

Vittorio Sgarbi **2002 Laureate Glenn Murcutt** **Ceremony Speech**

Under-Secretary of the Minister of Fine Arts and Cultural Affairs

It is the second time that the Pritzker Prize, the most important prize for the architects of our time, has been assigned in Italy. In 1990 it was given for the first time, in Venice, the artistic capital of the East, and it was won by Aldo Rossi. Nowadays it has been assigned in Rome, the artistic capital of the West, in a time when the debate between the ancient and the modern architecture in Italy is extremely lively.

Italy is based on landscapes and town planning contexts of exceptional-artistic historical value. The architects who work in this particular condition have an extreme responsibility task, which requires specific technical and historical-artistic expertise. If we consider certain testimonies of the past civilization, if we consider Michelangelo or Rossetti, it would be easy to understand how little the contemporary architects feel. But it happens sometimes that they want to have the same importance of the great teachers of the past, that they want to be openly compared to them, in order to rebuild where they have already built.

A supreme arrogance act, which reveals an inadequate cultural and intellectual preparation to the problem, as if the modernity had the right to superimpose itself and to deform even the noblest documents of our history. Being intelligently modern means having conscience and respect of history, without looking for absurd comparisons which would only carry to ideological extremism.

Nobody can ask to the architects to have the historical and social conscience of all the places in which they are called to work. The local buyers, at every level, have to inform them about the things they do not know, they have to define a level of ideal feasibility, the architect can work on and can prepare his practical project. Architects must be helped in their task, they cannot only be considered "demiurghi," everything is granted to. It was not so at the times of Michelangelo and Rossetti and it cannot be so nowadays. The greatest architecture is always the union between the buyers' and the architects' projects. If one of the two elements misses, the result can be hardly the same. Everywhere is full of wonderful and modern architectures, hated by those who live in, only because the projects have not taken into consideration their demands, their expectations, their mental horizons. They are failures, beautiful to see, but however failures.

I still believe that the best architecture, as it was in the past, must exist only for its time. I think that the modern architecture should establish with the past a serene, cultured, meditated, mature and not conflictual relationship. I think that the modern architecture should build, instead of rebuild; it should invent new places, and civilize where civilization does not exist. It should be done without the desire to be the centre of attention, with the consciousness to develop a role which must not entertain the minority, but serve the majority. Nothing to say when Frank O. Gehry builds in Bilbao in a substantial desert, or Renzo Piano in an abandonment zone in Rome; however it would not have sense if these architects were left free to act in the same way also in the historical centres, where through the time they have reached inviolable balances.

When one moves into the past, it is necessary to have another kind of sensitivity. One should act as Carlo Scarpa did in Castelveccchio: not hide, not falsify, but establish a consistent dialectic relationship with the historical document, one goes to touch. Although he has never had significant opportunities to compare him to the ancients, Glenn Murcutt, the winner of the Pritzker prize for this year, represents this way of interpreting the architecture.

Vittorio Sgarbi, 2002 Laureate Glenn Murcutt (continued)

Murcutt was born and acts in Australia, in a world where the ancients are considered in an antithetic way, if compared to the European way. Murcutt works on "bench-scale" but for many buyers, far from every temptation to give a new form to the world, he works to solve practical problems, to look for a right union with the nature, in order to get from the nature, from its ordinary and strangest appearances, the right inspiration for technical and formal innovative solutions. Murcutt is an excellent example of a social architect in a time full of asocial architects, individualists, exhibitionists, devoted to the affirmation of their point of view against everything and everyone. Murcutt is absolutely modern, but his way to be in front of the nature, in his measure to man dimension, there is a classicism bottom; for instance, it is the same in the project for the Bingie Bingie house, in which the relationship of necessity with the place is seen by the architect in the same way Palladio felt for his villas.

This is not a prerogative of the ancient times: coming at more recent years, I find analogous propensities to increase the value of the relationship with the nature of the place, its colors and its moods, in Louis Kahn's works and even more in the Mexican Luis Barragan's works, without remembering the Scandinavian school's examples. My wish is that this recognition to Murcutt marks a renewed tendency in contemporary architecture, a reaction to gigantism, a renewed pleasure for the continuity between nature and civilization. Because at the end I consider good architecture as the continuation in earth of God's work.

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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