

# The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts

## Water - Introduction

Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, has sometimes been credited with the invention of painting. “What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?” asked Leon Battista Alberti, artist and theorist of the Italian Renaissance. When we remember that Narcissus’ longing to embrace his own image paralyzed him until death, Alberti’s question points to a remarkable definition of painting as both seductive and sinister, as an alignment of art and nature that is, in a way, water’s own reflection.

Tadao Ando, the architect of the Pulitzer building, created a situation where we may embrace watery deception for ourselves. The pool in the center of the building can appear to be deep and the far end to coincide with the horizon line. Although the viewers might soon determine the contrary, the spell remains as long as there is a desire to accept the illusion.

The magic of Ando’s water also operates via architecturally framed views, which makes it appear as a projection screen for “ornaments”: on calm and sunny days the rectangular pool mirrors the environment; on rainy days it is decorated with dots and circles; on windy days a pattern of waves forms; and in the cold season swirls of steam rise from a dark background. The experience of water then goes beyond the direct perception: according to the position of the sun, the surface reflects light into the galleries and corridors of the building, and bands of light – sometimes echoing the movement on the water surface – wander along the walls. The stage for an exhibition on the poetics and deception of water is set.

The choice of artworks might seem arbitrary by traditional standards. As the Pulitzer is not a typical collecting institution, works were selected according to their possible interaction with Ando’s architecture. Our aspiration is that the space appears as though specifically conceived for the works and vice-versa. The curatorial approach is restricted to the choice and placement of works in the galleries as well as the introduction to this publication. Instead of institutional prose the remaining text is constituted by the artists themselves. In numerous cases, statements were collected directly from the artists via a questionnaire. In other cases, existing texts were excerpted or arranged.

We would like to invite you to experience the work and invent your own narrations, aesthetic or anecdotal, based on the juxtapositions you discover. We would consider our initiative a success if some of the relationships remained in the memories of visitors long beyond the duration of the exhibition.

Matthias Waschek  
Director