

Gregory Colbert's

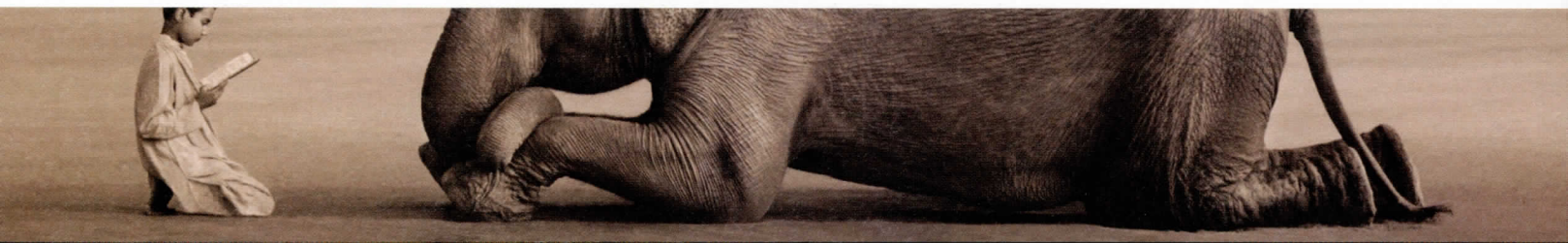
a s h e s   a n d   s n o w

THE NOMADIC MUSEUM  
ZÓCALO, MEXICO CITY  
CONCLUDES AFTER HISTORIC RUN

**Mexico City and New York (May 20, 2008)**—A temporary museum housing more than 50 large-scale photographic artworks and 3 accompanying 35mm artistic films by Gregory Colbert transformed Mexico City's Zócalo into a timeless realm in which the boundaries between humans and animals disappeared.

The exhibition, *Ashes and Snow*, was on display from January 19 through April 27, 2008. It was presented in the Nomadic Museum, the permanent traveling home of the project. During the 100 days that the exhibition was open to the public, the Nomadic Museum attracted over 8.7 million visitors. More than 10 million people have visited the exhibition on its global journey, making *Ashes and Snow* the most popular exhibition by any artist in history.

The Rolex Institute has made it possible to preserve the body of work as shown in its original form at the Venice Arsenale in 2002. This collection was joined by photographic artworks and films from recent expeditions to comprise the work on display, so that the show itself, along with the architecture, evolves as it travels.



The Mexico City opening marked the fifth installation of *Ashes and Snow*, Colbert's sixteen-year personal and artistic odyssey. The exhibition has been on display in Venice, New York City, Los Angeles, and Tokyo. To date, the artist has completed more than forty-five extensive international expeditions to places as diverse as India, Egypt, Burma, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Ethiopia, Namibia, Tonga, the Azores, Antarctica, and Borneo to explore the natural interaction between man and animal. A devoted group of private collectors has made it possible for Colbert to photograph many of the totemic animals that touch our spirit—elephants, whales, manatees, eagles, and other animals in their own environments and on their own terms.

Colbert, who calls animals “nature’s living masterpieces,” captures extraordinary moments of contact between man and nature. *Ashes and Snow* is the shared memory of distant lands, peoples, and animals. None of the images have been digitally collaged or superimposed. They record what the artist himself saw through the lens of his camera. These mixed media photographic works marry umber and sepia tones in a distinctive encaustic process on handmade Japanese paper. The artworks, each approximately 3.5 by 2.5 meters (11.5 by 8.25 feet), are mounted without explanatory text so as to encourage an open-ended interaction with the images. The films are not documentaries. They are poetic narratives that depict a world that is without beginning or end, here or there, past or present. The overall effect is an experience of wonder and contemplation, serenity, and hope.

“When I started *Ashes and Snow* in 1992, I set out to explore the relationship between man and animals from the inside out. In discovering the shared language and poetic sensibilities of all animals, I am working towards restoring the common ground that once existed when people lived in harmony with animals,” says Colbert.





Gregory Colbert originally conceived the idea for a sustainable traveling museum in 1999. He envisioned a sustainable structure that could easily be assembled in ports of call around the world, providing an ephemeral environment for *Ashes and Snow* on its global journey. The public debut of *Ashes and Snow* took place in 2002 at the Arsenale in Venice. Built in 1104, this monumental space inspired the architectural concepts of the Nomadic Museum.

Designed by Colombian architect Simón Vélez, the Zócalo Nomadic Museum was the largest bamboo structure ever built. The building demonstrated sustainable practices and an innovative architectural approach in its use of bamboo as the primary structural element, along with shipping containers and other recyclable and reusable materials.

The Zócalo Nomadic Museum occupied 5,130-square meters (55,219-square feet) containing two galleries and three distinct theatres. Inside, visitors accessed two gallery spaces bordered on either side by water-filled bays over which the unframed artworks were suspended between bamboo columns. Throughout, diaphanous handmade curtains made of one million pressed paper tea bags from Sri Lanka hung from the ceiling. Colbert's one-hour 35mm film, narrated in Spanish by actor Enrique Rocha and edited by two-time Academy Award-winner Pietro Scalia, was continuously projected on a large-format screen in a column-free central theater. Two short film "haikus" were shown at the end of each gallery.

The title *Ashes and Snow* refers to the literary component of the exhibition—a fictional account of a man who, over the course of a yearlong journey, composes 365 letters to his wife. The source of the title is revealed in the 365<sup>th</sup> letter. Colbert's photographs and films loosely reference the traveler's encounters and experiences described in the letters, fragments of which comprise the narration in the films. *Ashes and Snow: A Novel in Letters* was first published in 2004.



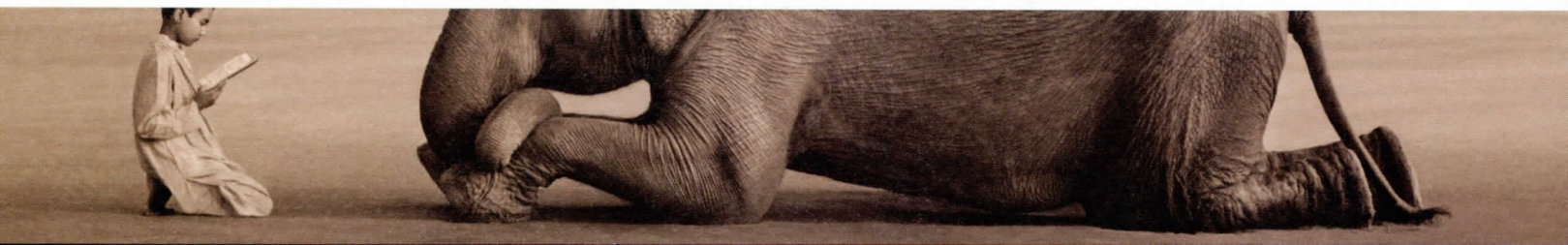
*Ashes and Snow* has no final destination, and new species are added as the project evolves. Each exhibition is simply a port of call. Additional venues are planned in South America, Asia, and Europe.

### **About the Artist**

Canadian-born artist Gregory Colbert began his career in Paris making documentary films about social issues. Filmmaking led to his work as a fine arts photographer, and the first public exhibitions of his work were held in 1992 at the Musée de l'Elysée in Switzerland. In 2002, he launched the *Ashes and Snow* exhibition in Italy at the Venice Arsenale, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century shipyard. It was the largest solo exhibition ever mounted in Italy. The Venice exhibition featured images of Asian elephants, manatees, sperm and humpback whales, royal eagles, gyrfalcons, Antigone cranes, sacred ibis, Harris hawks, and loggerhead tortoises. Subsequent exhibitions included works from his more recent collaborations with orangutans, jaguars, ocelots, elephant seals, cheetahs, leopards, caracals, zebras, elands, wild dogs, meerkats, and African elephants.

### **About the Architect**

Colombian architect Simón Vélez was born in 1949. Over the course of his forty-year career, Vélez has emerged as one of the world's leading architects and the most eminent proponent of bamboo as an essential building component. Vélez has created joinery systems that utilize bamboo as a permanent structural element in both residential and commercial structures. His recent projects include the design of Crosswaters Ecolodge, the first ecotourism destination in China in the forests of Nankun Shan Mountain Reserve, in the Guangdong Province. It is the largest project in the world to use bamboo in a commercial project, and the first project of this scale in Asia to use bamboo as a structural element in a dwelling. The project received the 2006 American Society of Landscape Architects Analysis and Planning Award of Honor. To date, Vélez has designed bamboo buildings in Germany, France, the United States, Brazil, Mexico, China, Jamaica, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, and India.





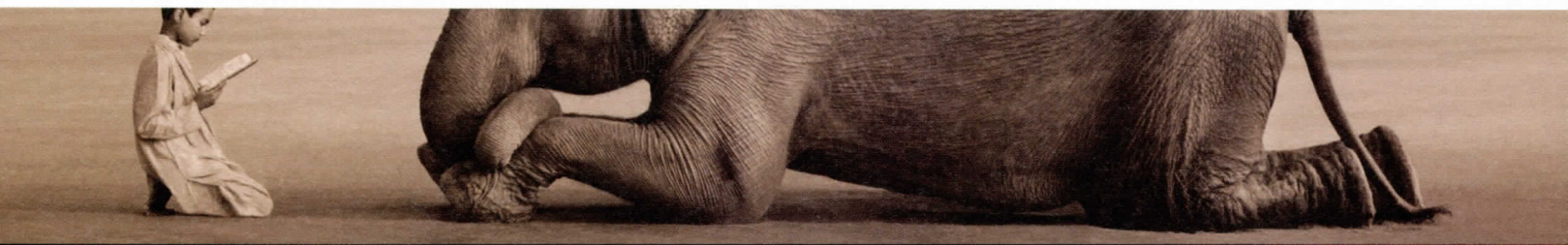
### About the Rolex Institute

Since its inception in 1905, Rolex has been at the forefront of revolutionary innovations, setting the industry standard for beauty, craftsmanship, accuracy, and style in watch making. The Rolex Institute's support of *Ashes and Snow* continues a long history of corporate sponsorship for the arts. Rolex has developed close ties with many of today's greatest artists, including Plácido Domingo, Renée Fleming, Sylvie Guillem, and Yo-Yo Ma. In addition to both its traditional and unconventional support of artistic endeavors, the company maintains ongoing programs in the arts and sciences. The Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative pairs emerging young talents with established masters for a year of creative collaboration, while the Rolex Awards for Enterprise support individuals carrying out pioneering projects in science, technology, exploration, environment, and cultural heritage.

### USA & INTERNATIONAL

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## Critical Acclaim

### Venice, Italy, 2002

The power of the images comes less from their formal beauty than from the way they envelop the viewer in their mood. . . . They are simply windows to a world in which silence and patience govern time.

—*New York Times*, 2002

Colbert's work feels timeless and sacred. It resonates with a luminous, essential wisdom speaking through the ages. . . . Colbert's work operates in a parallel universe to ours, an earnest, refreshing, post-ironic world where pure wonder and awe still reside.

—*The Globe and Mail*, 2002

There is no way to accurately translate the English word "bliss" into Italian. Yet it's this word that precisely explains the exhibition *Ashes and Snow*...[Colbert] doesn't have the approach of a naturalist...and we are confronted with an artistic itinerary or anything like a performance. There is no conceptualism, no computer simulation, no particular technological display.

—*La Repubblica*, 2002

Gregory Colbert is an elephant whisperer.

—*Elle France*, 2002

This huge exhibition is a poem celebrating the diversity of nature through images...and also serves as a warning to mankind to return to the values of its animal origins, to belong to the earth in a way that is non-racial and natural. Gregory's world makes us disturbingly aware.

—*Leo*

We are astonished by Gregory Colbert. His art takes us by surprise because it is not just an aesthetic research but an uplifting spell...an ambitious project...It's not going to far to speak of these photos as sublime, not out of place to say that they enchant us, purify our gaze. Colbert's photos stun us with their beauty. They are an alternative to the drift that darkens our times and feeds contemporary art.

—*La Tribune di Treviso*

Colbert is undoubtedly an artist and a virtuoso of photography. His images are technically superb, exemplary in their rendering of light and shade, softly enveloping in his choice of light. There is no trick, no deception: man and animal dance together in a kind of cosmic harmony.

—*L'Unita*

This universal exhibition is certainly one of the most poetic photographic shows of the past few years.

—*Financial Times Deutschland*





Almost unknown more than two months ago, Gregory Colbert launched into the art world like a meteorite.

—*L'Express*, 2002

## New York 2005

The season's most original art exhibition . . . a show of striking photographs.

—*Town and Country*, 2005

His astonishing pictures—sepia and umber in tone . . . documented the whole caravan of beauteous creatures who had passed before his magic lens. . . . For all its apparent sobriety, this is an ecstatic space; as for the installation, it is Zen. . . It's like a Rothko chapel writ large.

—*Wall Street Journal*, 2005

In these photographs . . . the animals and the people seem to move in a cosmic dance filled with rhythmic and visual beauty that breaks out of the mundane world of classifications, of 'us' and 'them,' and into the sublime.

—*Camera Arts*, 2005

A magical, mystical tour.

—*Life* magazine, 2005

Distinctive . . . monumental in every sense.

—*Condé Nast Traveler*, 2005

The photographs seduce through starkness and spirituality. . . . Timeless and exquisitely timely.

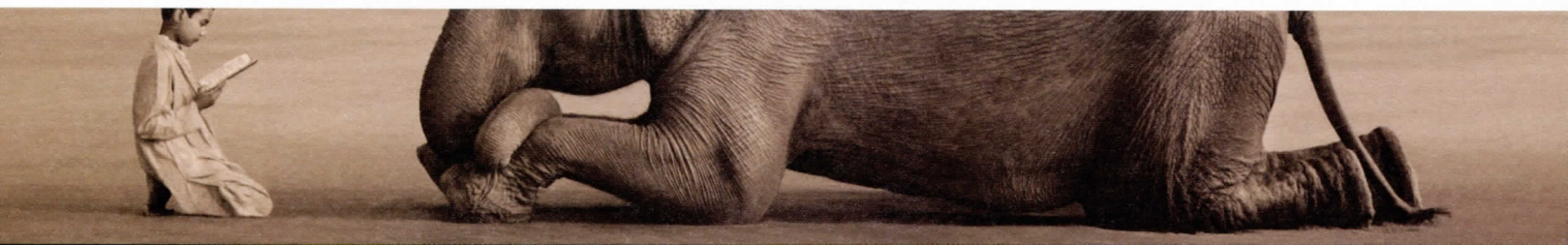
—*Newsday*, 2005

The most arresting aspect of Gregory Colbert's photographs . . . is their air of dreamlike calm. The serenity pervades the sepia-toned pictures.

—*Smithsonian*, 2005

The Nomadic Museum restores the possibility of wonder to museums whose excesses of clarity and light have banished the shadows. The power of the show and the power of the building are so reciprocal that it is difficult to separate the dancer from the dance. [Colbert conditions] the senses of the visitors to facilitate their psychological entry into the space of the photographs, to deliver the message that man is not, and cannot be, separate from the nature within which he evolved. In these agnostic and cynical times, the building becomes a place to feel and even believe. *Ashes and Snow* is a show that is disarmingly, and grandly, simple.

—*Modern Painter*, 2005



His work has an almost preternatural calm.  
—*New York Magazine*, 2005

Gregory Colbert...is for all the world a modern day Noah.  
—*The Villager*, 2005

### **Santa Monica, California, 2006**

An extraordinary exhibition.  
—*The Economist*, 2006

A new master is born.  
—*Photo magazine*, 2005

Fascinating photos of humans and animals...that reflect an astonishing harmony.  
—*Stern*, 2006

Included in *Vanity Fair's* 2006 Best of the Best

There is no clash of species in *Ashes and Snow*; it is a world in which man and animals peacefully co-exist, living in each other's dreams.  
—*Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 2006

A vast, dramatic show—an awe-inspiring tribute to nature, tribal life and endangered animals.  
—*South China Morning Post*, 2006

### **Tokyo 2007**

Tokyo is such an artificial space in which we who live here can gradually lose the sense that we still inhabit the natural world. When we come to the Nomadic Museum, however, we are reminded of the warm feelings man must have had while living with nature. The museum is a space where we can reconnect with who we really are.  
—*Asahi Shimbun*, 2007

The exhibition presents a marvelous vision that transcends time and place.  
—*Goethe*, 2007

*Ashes and Snow* is an expression of the poetic possibilities of a harmonious relationship between animals and man.  
—*Newsweek*, 2007

There is a calm flow of time that is intrinsic to nature but lost from modern society.  
—*Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, 2007





He has realised a vision with an eloquent message, delivered without commentary or caption: if we didn't know before what we are obliterating, we do now.  
—*South China Morning Post*, 2007

### Mexico City 2008

We (Mexicans) are about to discover something we have never seen, a temple where we can experience the light, the space, and the magic of silence... Once inside the museum you become part of it; and once you leave, a part of you stays behind.  
—Joaquín López-Doriga on *Noticieros Televisa*, 2008

In the middle of the Zocalo a bamboo museum is born. Its roots point towards the sky within it lies a secret that will take your breath away: the exhibition of *Ashes and Snow*.  
—*Reforma* newspaper, 2008

The power of the images... is eternal and sacred.  
—*Architectural Digest*, 2008

The trajectory of Gregory Colbert is...surreal.  
—*El País*, 2008



## The Nomadic Museum

Gregory Colbert originally conceived of the idea for a sustainable traveling museum in 1999. He envisioned a structure that could easily be assembled in ports of call around the world, providing a transitory environment for his work on its global journey. The first public installation of *Ashes and Snow* at the Arsenale in Venice, which opened in 2002, inspired the architectural concepts used in the Nomadic Museum.

Colbert transformed the interior of the Venice Arsenale using atmospheric elements including stone, curtains made from one million pressed paper tea bags from Sri Lanka, and minimalist lighting techniques. Built in 1104, the Arsenale was originally used to assemble and launch boats to sea via the Venetian canals. The interior architecture of the structure provided an ideal setting for *Ashes and Snow*, as the monumental space graciously accommodated Colbert's large-format photographic artworks and films.

The first Nomadic Museum debuted with the opening of *Ashes and Snow* in New York City in March 2005. The museum then traveled to Santa Monica, California, in January 2006, Tokyo, Japan, in March 2007, and Mexico City in January 2008. To date, more than ten million people have attended the exhibition.

The most recent installation of *Ashes and Snow* in Mexico City closed on April 27, 2008. It was housed for the first time in a bamboo structure designed by Colombian architect Simón Vélez. The building demonstrated sustainable building practices, using bamboo and shipping containers as primary elements along with recycled and/or reusable materials.

The museum occupied 5,130-square meters (55,219-square feet) containing two galleries and three distinct theatres. Inside the museum, two galleries extending 114 meters were bordered on either side by water, over which the unframed artworks were suspended between bamboo columns. Short haiku





films were shown in continuous loops in theaters at the end of each gallery. The full-length feature film was projected in the large central theater.

For the first time, the Nomadic Museum incorporated water as a design element to recall the unique history of the Zócalo, which was once surrounded by canals. This architectural choice honored the symbolic significance of the Zócalo as the center of Mexico–Tenochtitlan, a city founded by the Aztecs on a small island in the middle of Lake Texcoco in 1325.

Like other elements of *Ashes and Snow*, the museum is an on-going project that will transform in each location to adapt to its environment and the evolving artistic content of the exhibition itself. Colbert will continue to collaborate with innovative architects to integrate the most recent advances in sustainable architecture and give new expression to the museum as it travels.



# Ashes and Snow

## The Nomadic Museum

### Design Fact Sheet Zócalo, Mexico City

#### Project

The Nomadic Museum  
Zócalo, Mexico City

The Nomadic Museum was a 5,130-square-meter (55,219-square-foot) temporary structure that housed *Ashes and Snow*, an exhibition of large-scale photographic works and films by artist Gregory Colbert, that was on view from January 19 to April 27, 2008.

The 45 meter-wide by 114-meter-long (148-foot-wide by 374-foot-long) museum was situated in the Zócalo, the public square in Mexico City's historic center.

The Mexico City structure was the fourth iteration of the Nomadic Museum, which was originally sited at Pier 54 in New York City from March 5 to June 6, 2005. The museum was reassembled in Santa Monica in 2006, and in Tokyo in 2007.

#### Location

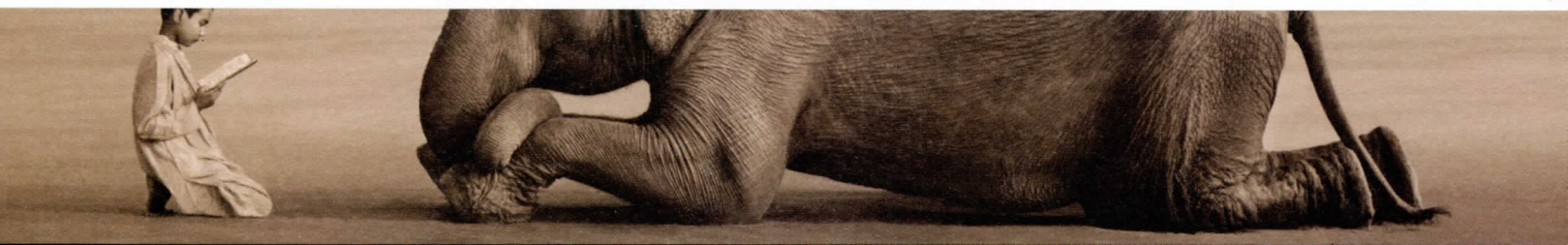
Zócalo, Mexico City  
Accessible by all forms of public transportation.

#### Architects Schedule

Simón Vélez, lead architect  
Construction Began: October 2007  
Structure Completed: January 2008

#### Site Highlights

The Zócalo, meaning base or plinth, is the third largest square in the world. Since the beginning of the Aztec rule in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it has been the center of public life in Mexico City. Today, it is surrounded by historic monuments, including the ruins of the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan, and is home to the National Cathedral and Palace. It remains the political and cultural hub of the city.





## Design Highlights

Sustainable design utilizing bamboo and shipping containers were primary components, along with recycled and/or reusable materials. For the first time, the Nomadic Museum incorporated water as a design element to recall the unique history of the Zócalo, which was once surrounded by canals. This architectural choice honored the symbolic significance of the Zócalo as the center of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, a city founded by the Aztecs on a small island in the middle of Lake Texcoco in 1325.

## Interior Design

The museum consisted of two photographic galleries and three distinct theaters. Two short films were shown at small theaters at the end of each gallery. A one-hour 35mm feature film by Colbert, narrated in Spanish by actor Enrique Rocha and edited by two-time Academy-Award winner Pietro Scalia, was continuously projected on a large-format screen in the central theater. The soundtrack for the film featured Michael Brook, Lisa Gerrard, and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, among other musicians. Varying sizes of stackable paper tubes served as seating for visitors watching the film.

The two galleries were bordered on either side by bays filled with water, over which the unframed artworks were suspended between the bamboo columns.

Diaphanous handmade curtains made of one million pressed paper tea bags from Sri Lanka were an additional component of the installation.



## ashes and snow films

Gregory Colbert has used both still and movie cameras to explore extraordinary interactions between humans and animals. Colbert believes that nature doesn't have a style; it has a voice. His artistic films aim to lift the natural and artificial barriers between humans and other species, dissolving the distance that exists between them. Colbert chose to film animals in their native habitats to create films that can be viewed as works of art or as poetic field studies.

The 60-minute feature film was edited by two-time Oscar-winner Pietro Scalia. It is narrated by actors Enrique Rocha (Spanish), Laurence Fishburne (English), and Ken Watanabe (Japanese). The musical collaborators include Michael Brook, David Darling, Heiner Goebbels, Lisa Gerrard, Lukas Foss, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and Djivan Gasparayan.

### ashes and snow: the film

#### **animals**

Asian elephants  
Sperm whales  
Humpback whales  
Royal eagles  
Manatees  
Peregrine falcons  
Gyr falcons  
Elands  
Baboons  
Cheetahs  
Meerkats  
African wild dogs  
Pilot whales  
Harris hawks  
Sacred ibis  
Antigone cranes  
Caracals

#### **cast**

Bertha  
Gregory  
Venuri  
Khema  
Sobini  
Vinci  
Beny  
Sarki  
Chiko  
Senaitje  
Anna  
Sherbat  
Mamoud  
Vanessa  
23 Burmese monks

#### **written and directed by**

Gregory Colbert

#### **cinematographers**

Gregory Colbert  
Philippe Vene  
Koji Nakamura  
Acacio Almeida  
Yorgos Arvanitis

#### **narrators**

Enrique Rocha  
(Spanish)  
Ken Watanabe  
(Japanese)  
Laurence Fishburne  
(English)

#### **editor**

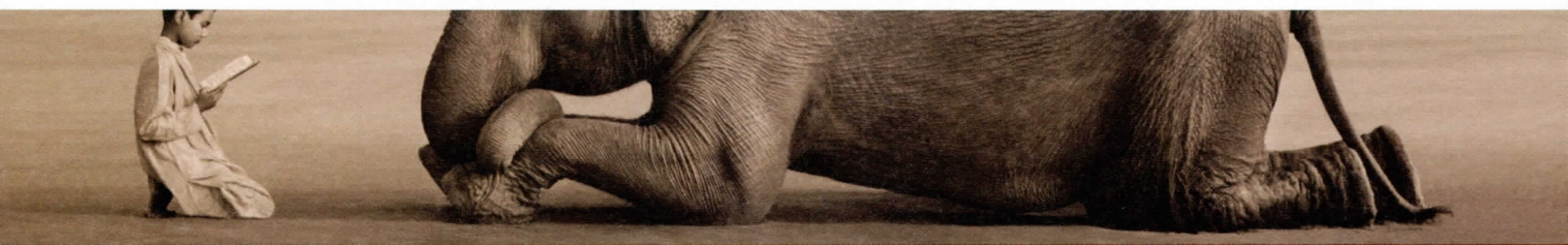
Pietro Scalia

#### **music**

Michael Brook  
Patrick Cassidy  
David Darling  
Robert Een  
Lukas Foss  
Djivan Gasparayan  
Lisa Gerrard  
Heiner Goebbels  
Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan  
Temple of Sound

#### **produced by**

Gregory Colbert





**short "haiku" films**

**dreamsong**

**animals**

Orangutans  
Rhinoceros hornbills  
Gibbons  
Samba deer  
Saltwater crocodiles

**cast**

Bertha  
Vanessa

**blackrain**

**animals**

Jaguars  
Ocelots  
Kinkajous  
Tyras  
Anteaters  
Jabiru storks  
Tapirs  
Grey foxes  
Margays

**cast**

Bertha  
Rosinda  
Denese  
Ashley

**music**

Jóhann Jóhannsson

**post production**

**supervisor**

Alessandra Pasquino

**music supervisors**

Peter Afterman  
Margaret Yen

**additional editor**

Elisa Bonora

**assistant editors**

Shawn Mitchell  
Neil Jariwala

**apprentice editor**

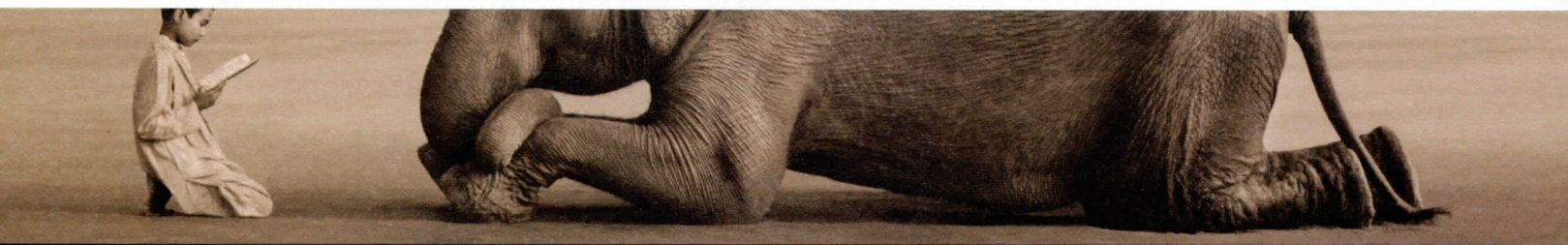
Sean Martin

**colorist**

Clark Muller

**special thanks**

Michael Ostin  
Nile Rodgers

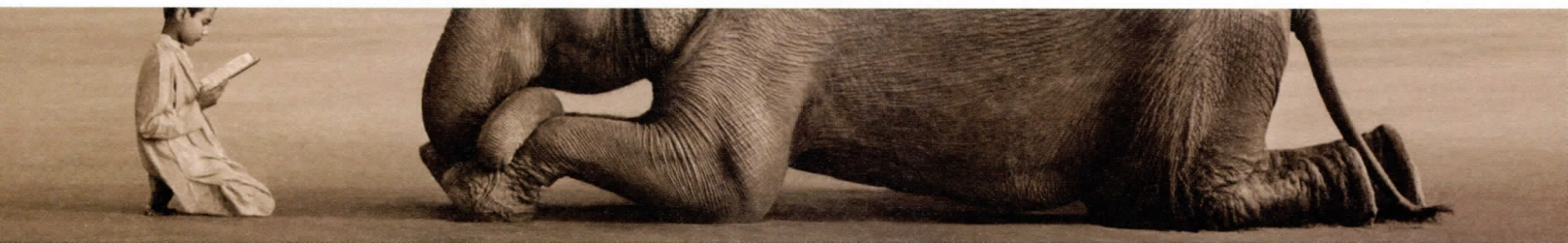


## Gregory Colbert

Born in Toronto, Canada, in 1960, Gregory Colbert began his career in Paris in 1983 where he began making documentary films on social issues. Filmmaking led to fine arts photography. His first exhibition, *Timewaves*, opened in 1992 at the Museum of Elysée in Switzerland.

For the next ten years, Colbert did not show films or exhibit his art to the public. During this time, he did extensive underwater work in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and traveled to such places as India, Burma, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Dominica, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tonga, Namibia, and Antarctica to film and photograph wondrous interactions between human beings and animals. Since 1992, he has launched more than sixty such expeditions to collaborate with elephants, whales, manatees, sacred ibis, Antigone cranes, royal eagles, gyr falcons, rhinoceros hornbills, cheetahs, leopards, African wild dogs, caracals, leopards, baboons, elands, meerkats, gibbons, orangutans, and other animals. Human subjects include Burmese monks, trance dancers, San people, and Colbert free diving with whales.

In 2002, Colbert presented the culmination of his singular work, *Ashes and Snow*, at the Arsenale in Venice, Italy, a twelfth-century 125,000-square-foot shipyard. It was the largest solo exhibition ever mounted in Italy. In spring 2005 the show opened in New York City in the first-ever Nomadic Museum. *Ashes and Snow* has since migrated in the Nomadic Museum to world capitals on four continents and has become the most attended exhibition by any artist in history.





## Simón Vélez

### Architect

A third-generation architect, Simón Vélez was born in Manizales, Colombia, in 1949. Over the course of his forty-year career Vélez has emerged as one of the world's leading architects and the most eminent proponent of bamboo as an essential building component.

Vélez has created joinery systems that utilize bamboo as a permanent structural element in both residential and commercial structures. For four consecutive years he has been invited by the Vitra Design Museum and the George Pompidou Center to conduct workshops in France in which structures of bamboo-guadua were built as an instructive exercise.

For Expo Hanover 2000, he designed and constructed a 2000-square-meter bamboo pavilion for ZERI (Zero Emissions Research Initiative). The structure utilized bamboo, recycled cement, copper, and a mixture of terracotta, cement and bamboo fiber panels. He recently participated in designing Crosswaters Ecolodge, the first ecotourism destination in China in the forests of Nankun Shan Mountain Reserve, in the Guangdong Province. It the largest project in the world to the use bamboo in a commercial project, and the first project of this scale in Asia to use bamboo as a structural element in a dwelling. The project received the 2006 American Society of Landscape Architects 2006 Analysis and Planning Award of Honor.

To date, Vélez has designed bamboo buildings in Germany, France, the United States, Brazil, Mexico, China, Jamaica, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, and India.

