

CHISELED BEAUTY

On Javier Carvajal

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If, according to Coderch, Nefertiti's bald head represented the model of Beauty sought by Alejandro de la Sota, and Medusa's disheveled head that of Sáenz de Oíza, for Javier Carvajal we must seek the meticulous and serene head of Caesar: the supreme example chiseled form. Architecture that models air with past perfect perfection.

Between Sota's simple silence and Oíza's piercing cry, we find Carvajal's extreme music. And it so happens that, as Carvajal liked to quote Niels Bohr; "one truth can be the opposite of another truth;" and, in truth, these three Spanish architects understand Architecture in very different ways.

Javier Carvajal's architecture, his career and his life have been brilliant, he has blazed a trail from the beginning. So much so that Oíza retired because "the young and brilliant Carvajal" had presented himself at the examinations through which he won his professorship in Design at the Architecture School of Madrid. Shortly after completing his education, he won the competition for what is now the School of Industrial Engineering in Barcelona, which he built upon returning from Rome where he was a scholar at the Spanish Academy. On a visit to Barcelona not long ago, Peter Eisenman was unreserved

in his praise for the work. In 1963 he beat all the top architects who presented designs in the competition for the Spanish Pavilion at the New York World's Fair. And he built it. And American architects paid him tribute with some of their highest awards, tempting Carvajal to begin an American adventure, but he renounced it to return to work in Spain. And a few years later, in 1968, German Architects gave him the "Fritz Schumacher" award at the University of Hanover for the best work of Architecture built in that year, for his Somosaguas houses. In 1971 after tumultuous elections, he was made Dean of the Official College of Architects of Madrid. And after that, Director of the School of Architecture of Barcelona and also that of Las Palmas.

In short, all the awards, all the posts, all the commissions, all the publications, all the recognition. But this, as you know, in our country is more than dangerous, it is unforgivable.

And suddenly, there was a long silence, which has fortunately now ended. He has described it positively; as an interior exile. And throughout there was his silent dedication to teaching.

The current exhibition at the Círculo de Bellas Artes is and should be the beginning of a restoration of recognition of this figure. It displays the most outstanding creative moments of Carvajal's career, organized into three clear periods:

The first period dates from his beginnings to the New York pavilion. The blue house on Madrid's Plaza de Cristo Rey (1954) is from this period, and not only has the apartment tower resisted the passage of time, it has improved with it. Also, the Spanish Pavilion at the Triennale di Milano in 1957 in which he dares to wrap the artists' pieces in a marvelous metal cloth. This earned him the Gold Medallion of the Triennale. The church in Vitoria, in which he realizes the spiritual gesture of bringing one's hands together and achieves a space that still surprises visitors today. The Loewe store on calle Serrano in Madrid, whose senseless destruction is still controversial, was chosen by Haig Beckfor that legendary issue of International Architect dedicated to Madrid, in which Carvajal's building for Adriatica in the Plaza de Castelar also appears.

In the second period, we find, with the weight of the fame achieved in New York, the houses in Somosaguas, which already form part of the history of contemporary Spanish architecture. As do the apartments on calle Montesquinza, from 1966. And the group of apartment buildings and offices in León, a prologue to what would later be, in 1968, the Torre de Valencia. And still in 1974, shortly before the Adriática building, the impeccable Banco Industrial de León on calle Serrano.

The exhibition does not show much of the third period, but all of it is good: the houses in Pozuelo and la Moraleja. The nearly built Spanish Embassy in Warsaw. And above all, the hotel of Seville, in which some powerful white cylinders surge above an organic

plinth conceived emphatically in concrete.

How could we define, at this stage, the architecture of Javier Carvajal? One article about his work proposes that it is composed certain balances of greater or lesser degrees of the different “isms”. I would go so far as to say that Carvajal’s architecture is one hundred percent... Carvajal. So clear and recognizable that, much to his dismay, he has been copied by those who, with the zeal of the convert, want to be... purists of the pure.

Javier Carvajal has that amazing ability to articulate spaces, to set and arrange them, like the architects of the Alhambra that he admires so much. Floors, elevations, and sections are linked together with such fluidity that the response to the game proposed by the architect appears to the observer to be the most natural one in the world.
Translated

into forms of tremendous strength. But it is not form for form’s sake, rather form in which the determinants and requirements that architectural fact demands accurately and aptly converge.

To take a comparison from bullfighting, I would say that Carvajal knows how to “torear fetén” and to do it authentically, beautifully. Linking verónicas (a type of pass with the cape), he makes the bull fly past. And then, without interruption, with elegant muletazos (passes with the smaller cape used in the final moments before the kill), he gives the bull the “promenade architecturale” that Le Corbusier recommended to those he cared about. Sticking close to the bull without touching it or allowing it to touch him. Bullfighting at its finest. And so he receives thunderous applause. Like the long and overwhelming ovation that he was given at the School of Architecture in Madrid when in its auditorium, filled to the rafters, he retired (“se cortó la coleta”, cutting off the bullfighter’s pigtail) at the end of that cold winter of 1991, as was required by the inadequate retirement law, still in effect. But laws change, pony tails grow and bullfighters always return to the ring.

The exhibition at the Círculo de Bellas Artes in partnership with the Official College of Architects of Madrid succeeds in finally lifting the veil that had temporarily hidden the figure of a master of contemporary Spanish architecture. And this show seeks, once again, to fit together the pieces of the complicated and never finished puzzle of the recent history of Spanish architecture. In it, the figure of Javier Carvajal is a key piece. As my students at the Architecture School of Zurich exclaimed when Carvajal showed his work and held some unforgettable critical sessions: "That is a true architect."