

## **REBEL BEAUTY**

### **On Miguel Fisac**

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Entering the labyrinth of humanized air of Miguel Fisac's Architecture offers the pleasing reward of rediscovering something which many of us already knew and which a long time and silence had hidden from us: an Architecture above time. A profound Architect, builder of thoughts. A complete person of radical coherence.

Ángel Ferrant used to say, "Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens, you continuously have to start over again". This accurate appraisal of Spanish reality in every field is most clearly reflected in the case of our architecture. And this is a good time to situate Fisac once again in the place he deserves.

If I had to describe the beauty of Fisac's architecture, I would use the word rebellious. The rebelliousness that profound creation assumes above and beyond fashions, bypassing them. The rebelliousness of making an architecture based on thought at a time when superficiality seems to triumph in the frivolous display windows of the numerous magazines assaulting architects.

Fisac always starts from thought; there are always reasons behind his work. Form and forms are always decisions that some people resolve by relying on fashion and others resolve relying on thought, as is the case of Miguel Fisac. There are reasons for the pagoda form of the Jorba Laboratories. The forms of the hollowed cement are clearly explicable in his "flexible formworks". There is a clear, almost pedagogical logic to his "bones". A model of reason.

And if Beauty has been, is and will always be the only, true and dangerous revolution against this society which has opted for mediocre stability, Miguel Fisac has risen as the creator of this rebel Beauty.

#### ARCHITECT OF ARCHITECTS

Like a Gypsy curse, someone told Fisac that he would never be an "architect of architects". Something like a jinx, which some of us never believed, fortunately was never fulfilled. And the spell was broken definitively when he was awarded the Gold Medallion, precisely by architects.

I am reminded of a lovely anecdote told by Yehudi Menuhin. When still very young, the then promising violinist made his first public appearance in concert. When he finished, the auditorium rose to its feet and applauded enthusiastically. But, and this was the best part, the musicians in the

orchestra, conquered by Beauty, also stood up, carried away by his genius, applauding. For Menuhin the musicians' applause was what truly mattered.

He was recognized by "those who truly understood".

Similarly, it was the architects' recognition that gave that distinction profound meaning to Miguel Fisac.

And that recognition comes on top of what he had already been receiving, for a long time, in certain international circles. From the Golden Medallion awarded him in Vienna in 1954 for his church in Vitoria or his lectures in Stockholm based on his "bones" in 1982, up to the anthological exhibition of his work in Munich.

#### HISTORY, LIGHT AND BONES

We could try to arrange Miguel Fisac's architecture into three periods, though both he and his buildings resist any kind of classification or labels.

His sage reading and intelligent distillation of History lead him to produce his first works which are so interesting and even more read now, when so much has occurred in Architecture and too many fashions occupied it in so few years. This is the period of the buildings of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, (Council for Scientific Research) of 1942 and the Instituto de Optica, of 1948.

His prodigious mastery of light presides over the period during which he built his best-known churches. This mastery is materialized in sage articulations of straight and curved walls on which he cuts open the exact slices so that the light penetrates and magically stretches and tenses the space. This can be seen in the Arcas Reales of Valladolid, of 1952, the Dominicos of Alcobendas, of 1955 and the Coronación de Vitoria of 1958, to the most recent Flor del Carmelo, of 1992, with Santa Ana, of 1965 in between, both these latter, in Madrid.

And a third period in which a profound understanding of new technologies, which leads him to such overwhelmingly logical inventions as his "bones" or his "flexible formwork", is shown in works as "current" as the Centro de Estudios Hidrográficos in Madrid from 1960, the Bodegas Garvey of Jerez and the IBM building in Madrid from 1967 or the Casa de la Moraleja, from 1973.

Dating Fisac's works makes us realize that so many of his buildings made

yesterday could be understood as if they had been built today or tomorrow. It is an architecture that resists being dated, that goes beyond time. Isn't that the one trait the highest creations of Humanity have always had?

Because Miguel Fisac is so personal, so full of "genius", when the best architects in the 1950's were engaged in "rationalism", he was making something else, a splendid architecture which is hard to classify. Rebellious. Revolutionary. Free. And if that period of post-war architects who set up modernity has been called heroic--and I believe rightly so--, I would dare to suggest here that what Fisac did was very much in character: "the most difficult thing yet": to be heroic among heroes. To be rebellious among revolutionaries. To be entirely free among the free.

#### THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SONG

The fact is, Miguel Fisac has followed his own path; he has made his own architecture; and he has played his own song, the most beautiful song. As is told in a short story by Max Bolliger: There once was a king who, having heard an unknown bird's beautiful song in his dreams, sent his bird keeper, under terrible threats including death, to catch it for him. Imitating their sound with his flute, the bird keeper went trapping the most melodic birds, whose calls never coincided with the song the king had heard in his dream. The last day before the deadline set, the dejected bird keeper grabbed his flute and, prepared to die, played his own song. And oh what a surprise! The King recognized the dreamed melody in it. And he spared the flute-playing bird keeper and gave him his freedom, along with all the birds in the kingdom, and a great celebration was held.

Well, this, his own song, the most beautiful song is what Miguel Fisac has always played, with his architecture, with all his soul and all his life. And with it, with his own architecture, he has achieved the most precious gift, that of freedom. Indispensable freedom for a creator, an architect, who has achieved with his work the most beautiful and rebellious Architecture.

Finally, architects, and mind you they are fastidious, turn their attention to Fisac once again, discovering that he is one of the greats. As a person, whole and coherent. As an architect, revolutionary and rebellious. Unclassifiable. Free.

Like Ulysses, he has crossed the straits of life, yoked to the mast of the ship of Architecture with the ties of reason and honesty. With his ears and eyes wide open, he has seen it all and it hasn't mattered. Like the Trojan hero, the fascinating sirens have tempted him with their seductive song: money, fame

and power. Scylla and Charybdis have tried to swallow him like the son of Laertes, with misunderstanding, contempt and oblivion. But nothing and no one has succeeded in it. And he has finally reached his Ithaca, his reunion with and recognition by Penelope.

In the beginning it was Fisac. Then, silence. And now, finally, Fisac. Welcome home!