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THE LATE GUSTAVO DA ROZA

Statement by:
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Thursday, September 22, 2022

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, it is my real pleasure today to pay tribute to internationally acclaimed architect Gustavo da Roza, a friend, professor and, for many years, Portugal's Honorary Consul. Gus died at 89 last April in Surrey, B.C. Born in Hong Kong, he studied in the U.S. and moved to Winnipeg in 1960.

I met Gus in 1970 during the Winnipeg Art Gallery's construction, he the architect of this iconic triangular building on Winnipeg's Memorial Boulevard and I the curator who was to review site progress daily. Da Roza, a young University of Manitoba architecture professor, challenged by the competition, sketched his initial design on the back of an envelope. The site was triangular; he was determined to use every inch. Many of you have visited this clean-lined Manitoba limestone building with embedded characteristic fossils.

Opened by Princess Margaret on September 25, 1971, though still unfinished due to a construction strike, we had installed parts of the collection. A special trumpet fanfare composed by Sonia Eckhardt-Gramatté, the director's wife, played from the top of the Hudson's Bay parkade across the street. At one point, an RCMP officer raced through the exhibition, asking if anyone had seen Lord Snowdon; he was missing. I had seen him: He and Gus had gone to the front point of the building. Lord Snowdon, a designer himself, was intrigued by how Gus had used the three points of the building; they are fire escapes.

Serving Manitoban audiences and artists well, its spaces are wonderful for presenting art. Its design has stood up well. When I returned as director in 1999, the environmental systems, the vault and the Muriel Richardson Auditorium had to be upgraded. Having daily witnessed its original construction, I knew its principles, but we needed Gus to assist.

He and I had kept in touch over the years, both in B.C. and Manitoba. I admired his vision and his understanding of what a gallery was. He did help with those renovations in the early 2000s, and has again since with the alterations to the shop and the addition of Qaumajuq, the Inuit art centre, which opened last year.

Gus designed many international buildings, including those in Dubai and a number of houses in Winnipeg, which, like the Winnipeg Art Gallery, are iconic and clean in design and function.

His love of life, his unique creativity, attention to detail, sense of humour, wit and real friendship are inspiring and have been a gift to me these last 50-plus years. Thank you, Gus.

My condolences go to his wife, Gloria, and his children and grandchildren.
