

The Pritzker Architecture Prize

Rem Koolhaas 2000 Laureate Ceremony Speech

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Thank you very much, Carter. Mr. Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, for my family, as for many Jewish families, the route to Jerusalem has been a somewhat circuitous route, and as you might suspect it took us a bit more time than perhaps it should have to get here.

I suppose it could be said that our journey started here in this place in the year 70 when Titus breached the walls and burned the city and the temple. In more recent times our family was exiled from Kiev by the pogroms in the early eighteen eighties. That exile led us to Chicago, where we had the great fortune to find opportunity and freedom. And so after a journey of many, many generations, and many years, we've ended up back here in Jerusalem at the Temple Mount, where time, space and ideas meet as one.

Each year the site for this presentation is discussed, debated and then chosen. In each instance, we hope that the site will lend some of its ideals to the creation and appreciation of architecture. We now sit at one of the three centers of Western civilization. Western civilization has grown up on the hills of three cities: the Seven Hills of Rome, the Acropolis of Athens and here, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Rome has given us the practice of government and law, and in the field of architecture it's given us the arch. Athens has given us philosophy, democracy and theater, and in the field of architecture it's given us the column.

Yet Jerusalem has given us no indigenous architecture. None, whatsoever. When Solomon built the first temple in the tenth century, B.C.E., he had to get it done by commissioning his friend Hiram, a foreigner from Tyre. Hiram, in turn, had to send his architects and builders to Jerusalem. And here what you see is Herod's second temple. Herod, who built a thousand years after Solomon, had to send to Rome for his architects and for his engineers. Still no Jewish architecture. In fact, one might argue that it's really only with the Supreme Court Project of our friend, Jacob Rothschild, and the Karmi's, when Jewish architecture took on any real meaning whatsoever. Think of it. All around us here in Jerusalem are examples of Canaanite architecture, Greek, Roman and Byzantine architecture, several forms of Islamic architecture, and wonderful examples of Ottoman architecture, and yet nowhere is there to be found in the ancient city of Jerusalem any identifiable Jewish architecture. So why this year in Jerusalem? It's because Jerusalem has given us the word.

It has given us values and ideals. What came forward from this Temple Mount was the word and the ideal that all human beings are of ultimate sanctity, because all are created in the image of one God. It's this idea and the belief in the absolute worth of the individual and of humanity that the Prize seeks to recognize in its recipient's work. Great works of architecture should express their commitment to the service of humanity and the celebration of the individual. It's here that the meaning of this place intersects with the aspirations of architecture.

While we stand here at the foot of the essential concepts of Western civilization, we also stand in the shadow of a unique concept of architecture. Let's look at this great building for a moment. These walls are in fact retaining walls of the Second Temple. Atop the Temple sat a courtyard, which had a section of building called the Holies.

Within that was a centerpiece structure which was called the Holy of Holies. Inside of the Holy of Holies, was the Golden Ark and inside of the Golden Ark were the Ten Commandments. Now comes the question of designing a space that's worthy of holding the word of the Ten Commandments.

The Herodian Temple Mount as it stood prior to its destruction in 70 C.E. A virtual reality computer model as constructed by the Urban Simulation Team at UCLA and the Israel Antiquities Authority. The

Speech by Thomas J. Pritzker (continued)

Bible tells us that the Holy of Holies was a perfect cube, twenty cubits by twenty cubits, by twenty cubits. But the Talmud goes on to describe the space of the Golden Ark that held the word was a space that was measureless. How can a space be measureless? Well, apparently this was a space that had no volume. The Talmud describes how that worked. According to the Talmud, the Holy of Holies was a cube of twenty cubits, yet the distance from any wall to the side of the Ark was ten cubits. So we have an Ark designed of the ultimate architectural space—a space that has no volume—and that was the space which was designed to hold the Ark that enshrined the word.

At this place we can also move from the sublime of architectural concepts to the reality of our architectural environment. Above me is one of the world's great pieces of graffiti. That's right, graffiti. As best we can tell, it was probably engraved in these Herodian stones by a Jew, who came to these walls during the second century Hadrianic persecutions, when pilgrimage was forbidden. Our anonymous pilgrim took a verse from the book of Isaiah to express his thoughts and feelings about these walls and this place. The verse describes both the success of architecture and the ultimate aspirations of people. It's from *Isaiah*, Chapter Sixty-Six, Verse Fourteen, and it says, "And you shall see and your heart shall rejoice And your limbs shall blossom like new grass."

What better way, ladies and gentlemen, to introduce Rem Koolhaas, an architect and a man of the word. He has influenced our surroundings with ideas, words and a built environment. Like several other Pritzker laureates, the written word has been an important part of Rem's medium. Rem Koolhaas' book, *Delirious New York*, a 1978 Manifesto, used New York's architecture as a metaphor for the chaos of contemporary life. This book made him an instant cult hero, exerting an enormous influence over our entire generation of young architects. His influence has been made even more profound by his work at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, where he's working with students studying the changing urban condition and pursuing ideas on how the world should continue to build. In fact, to quote one juror, we have obtained from his work a more sober and accurate understanding of architecture's true social potential, that breaks the stalemate between theory and practice. Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to award the Pritzker Prize to a man of the word and a man of architecture, the Pritzker Laureate for the year 2000, Rem Koolhaas.

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