

## **Speech for Honorary AA Diploma**

Madelon Vriesendorp

...Arriving at the end of the swinging 60's, I saw the AA grow from an old-fashioned English institution with big, comfortable leather chairs in the front members room — from which grandees and students argued their case with a glass of wine and a cigar or a pipe — to an incredibly global body, everyone enjoying their differences.

In the beginning I watched, as a comfortable outsider, the Gurdjieffian, John Lloyd, recruiting beautiful girls to his exclusive sect, through to Alvin, an incredible negotiator, saving the AA from financial ruin (which chairmen had to do ever since), recruiting students from all over the world and enjoying the diversity. He kept the dialogue going, almost always without fistfights, developing a knowing, quiet and ironic distance; “Rem, what about the plumbing?”

From then on the explosion of theories and off-key Architecture was unstoppable, from the introverted Mohsen to the extroverted, omnipotent Brett.

All this excitement only temporarily dampened by the yearly critique from the baffled external examiners; “What are these chickens doing in the library?”

Nigel's humour and disregard of convention, his relentless quest for invention through play, but still insisting on serious thought (which I suppose, Carlos still champions) was exciting.

All this time I was on the side-line enjoying to observe those knights on their high horses, carving out their important place in the Architectural argument.

The champions ranged from Rem & Elia, Bernard Tschumi & Nigel Coates, Peter Cook, Tony Fretton, and later Zaha and Shumon, to name a few. There was a flow of inspirational thinkers, who were allowed to follow their own, sometimes idiosyncratic, paths: Sam Stevens, Cedric Price, Bob Maxwell and Charles Jencks, who shamelessly ‘outed’ Rem as a devilish satirist, with “my student Rem Koolhaas said ‘Cedric Price is a prince desperately trying to turn back into a frog’”. From then on Rem was viewed with great suspicion, as Cedric was a demi-god.

And still now Marc Cousins enlightens and delights his audience. His humorous musings made me realise again that without humour there is no inclusiveness, no curiosity, no invention or even serious thought.

I am thankful to Brett to treat me with such generosity, to Rem, who lovingly kicked me up the butt, and to Charlie who inspired me and gave me her intelligent & humorous view, with her astute political opinions. My son Tomas, who never

tired of telling me the truth and of my failings, hoping (in vain?) for improvements.

I'm sharing this Diploma with Zoé, who stood by me faithfully, patiently and lovingly. Another special friend; Shumon, who pulled me out of the mothballs and tried to make me famous. Sylvia, who never ceases to make me laugh, all the while hiding her genius. Noemi, who showed immense willpower and courage.

And the list goes on — my niece Fenna, Natasha, Zaha, Jarmila, Steve, Ian, Fernando, Teri, Paul, Graham, my whole family, too many to mention!

But I must mention one incredibly faithful friend and collaborator, a source of immense knowledge, who never tells a story twice; Charles Jencks, with whom I should have celebrated his 'Multiverse'. He generously let me take this Diploma today.

Just one more person, who is growing in stature every day; My idol, my grandson Zi, who astonishes me with his wise and thoughtful nature. He's just 5 years old and said;

'I don't like scary movies, I used to like fighting and scary things, but now I like movies about love, because then I think about love and then I know love and then I want to get married again'...

*Given on the occasion of Madelon Vriesendorp's Honorary Diploma from the Architectural Association, London, June 2017. Transcription for the artist's own archive.*