

Frei Otto
2013 Laureate
Ceremony Acceptance Speech

Christine Otto-Kanstinger
Accepting the prize on behalf of Frei Otto

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, it is a great honor to be invited to this wonderful place and to be here with you tonight.

I would like to sincerely thank the Pritzker family and the members of the jury. On behalf of my family I want to thank you for all the sympathies. Thanks to all who have played a part in my dad's life — collaborators, colleagues, clients, friends — and above all my mom, who was for almost 68 years at his side, gave him encouragement, took care of the large family, travelled the world and ate raw fish with him, even though she doesn't like fish!

The fact that we are here today shows that Frei Otto's life did effectuate something. The Pritzker Prize honors a living architect!

I am convinced this is true, his ideas are alive! Frei Otto was a genius. I am glad that I was born into his world, spent most of my life in spaces created by him, and that I was able to work so intensely over the past 32 years as an architect with him.

We built hundreds of models, studied soap films, sand, earthquakes and floating magnets. We have sketched, drawn, glued layouts and wrote essays. We climbed on tents, photographed, discussed, held lectures and laughed. Once my dad wanted to paint a model and by accident he sprayed his own face and hair in a very loud lime green!

Many designs were not realized. But they were all not castles in the air. From the very beginning, there was always at least one idea of how to realize the design.

Every detail was important and was puzzled out.

Frei Otto never wanted to build for eternity, but for living people!

Everyone should be able to build and shape his own individual, imaginative house.

Buildings should adapt to the needs of the people, and not vice-versa.

The material and energy consumption and sealing of ground should be minimal. Renewable energies used.

Sometimes, Frei Otto told a potential client that he, the client, would not need at all the building he wants.

We must build with nature, not against it.

Frei Otto's approach has always been that the shape is not set, but, being searched and found.

For this he used physical form-finding processes.

Formative forces are, for example, the surface tension, the force of gravity, pressure differences, adhesion, or magnetic, or electrostatic forces. Nothing but basic physical laws. The similarity with natural structures was recognized only after the first experiments with soap films, bubbles, and nets. Together with biologists, Frei Otto has built a very deep understanding of design principles in nature.

Frei Otto, 2015 Laureate (continued)

Not with the idea to use this for building, like bionics. He himself thought his best insight at all was that bubbles and nets are the source of all life, of all living form. Frei Otto has always felt responsible for his ideas, even if he had no influence. He argued for inconvenient things, asked questions, and formulated ideas — critical, demanding, or thoughtful.

I quote:

Do we need architects? If yes, what kind?
What is man? Crown of creation or death of all life? Can men survive?
What is creation? Processes of growth and decay? Evolution? Will nature stay alive?
What a beautiful world!

Thank you!

© The Hyatt Foundation / The Pritzker Architecture Prize

For more information, please contact:

Eunice Kim
Director of Communications
The Pritzker Architecture Prize
Tel: +1 240 401 5649
Email: eunicekim@pritzkerprize.com