

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.

