

REPORT

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SHAPE SHIFTING

The work of an architectural genius and a cultural guardian, the Prada Transformer that sits in the front yard of Seoul's 16th century Gyeonghui Palace is a piece of multi-disciplinary art.

Miuccia Prada and Rem Koolhaas are stars at the top of their games – she in fashion, he in architecture. But neither subscribes to the notion that each discipline exists all its own. Instead, they continuously prove how fashion, art, design, cinema and architecture can sit harmoniously one next to the other through their numerous collaborations.

Their union first started with the Prada Epicenter flagship store in Soho, New York, which opened shortly after September 11 in 2001. With that, Prada became the first luxury brand to integrate fashion and contemporary art into an art exhibition space. It did not end there. Plans are afoot to build a permanent compound for the 16-year-old Fondazione Prada, a non-profit art organisation meets cultural institution set up by Prada and her husband, Patrizio Bertelli.

Last decade, when designers found their interests outside of fashion limited to the scope of Hollywood, Prada chose to champion a boisterous mix of talented young multimedia artists, such as Tom Sachs, Mariko Mori, Carsten Holler, Nathalie Djurberg and Francesco Vezzoli in the name of Fondazione Prada.

The latest joint project is the most ambitious to date. Prada and Koolhaas unleashed the Prada Transformer in Seoul, South Korea, in the front yard of the 16th century Gyeonghui Palace in late April. The historical space will be juxtaposed with a 21st century steel-frame tetrahedron skinned in an amorphous membrane that is used to wrap abandoned airplanes in the desert as a form of preservation.

Designed by Rem Koolhaas/OMA and realised with the support of LG Electronics, Hyundai Motor Company and Red Resources Inc., four entirely different structures are housed inside the same tetrahedron shape. Each configuration, which can simply be switched by rotation with the help of four construction cranes, is designed to accommodate an array of cultural programmes and events including art, architecture, film and fashion.

“The starting point was the idea of movement, something like mobile architecture,” says Prada. “I don't want to say contemporary, because contemporary is such a trendy word... I would say a series of activities in different places. We wanted to have a flexible space, something that could exist

anywhere we think could be right for it.” There’ll be four different bases, one for each of the four different activities. For contemporary art, the base is cross-shaped; for the fashion show, it is round; for the exhibition, hexagonal; and the last one, for cinema, is rectangular.

“The interesting thing about this building is the acknowledgement of the Transformer as a dynamic organism, as opposed to simply a static object, which arbitrarily fits the programme,” says Koolhaas. “Prada Transformer helps add an extra dimension regarding the treatment of this typology by allowing it to be moulded in real time, depending on the specific programmes it intends to facilitate inside.”

The Prada Transformer will open to the public from April 25, in conjunction with the exhibition, *Waist Down – Skirts by Miuccia Prada*, an ongoing project by Prada in collaboration with AMO (Koolhaas’s think tank division). It showcases a collection of skirts “in motion” ranging from the first-ever Prada show to the present day. The exhibition includes skirts and mannequins designed by fashion students of the best local universities and design schools. The aim is to show the interaction between two fashion worlds and to amplify the meaning of fashion from different cultural perspectives.

Following that, the exhibition space will be transformed into a cinema showing a line-up of films selected by Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, the director of Oscar-multinominated *Babel*, from June 26 to July 5. *Flesh, Mind and Soul* is the concept for the unique programme, co-curated by film critic Elvis Mitchell – spanning multiple genres, countries and decades of filmmaking, including a rich and substantial amount of physical, intellectual and spiritual films that will create a whole cinematic experience.

Thereafter, Swedish artist Nathalie Djurberg’s *Turn Into Me* art installation that is curated by Germano Celant will take over from July 30 to August 20. And because of Seoul’s strong fashion directions, Prada will present its Autumn/Winter 2009 show as a grand finale for the Transformer before the whole structure gets packed up and resettled somewhere on the planet that the Foundation sees fit.

In the meantime, art enthusiast, book that flight to Korea.