

A project by Fondazione Giorgio Cini and Pentagram Stiftung

LE STANZE DEL VETRO

Glass Tea House Mondrian by Hiroshi Sugimoto

On the occasion of the 56th Venice Biennale, a book about the project is being published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König.

The pavilion will be open for Biennale visitors with special tea ceremonies taking place throughout the opening week from May 7, 2015.

Invitation to book launch and signing in the presence of the artist, followed by a conversation with Bruno and Christina Bischofberger on May 7, 2015

Hiroshi Sugimoto's Glass Tea House Mondrian is the first in a series of pavilions commissioned by Le Stanze del Vetro on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice. The concept of these temporary pavilions is to allow an internationally acclaimed artist to work on a large scale, and to engage with the space between sculpture, art, and architecture. In a sense, this project follows the example of the Serpentine Gallery's pavilion series, the crucial distinction being that we are commissioning an architectural artwork by an artist, as opposed to an experimental building by an architect. Each pavilion will stand for two years, during Venice's Art and Architecture Biennales.

Although Sugimoto is primarily known for photography, his practice extends across a wide range of media. He has a long-standing engagement with architecture, founding the Tokyo-based architecture studio New Material Research Laboratory in 2008. Sugimoto's architectural work has manifested itself in several "functional" projects, ranging from buildings, interiors, and the conception of the Odawara Art Foundation in Kanagawa, Japan to more conceptual works. Among the latter, his interest in Japanese tradition and aesthetics is clear: for the Benesse Art Site Naoshima in southern Japan he reconstructed the Go-Oh Shrine in 2002. In his own studio in New York's Chelsea district, Sugimoto created the Tea House Imameido (2011), an unexpected place of tranquility, formality, and tradition in the heart of this chaotic Western metropolis.

Glass Tea House Mondrian is Sugimoto's first architectural work in Europe. He has built a pavilion of extraordinary beauty in a formerly unused space on San Giorgio, located between Andrea Palladio's famous monastery and Le Stanze del Vetro museum. Visitors approach the pavilion by way of a small Japanese garden leading to a bamboo

gate that sets the atmosphere for the main pavilion. The pavilion itself consists of two main elements: an open-air landscaped courtyard with a reflecting water pool and a glass structure.

The courtyard is surrounded by an exterior fence made entirely of Japanese cedar and inspired by the Ise Grand Shrine in Ise, Japan. Along one side of the reflecting pool of deep blue glass mosaic, a black tiled path guides visitors to concrete benches from which the tea ceremony can be observed. Near the end of this path, stepping-stones set in the pool lead guests to the tea house entrance. The tea house, a clear glass cube measuring two and a half by two and a half meters, hovers above the pool, and inside it the traditional Japanese tea ceremony is performed on a tatami mat. It can accommodate two guests at a time, together with the host. This central construction—a house on stilts and rocks, surrounded by water—brings to mind the many islands that make up Venice. After the tea ceremony, visitors exit the courtyard through another Japanese garden, in which Sugimoto has placed found local architectural fragments. The whole experience is carefully orchestrated to create a sense of contemplation and aesthetic awareness.

Like Sugimoto's photographs, this work conveys a meditative, almost religious atmosphere: it is an oasis of calmness that invokes time, memory, and a heightened sense of self-awareness. Although reconceived as a performance for Glass Tea House Mondrian, the traditional Japanese tea ceremony is a highly aestheticized and ancient social custom, and Sugimoto's use of it attests to his interest in history and ritual. The pavilion combines craftsmanship with cutting-edge technology, bringing together tradition and the present. It bears witness to his obsessive striving for aesthetic and technical perfection, which is central to his artistic practice. This ambition is as apparent as it is successful, both in the harmonious combination of such varied materials as glass, metal, wood, cement, bamboo, and stone, as well as in his meticulous composition of particular vistas, to which he directs the visitor with the exacting eye of a photographer. Sugimoto oversaw the entire construction process himself, attending to even the smallest details, knowing exactly how each piece should relate to the rest, and creating a complex abstract composition from different materials, colors, and surfaces. Indeed, Glass Tea House Mondrian, although inspired by Sen no Rikyu, straddles Japanese tradition and Western modernism, suggesting that the pursuit of abstraction has been underway for centuries.

(excerpt from the introduction to the book by David Hrankovic)