

Parasol unit
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PRESS RELEASE

Siah Armajani
An Ingenious World

18 September – 15 December 2013
(Preview: 17 September 2013, 6.30 – 9 p.m.)



Images left to right: Siah Armajani: *Alfred Whitehead Reading Room*, 2013. Wood, plexiglass, brass, glass, 244 x 366 x 488 cm (96 x 144 x 192 in). Commissioned by Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art on the occasion of the exhibition Siah Armajani: *An Ingenious World*. Photograph: Larry Marcus; Siah Armajani: *Dictionary for Building: The Garden Gate*, 1982–83. Wood, paint, book, 241.5 x 82 x 188 cm (95 1/8 x 32 1/4 x 74 in). Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Purchased with the aid of funds from William D. and Stanley Gregory and Art Center Acquisition Fund, 1983; Siah Armajani: *City Center #9 Poetry Garden, Los Angeles*, 1997. Coloured pencil on mylar; 61 x 91 cm (24 x 36 in). Collection Lannan Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Photograph: Wendy McEahern.

Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art presents the first major survey in the UK of Iran-born, American artist, Siah Armajani, who is internationally renowned for his extensive public art commissions, which include bridges, reading rooms and poetry gardens. This exhibition traces the artist's oeuvre from his early works on paper, made in Iran during the late 1950s, to his mature works, including his most recent structure, the *Alfred Whitehead Reading Room*, 2013, specifically created for the outdoor space at Parasol unit, London.

Armajani's work is rooted in his own Persian cultural heritage, his knowledge of Western philosophy, literature and poetry, and his interest in American vernacular architecture, with which he acquainted himself while studying in the United States in the early 1960s. His early works are distinguished by a poetic use of Persian script, a manipulation of traditional techniques, a singular use of space, and a bold vision that employs various media to serve his artistic intent. The combination of text, idea and the peculiar use of space to be observed in these early works has continued into his mature works, in many of which poetry or a philosophical statement is an important element.

Armajani's later works are often astute architectural models, inspired by generic structures and conveying the idea of *house* or *bridge*. They have, through his creative process, developed into a unique oeuvre. In Armajani's structures the idea always has priority over function. His belief in democracy and open communication as essential requirements for a healthy society, along with his philosophical and political interests, eventually led him to create art in the public realm, for which he is renowned. Throughout

his career Armajani has made surprising and thought-provoking connections between architecture, poetry, history, democracy and communication. His works are housed in some of the world's most important museum collections.

Born 1939 in Tehran, Siah Armajani now lives and works in Minneapolis, MN, USA.

Siah Armajani: An Ingenious World is accompanied by a comprehensive book, published by Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art. A related programme of educational events and workshops, highlighting the *Alfred Whitehead Reading Room*, will include creative writing, poetry, lectures and, on 19 September 2013, an artist talk with Siah Armajani.

Curated by Ziba Ardalan, Founder/ Director, Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art.

Parasol unit is grateful for the generous support of Farah and Hassan Alaghband, Beam Contemporary Art, New York and London, Kristi Jernigan, and the Prospect Creek Foundation. Additional support has been provided by Fatima Maleki and Magic of Persia.

NOTE TO EDITORS

Artist Biography

Siah Armajani was born 1939 in Tehran, Iran. In 1960, he immigrated to the United States to attend Macalester College, Minnesota, since when he has continued to live and work in Minneapolis. Key works are installed in museum collections around the world, including: the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Walker Art Center in the USA; the British Museum, London, and Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt. His recent solo exhibitions have included MAMCO, Geneva; the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. In 2010, he was honoured with the Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government; and received the McKnight Foundation Distinguished Artist Award. In 2011, the Meulensteen Gallery, NY, exhibited a rare overview of Armajani's early works from 1957-1964.

Visitor Information

Admission to all Parasol unit exhibitions is free

Opening hours: Monday by prior arrangement. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday, 12-5 p.m.
Directions: Old Street tube or Angel tube. Buses: 43, 205 or 214 via City Road

Founded in December 2004, Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art is a registered educational charity and a non-profit institution that operates purely for the public benefit. Every year the foundation organises four challenging and thought-provoking exhibitions of works by international contemporary artists working in various media, arranges other artistic projects and gives awards that offer the possibility of an exhibition to graduating student/s from a UK art school. The foundation also engages with the public and the neighbouring community through a full programme of educational events. In its genuine mission to serve the public, the foundation does not bear the founder's name and its exhibitions do not derive from any particular private collections. Admission to all exhibitions at Parasol unit is free of charge. Thanks to this innovative model between private funding and public support one of London's most vibrant contemporary art spaces has come to exist and thrive.

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