

Philippe Douste-Blazy 1995 Laureate Tadao Ando Ceremony Speech

French Minister of Culture

Mr. Minister, dear Jacques Toubon, Madame the Ambassador, ladies, gentlemen, there are places where spirit flows. Versailles represents one of the summits of French art, of Western art, and of universal art. But what is the spirit presiding over the awarding within these walls, to an architect from Japan, of the prestigious prize founded by an American? Well, it is the spirit of architecture, none the less.

Here in Versailles we are reminded that the Egyptian tradition, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome made architecture the major mode of expression for any civilization.

Gods, kings, and people, were served by the other arts, architecture is, rightly, identified to the memory of these masters: Ramses, Pericles, and here, Louis XIV. They would be little remembered outside the buildings that their wonderful genius favored or, perhaps, imposed on their people.

No surprise, therefore, that the classic tradition of architecture was the first of the fine arts. An art so deeply embodied, so ready to become the very expression—and, if I may say so—the symbol of a nation. This art is also, paradoxically, one of the most international ones. The dissemination of models, the dissemination of treaties, the mobility of architects from Roman times right through Classic times consecrated the privilege of talent over nationality, over birth. Architecture has always been a classic art in the sense of a universal art and, because of this tradition of universalism in France, it is the major French art.

Architecture deals with the organization of space and spaces. France has launched the building of major works such as the Pompidou Center by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers; the Grande Arche de la Defense by Paul Andreu and J. C. von Spekelsen, and the buildings designed by Christian de Portzamparc.

But architecture also deals with a space that has already been fashioned by the past centuries. Even in our existing framework, we must find some sign of continuity. There are grandiose gestures. But there are also more sensitive, subtler works of art where there is a manifest and discreet sense of humility. This humility and modesty are the quintessence of classic art. And I think we can say that Tadao Ando makes this his characteristic. I would like to say, on my own behalf, after Jacques Toubon, how much I admire him. I know that he started designing very simple row houses. Then he worked on temples. He worked on shrines. And he has also been remarkable in the creation of places of culture. The Pritzker Prize, a really noble prize of architecture, recognizes a witness of his times.

And, to finish, ladies and gentlemen, I want to say that I see a sign and a promise in the fact that most of his works are religious, artistic, and cultural places where the spirit flows. As Minister of Culture, I am particularly satisfied that this is the case. Thank you for your attention.

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