

CHISELED BEAUTY

About Javier Carvajal's architecture

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If the model of Beauty pursued by Alejandro de la Sota was represented, in the mouth of Coderch, by the bald head of Nefertiti, and the unbridled head of Medusa would be an accurate summary of that of Sáenz de Oíza, for Javier Carvajal we should look for a neat and serene head of Caesar: fullness of chiseled form. Architecture that models the air with a more than perfect perfection.

Between Sota's simple silence and Oíza's piercing cry, Carvajal's extreme music. And, as he likes to repeat, quoting Niels Bohr: "One truth can be opposed to another truth", and indeed the ways in which these three Spanish architects understand architecture are very different.

Javier Carvajal's architecture, his career, his life, has been very brilliant, dazzling, from the beginning. So much so that in the competitive examinations in which he won his Chair of Projects at the School of Architecture of Madrid, Oíza withdrew because "the young and brilliant Carvajal" was presented. Having just finished his career, he won the competition for the building of what is now the School of Industrial Engineers in Barcelona, which he built on his return from Rome, where he was a boarder at the Spanish Academy. Peter Eisenman, on a visit to Barcelona a short time ago, was not shy in his praise for this work. In 1963 he beat all the best architects who entered the competition for the Spanish pavilion at the World's Fair in New York. And he built it. And the American architects gave him the highest awards, tempting Carvajal to undertake the American adventure, which he gave up to return to work in Spain. And a few years later, in 1968, German architects awarded him the "Fritz Schumacher" of the University of Hannover for the best architectural work built that year, for the Somosaguas houses. And in 1971, after a tumultuous election, he became Dean of the Colegio O. de Arquitectos de Madrid. And later, Director of the School of Architecture of Barcelona and Las Palmas.

In short: all the awards, all the positions and commissions, all the publications, all the recognitions. But this, as you know, in our country is more than dangerous and unforgivable. And suddenly, there was a long silence that, fortunately, has now ended. He positively describes it as an inner exile. And in this time, his quiet dedication to teaching.

The current exhibition at the Círculo de Bellas Artes is, it should be, the beginning of a return to the recognition of his figure. It shows the most outstanding creative moments of Carvajal ordered in three clear periods:

A first period, from the beginning to the New York pavilion. From these years is the blue house of cannons in Madrid's Plaza de Cristo Rey (1954), which not only resists but gains with the passage of time. The Spanish pavilion at the Milan Art Triennial in 1957, where, for daring, he dares to wrap the artists' pieces in a prodigious metallic fabric. And on top of that he was awarded the gold medal of the Triennial. The church of Vitoria,

where he materialized the spiritual gesture of joining hands, achieving a space that still surprises us today. And the Loewe store in Serrano, whose useless destruction is still hot, which was picked up by Haig Beck in that mythical issue of International Architect dedicated to Madrid, where his building for the Adriática in the Plaza de Castelar also appeared.

In the second period, with the weight of the purple achieved in New York, the Somosaguas houses are already history of contemporary Spanish architecture. Also from 1966 are the apartments on Montesquín Street. And the housing and office complex in León, prologue to what would later become the Torre de Valencia in 1968. And still in 1974, shortly before the Adriática, the impeccable Banco Industrial de León on Serrano Street.

And in the third period, according to this exhibition, little but also good: the houses of Pozuelo and La Moraleja. The almost begun Spanish embassy in Warsaw. And above all, the hotel in Seville, in which, on an organic base conceived in rotund concrete, powerful white cylinders emerge with force.

How could we define Javier Carvajal's architecture at this point? In an article about his work, some balanced percentages of the different "isms" that compose it were proposed. I dare to propose for Carvajal, that his architecture is one hundred percent? of Carvajal. So clear and recognizable that it has even produced that which he likes so little or nothing: to be copied by those who want to be more papist than the Pope.

Javier Carvajal has that amazing ability to articulate spaces, to link them, as the architects of the Alhambra, which he admires so much, knew how to do it. Plans, elevations and sections are concatenated with such fluidity that the response to the game proposed by the architect seems to our view as the most natural thing in the world. Translating into forms of enormous strength. But it is not form for form's sake, but form in which the conditioning factors and requirements that the architectural fact demands converge with certainty.

In a bullfighting simile, I would say that Carvajal knows how to fight *fetén*. Chaining *veronicas* he makes the bull fly. And then, without interruption, with elegant *muletazos*, he gives the bull the promenade *arquitecturale* that Le Corbusier advised, whom he considers so highly. He sticks to the bull, but without touching it, or letting himself be touched by it. Fine bullfighting. And so the closed applause starts. Like the very long and very closed ovation he received at the School of Architecture of Madrid, when in its auditorium filled to capacity, he cut his ponytail at the end of this cold winter of 1991, because that is what the retirement canons of the inadequate law in force demand. But laws change, tails grow, and bullfighters always return to the bullring.

The exhibition at the *Círculo de Bellas Artes*, in collaboration with the *Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid*, finally comes, in good time, to draw back the veil that has temporarily hidden the figure of a master of contemporary Spanish architecture. And this exhibition tries, once again, to fit the pieces of the complicated puzzle, always unfinished, of the recent history of Spanish architecture. And the figure of Javier Carvajal is a key

piece in it. As my students at the Zurich School of Architecture exclaimed last year, when Carvajal exhibited his work there and held some unforgettable critical sessions: "This is a real architect".