

J. Irwin Miller **1980 Laureate Luis Barragán** **Ceremony Speech**

About Prizes

by J. Irwin Miller

Prizes have been awarded by humans to their fellows as far back as history records—for achievements in war, in poetry, in music, in athletics, in whatever fields were valued by particular generations at particular times.

The prize might be a laurel wreath, a medal, Blenheim Palace, the king's daughter, or a duchy.

Prize ceremonies have been occasions for general celebration, or they have expressed simple gratitude, but they have also in a very significant way expressed the need to reward excellence, the human achievement at its most creative.

Sometimes a generation's judgment of its own artists and creators has been flawed. Socrates was put to death. Mozart buried in a pauper's grave, and Wren discharged as architect of St. Paul's. The list is long, but so is the other list. Ictinus and Callicrates were esteemed by 5th century Athens. The honored names of the architects of Hagia Sophia survive to this day. And during their lifetimes, Wright, Mies, and Corbusier were recognized publicly as giants of their century.

It is a good thing for a society to rejoice in splendid achievements, to hold up excellence to all its members, and to call attention to those who accomplish great works. These rare person remind the rest of us what we have in us to do if we will achieve only a portion of the commitment, the discipline, the clear vision, and the taste for work (even to the threshold of pain) which are invariable characteristics of the infinitesimal number of the greatest in any time.

A world prize in architecture is long overdue. "First we shape our buildings, then our buildings shape us." Architects have built slums and even whole cities which crush the human spirit. But always a few have designed other and better kinds of cities, more humane housing, cathedrals, colleges, parks, centers of government, even factories and barns, which reveal truth, which give us joy for centuries, and which shame us from sinking to our meanest.

This prize gives a just and due reward to the small band of the best, but even more it serves to remind every member of the discipline that architecture can and should be more than a close professional guild. Architecture, indeed every profession at its most admirable, is a calling, a "vocation" in the root meaning of that ancient word.

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