

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

After Hollywood and Disney, Has Frank Gehry Become LA's Third Global Franchise?

Allon Schoener · Wednesday, September 23rd, 2015

PART ONE

With critical acclaim, numerous significant awards and prestigious projects located in Asia, Australia, Europe and North America, some completed, some being completed and/or some in discussion, Frank Gehry with his firm Gehry Partners LLP spans the globe much as Hollywood and Disney have done. How does one assess a person of such gargantuan accomplishments?

Before doing that, I want to review my take on some other major figures in the world of architecture whom I have known, collaborated with, and/or admired as a member of the audience where they were featured in public programs. I believe that this could contribute to appreciating my assessment of Frank Gehry's exceptionalism.

Denise Scott Brown / I was a member of the audience where she was featured with other architects in a public program. I found her to be positive and authoritative without personal warmth.

Elizabeth Diller / I met her briefly at the opening of The Broad and found her to be warm, friendly and unpretentious with unqualified dedication to the imaginative pursuit of her profession.

Charles Eames / As a friend and project collaborator, I found him to be intense, inspiring and constantly preoccupied with his numerous projects.

To have entered his aura was a personal transformative experience.

Ray Eames / She was a friend. Although Ray was Charles' collaborator on many projects, she was not directly involved in the one on which he and I collaborated. She was a multi-talented person of great artistic sensitivity. At breakfast, she hosted a meal with beautiful delicious food surrounded by variegated objects of exceptional color and outstanding design. It was an experience never to be forgotten.

Peter Eisenman / I met him as a foundation official providing funding for one of his projects. Egomaniacal slob best describes him.

Bucky Fuller / I was a member of the audience where he was the featured speaker. I found him to be self-possessed, brilliant, rambling and often opaque.

Philip Johnson / We were members of the same panel. Authoritative and impersonal best describe him.

Richard Meier / I was a member of the audience at two events to which we were invited. My observation: “He wore something more expensive than my Paul Stuart suit.”

Le Corbusier / I was in the audience when he spoke at Columbia University. He was self-possessed, rambling and ingenious.

George Nelson / He was a friend over an extended period of time. Trained as an architect, his more notable achievements were in the field of modern furniture design and the creation of World’s Fair exhibitions. He was a warm and acerbic intellectual.

Richard Neutra / I met him through a friend who was a client. I found him to be serious and business-like.

Renzo Piano / I was a member of the audience when he was the featured speaker. Positive, friendly and modest best describe his demeanor.

Ernesto Rogers / He was a featured speaker at one of the International Design Conferences at Aspen where I was on the planning committee.

He was knowledgeable, as only Italians can be, and was attempting to lead Italy into the Post World War II world of architecture and urban planning.

Richard Rogers / I was a member of the audience where he was one of the featured speakers. To me, he appeared to be a robust braggart. (He is a nephew of Ernesto Rogers.)

Ricardo Scofido / I met him at one of The Broad’s preliminary events. I would describe him as modest to the point of embarrassment.

Raphael Soriano / He was a friend. I found him to be affable and warm-hearted. Dedicated to his individualistic style, he was an exceptional talent never fully recognized in his lifetime.

James Sterling / He was a featured speaker at a program that I had organized. I found him to be modest and somewhat self-effacing.

Frank Lloyd Wright / I conducted an interview with him. There is only one way to describe him – a gargantuan ego.

So where does Frank Gehry fit into my constellation of notables? My only contact with him personally occurred at the Press Preview of the recently opened exhibition “Frank Gehry” at LACMA.

Knowing him only through his work as a luminary, I had no idea of what to expect. Needless to say, I was overwhelmed by his warm, modest and at the same time – positive personality. He sees his roots in the 1960s LA art scene where some of his long standing friendships were forged.

Although he did not use the term “post modernist” to describe his work, he did speak with some disdain about other architects who, as he did, rejected the disciplined rigidity of Mies van der Rohe, but took a different route. Gehry did not consider wrapping a traditional building with a

decorative skin of historical references to be significant architecture.

Although born in Montreal, he sees himself as an “Angeleno” with deep sincerity. When asked about his involvement with planning for the future of the Los Angeles River, he exuded a sense of civic pride that one often identifies with a provincial booster. Apparently, he is undaunted by the complexities of such an extensive project involving multiple municipalities and jurisdictions.

TO FOLLOW: A CRITIQUE OF THE EXHIBITION.

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