

Thomas J. Pritzker

2017 Laureates Rafael Aranda, Carme Pigem and Ramon Vilalta Ceremony Speech

Your Majesty, the Emperor...Your Majesty, the Empress... Your presence at the commemoration of the Pritzker Architecture Prize honors us deeply. On behalf of my wife and I, let me first thank you for your interest in architecture and for your presence here today. Arigato Gozaimasu.

Your presence brings to mind the importance of history, continuity and stability to the human spirit. The human spirit is also the focus of great architecture. Great architecture should not only provide shelter, but it should do so in a manner that lifts the human spirit. This can be architecture's great contribution to society. We see examples of this throughout Japan running from the Great Daibutsuden of Todai-ji to the modern works of many of the Laureates who are with us today.

Before going further, I want to make a personal statement. I see many Japanese friends in today's audience. For more than four decades you have opened up the glories of your culture. You know who you are and I want to use this occasion to thank each of you for this wonderful gift.

As I think about Japan through the prism of architecture, I see just how remarkable Japan's contributions have been. For centuries Japanese architecture has built houses with a ceiling and a floor in order to bring nature and the world into the home. Its use of walls keeps space flowing. In effect, Japanese architecture has shown us that we do not have to choose between shelter and remaining connected with nature. With wisdom, we can have a balance that includes both shelter and a connection with nature.

Today, many societies are struggling. One group wants to turn inward and close themselves to outside forces and influences. The other group embraces internationalism with far less regard for local interests. One of the great questions of our age is whether we must choose between these or whether we can have both. The answer, of course, is to achieve a balance between these two. The answer, of course, is not to see them as mutually exclusive, but to look for ways to have balance and then to constantly adjust that balance. This lacks the simplicity of black and white, but has the benefit of a sustainable philosophy that can navigate through the rapid changes that we see in today's world.

This Japanese sense of the balance between the particular and universal, the local and the global, is of ever growing importance in our times. It is not an accident that from this island society, we have seven Pritzker Laureates. When we observe and study Japan, and the Emperor and the Empress, we see a culture that has retained its deep commitment to country and tradition, while at the same time robustly engaging in global matters. The concept of balance is deeply embedded in Japanese society. This is not easy and requires great agility. Japan continuously calibrates the needs of its home community and people in the context of a dynamic and ever-changing world. The lesson is clear. Great civilizations are always looking inside to their own resources and outside to the great ideas of the world. Limiting one's view to one or the other is just not sustainable. Japan shows us that with balance, you can be both local and international.

There is an elegant fit between this great message of Japanese civilization and this year's Pritzker Laureates: Rafael Aranda, Carme Pigem, and Ramon Vilalta. These three Spanish architects have worked together in a deep and intimate collaboration for nearly thirty years. The Pritzker Jury honors them for the physical and spatial beauty of their built work; for the artistry and craftsmanship of each of their buildings and structures; and for the functionality of their work as it serves the purposes and peoples who engage with those works. Aranda, Pigem, and Vilalta present us with an example of balancing local needs with global ideas. They are firmly rooted in their locale in Catalonia and Southern France. They use local materials. They bring their surroundings into their buildings visually through glass and materially through wood. The result is that the occupant and visitor know exactly where they are in time and in space. Their localism is, however, not the end of the story.

Aranda, Pigem and Vilalta, 2017 Laureates (continued)

There is an abiding international aspect to their work. They are eclectic in the way in which they use traditional materials and modern construction to create spaces of a form only recently possible. Their work expresses modern architecture in all its variety, which by definition is international in its approach. In many ways, our three Laureates have found a balance and thereby demonstrated that we can serve local needs in the context of a globalized world.

In their decade's long collaboration, our three Laureates provide us with another lesson. It is uncommon for two to act as one. Imagine then how rare it is when three can act as one. That is what we see with Aranda, Pigem and Vilalta. Their collaborative spirit and agility is something that humanity needs now more than ever.

With that, let me now introduce our three Laureates: Rafael Aranda, Carme Pigem, and Ramon Vilalta, would you please come forward.

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