

INEFFABLE OÍZA

About Sáenz de Oíza

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As an architect, what Eduardo Galeano wrote is appropriate for Oíza: "We men are what we do. And the best of what we do is to change what we are". Change in permanence. Or permanence in change. So it is, changing with a certain Borgesian aroma, the architecture of Oíza. And it is not easy, it is impossible, to pigeonhole him with any architectural label. Although behind this diversity of forms there is always a deep understanding of the problems that architecture poses.

I wrote some time ago about how Oíza understood the architectural problem of the tower using the image of the crater to express how he solved the key moment of vertical architecture in its encounter with the horizontal plane of the earth. The crater solution repeated in his two most important buildings, which may seem as formally distant as Torres Blancas and the Bank of Bilbao, is evidence not only of change but also of permanence. I am interested in highlighting here precisely how even with such different forms, the central core of the question remains the same. And the answer to the central problem, over and above the forms, is the same. Just like the curving of its corners. The crater. The permanence.

Oíza's three facets as a person, as a teacher and as an architect are inseparable. Oíza's deep-rooted honesty as a person cannot be separated from his proven mastery as a teacher or his irrepressible strength as an architect. The strong architecture of Oíza, the master.

CÁSEDA-NAVARRA 1918.OÍZA. THE PERSON: THE PERSON'S DEEP HONESTY

I see Oíza sitting in his house in Pollensa where we went to visit him in the summer of 1994, on the raised terrace, dominating the landscape. Surrounded by friends. With the doors always wide open. With the pleasant flow of his conversation. With the large family in cordial reunion. He listens, like a wise man, with the wisdom that comes from a life of sobriety and strict honesty. He has never yielded. He has always resisted. Clean, as when he looks. And he tells you the usual as if it were new, and how new it sounds in our ears. The importance of the threshold. The Basque poem. The fat point. Trigonometry. The series. Etc...

MALLORCA. SPRING 1996

Oíza was on the jury of a competition for an office building in Inca-Mallorca. With Rafael de la Hoz, Martínez Lapeña and Nicolau as architects among others. Among those registered was me. And there was a project "like Campo Baeza's": white, pure, parallelepipedic, clear. (Well, what some people think is Campo Baeza). A large part of the jury, as soon as the panels appeared on the table, defended it as a sure winner. Oíza kept quiet and only spoke at the end. He attacked that project strongly, with reasons, to defend another that, diametrically opposed, was a contextual project, with stone walls, of sandstone, closed to the outside and open to the inside, transparent, full of light. And

full of sticks and trees. What the slogan summarized as a "secret garden". And the more the others insisted on the clear and impeccable project, the more Oíza insisted on the one with the sticks ("which must be by someone very young, with all the freshness and impetus of someone with very clear ideas"). In the end, the project that Oíza defended so strongly went ahead. And when the escrows were opened, the miracle happened: the one with the sticks was from.... Campo Baeza. The project, already built, seems to prove Oíza right. A visit by him to the already built work was proof, once again, of his generosity.

MADRID 1958-1998. OÍZA TEACHING: THE PROVEN MASTERY.

I see Oíza, as I always saw him at the Madrid School of Architecture, surrounded by students. Like Mies, and like Corbu. And always questioning them, suggesting, provoking them. Convincing them, fascinating them, subjugating them. The very long and intense time that Oíza has dedicated to teaching is exemplary. Instead of the distant and disappeared professor who seeks ignorant admiration in the distance, Oíza has always been and is always close to his students. Teaching as if by osmosis, mouth to mouth. Teaching with the most effective rules of mayeutics. Like a classic Socratic. Deceiving with his captivating gestures. Transmitting his latest discovery, his latest novel read, his latest poem encountered. With the generosity of teachers who serve their students, far from serving them. I still remember that sometimes I crossed paths with Oíza, when I was already a teacher, walking home from school. Because sometimes he walked home, being coherent with his person.

PAVIA. SUMMER 1983

Oíza was one of the great figures who visited that international summer course in the splendid Italian city of Pavia. Classes and lectures were held at the beautiful Piermarini University and the impressive Borromeo de Pellegrini, an ancient palace where people lived and where part of the activities took place. In terms of formality, everything, like Italy itself, was in grand style. The good offices of Javier Bellosillo and Remo Dorigati made this marvel possible. Oíza's lecture in the garden was a trigger and became a necessary point of reference. But the most extraordinary thing was to share a few days, a few days, with Oíza, the master, at his side. With generous gestures such as after a dinner with not a few diners, all students, discovering that Oíza had paid, or walking with him in Mantua (the house of Mantegna) or Vigébanò where the Spanish Cardinal Caramuel made that magnificent square. He listens. (Still many years later at a dinner in Milan, where we were reviewing the article that Zodiac had asked me to write about Oíza, some of those present recalled that summer in Pavia and how his generosity had impressed them).

MADRID 1998.OÍZA ARQUITECTO: THE UNSTOPPABLE FORCE.

Oíza ineffable. Oíza unclassifiable. Unclassifiable hearing. Oíza always starting. Like a long-distance runner. He wins the races, and instead of retiring to enjoy the triumph, he returns to the start of the track. To start the race again. He is not one of those who stand

on the podium. Like others. He continues to participate. He continues to compete. Keep working tirelessly.

His works can be read from his idiosyncrasy. Not from a style. Nor from a label. His expectant attitude, of eternal youth, always open, means that, formally, he is always changing. And surprises. And sometimes disconcerting: change in permanence or permanence in change. Like walking, without stopping, on a Moebius tape.

But over and above his successes and failures, when we look at his work as a whole, we must recognize the overwhelming force of Oíza's architecture, which is that of a master of the times in which he has had to live. Each of his buildings, Aránzazu, Torres Blancas, Banco de Bilbao, Santander, M-30, are the flagship of the many journeys that architecture makes in time. It could be said that more than buildings, he has built symbols of his time.

LONDON, SPRING 1991

We were invited to give some lectures at the RIBA headquarters in London. It was an undeserved honor for me to be at the master's side in such a situation. I had carefully prepared my lecture and my speech in English, even rehearsing a pretended good pronunciation. I even had the audacity to give it in English before my students at the Madrid School, who made precise corrections. Oíza had also prepared the text in impeccable English. Those days we visited Soane's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, wonderful, and the National Gallery, as well as other things. This is attested to by some very widespread images. Oíza is always good to be with. He is a deeply cultured man, of very pleasant conversation, and affectionate.

When it was Oíza's turn to give his lecture in the packed RIBA hall, he soon abandoned his script on the table and, wielding his peculiar English, kept the proverbially phlegmatic British audience in suspense for two hours, as they kept vibrating to the sound of Oíza's words. Such was his power of conviction. They laughed, cried and were moved by Oíza. With his architecture and his person. The end was a loud and prolonged ovation, very un-English.

TEACHER

Zodiac, the prestigious Italian magazine, recently asked me to write an article about Oíza for an issue they dedicated to the great European masters. Jørn Utzon, Fernando Tavora, Aldo Van Eyck or Colin St John Wilson were among others. All of them with a solid work. With a long time confirming their undisputed quality. With an attitude, all of them, of deep humility of the truth (I always say to Oíza that he has to meet Utzon in Mallorca where they go for two long seasons to calm the soul). All of them, above the lightness of fame, have an enormous weight of their own, with the density of those who are already in History. This consideration by the Europeans of Oíza as a master is more than significant.

MADRID-MALLORCA 1998

Straddling Mallorca and Madrid. From the serene terrace of Pollensa to the concentrated room of General Arrando. Still, enviably young, in his radical honesty. He continues, and hopefully for many years to come, in one way or another in his teaching. His pleasant conversation, always positive, never ceases to have a certain pedagogical quality. And he goes on, going on and on, competition after competition, project after project, with that iron will to make architecture, to set up the architecture of our time. Like a master.

If we cut the trunk of the cherry tree
We will not find the flowers in it.
Only spring has
The seed of blossoming.

The beautiful version of José Angel Valente, the poet, of this beautiful Koán of the tree summarizes in some way what I would like to say about Oíza, the master, and his architecture. Oíza is the trunk and the flowers and the spring and the seeds. That is how devastating he is, his life and his work.

N.B.

I wrote this text about Oíza a long time ago. It was never published and I want to recover it now by bringing it to light in this book. Oíza was not only great but also a person of enormous generosity. I would like this publication to be a small tribute to the master.