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Dominique Perrault

Future Pritzker Prize? Dominique Perrault won in 2015 the Praemium Imperiale, a prize delivered by Japan's imperial family, and became the second French architect (after Jean Nouvel in 2001) to have his name on this prize list alongside the biggest world stars of architecture.

Dominique Perrault, 62 years old, succeeds in everything and never ceases to surprise us, and this since the competition that made him famous, for France's National Library, won in 1989 when he was only 36.

20 years after the inauguration of what became the last of François Mitterrand's "*Grands Projets*", Perrault is bestowed upon with honours. His work is exhibited in the most important museums in the world, including the Centre Georges Pompidou. He sits at the French Academy of Beaux-Arts. He builds everywhere, rehabilitates emblematic sites such as the grand post office in the rue du Louvre in Paris, a pavilion at Versailles, or the racecourse in Auteuil which will be inaugurated in 2016. Recently, he received public mandates for Greater Paris, and, also in February 2016, fact-finding and orientation missions to reflect on the future of the Ile de la Cité for the next 25 years.

And yet, despite the honours, his successes and his talents, Dominique Perrault does not act like a star. In 2015, he created DPAx, a research platform to promote a cross-disciplinary dialogue exploring architecture along different perspectives and promote innovations. Dominique Perrault explores as much the future's paths as he does the paths of glory.

1
Citylights, Rénovation et réaménagement des tours du pont de Sèvres, vue depuis le forum, Boulogne-Billancourt (92), 2015. Courtesy Dominique Perrault Architecture/Adagp/André Morin.

2
DC Towers, Vienne (Autriche), 2016. Courtesy Dominique Perrault Architecture/Adagp/Michael Nagl.

3
Cour de justice des communautés européennes, Luxembourg Ville (Luxembourg), 2008. Courtesy Dominique Perrault Architecture/Adagp/Georges Fessy.

4
Tour Fukoku, Osaka (Japon), 2010. Courtesy Dominique Perrault Architecture/Adagp/Daici Ano.

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What are the links between architecture and creation?
These links are very closely knit as there is an obvious permeability between art and architecture. Architects, depending on their tastes, can be inspired by theatre, dance, literature, music, painting, visual and plastic arts, etc. But no architect can be completely hermetic to the arts.

The links between creation and architecture are like bridges, different from a "copy-paste" attitude, and rather like exchanging sensitivities, approaches, ways of perceiving the world which can echo in each of us.

For my part, I am very influenced by visual and plastic arts, in particular everything that was experimented during the second half of the 20th century, with works on geography, territory, conceptual research, installations. In short, everything that deals with a site, its physicality, its transcription, its transformation.

These works find a strong echo in architecture as an action on a site, in particular those of great emblematic figures of land art, such as American artists Michael Heizer or Walter De Maria. But my inspirations and influences can also become more hybrid, like with French artist Claude Rutault, who hasn't been acclaimed enough in my opinion. His questioning of painting, of the link between painting and the wall, between painting and the site, finds a direct echo in architecture and its own relation to the wall, but also to the site.

How important is research in your practice?
I consider research in architecture to be applied and not fundamental: although it's a conceptual work, it has to be confronted to reality, with roots attached to sites, situations and real configurations.
For us, architects, research is not a utopia, but can be fiction, in the sense that it can reveal a possibility which was not expected.

The other, and more political, dimension of research is that it facilitates the presentation of analyses and projects to clients. The personal and intellectual relation between the architect and the client has been very much debased because of "design/construction" or "promotion/who-knows-what" discourses erasing the links between them, links that are still necessary to work together.

The research approach allows to recreate a bond which must be engaging as much as committed, by giving the architect a specific position that is only his own. He then becomes a researcher, an author, a creator. The research he conducts is his own. He's a professional, but a professional with a mission, who will intervene in accordance with his commitment.

Do you grant a lot of importance to aesthetics in your projects?
Aesthetics is not a style. It is indispensable, but not at first. In my opinion, it's a kind of consequence, the result of an intellectual and experimental process. In the architecture field, aesthetics appears as the physical result of a thought, the consequence of a complex, multiple and diverse creation process. It's not an end in itself, although it comes at the end!

How important is Europe as a territory for your projects within your agency?
Since the 1990s, as projects followed one another, we created several offices in Europe. One in particular, was in Luxembourg for the extension of the European Union Court of Justice, inaugurated in 2008, an emblematic project for Europe and still on the agenda as a third tower will be erected in 2019. Also in Spain where we undertook many projects in Barcelona and Madrid (the Tennis Olympic Centre, the Arganzuela footbridge). In Switzerland, our office in Geneva is undertaking projects in Zürich, Fribourg and Lausanne.

Europe is a territory for our work, but also a teaching territory, as I taught at the Victor Horta Institute in Brussels, at the E.T.H. in Zürich and I currently teach at the EPFL in Lausanne. In 2014, we delivered the DC Tower 1, the highest tower in Austria, on the Danube, and we published a book entitled Bratislava Metropolis on the metropolitan cross-border region between Vienna, Budapest, Bratislava and Brno.

This territory is therefore not strictly Europe, but it's a territory that functions as a true work, teaching and research network, a network which was awarded the European Mies van der Rohe prize for France's National Library.