

Madrid Alumni 2018: 'Tuning in to gender realities'

Colegio de Arquitectos de Madrid

Vice President,
speakers,
Alumni President,
alumni,
friends,

The comedian George Burns once said, "the secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible!"

Nevertheless, for this speech I will have to disregard his sage advice, as the issues that bring us together today cannot be dealt with so glibly, rather they require much care and attention. Should I thank your participation in the round table and shut up? Or should I voice my concerns and intentions?

One thing I promise: to try to avoid the error many speakers make – many of whom know less than their audience do – of pontifying as if I had exclusive access to great truths.

Please rest assured I am being very careful not to appear so presumptuous as to think I am here to enlighten you on gender issues, or to provide magic cures against discrimination.

Because, to be completely sincere, we should always start by recognizing a truth sung years ago by the Valencian singer Raimon, that the only certainty is the deep-seated nature of our doubts.

My role here on this stage is to acknowledge the contributions and reflections of the speakers before me and to promise that I – we – will make the UOC work, or work even harder, in tune with gender realities.



«Inequalities between men and women must be understood as structural and systemic deviations»

For inequalities between men and women must be understood as structural and systemic deviations; the forms and manifestations of inequality differ depending on the culture, country, society or context in which they arise, but one element appears ever present: less access for women to all kinds of rights and resources.

As we being hosted by the College of Architects, it seems fitting to mention the French architect Odile Decq, whose fortunes serve as an example of what I was commenting on before.

Odile Decq has regularly been nominated for the Pritzker Architecture Prize, commonly referred to as the Nobel Prize for architecture, which only three women have won since it was created in 1979, one of whom was Spain's Carme Pigem in 2017.

As I was saying, Decq is now a well-established figure, but when at the age of seventeen she revealed her ambition to be an architect, her father tried to put her off the idea.

Failing in this, he went to see a friend of his who was an architect, who tried to put his mind at ease by telling him she could always be a kitchen cabinet designer.

Faced with this outlook she left Brittany for Paris, where she ended up opening a major architectural firm with her partner.

But despite her having won prizes such as a Biennale di Venezia Golden Lion, when her husband died in an accident friends told her she should close the firm and go work under a proper architect, she being a mere assistant.

Somewhat surprised and unhappy, Decq cut ties with the friends and kept the firm going. And it went on to win contracts, awards and acknowledgements.

She was even made director of the Paris School of Architecture.

Nevertheless, she continued to be treated as an outlier, people saying that architecture wasn't for women.

So she continued to refuse to be typecast, rebutting sexist arguments and creating the Confluence Institute for Innovation and Creative Strategies in Architecture, where half

the students are female.

Now at 62 she remains active and ready to fight for her causes.

I like to think that today there are many more like Odile Decq, who needn't be as alone in their careers, with male and female friends alike supporting and standing up for them.

Protesting and denouncing is always a first step, the most urgent... but it is not enough if unaccompanied by actions and policies that bring about evolution in society, change its assumptions, and integrate and mainstream feminism.

And to be honest with you: we need help. We need help – myself not least – aware of the fact we are dealing with issues of a sensitive but also urgent nature.

But this insecurity must not hold us back, it should stir us to become standard-bearers for hope, social progress, equality and justice.

As an institution, we know you are right, but we must start by defeating caution and resistance to make way for proactive actions, based on firm convictions.

Historically, all progress in human, civil and political rights have been driven by small, aware vanguards from ethnic, social or cultural minorities.

However, today we are talking about a revolution that involves over half of humanity and which, due to its relevance, challenges every human being.

This is the great revolution still to come, and its potential for change undoubtedly makes it one of our last hopes for renewal and improvement.

We face opposition of all kinds, some arising from well-known, traditional sexism, some camouflaged in shining disguises.

But we also know that by our side we have allies and, if you'll pardon the expression, the times are on our side.

Today, mainstreaming a gender perspective in our thoughts and actions is not weird or exotic, ridiculous or barbaric.

It is the persistence of sexism which we must start to see as strange, exotic, ridiculous or barbaric.

The essayist E. B. White, a writer for The New Yorker and creator of Stuart Little, wrote, "Prejudice is a great time saver. You can form opinions without having to get the facts."

We would rather not save time.

Given the choice, we place greater value on forming opinions based on fact and acting accordingly.

Aware that we are not ideal institutions, we seek to become active participants, acting decisively to ensure the University corrects today's gender discriminations and, through education, prevents those of tomorrow.

Because it is not simply a matter of fixing our own immediate environment, but of transcending it and making an impact on society.



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When the UOC establishes one of its goals for 2020 as strengthening the gender perspective as a value, we must do so looking both inwards and outwards.

Inwards because it involves every aspect of the organization: teaching, research, management, human resources and data collection; outwards because the University is a transformer of society, thanks to its anti-systemic and disruptive character, not to mention its critical spirit.

Without these traits, there would be no university.

And, like many other insecure – and even a bit disoriented – men, without ceasing to be a man, I'd like to ask a favour of everyone here: do not change, because what we must do, all of us together, is change society.

In the words of the philosopher Marina Garcés, who will start teaching at the UOC next academic year:

"We do not need a new world: we need a world, this one, where we can live and fight for a decent life."

Therefore, for tuning in to gender realities to become more than just a slogan, it needs to be demonstrated in theory and in action, in goals and in practice, in daily life and in the future.

Because what has to change, to evolve, is society, not the women of today, and even less so those of tomorrow.

Thank you very much.