

AN ARCHITECT FOR HISTORY

Tasos Tanoulas. Europa Nostra Award 2013

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The Greek architect TASOS TANOULAS has been awarded the 2013 Europa Nostra prize for his work on the impeccable restoration of the Propylaea of the Acropolis of Athens. And it is a reason to rejoice that an architect who treats the memory of Architecture with care has been so recognized.

If memory is essential in any creative work, it is even more so in Architecture. Painting, Sculpture, Music and Literature produce beautiful pieces that are autonomous, capable of standing on their own. But not so in Architecture. Architectural works, because of gravity and their own nature, are immovable, they remain in a fixed place, whether we want them to or not, in the place where they were erected. And because of the physical weather, and the air and the rain and the snow, they wear out, they wear out.

And so, if it is important that there are creative architects capable of building the works that constitute history, it is just as important, if not more important, that there are architects capable of preserving those works, of keeping that memory intact, alive. To make History live on.

If we celebrate that there was a Mnesikles able to raise a Propylaea in the Acropolis of Athens, where time is suspended and our breath is cut, we must also celebrate that there is a Thasos Tanoulas able to preserve, leaving his life in it, the first architectural ensemble in the history of architecture.

Ulysses, after several tests, convinces Penelope that it is him thanks to the recognition of the olive tree.

There had grown within the courtyard an olive tree trunk of extensive leaves, stout and flourishing, wide as a column. I built the dormitory around it, until it was finished with thick stones, and covered it well with a roof, and added well-fitting doors, skillfully locked. It was then that I cut down the foliage of the olive tree with extensive leaves; I began to prune the trunk from the root, polished it well and skillfully with the bronze, and evened it with the plumb-line, making it the foot of the bed, and then I drilled it all out with the berbiquí. Beginning here, I polished it to completion, adorned it with gold, silver, and ivory, and tightened inside some ox-skin straps that shone purple.

Odyssey XXIII. 190

Well, from this mythical olive tree of Ulysses, the branches that he himself cut were preserved and were gilded according to the method described by Athena as Homer tells us very well: "As when he pours gold on silver a knowledgeable man to whom Hephaestus and Pallas Athena have taught all kinds of skills". (Odyssey XXIII. 160)

Well, these golden branches of the olive tree of Ulysses and Penelope are the ones with which the Greek architect Tasos Tanoulas, crowned with the Europa Nostra award, has been decorated.

We are fortunate that the History of Architecture is in such good hands. That the center and root of Architecture that is in the Acropolis of Athens, the Propylaea of Mnesikles, is in the best hands. In the hands of Tasos Tanoulas.

Tasos Tanoulas is a wonderful architect. A wise man, a professor, a teacher, an architect. As fate would have it, on my last trip to Athens I had him as my guide and teacher. With him we analyzed the Propylaea and walked through the Parthenon and the Erechtheion, through places usually off-limits to tourists. I caressed again and again the sacred stones with my hands and I was moved, observed by the master who enjoyed seeing how a contemporary architect understood that Architecture also has that material, corporeal dimension that is only understood with the contact itself. How not to tremble with emotion before those living stones that spoke to us with the voice of Thassos Tanoulas?

I will never forget that ineffable morning as long as I live. I will never thank Professor Tanoulas enough for that master class that was the equivalent of several years of apprenticeship in any School of Architecture in the world. When in the afternoon I gave my lecture to a packed house of architects who were generously crowding the floors of that large hall, I proposed to them to offer them my silence in exchange for one of Tanoulas' master classes.

Mnesikles has convinced Pericles to crown our architect with the golden olive tree with his own hands. There will be applauding, in the front row, Cyril of Ancona and Giuliano of Sangallo and Procopius and even Justinian himself. John Travos, his teacher, will also be there. And in a discreet corner I will be with Carmen Serrano de Haro and Alfonso Lucini, all three very excited to see how a good friend is rewarded. Since my last visit to Athens by the hand of Tanoulas, "I will never be the same who was never here" as the poet so well writes.