



ORDEN POUR LE MÉRITE  
FÜR WISSENSCHAFTEN UND KÜNSTE

Aushändigung des Ordenszeichens durch den Ordenskanzler  
HANS GEORG ZACHAU an

LORD NORMAN FOSTER

bei der Öffentlichen Sitzung im Großen Saal des Konzerthauses,  
Berlin, am 2. Juni 2003

DANI KARAVAN sprach die Laudatio auf LORD NORMAN FOSTER:

Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,

I can start my laudation of Lord Norman Foster from many different places. I could mention the various titles and awards his work has earned. I could cite the countries and cities where buildings he designed have been built. I could tell his life story or his attempts to improve the environment and people's lives.

About two weeks ago, I crossed the bridge over the river Thames, on my way to meet him. First I met Lady Elena Foster, and saw the fascinating artistic project she is producing with internationally acclaimed artists. Then I met Norman in his office in the building he designed overlooking the Thames. A very large office, full of light, with long rows of desks occupied by architects, engineers, project managers and secretaries. At the very end, by the last desk, I saw Norman working and next to him, his secretary, not apart, but one among many.

Lord Norman Foster, superstar, recipient of the most important architecture awards, creator of buildings that have become cultural icons of the 20th and 21st centuries. Here he works, just like everybody else.

My wife Hava, who was there with me, was as impressed with the openness and democracy in evidence. Norman said: »Here, architectural hierarchy reigns.« Yet it didn't seem to exist there.

Architectural creation cannot exist without hierarchy, and yet it also cannot exist without a democracy of cooperation. These are some of the paradoxes that make up architectural creation – a union of opposites producing a synthesis. Norman, in his work, personifies this union in his own wonderful way.

He was born in Manchester, an industrial city not yet aware of the pollution it creates. From there he left for the United States as a scholarship student. Here, in Berlin, there is no need to retrace his steps, because here, in Berlin, everybody knows who Norman Foster is. John F. Kennedy, when visiting Berlin, said »Ich bin ein Berli-

ner.« Foster doesn't have to say the same. He *is* a Berliner, if only for the Reichstag's transparent dome.

Foster has succeeded in turning a depressing, classicist-style building, in a city that symbolized the tyranny of evil and one of the worst tragedies mankind has ever known, into a modern, contemporary building, which symbolizes the new democracy and openness, without destroying the old and without erasing the memory of the past. Fifty years after the war a British architect was commissioned to design one of the most important buildings in the German Capital. I have a dream that one day a Palestinian architect will be commissioned to design an important building in the Israeli capital and an Israeli architect will be commissioned to design an important building in the Palestinian Capital.

The Renaissance defined architecture as the mother of all arts. Arnolfo Di Cambio, Florence's first urbanist who designed the Terra Nova, the Palazzo Vecchio and the Santa Maria Degli Fiori, the Cathedral of Florence, was wise enough to leave a large opening in the cathedral's roof for those who would know how to build the dome – for Brunelleschi. Arnolfo Di Cambio was also a great sculptor, who crossed the line between the Romanesque and Renaissance styles.

He wasn't the only one, so were painters and sculptors such as Giotto, who built the Campanile by the cathedral, Andrea Orcania, who built the Loggia in the Piazza della Signoria, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Giulio Romano, all the way to Le Courbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Mendelssohn, Louis Kahn and others.

Architecture is art. It is a creation born of the union of opposites in a wonderful synthesis. This is its uniqueness. First and foremost, human life depends on it. Architecture creates a place for man, a refuge, a shelter. It serves man's day-to-day needs and creates a tapestry of social life. Some regimes have used architecture to reinforce their control over man; others have used it in order to improve man's quality of life.

All art is created within the architectural creation, under its wings.

In this sense, it is like no other form of art.

The moment the aesthetic emerges out of the functional, architecture becomes art, and sometimes great art. Like sculpture, painting, poetry, music and literature, which aren't functional, which could be seen as non-essential for people's survival in the physical sense, though not in the spiritual one.

Not all architects can create this synthesis out of the complex opposites that make up architectural creation, just as not all sculptors, painters or musicians can reach the highest spheres of true art.

Norman Foster is an architect-artist who creates this very difficult synthesis. Despite all commitments, he creates a unity. He creates culture, art. He creates a place for man.

I could analyze his urban planning in Duisburg, the laboratory building in Stanford University in San Francisco, the underground entrances in Bilbao, the street furnishings in Valencia, the bank and airport in Hong Kong, the new building for the London Municipality, the British Museum Court or the Thames Millennium Bridge.

I have experienced all of these, both physically and spiritually. Foster's architectural creations can only be experienced in this way. This is the only way to understand the spaces he creates, his commitment to man, to human scale, and to man's physical and spiritual needs. All of his works display his commitment to the environment, to its past, present and future.

A deep look into his creations and ideas leads to the conclusion that it all comes from his belief in man and in the world in which we live, and from this desire and duty to serve them, humbly and simply. He is there as an architect and at the same time, he makes his presence invisible in a society that doesn't know, or doesn't want to know, that it might destroy itself and the world in which it lives.

This time, I came to his office by the Thames to discuss a project that I had asked him to lead – designing the Walter Benjamin house in the border town of Port Bou, between Spain and France. A modest, small and nostalgic project, in the old, abandoned town hall in this dying town, which hopes to be given a new lease of life by Norman Foster.

Despite his international commitments, he agreed to take on this small project, near the cemetery, which holds the unmarked grave of the Jewish philosopher who tried to escape the Nazis, and near the homage I created in his honor.

In the plans he showed us, Norman created the first and fascinatingly simple lines, that turn the house into a place that enables all the necessary functions, without destroying its uniqueness, and at the same time turning it into a contemporary architectural creation. There, at the end of his office, beyond the desks and the employees at their computers, he received us – a modest man who continues the wonderful tradition of architects who were great not only as architects, but also as artists and as human beings. Congratulations Lord Norman Foster, for joining the Orden Pour le mérite, and thank you for bringing with you your wife, Lady Elena Foster.

LORD NORMAN FOSTER dankte mit folgenden Worten:

It is always a delight to return to Berlin, a city where I truly feel at home, and where we are always received with such warmth.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dani for his kind introduction and the Orden Pour le mérite für Wissenschaften und Künste for bestowing on me this prestigious award.

It is a great honour and I am deeply touched by your generosity. It is a great privilege to join the ranks of your distinguished order.

Thank you.