

Gregory Colbert's

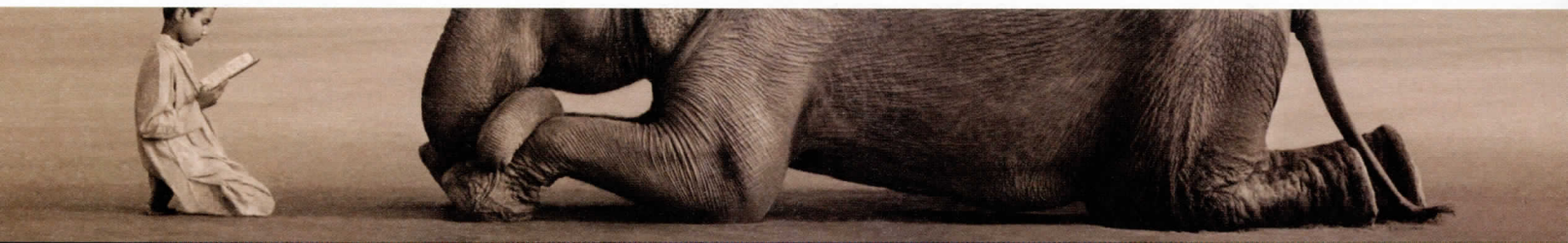
a s h e s a n d s n o w

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.

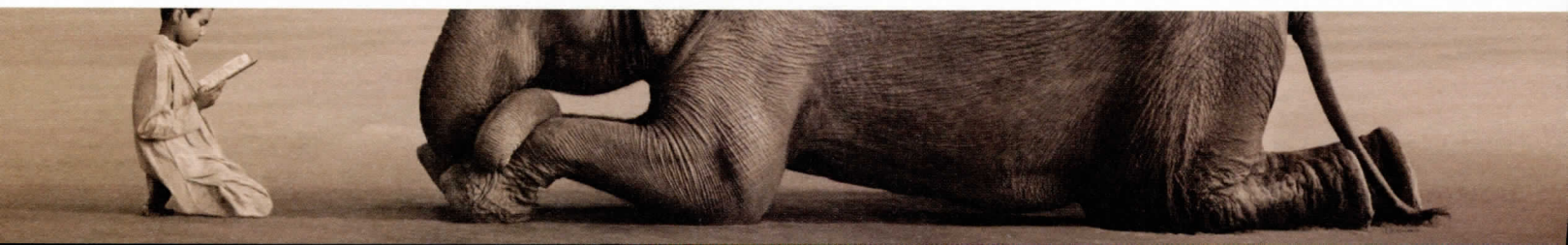
The Rolex Institute has made it possible to preserve the body of work as shown in its original form at the Venice Arsenale in 2002. This collection was joined by photographic artworks and films from recent expeditions to comprise the work on display, so that the show itself, along with the architecture,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

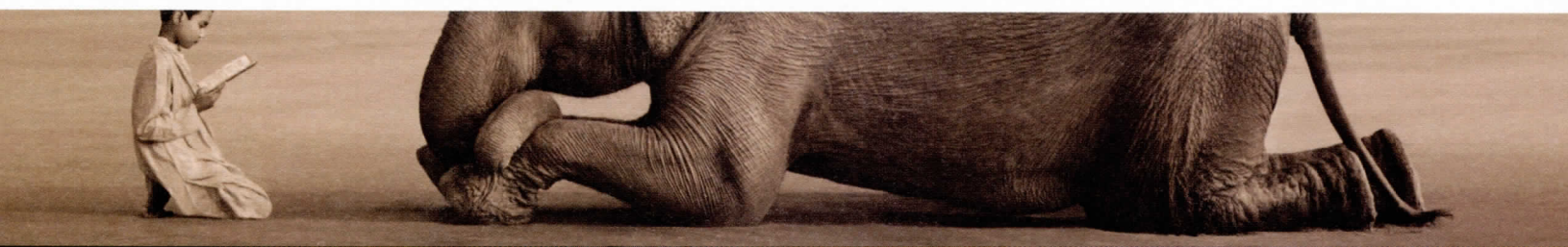


Gregory Colbert originally conceived the idea for a sustainable traveling museum in 1999. He envisioned a sustainable structure that could easily be assembled in ports of call around the world, providing an ephemeral environment for *Ashes and Snow* on its global journey. The public debut of *Ashes and 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 365th 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 12th-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.

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