

Thomas J. Pritzker
2004 Laureate Zaha Hadid
Ceremony Speech

Governor, Mr. Minister, Professor Piotrovsky, ladies and gentlemen, each year I have the pleasure of writing a speech for this great event. The effort affords me the opportunity to learn something new. To learn more about the recipient and more about the venue for the presentation.

I have no problem waxing eloquent about this year's recipient for I have no doubt that she is one of the great architects of our time. I will address this in a few moments. My challenge is to speak about this enchanting venue that has been made available to us by the Governor of St. Petersburg and Professor Piotrovsky, its director.

For the Americans in the audience, the temptation was great to open my remarks with the phrase "Four score and seven years ago," that, of course, should evoke images of the Winter Palace in the year of 1917. But for The Winter Palace, 1917 is more like "recent" history.

In fact, its journey begins in 1703, when Peter the Great stood astride the muddy marshes of the Neva River delta and dreamed a city into being. If ever there was a city whose vision was given shape and form, by architects, it is St. Petersburg. From the very beginning, Peter the Great relied on Domenico Trezzini, a 33 year-old Italian-Swiss architect from Lugano. A parade of the greatest architects of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to follow him.

This is the city that used architecture to open Russia to the West and to open the West to Russia. We who come to this place from across continents and oceans of time acknowledge this history with respect and with awe. We listen carefully to the old voices that come down to us from decades and centuries past. My own family's journey was shaped by the history of this very building. It was in St. Petersburg, in the Winter Palace, that Alexander II freed the serfs and began to open Russia's cities to the Jewish population. In fact, this made it possible for my family to move from a small Ukrainian village to Kiev, and from there, in 1882, to the United States.

Tonight we celebrate an architect in a city that summoned architects to its very birth. This is a special celebration. Zaha Hadid is the first woman to be so honored with the Pritzker Architecture Prize. And tonight there is an elegant meeting between two great women.

The soul of Russia and of the Russian people is carried in its poetry. And this great city, St. Petersburg, has its own poet, a woman who suffered in difficult times, and who gave voice to all the beauty, grandeur and courage that was St. Petersburg, from Empire to Revolution, to Seige.

So tonight, St. Petersburg's Poet Laureate, Anna Akhmatava and Zaha Hadid meet, here, in the halls of the Hermitage. Akhmatava saw the city as ethereal. She saw its buildings touching eternity, and dancing with the landscape, anticipating Zaha Hadid's production of the Ballet Meta-Polis.

Listen to her words:

*How I love,
how I loved to look At your chained shores,
At the balconies,
where for hundreds of years
No one has set foot.
And verily you are the capital
For us who are mad and luminous;*

Thomas J. Pritzker, 2004 Laureate Zaha Hadid (continued)

*But when that special, pure hour
Lingers over the Neva<
And the May wind sweeps
Past all the columns lining the water,
You are like a sinner turning his eyes, >
Before death to the sweetest dream of paradise . . .*

It is written of Zaha Hadid that although most of her recent works are large buildings, she draws them as transparent volumes. Instead of the weighty presence of tectonic plates, she now suggests that the manipulation of geometry and structure could liberate a space from its confines. The preoccupation with the continuity of a landscape becomes recast as open reaches and interior volumes.

She is an architect whose buildings are shadows emerging out of landscapes. And thus it is fitting to celebrate her with the words of Akhmatova, who speaks to her beloved St. Petersburg:

*Our separation is imaginary:
We are inseparable,
My shadow is on your walls,
My reflection in your canals,
The sound of my footsteps in the Hermitage halls*

Zaha Hadid choreographs land, space, structure, and person, so that each is inseparable from the other, and each calls to the other, My Shadow is on your walls, My reflection in your canals.

Ladies and Gentlemen, tonight it is the footsteps of Zaha Hadid that are heard in the Hermitage halls.

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