

# SEANKELLY

Phillips, Sarah. "Candida Hofer's best photograph – an 18<sup>th</sup>-century theatre in Mantua," *The Guardian*, February 6, 2013.

**theguardian**  
Winner of the Pulitzer prize

## Candida Höfer's best photograph - an 18th-century theatre in Mantua



Teatro Scientifico Bibiena Mantova (2010, detail), by Candida Höfer. Photograph: courtesy Ben Brown Fine Arts courtesy Ben Brown Fine Arts/PR

I wanted to capture how people behave in public buildings, so I started taking photographs of theatres, palaces, opera houses, libraries and the like. After some time, it became apparent to me that what people do in these spaces – and what these spaces do to them – is clearer when no one is present, just as an absent guest is often the subject of a conversation. So I decided to photograph each space without people.

This was taken during a tour of northern Italy in 2010. As I travelled around, I found amazing buildings in the most inconspicuous of places. Locals live their day-to-day lives amid marvels like this theatre, the Bibiena in Mantua. Built in the late 1760s during the Enlightenment, it was intended to host scientific events, although that was not its sole purpose: several weeks after it opened, a 13-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart played there.

I visited in midwinter and it was bitterly cold. My assistant and I shivered throughout. By then, I knew how to find the correct angle to photograph a space quickly, but it still took a whole day to set up. I never use my own artificial lights – I prefer to use what I find on a shoot, such as the lights in this auditorium. I took

three shots on a large format camera and knew I'd done all I could. Because I use film, printing is the decisive point in my work.

I like this shot because it has an intriguing ambiguity of scale: the theatre appears large yet somehow small; and it is perfectly formed of grand individual structures. This is not a shot about emotion. It's about colour, lines, light distribution – and inner balance.

**CV**

**Born:** Eberswalde, Germany, 1944.

**Studied:** Düsseldorf Art Academy.

**Influences:** Conversations with my friends.

**High point:** Any exhibition that meets my expectations, such as my *Affinities* at the Artipelag Konsthall in Stockholm last year.

**Low point:** Whenever I have to work before or after opening hours in public spaces – with politely curious security guards standing behind me.

**Top tip:** You need patience when shooting, and endurance to get your projects done.

Interview by Sarah Phillips

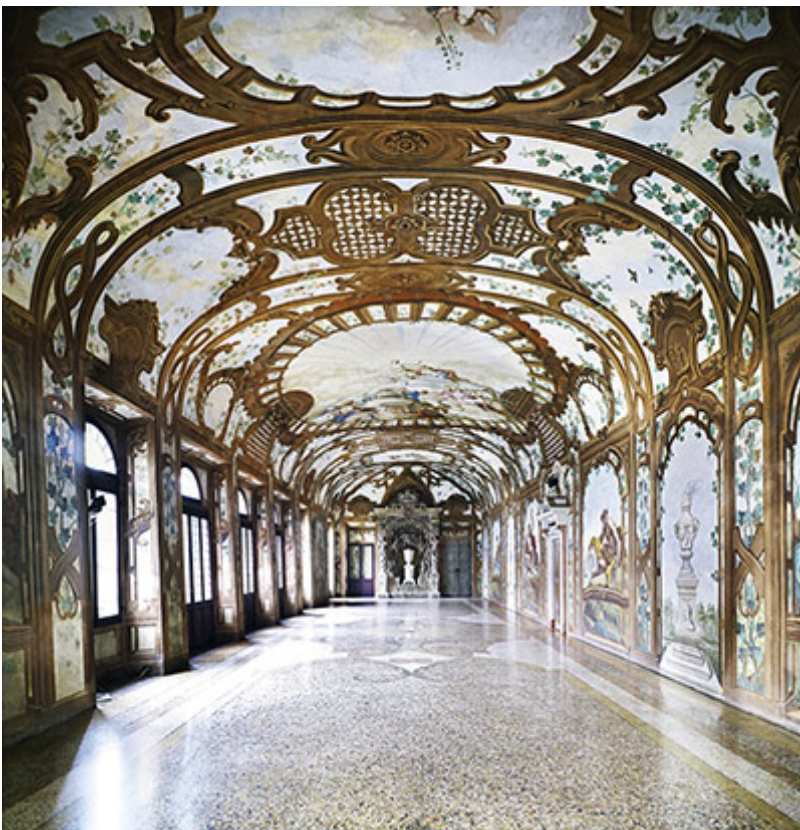


Teatro Comunale di Carpi I, 2011

2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Galleria Degli Antichi Sabbioneta I, 2010  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Palazzo Ducale Mantova III, 2011  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Teatro Olimpico Vicenza II, 2010  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Teatro La Fenice Di Venezia III, 2011  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Teatro Olimpico Vicenza III, 2010  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Palazzo Ducale Mantova I, 2011  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Biblioteca Teresiana Mantova I, 2010  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Palazzo Ducale Mantova IV, 2011  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Teatro La Fenice Di Venezia V, 2011  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Art



Teatro Scientifico Bibiena Mantova I, 2010  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts



Palazzo Ducale Mantova V, 2011  
2013 Candida Hofer, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts