

**JAVIER CARVAJAL HAS DIED**

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Olivier Messiaen's Quartet for the end of time sounds in the air. A music of abysmal beauty. A precious and precise music that, to me, evokes the architecture of Javier Carvajal. Because precision is a quality that well defines our architect. And precise is an adjective that is perfect for Javier Carvajal's architecture. When I wrote that his architecture "comes to put dimensions to the water", to express its precise precision, I added that it also puts "dimensions to the air", which is what we architects really do. With the wisdom of one who, after proclaiming, as our architect insisted over and over again to his students, that architecture is an "art with a reason of necessity", knows well that Beauty, also that of architecture, is of primary necessity for man. Beauty that Javier Carvajal takes from the air, chiseling it with his masterful hand. The air thus chiseled, as the poet reveals, "is serene and dressed in beauty and unused light. With the beauty and light of its architecture.

Javier Carvajal was born in Barcelona the same year that, also in Barcelona, Antonio Gaudí died, in 1926. His life, his career and his architecture have been very brilliant from the beginning. He received the Extraordinary Prize in the Final Project in 1953. And just after finishing, in 1955 he won the competition to build the Escuela de Altos Estudios Mercantiles building on the Diagonal in Barcelona, which he built on his return from Rome, where he went on a scholarship to the Spanish Academy that same year. In 1963 he beat the best Spanish architects of the time who were competing 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: the Award for the best foreign architecture at the New York World's Fair from the American Institute of Architects, the AIA. And they tempt him to undertake the American adventure, which he renounces to return to work in Spain. In 1965, in the competitive examinations in which he won his Chair of Projects at the School of Architecture in Madrid, Oíza withdrew because "the young and brilliant Carvajal" was presented. And a few years later, in 1968, German architects awarded him the Fritz Schumacher Prize of the University of Hannover for the best work of architecture built that year for the beautiful houses of Somosaguas. And in 1971 he became Dean of the Official College of Architects of Madrid. And later, Director of the School of Architecture of Barcelona and Las Palmas.

All the awards, all the positions and commissions, all the publications and recognitions. But this, as you know, in our country is more than dangerous, it is unforgivable. And suddenly there was a long silence that he has positively described as an inner exile. And in all this time, his quiet dedication to teaching between Madrid and Pamplona. And now, at last, after so long, he is recognized with the Gold Medal of Architecture.

## TRAJECTORY IN THREE MOVEMENTS

If we had to order his work according to his most outstanding creative moments, I would do it in three clear periods.

With the blue house of the canyons in Madrid's Plaza de Cristo Rey in 1954, which not only resists but gains with the passage of time, opens the first period. Then came the Escuela de Altos Estudios Mercantiles of which Carvajal himself said that it was "of a rationalism with more echoes of Terragni than of the other masters, and with echoes of the rationalism of GATCPAC". Many years later, Peter Eisenman, on a visit to Barcelona, was not shy in his praise of this work. From that period is the exquisite Spanish pavilion at the Milan Art Triennial of 1957, where he dares to wrap the pieces of the artists in a prodigious wire mesh. There he took a very young Chillida, among others. His modernity still surprises us today. And he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Triennial. The Pantheon of the Spaniards in Rome dates from 1959. Then came 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, another exquisite operation. And in 1960, the sober School of Telecommunications Engineers in Madrid.

The Spanish Pavilion at the New York World's Fair would mark a high point in his career and open a second period, with even greater public recognition, from the praise of Salvador Dalí to that of Ada Louise Huxtable, the most important architecture critic of that time in the New York Times. Later would come the Somosaguas houses, which are already the history of contemporary Spanish architecture. Carlos Saura filmed *La Madriguera* there with Geraldine Chaplin wandering through Carvajal's architecture. And the houses Biddle Duke, in Sotogrande, and Sobrino, in Aravaca, both from 1966. Also from 1966 are the impeccable concrete apartments on Montesquinza Street. And the office building on Caracas Street, which, together with the housing and office complex in León, would be a prologue to what would come later, in 1972, with the Torre de Valencia. And still in 1974, shortly before the Adriática, the Banco Industrial de León on Serrano Street.

He concludes with a last period in which there are fewer but also very interesting works: the Rodriguez Villa House in La Moraleja in 1982 and the Cardinal House of 1985 in Pozuelo. In 1988 the Spanish Embassy in Warsaw and, for the Seville Expo in 1992, the hotel in which white and powerful cylinders emerge forcefully on a base of rotund concrete.

Is there any way at this point to redefine Javier Carvajal's unmistakable architecture? So clear and recognizable that it has even produced what he likes so little or nothing: to be copied by those who want to be more papist than the Pope.

Javier Carvajal shows an amazing ability to articulate spaces, as did the architects of the Alhambra that he admires so much. Plans, elevations and sections are concatenated

with such fluidity that the response to the game raised 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 demanded by the architectural fact converge with certainty. With the same exigency with which he demanded it in his project classes.

I still remember the long, standing ovation he received at the Madrid School of Architecture when, in its packed auditorium, he cut off his ponytail at the end of a cold winter in 1991. Because that was what the retirement canons of an inadequate law established. But laws change, ponytails grow, and bullfighters always return to the bullring.

This medal now recognizes a key figure in the history of Spanish architecture. And it tries once again to fit the pieces of the complicated puzzle, always unfinished, of that history. As my students at the Zurich School of Architecture exclaimed when Carvajal presented his ideas there and held some unforgettable critical sessions: "This is a true architect".