



*Fondazione Giorgio Cini onlus*

**Matthias Schaller**

## ***Purple Desk***

**Venice, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore**

**4 June – 24 July 2009**

In the exhibition entitled ***Purple Desk*** Matthias Schaller continues his strategy of “indirect portraits”. What Schaller (indirectly) portrays is not faces or people, but feelings, anthropological conditions or institutional situations. The institution explored in *Purple Desk* is the **central government of the Catholic Church**.

Inspired by a prototype from the collective visual memory – *St Jerome in his Study* by Antonello da Messina – **Schaller offers a portrait of the Vatican Curia by showing the offices of the cardinals responsible for the various departments**. The artist slightly manipulates these spaces and the artefacts ordering them. The offices are photographed frontally, highlighting the logic underlying the organisation of their space and the system of signs expressing their institutional character and revealing their identity. In these portraits without sitters, or these still lifes of objects and atmospheres, the subject of the photograph is expressed as a milieu representing a sphere of life. Although absent, the cardinals are evoked by the stage of their daily actions, on which each presence (and each absence, not only the physical absence of the “body” occupying the office, but also the absence of any personal objects or references) eloquently testifies to a way of conceiving the exercise of power, the nature of the power exercised, and the dignity of high office.

The “purple desks” are ironically contrasted by another series of photographs, again offering an indirect portrait of the anthropological condition of modern man. But in this second series technology enables man to abandon his natural space. The shells of the cardinals’ offices are counterpointed by much tighter “casings” – spacesuits imprisoning, but offering the possibility of “going beyond”. The long series of Curia offices, like the **short sequence of astronauts**, confirms Max Weber’s claim that “human beings are hostages to webs of meaning that they themselves have woven”. And these webs are bodied forth – become visible and intelligible – in casings, both restraining and protecting their occupants.

*Purple Desk* will be held in the striking space of the **former swimming pool on the Island of San Giorgio** – a new, original venue enhancing the Cini Foundation exhibition facilities.

To mark the exhibition, the **publishers Steidl** will launch the book entitled *Purple Desk*.

**Matthias Schaller**, was born in Germany in 1965, and lives in Venice and New York. His works have been shown in Europe and the United States. In summer 2009 he will exhibit his *Fratelli d’Italia* series (first shown at the Giorgio Cini Foundation during the Venice Architecture Biennale 2008) at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, while in 2010, his *Vorbild* series will be shown at the Picasso Museum, Münster.

**Books** by and on Matthias Schaller: *The Mill* (2007), *Controfacciata* (2008), *Purple Desk* (2009) and *Disportraits* (a retrospective publication with an introduction by Germano Celant, and an interview with Matthias Schaller by Germano Celant, 2009). All the books are published by **Steidl**.

**Press information:**

Elena Casadoro, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, [stampa@cini.it](mailto:stampa@cini.it), [www.cini.it](http://www.cini.it)  
Claudia Glenewinkel, Steidl, [cglenewinkel@steidl.de](mailto:cglenewinkel@steidl.de), [www.steidlville.com](http://www.steidlville.com)  
[www.matthiasschaller.com](http://www.matthiasschaller.com)