heart some serenity. The message is clear to me: it is acknowledged that our condition is transitional, different from environment to environment, yet universal; gradually freed from the narrow concept of centre and periphery.

All my gratitude to the Pritzker family, who love architecture as Art, celebrating it in that condition; who appreciate it by its integrity and not by its lateral views.

I express my thanks to the members of the jury who—constantly and without reserve—search for that integrity.

My thanks to my family and to my friends—colleagues, collaborators in the studio, clients and others here present or not, to all those that honor me with their presence in this room.

After all I dare to understand the reason this prize has been granted to me. I feel happy and proud.

Thank you very much.