

**Award presentation Vitlycke Museum, Tanumshede, Sweden
Suad Amiry on November 10, 2013**

Dear Suad Amiry,

and dear all of you, who have come to Vitlycke to celebrate this year's winner of the prize from the Hans Manneby Memorial Fund,
– Museum horizon.

For this year the board has decided to widen the horizon by also looking outside the traditional museum walls. And indeed, the museum concept is being broadened by foremost eco museums and also Vitlycke Museum takes its existence from outdoors, the rock carvings.

This international prize is given to an individual who has qualities like being imaginative, committed, democratic, someone who is open-minded, inclusive, innovative and who is an inspiration to her/his organisation – as well as others - who has the ability to share knowledge, promote learning, build national and international networks, and, maybe foremost in the long list of criteria for receiving this prize, someone who is engaged in the development of contemporary society, who operates in close contact with the world around. Yes, much is asked for - but these qualities reflect Hans Manneby's work and personality.

First some short biographical data. With a mother from Damascus and a father from Jaffa, who were forced to flee from Jerusalem to Jordan in 1948 you were when you arrived some years later, a Palestinian cosmopolitan by birth. Your young years in Amman were followed by studies in Cairo, Beirut, Michigan and Edinburgh, before you decided to settle in Ramallah, in Palestine, 1981.

Your PhD in Architecture from The University of Edinburgh led to a position at Bierzeit University. Ideas started developing. After a creative process of about ten years the birth of Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation was a fact. You were the “mother” and your colleague at Birzeit, Nazmi al Jubeh, professor of history, was the “father”.

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From the start in 1991 you held the position of Director of Riwaq with Nazmi as co-director until 2011 when you handed over to Fida Touma and Khaldun Bshara, who both had been with Riwaq for many years. You are still on the team of 15, though. Not easy to leave such a wonderful group of curious, creative and dedicated individuals. And full of fun. That is obvious even in their Annual Report. You have indeed managed to gather - and keep – a strong staff and it seems you have all shared and learnt from each other in a friendly atmosphere in spite of the unstable situation around you.

One part of the motivation for awarding you this prize talks about your "fervent commitment to endangered built heritage in Palestine". You certainly have proven that commitment. Obviously you must have asked yourself how you could use your skills and knowledge as an architect in a way that would best benefit the Palestinian people. So, your ideas were manifested in the format of Riwaq. Nazmi's deep knowledge of the history of Palestine and yours in built heritage was of course an unbeatable combination as a foundation. And I believe you soon completed the multidisciplinary character of the organisation with experts in sociology, archaeology, political science, philosophy, urban planning, an artist and also a poet, all kinds of suitable people.

For your PhD your research was on Palestinian village architecture. You already then acquired skills and sensitivity to see beyond the material buildings into the immaterial qualities - the insight that buildings and walls are more than shelter, they tell about peoples' lives, their history and needs, history of importance also to carry into the future. You and your team have made a broad spectrum of Palestinian society aware of the common cultural heritage – including politicians and leaders –that cultural heritage is something to value and be proud of, something to be rehabilitated instead of demolished by others or themselves. But to you, your team and the communities, it was not enough to restore the buildings, they should also be revitalised. "Heritage with new life", as the person who nominated you, Göran Tannerfelt, put it. So the buildings are now being used for different purposes to serve the needs and wishes/dreams of the local communities.

Furthermore - to the benefit of the whole Palestinian society, Riwaq's mission and work created thousands of jobs among craftsmen, students, skilled workers etc. Old knowledge of valuable construction methods have been studied, taught and used. Forgotten skills have been detected and furthered to future generations.

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To sum up:

When you settled in Ramallah in 1981, you realized that there was no authority responsible for Palestinian cultural heritage, no National Heritage Board. You had to take action. First of all a National Register of Historical Buildings had to be set up. It took 13 years of research and intense work to complete three very heavy volumes in which over 50 000 historical buildings in 422 villages on the West Bank and in Gaza were described in detail, completed with maps, photos and drawings. Some 2500 students as well as many historians, architects, archaeologists were involved in this work. At the same time it became a training program. With the Register in place, important parts of the common Palestinian cultural heritage have been and are being saved, job opportunities have been created. Demolished and neglected heritage has been restored and revitalised - turned into useful spaces for development of individuals and communities, such as youth clubs, community centres, libraries, women organisations, cultural centres, NGOs . And others have been inspired to create organisations with the same aim; in Hebron, in Bethlehem and in Jerusalem.

There seems to be no borders for your and Riwaq's creativity and dynamic force. Over the years lots of "extras" have been developed – the Riwaq Biennale in Palestine from 2005 and onwards, the historic Palestinian participation in the Venice Biennale 2009 and the Qalandia International cultural festival last year where local groups organised a joint platform all over the country. Furthermore training courses, workshops and seminars for young professionals, historic excursions for school children, summer camps, etc. have been organised.

One last thing. You have managed to make your voice heard in many ways – your voice for Palestinian culture and history – in your many lectures and in connecting with other organisations/institutions all over the world. Also by publishing a series of beautiful books on different aspects of Palestinian historical architecture and culture, several written or edited by you, you have reached out and enlightened many people in and outside Palestine. After years of non-fiction you have, since 2001, also become a fiction writer, now with four books published. The latest one is a book where the protagonist is beautiful old Palestinian family houses and their history. But that is another story, to be told some other evening.

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You are certainly a most worthy prize winner and we know that Hans Manneby must be very pleased in his heaven; just regretting that you never met before.

Now to the prize. The motivation states that Suad Amiry receives the prize:

For her

“fervent commitment to endangered Palestinian built heritage creative force to include a broad spectrum of the Palestinian society and extraordinary skills to share her visions and inspire others”

Congratulations!

Anita Theorell

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