Douglas Gordon
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art
Melbourne
31 May – 3 August 2014
Education Resource

"Art should be an excuse for a good conversation."
– Douglas Gordon

Artist Biography

Douglas Gordon was born in Glasgow in 1966 and is one of the most influential contemporary video artists. He completed a Bachelor of Arts at the Glasgow School of Art in 1988 and postgraduate study at the Slade School of Fine Art in London in 1988 – 90.

Gordon works mainly with photography, film (both his own and appropriated material) and text to create his artworks and installations. He appropriates images from popular culture and other sources to create his signature videos and photographic installations, coming to prominence in 1993 with the work *24 Hour Psycho*, a slowed down version of Alfred Hitchcock's iconic film.

Gordon has held significant solo exhibitions, including most recently at: Gagosian Gallery, London (2011), Yvon Lambert, Paris (2011), Museum fur Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2011) and Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2013).

Gordon has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, including the *Biennale of Sydney: You Imagine What You Desire*, Museum of Contemporary Art (2014) and represented Scotland in the **Venice Biennale** in 1997. Gordon has been the recipient of a number of prestigious awards, including the **Turner Prize** (1996) and **Hugo Boss Prize** awarded by the Guggenheim Museum in 1998.

Douglas Gordon lives and works in Berlin and Glasgow.

Photo by Jennifer Osborne

Photo by Robin Friend

Artist Practice

"He looks at how things can be shifted, slowed down, repeated, mirrored, to illustrate the construct of those things and make us conscious of how they're built."[1]
- ACCA Associate Curator, Hannah Mathews

Douglas Gordon is known for working with photography and its moving image derivatives, video and film, to explore their materiality, codings and mechanisms. He has diverted, manipulated, amplified, and interrogated films and iconic images by excerpting, juxtaposing, and superimposing them, by printing them in negative, and by slowing them down.

Gordon often works with common or popular culture imagery, icons and ideas, rather than those with 'an academic status'. This means he starts with the familiar, well known and generic, manipulating and resituating them to reveal them afresh and exposing aspects that had formerly been overlooked, unnoticed or disregarded.

Gordon was brought up in a heavily religious environment, as he describes, a "loving, brutal and physically testing home."[2] His experiences growing up have played a major influence on his art practice.

His works tend to be structured around dualities and dichotomies, exploring dark themes and existential dilemmas: life and death, good and evil, guilt and innocence, light and dark.

Although Gordon admittedly hated his video art classes at Art School, he was fascinated by film and its aesthetic qualities (the way light passes through **celluloid film**) and this inspired him to utilise the medium as a form of readymade in his works.

Much of Gordon's early work incorporates sections of films that were formative to his own sense of identity, such as *Psycho* and *Taxi Driver*. His strict upbringing meant Gordon wasn't allowed to watch these films as a young boy, and found them highly influential upon viewing them at an older age during his Art School studies. These two films informed the works *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) and *Through a Looking Glass* (1999), where he subtly appropriated and manipulated the existing film footage to create a new work. These two works are presented in the ACCA exhibition.

Douglas Gordon, *Self-Portrait of You + Me (Elvis)*, 2007
Smoke and Mirror, 139.1 x 99.1 x 7.6cm

[1] ACCA Associate Curator, Hannah Mathews in "the only way out is the only way in: Douglas Gordon", *Timeout*, 19 May 2014: http://www.au.timeout.com/melbourne/art/events/11216/douglas-gordon-the-only-way-out-is-the-only-way-in
[2] Douglas Gordon in *Victorian College of Arts Douglas Gordon Public Lecture*, Wednesday 28 May, 2014.

Curatorial Rationale

The only way out is the only way in: Douglas Gordon presents six of the artist's works from 1992 to 2013, encompassing two-channel projections, a salon-style hang of framed photographs and mirrors, a text-based room installation and a survey of all his video works created since 1992 on a collection of 101 television monitors.

The exhibition is designed in such a way that you must exit the way you enter – as the title informs us: *The only way out is the only way in.* The curatorial team and Gordon worked closely to design the gallery spaces, to create a purpose-built design where the viewer is led by Gordon and his works, to navigate and explore the exhibition. The placement of the artworks creates a deliberate rhythm: moving between loud, intense moving imagery to quieter (yet still dark) and still photographic architectural interventions. The last work you encounter is *30 seconds text* and it prompts us to think about our own existence. The only way out is to turn around and return through the spaces, encountering the artworks again.

As ACCA Artistic Director, Juliana Engberg describes, *"it requires you to return on yourself, and retreat through this hall of mirages; perhaps to see differently, or again, this accumulation of self and others that Douglas Gordon has made. Life and death have been constant preoccupations; goodness and evil perpetual provocations; Heaven and Hell continual, possible, probable co-existences. The light at the end is found at the beginning, and in the beginning was the light. Douglas has been telling you stories. And, so now, here we re-enter the real world.* [3]

[3] Juliana Engberg, "Introduction. Sinner Man…" in Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, *The only way out is the only way in: Douglas Gordon*, Adams Print: Melbourne, 2014. Page 5.

Exhibtion Layout / Floorplan
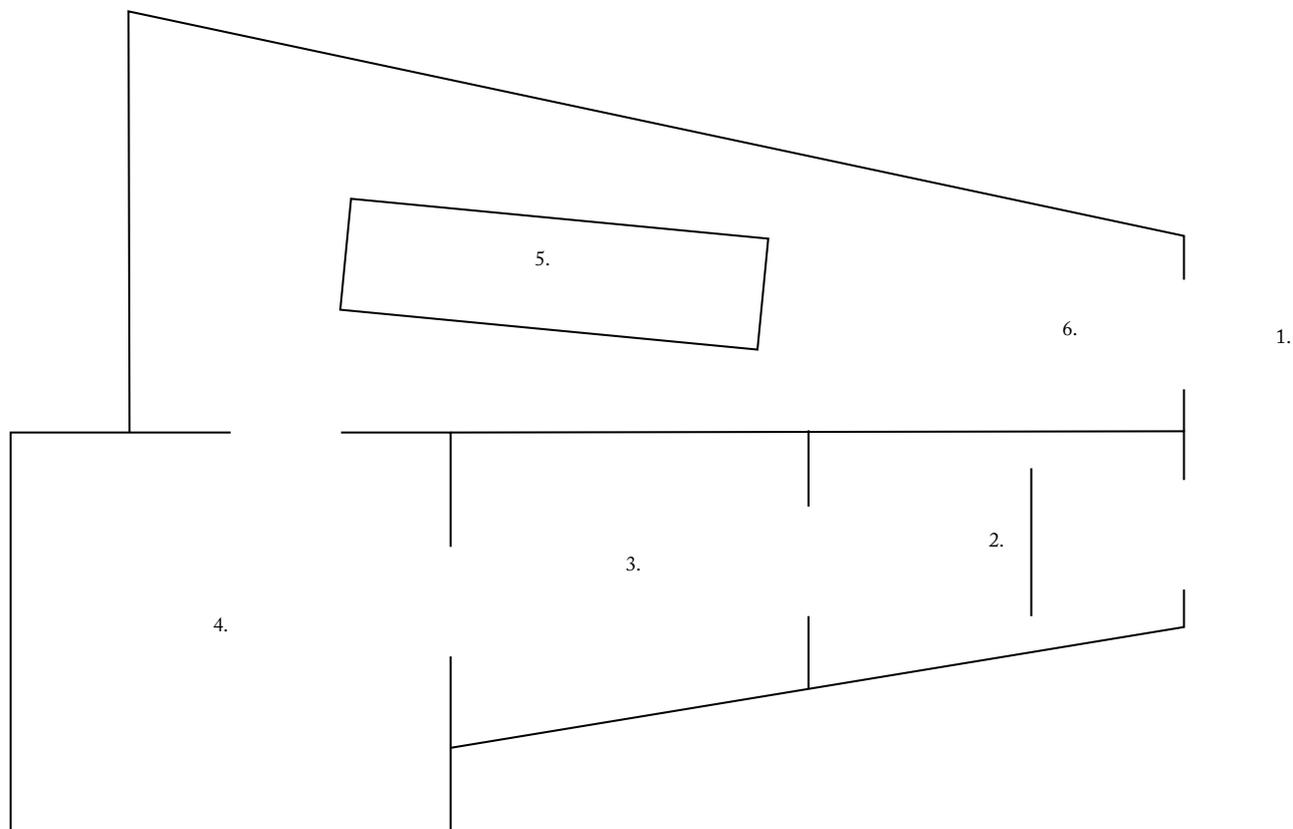
1.
Private Passions, 2011
Digital C-print
187.4 x 134.7 x 7 cm
edition of 7 + 3 AP
© Studio lost but found / VG
Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2014

2.
*Between Darkness and Light
(After William Blake)*, 1997
video installation with sound
installation dimensions
variable
© Studio lost but found / VG
Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2014

3.
*Everything is nothing without
its reflection: a photographic
pantomime*, 2013
180 framed photographs, 180
framed mirrors
various dimensions
© Studio lost but found / VG
Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2014

4.
Through a Looking Glass, 1999
video installation with sound
installation dimensions
variable
© Studio lost but found / VG
Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2014
Taxi Driver copyright 1976
Columbia Pictures Industries,
Inc. All rights reserved
Courtesy Columbia Pictures

5.
*Pretty much every film and
video work from about 1992
until now*, 1999 -
multi-channel video
installation with sound
installation dimensions
variable
© Studio lost but found / VG
Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2014

6.
30 seconds text, 1996
text on black wall, light bulb,
timing device
installation dimensions
variable
© Studio lost but found / VG
Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2014

Video Art – A Short History

Video art is a term used to describe art that uses both the apparatus and processes of television and video. It can take many forms: recordings that are broadcast, viewed in galleries or other venues, or distributed as tapes or discs; sculptural installations, which may incorporate one or more television receivers or monitors, displaying 'live' or recorded images and sound; and performances in which video representations are included. [4]

Video technology was first launched in the United States in 1956 and was initially used in commercial technical production (1956 was also the year that television was introduced into Australia). A decade later, in 1965, portable video technology (the Sony Portapak) became available for people outside the professional industry, and enabled artists and activists to start producing their own video works. This invention marked a "revolution in image making". As Michael Rush explains, *"No longer bound by the constrictions of Hollywood power brokers and mainstream television producers, those with a vision were able to participate in the visual communication revolution that was rapidly changing social and cultural life throughout the world."* [5]

The history of video art can be traced back to German artist Wolf Vostell, who in 1959 began creating three-dimensional collage works using television sets. However, it is artist Nam June Paik, who is most widely regarded as the 'father' of video art, with his experiments using magnets on a live TV screen to distort its kinetic image.

Andy Warhol also played a significant role in the development of video as an artform. He was amongst the first to use portable video cameras to create artworks, including his first double-projection film *Outer Inner Space* (1965). This also, as Rush claims, represents one of the first examples of presentation that has developed into the now ubiquitous form of video installation – forms evident in Douglas Gordon's work.

Since it's conception, video art has continued to evolve and expand in response to the changes and advances in technology, particularly the introduction of digital video in the late 1990s. Furthermore, with the development of new formats and technologies artists are exploring new ways of combining, reformatting or appropriating a vast array of moving image based materials including digital film, video, computer art, graphics and animations. Artists are also accessing and using more online platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo to present, source or make works.

Andy Warhol, *Outer and Inner Space, 1965*
Outher and Inner Space | © Andy Warhol

Douglas Gordon, *Through a Looking Glass,* 1999 from *Pretty much every film and video work from about 1992 until now,* 1999 multi channel video installation with sound dimensions variable

[4] Mick Hartney, Oxford University Press, 2009, in MOMA "Video Art": https://www.moma.org/collection/details.php?theme_id=10215
[5] Michael Rush, *Video Art,* Thames & Hudson: London, 2007, Page 7.

Appropriation

Appropriation occurs when an artist recycles, borrows, references or quotes an existing artwork or image. There is a long history of appropriation in art, including artists borrowing from the work of others, from Marcel Duchamp's famous mustached *Mona Lisa* in *LHOOQ* (1919) and Andy Warhol's use of Campbell's soup can imagery, to Douglas Gordon's appropriation of existing film.

Although appropriation can be used as a postmodernist art technique to attack traditions, originality or uniqueness of an artwork, it can also be used to pay respect or act as homage to other artwork, imagery, forms or styles.

The act of appropriation recontextualises the original imagery; new, altered or varied meaning is created in the new context because of how the original imagery have been used and how other artistic aspects such as signs, symbols, formal elements, materials and techniques have been applied to create the artwork.

Douglas Gordon, *24 Hour Psycho,* 1993 from *Pretty much every film and video work from about 1992 until now,* 1999
multi channel video installation with sound dimensions variable

Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919
Rectified readymade: pencil on reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, (19.7 x 12.4 cm)
Private collection. © 2006 Marcel Duchamp / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Succession Marcel Duchamp

Copyright

Douglas Gordon's use of appropriation can stimulate discussion in the classroom around copyright and originality, particularly his use of cinema as 'readymade', such as Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*.

Copyright is the legal right of an artist, which protects their work from being copied or plagiarised without consent. The Copyright Act 1968 prohibits anyone from copying or recreating the work o another artist without permission or consent to do so. Copyright automatically exists when a work is created and extends for the life of an artist, and an additional 70 years after their death. What does this then mean for artists who appropriate the work or imagery of others?

The idea that artists, like Gordon, use and manipulate pre-existing imagery is in conflict with the basic reading of copyright aw – which is based on the belief that artists are creators of original images that they have a right to own.

However, appropriation is a widespread artistic practice and has a long history. Indeed, it would be difficult to find an artist who does not freely admit to taking inspiration or referencing the work of past or contemporary artists in creating new artworks.

When discussing appropriation in reference to copyright law it is important to consider the following:

• In Australia infringement of copyright will most often occur when the whole or substantial part of someone else's work is reproduced in material form without permission.
• There are, however, defenses (fair dealing or fair use) to copyright infringement and these include, for the purposes of:
• The purpose and character of the use, including it's commercial nature;
• whether the act of appropriation is 'transformative' creating something that serves a different purpose or expresses a counterpoint to the original;
• the proportion of work that was reproduced – whether it is a whole, substantial or minor part; and
• the economic impact of the act of appropriation (the taking).

An interesting discussion about copyright and contemporary appropriation can be found in: Lawrence Lessig, "The Failure of Fair Use and the Future of Free Culture", in Stefano Basilico (curator), *CUT: film as found object in contemporary video*, Milwakee Art Museum: Milwaukee, WI, 2004, pages 47 – 53.

For more detailed information in regards to Australian Copyright Law read: Dan Posker & Cameron Patience, Arts Law Centre of Australia, *Appropriation Art: an overview of copyright and consumer protection for artists*, 30 June 2010:
http://www.artslaw.com.au/articles/entry/appropriation-art-an-overview-of-copyright-and-consumer-protection-for-arti/

CLASS DEBATE
After exploring Douglas Gordon's exhibition, investigate the legal obligations involved in the act of appropriating.

Debate as a class the ethical and legal issues involved in Douglas Gordon's appropriative works. Do you think that these appropriations fall within "fair use"? Why?

the only way out is the only way in: Douglas Gordon

Exhibition Analysis Questions

ANALYSIS QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Visit the exhibition: The only way out is the only way in: Douglas Gordon and reflect on your experience with the following questions and learning activities.

VCE Studio Arts:
• The exhibition has been specifically curated and designed to support Gordon's artworks and create an experience for the viewer. After your exhibition viewing, discuss:

• How has the curation and exhibition design impacted on your viewing of the artworks?

• How is the experience of viewing the exhibition and its curation related to the key themes or ideas being communicated in Gordon's artworks?

VCE Art:
• The majority of Gordon's work incorporates film (both found and made footage). Discuss how he used and manipulated cinematic processes to create his own style.

• *The only way out is the only way in*. How does the physical placement of the artworks and the overall exhibition design affect their interpretation and viewing experience?

• Douglas Gordon was brought up in a devoutly religious home and more broadly his work is a personal investigation of guilt and redemption. Considering Gordon's background and artistic practice, how would you describe the relationship between the artist's life and experiences? What visual evidence supports this reading?

• Examine Gordon's use of existing film footage and presentation of his work. How does this challenge or reflect artistic or social traditions?

VCE Media:
 • Describe Douglas Gordon's manipulation of traditional narrative structure with reference to two artworks within the exhibition.

 • Identify and discuss how Gordon has used two production elements in his artworks to communicate ideas.

Between Darkness and Light (After William Blake), 1997

**video installation with sound,
installation dimensions variable**

DESCRIPTION

The first work the audience encounters is the moving image work *Between Darkness and Light (After William Blake)*. It sets the intensity and theme for the exhibition, presenting many of the strategies that Gordon uses in his art practice.

The work is an installation involving two projections that project from opposite sides onto a single, translucent screen. On one side seamy colour footage from William Friedkin's 1973 cult *The Exorcist* is projected. The opposite side screens black and white footage from Henry King's 1943 historical biopic *Song of Bernadette*. Both films are about children driven by external forces. In *The Exorcist* Regan McNeil is possessed by the devil, whilst in the latter Bernadette Soubirous is blessed by visions of the Virgin Mary that steer her life toward God.

By projecting the footage from opposite sides they overlap, meld and glide apart on a single screen, creating a third image. Due to the different lengths of the original work, and given that they play on a loop, the third image that appears is always different and is reminiscent of the mysterious, mythological and biblical images of the 17th Century English writer and artist William Blake.

INSPIRATION
• Henry King's 1943 historical biopic *Song of Bernadette*
• William Friedkin's 1973 cult *The Exorcist*
• Film mediums and aesthetics
• Dichotomies: Heaven and Hell / Good and Evil
• 17th Century English writer and artist, William Blake

AESTHETIC & STYLISTIC QUALITIES

"I was trying to get to the point where you can make sense of even the most chaotic images or pictures which formally and aesthetically are battling with each other. While one film is representing good, and one represents evil, the fact is that they can coexist quite easily – on a physical and conceptual level. I simply played the two films at the same time, together and on the same picture plane. They were not manipulated in any sense – there was no alteration to the speed, or the sound, or the form." [6]

• Seamy colour vs black and white merging, colliding and creating a new, unique and mysterious image
• Sound – intense clashing of sounds from the soundtracks of the two films

• Space – as the audience moves past the images and their shadows appear on the screen, creating a silhouette and therefore changing the image

"In Douglas' filmic collision, saintliness and the satanic meld and mesh to produce an endless supernatural turmoil." [7]

MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES
• Using film as a readymade: use of existing film footage, transferred to DVD and set on a loop
• Translucent screen
• Digital data projectors
• Audio speakers
• Dark gallery room

[6] Douglas Gordon in "Douglas Gordon: What I have done", *The Guardian*, 2011: http://www.theguardian.com/arts/pictures/image/0,8543,-10104531576,00.html
[7] Juliana Engberg, "Introduction. Sinner Man…" in Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, *The only way out is the only way in: Douglas Gordon*, Adams Print: Melbourne, 2014.

ANALYSIS QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

• Using Photoshop and found or taken images, explore your own dichotomies and create your own 'third images' by layering imagery and adjusting the transparency.

VCE Studio Art:
• Identify and describe Gordon's use of elements and principles to create aesthetic qualities in this artwork.

• Identify and describe some of the signs and symbols in the work.

• Why do you think Gordon titled the work Between Darkness and Light (After William Blake)? Discuss the connection of the title to the artwork and Gordon's intentions (meaning and message).

• Visit the National Gallery of Victoria *William Blake* exhibition. Compare and contrast Douglas' work to William Blake's artwork.

VCE Art
• Visit the National Gallery of Victoria *William Blake* exhibition. Referencing the frameworks, compare and contrast Douglas' work to William Blake's artwork.

Formal Framework:
• Analyse how Gordon has applied specific formal elements to create the work and how these qualities contribute to the meaning and message within the artwork.

Cultural framework
• Describe how the physical placement and installation of the artwork affects interpretation and contributes to its meaning.

• Identify specific social, cultural or religious contexts within the artwork. How do these contribute to its meaning?

Contemporary Framework:
• What impact does the presentation of the work and materials used have on you as the viewer? How does this work differ from traditional ideas of viewing and experiencing object-based art in galleries and museums?
    • Note: this is particularly relevant when comparing and contrasting to the work of William Blake at the National Gallery of Victoria. Consider how the third image created in Gordon's work creates new or different meanings in the contemporary context.

William Blake
Lucifer
illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri (Inferno XXXIV, 10-81)

Everything is nothing without its reflection: a photographic pantomime,
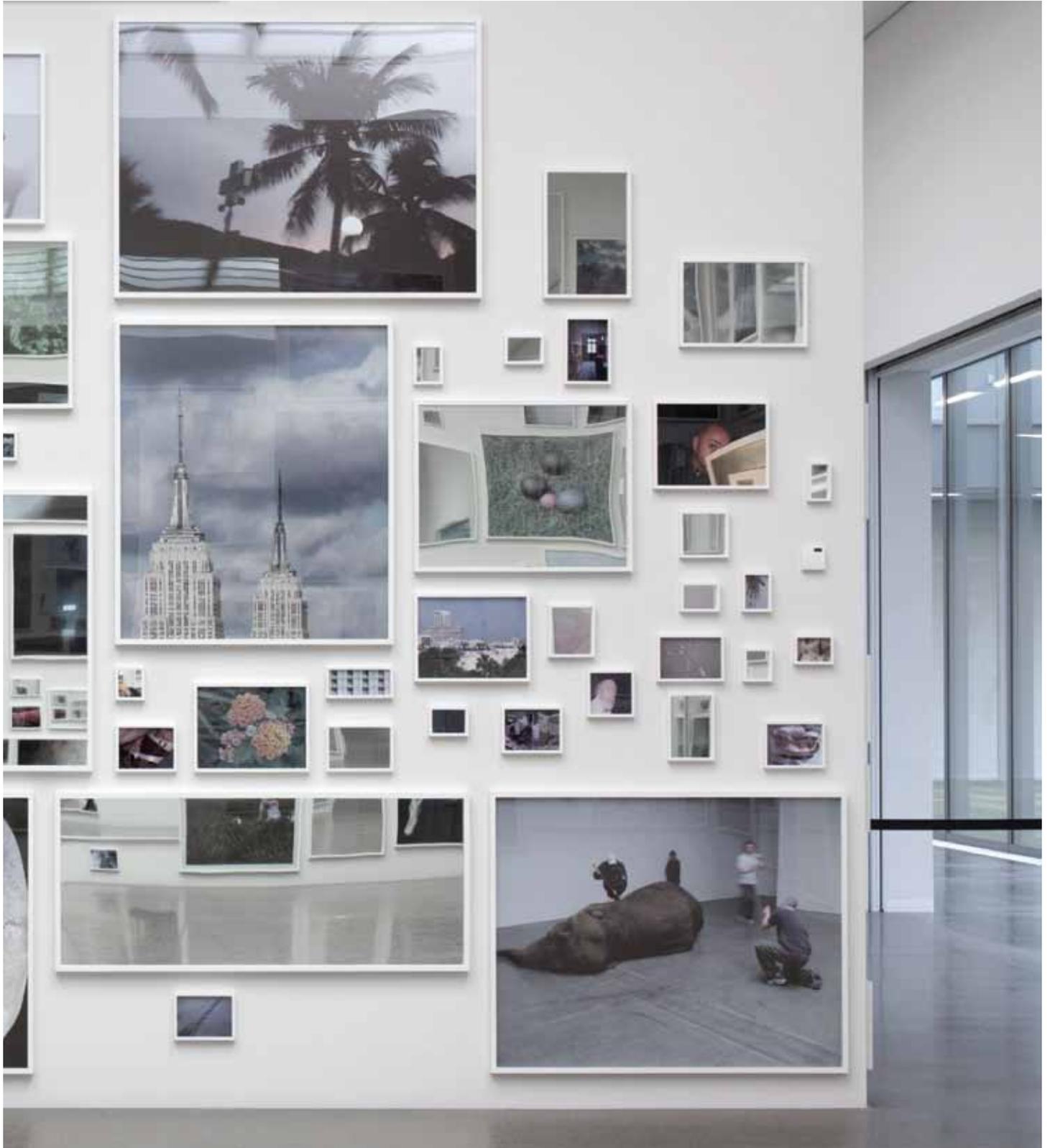
**180 framed photographs, 180 framed mirrors
various dimensions**

DESCRIPTION

Everything is nothing without its reflection: A photographic panto-mime is a photographic installation that comprises of 180 framed images – some found, others taken by Gordon – each image with it's own matching mirror equivalent. The mirrors and images are installed in a salon-style hang, filling the walls and the space with images and reflections.

The work offers us an intimate view of Gordon's existence with photographs capturing his life (travel, family, friends, food) and is therefore an autobiographical portrait. Although it is a very personal and overwhelming encounter for the audience, the installation invites the audience in, to intimately participate and become part of the work, to enter this Pantomime. And in the process of moving and looking, the viewer is caught in the reflections, brought into the works and theatrics of the space.

INSPIRATION

For more detailed information is available in an interview with Douglas Gordon, "Doctor Douglas and Mister Gordon": http://vimeo.com/23402748

• Gordon's everyday life, present and past: "Diary of my life".
• In the process of moving to a larger studio in Berlin, he was able to bring all his past works that were previously held in storage in New York and Glasgow together, into one studio space. It was during this time that the artwork idea formed.
• Although there are various categories: food, flowers, travel, animals, family, friends, Gordon considers them all "sustenance" – what he relies on for his life.

AESTHETIC & STYLISTIC QUALITIES

• Salon-hang style creates an "excessive, scintillating, hyper reflective palace for the contemplation of a life lived in a kind of exuberance". [8]
• The images and mirrors rely on each other and the images need to be seen together as a collective: "All is accumulated and everything is illuminated by its mirrored equivalent."
• "A diary of my life" – Douglas Gordon: presented in an autobiographical, scrapbook manner. The vast range of camera angles, shots, styles of photographs, photographic formats, some found, others taken by Gordon: like a snapshot of existence, the old and new all brought together.

MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES

• Vast variety of analogue and digital photographs either found or taken by the artist, including travel photos, shots of landscapes, family photographs, nature shots, food shots and private photographs.
• Variety of camera angles and shots and compositional considerations in the photographs.
• Variety of print sizes and frames.
• The work is designed to be experienced as a collective: the mirrors come in a variety of sizes to match their corresponding image size and form.
• The salon-hang fills the wall and room, overwhelming the audience and creating a space where the audience 'enters' the work.

[8] Juliana Engberg, "Introduction. Sinner Man…" in Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, *The only way out is the only way in: Douglas Gordon*, Adams Print: Melbourne, 2014.

ANALYSIS QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES
• After viewing the artwork, discuss the relevance or symbolism of the artwork title with reference to the following questions:

• Why do you think the artist has called the work "Everything is nothing without its reflection: a photographic pantomime"?
　• Describe your viewing experience and what the title means to you.
　• What connection does the title have to the artwork and ideas being communicated by Gordon?

• Gordon often doubles or mirrors images using two corresponding projections of screens. Explain how Gordon has used materials and techniques to mirror or double images in this installation.

• This work is a diary of Gordon's life. Create your own autobiographical artwork using images from your everyday life, past and present. Record and annotate the process of sourcing, collating and presenting the work detailing the symbolism of certain images and describing how they relate to one another.

Through a Looking Glass, 1999

video installation with sound
installation dimensions variable

DESCRIPTION

This work is a two channel installation that takes the iconic scene from Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976) where Robert de Niro (as Travis Bickle) asks: 'Are you talkin' to me?' while gazing into a mirror. Gordon has presented the original footage onto four, paired screens, in facing corners of the gallery. In one corner the original episode from the movie, filmed as a reflection in the mirror is shown and the second screen (its pair) displays the same episode with the image reversed, so it appears that the image is reflected and doubled. The same configuration occurs in the opposite corner of the room, with the protagonist's question aimed directly at the audience placed in the middle of the scene, thereby trapping the audience within the crossfire. The images, which begin in sync, progressively fall out of step, resembling Bickle's loss of control and mental breakdown seen in the film.

INSPIRATION

• American popular culture, imagery and film
• Martin Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* (1976)
• The guilt and inner redemption and turmoil of man
• The self and other
• Mental and physical breakdown of man

AESTHETIC & STYLISTIC QUALITIES

• The doubling, refection, inversions and repetitions along with the dark, psychological, investigation of the inner turmoil of man is a common concern of Gordon's work and is clearly displayed in the other works within this exhibition.

• Gordon approaches film as a readymade or found object. Gordon has taken pre-existing footage and a memorable cinematic scene, but presents it in looping, repeated, mirrored fragments, thereby disclosing previously unseen details and associations.

• The barren apartment seen in Gordon's work is also an important part of the work, contributing to the portrait of the character Travis Bickle. The apartment is run down, bare and basic. In the background behind Travis' head we can see pill bottles, cereal boxes and 'Wonder White' bread. Bickle stands an imposing American masculine character wearing a heavy green army jacket.

• American Art Critic Jerry Saltz interprets this work with a compelling reference to Andy Warhol and American popular culture, describing Travis Bickle as a symbol of American Masculinity, like a "moving Andy Warhol Painting."

"Bickle is Elvis with a gun, doubled, and multiplied. He is the cowboy John Wayne, the martyr James Dean, the rebel Brando. He is every American hero run amok, and the most ironic image of America since Jasper Johns painted the American flag, symbol of inclusiveness. This Vietnam vet, put on film in that bicentennial year, is the blown-out image of Johns' 1954 painting."[9]

[9] Jerry Saltz, "Scotch Tape", Artnet, http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/saltz/saltz3-26-99.asp
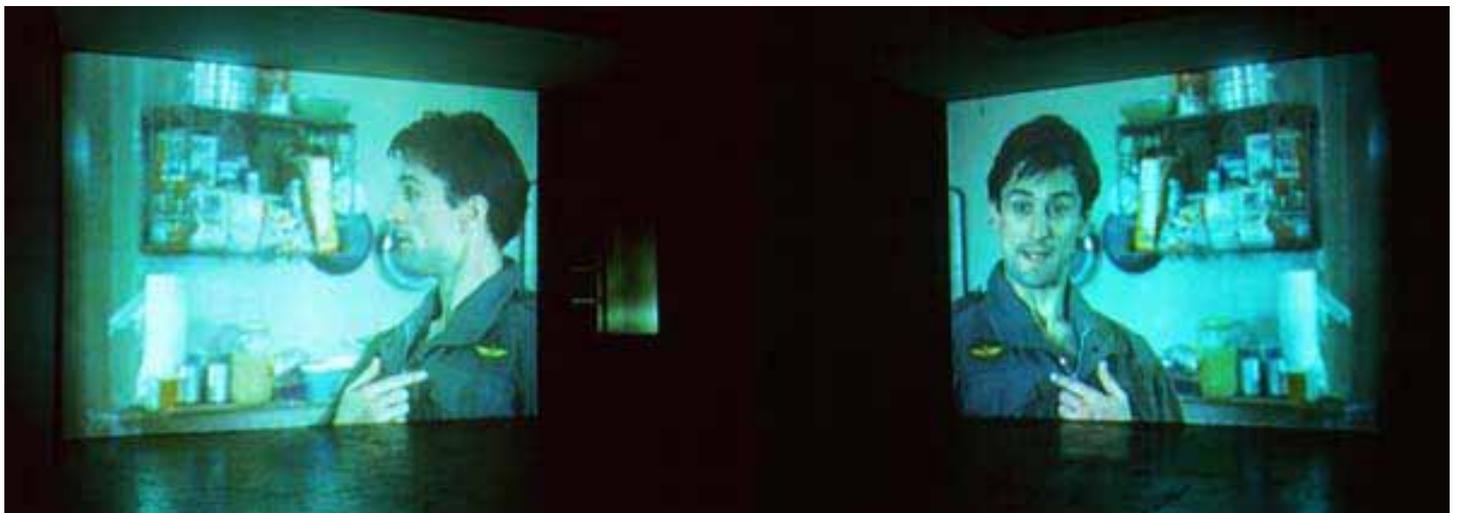
MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES
• Two channel video installation – two projectors screening on four screens
• Flipping / mirror image through video editing
• Sound through audio speakers
• Film is on a loop, pre-set during DVD formatting
• Use of readymade film: pre-existing footage manipulated to create new work

Studio Art
• Identify and describe Gordon's use of elements and principles to create aesthetic qualities in this artwork.

• Identify and describe selected signs and symbols in the work.

• By presenting the footage on two screens, Gordon creates a double, mirrored image. Discuss how this installation affected or impacted your viewing of the work. How does the presentation of the work help to communicate Gordon's ideas and meaning?

• As a class debate Gordon's use of pre-existing film footage to create artworks, such as *Through a Looking Glass*. Consider the following statements in your debate:

> • Gordon didn't make the film. Therefore it isn't his artwork.
> • Gordon has appropriated the footage, putting it into a new context, and in the process has created new meaning.
> • Gordon has infringed copyright law in the making of this work.
> • If you saw Gordon's work on YouTube or on the TV it wouldn't have the same impact. It needs to be experienced in person.

Art
Formal Framework:
• Analyse how Gordon has applied specific formal elements to create the work and how these qualities contribute to the meaning and message within the artwork.

Personal framework:
• Much of Gordon's work uses mirroring and doubling of imagery. Why do you think he has used dual screens and mirrored the image in *Through a Looking Glass*? How does this presentation reflect Gordon's personal philosophy or ideas behind his art practice?

Cultural framework:
• Describe how the physical placement and installation of the artwork affects interpretation and contributes to its meaning.

• Identify specific social, cultural or religious contexts within the artwork. How do these contribute to its meaning?

Contemporary Framework:
• What impact does the presentation of the work and materials used have on you as the viewer? Support your analysis with discussion of the similarities in presentation of works *Through a Looking Glass* and *Between Darkness and Light (After William Blake)*.

Pretty much every film and video work from about 1992 until now, 1999–
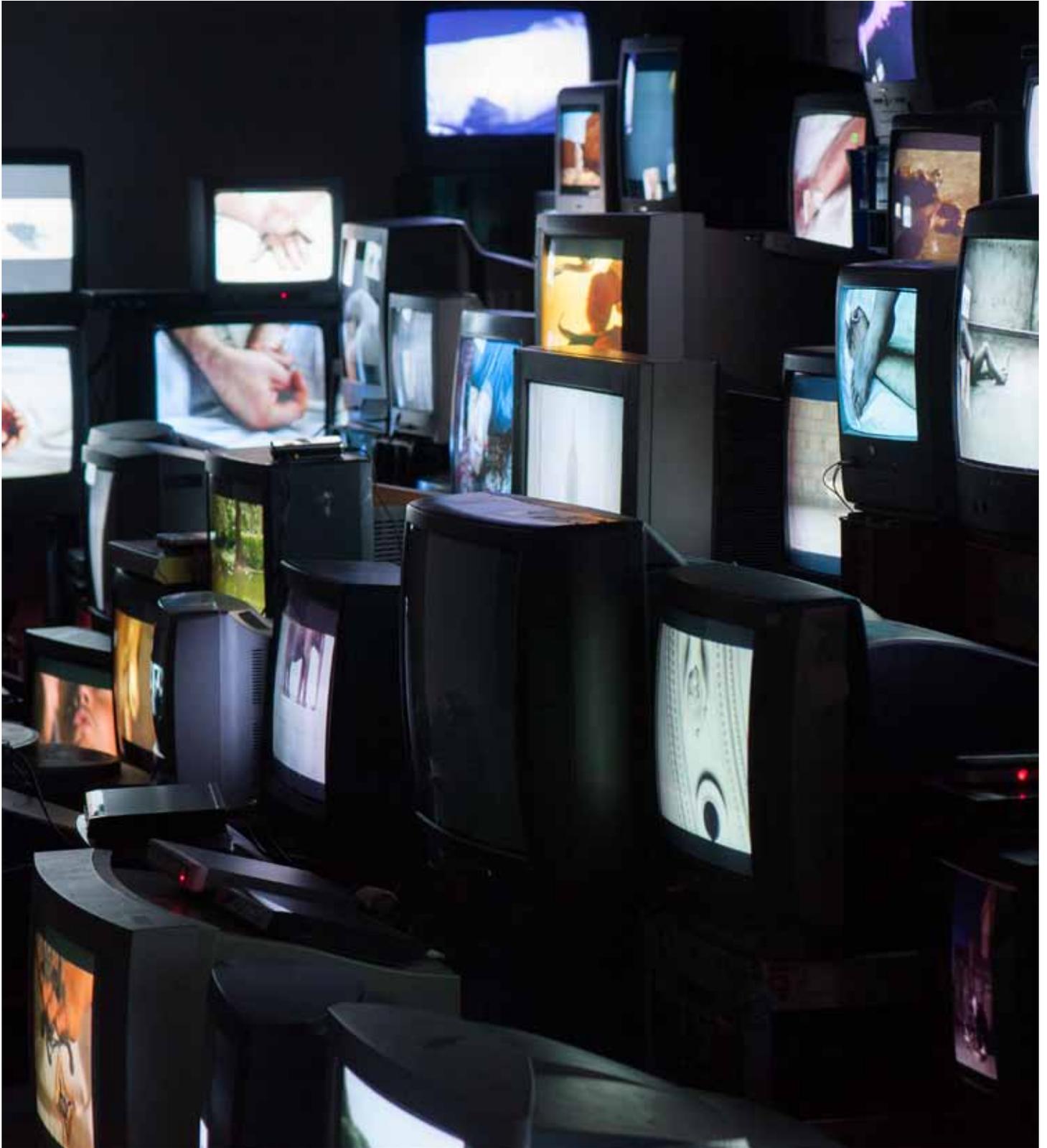
multi-channel video installation with sound
installation dimensions variable

DESCRIPTION

This work accommodates a vast space within ACCA's largest gallery, where the audience is able to physically walk, or loop, around the epic moving-image installation. The work was originally conceived for a show at the Foksal Gallery in Poland in 1999 and has grown over the years to become a survey of found and made footage.

Functioning in an encyclopedic vein, the installation presents all of the video works produced by Douglas Gordon since 1992. The works are displayed on 101 television monitors, stacked together in an island formation. Like a video archive, it offers insights into the central themes and artistic strategies of Gordon's film and video based works. We encounter works that explore, in fragments, recurring themes of memory and time, innocence and guilt, life and death, good and evil, memory and time.

In addition to his original film or video works, the installation includes some of his famous film appropriations and references including *24 Hour Pscyho* (1993) and *Feature Film* (1999) that draw directly on Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and *Vertigo* (1958).

INSPIRATION

• Pretty much every… artwork has its own unique inspiration.
• One central inspiration, common between these works however, is Gordon's interest in film medium and the manipulation of the structure, conventions and aesthetics of film.
• Similar to E*verything is nothing without its reflection: a photographic pantomime*, the work is presented in an encyclopedic manner and presents work from Gordon's past and present highlighting shifts in ideas and approaches, materials and techniques and similarities in themes and messages.

MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES

• 101 television monitors, each with its own DVD player, that plays the film on a loop from a DVD format. Adaptors have been used on some of the older television models for DVD (DVD was created in 1995 and some screens date back prior to that).
• Selected works have sound coming out of the monitor speaker. The majority of works are however, silent.
• All the film displayed is in digital format, but some footage has been reformatted from analogue to digital.
• There is a vast range of camera angles, shots, compositional and narrative devices used in the film works.

24 Hour Psycho (1993)

24 Hour Psycho is one of Gordon's most famous works and reintroduces key themes, present throughout all his practice: repetition, time and memory, duality, appropriation, darkness and light.

Specifically, this work is very concerned with the lapsing of time. Gordon has slowed down the original 110 minute Hitchcock film Psycho until it takes a little over 24 hours to play it full. It is projected in a dark room, onto a floating, translucent screen so the viewer can look at it from either side. By allowing us to walk around the screen and see the movie from behind Gordon transforms Hitchcock's story into a collection of images, devoid of their traditional narrative continuity.

By slowing down and stretching the narrative in Hitchcock's film Gordon exposes the tricks of the filmmakers trade and reorganizes our experience of time, which is a fundamental aspect of the medium. By removing the immediate tension and eliminating the sound track he draws our focus to the gestures in each frame, but in the process creates a new, heightened tension; everything is slower, more drawn out - the famous Psycho shower scene now takes one hour.

"I was concerned above all with the role of memory. While the viewer remembers the original film, he [sic.] are drawn into the past, but on the other hand also into the future for he becomes aware that the story, which he already knows, never appears fast enough. In between there exists a slowly changing present." – Douglas Gordon [10]

INSPIRATION

"I was back home, it was Christmas Eve… my friends weren't around, I'm not used to going to bed very early. There was nothing on the television, my family were all asleep. I remember lying upstairs in my wee brother's bedroom, just playing about with the video recorder and whatever tapes he happened to have… he had a tape lying about and it was Psycho, and when I saw it I thought 'Wow, Five Minute Psycho, that would be really brilliant!" So I tried to watch Psycho really fast, and it was fair enough, and then I started doing the opposite, like you do. So I started watching it slow, and there were specific sequences in it that I thought I wanted to watch again in slow motion, and that's really the root of where the idea came from: the more I watched in slow motion, the more I realized how interested this could be." – Douglas Gordon [11]

"24 Hour Psycho, as I see it, is not simply a work of appropriation. It is more like an act of affiliation… it wasn't a straightforward case of abduction. The original work is a masterpiece in its own right, and I've always loved to watch it… I wanted to maintain the authorship of Hitchcock so that when an audience would see my 24 Hour Psycho they would think much more about Hitchcock and much less, or not at all, about me…" – Douglas Gordon [12]

[10] Douglas Gordon, quote from Katrina M. Brown, 'Douglas Gordon: *24 Hour Psycho* (1993)'. In: David Evans (Ed.), *APPROPRIATION: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel: Cambridge, 2009, page 165.
[11] Douglas Gordon, in *APPROPRIATION*, page 164.
[12] Douglas Gordon in "Douglas Gordon: What I have done", The Guardian, 2011: http://www.theguardian.com/arts/pictures/image/0,8543,-10204531576,00.html

Feature Film (1999)

The viewer can hear the score to the Alfred Hitchcock film *Vertigo*, but cannot see the film footage. Instead it is a carefully edited series of close-ups of the hands and face of conductor James Conlon as he conducts the score in a Paris studio. Therefore, the audience hears the tensions in the music that accompanies the film, but it is entirely removed from its original context and the tense horror scenes captured in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. The work therefore becomes a portrait of the song and the music.

For more information refer to: Art Angel "Douglas Gordon: Feature Film":
http://www.artangel.org.uk//projects/1999/feature_film/about_the_project/feature_film
And the process of making feature film:
http://www.artangel.org.uk/projects/1999/feature_film/how_we_made_feature_film/douglas_gordon

Play Dead: Real Time (2003)

This work was filmed at an empty Gagosian Gallery in New York where the artist arranged for Minnie, a four-year-old Indian elephant (from the circus) to come in and perform tricks whilst being filmed. The idea for the film came to Gordon as he was thinking does an elephant lie down or sit down? Having never seen such a thing, he was curious.

The elephant captured in the footage performs a number of tricks including 'play dead', 'stand still', 'walk around', 'back up', 'get up', and 'beg' on the command of her off-screen trainer. The footage captures Minnie's tricks while the camera circles around, constantly moving, encircling the elephant in the stark concrete space.

"You can't ignore the elephant in the gallery, and I can't help wondering if Play Dead is a metaphor for artistic production: the elephant as this spectacular and unknowable thing, occupying a territory quite unnatural to it. Or perhaps the work is meant to be taken as a parable of death and resurrection, played out again and again in an endless cycle." [13]

For more: Douglas Gordon on working with elephants, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR07wSggs7k

[13] Adrian Searle, "Bring on the dancing Elephant", *The Guardian*, 2006: http://www.theguardian.com/artand-design/2006/nov/07/art

Phantom (2011)

Gordon collaborated with musician Rufus Wainwright to create Phantom and makes reference to Wainwright's album *All Days are Night: Songs for Lulu*, which was written in anticipation of his mother's death from cancer in 2010. In *Phantom* we see footage of Wainwright's eye, hovering in a dark space, multiplied and blinking, staring out at us. The work displays Douglas' long connections with dichotomies life and death, light and dark. Accompanying the eyes blinking, we hear Wainwright's melancholy voice and piano sing out, creating a highly emotive work that draws the viewer in.

For more, including an example clip and interview with Rufus Wainwright, see "Phantom – Part II":
http://vimeo.com/23403789

For more information about inspiration and materials & techniques in Phantom, see:
https://www.youtube.com/user/biennaleofsydney

30 seconds text, 1996

30 seconds text.

In 1905 an experiment was performed in France when a doctor tried to communicate with a condemned man's severed head immediately after a guillotine execution.

"Immediately after the decapitation, the condemned man's eyelids and lips contracted for 5 or 6 seconds... I waited a few seconds and the contractions ceased, the face relaxed, the eyelids closed halfway over the eyeballs so that only the whites of the eyes were visible, exactly like dying of ewly deceased people.

At that moment I shouted 'Languille' in a loud voice, and I saw that his eyes opened slowly without twitching, the movements were distinct and clear, the look was not dull and empty, the eyes which were fully alive were indisputably looking at me. After a few seconds, the eyelids closed again, slowly and steadily.

I addressed him again. Once more, the eyelids were raised slowly, without contractions, and two undoubtedly alive eyes looked at me attentively with an expression even more piercing than the first time. Then the eyes shut once again. I made a third attempt. No reaction. The whole episode lasted between twenty-five and thirty seconds."

...on average, it should take between twenty-five and ...

text on black wall, light bulb, timing device
installation dimensions variable

DESCRIPTION

In *30 seconds text* the audience encounters a completely darkened space, with black walls, black carpeting, text on the wall in white Bembo and Helvetica fonts, and a light globe that turns itself on and off precisely 30seconds at a time.

30 seconds text reveals Gordon's interest in language and text. When the light bulb turns on, it illuminates the space for 30 seconds, allowing us just enough time to read, printed on the wall, an early 20th Century French Scientist's account of his attempt to communicate with the head of a criminal immediately after it was separated from his body by a guillotine. As the text reveals, for about 30 seconds, the executed man's eyes continued to respond to the sound of his name being called, before going completely blank. Then suddenly the room goes back to absolute blackness: perhaps this is what it is like to get your head cut off?

Time is the vital element in this work: 30 seconds of light to illuminate the space for the 30 seconds it takes to read the text to reveal the 30 seconds it took to take the severed head to die from the experiment that took place in 1905.

In this work the viewer enters an ambivalent zone between life and death. *30 seconds text* marks an end point to the exhibition, the point at which the audience must turn around and renegotiate the exhibition in order to exit it.

INSPIRATION
• Life and death
• Experiment between Dr. Beaurieux and the criminal Languille (Montpellier, 1905) taken from the Archives de l'Anthropologie Criminelle

AESTHETIC & STYLISITC QUALITIES
• Dichotomies: black and white, dark and light, life and death
• Time: an important element in this work, physical and literal experience of time
• Space: the installation space is important to create the environment to experience this work
• Installation, experiential work – relies on the viewer to experience the work and the emotions that are triggered

MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES
Although this installation uses quite minimal materials it relies heavily on the dark, chamber-like environment created and audience interaction with the work:
• Lightbulb on automatic timer
• Black painted, carpeted insular room
• White vinyl text in Bembo and Helvetica fonts on wall

ANALYSIS QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Exhibition design and symbolism
30 seconds text is the last room you encounter, but it is designed as a dead end. Requiring you to turn around and return through the rooms and works you have previously explored, making your way out of the exhibition.

Read Juliana Engberg's statement about the exhibition rationale and curatorial design:

"It requires you to return on yourself, and retreat through this hall of mirages; perhaps to see differently, or again, this accumulation of self and others that Douglas Gordon has made. Life and death have been constant preoccupations; goodness and evil perpetual provocations; Heaven and Hell continual, possible, probable co-existences. The light at the end is found at the beginning, and in the beginning was the light. Douglas has been telling you stories. And, so now, here we re-enter the real world." [14]

Discuss the placement and design of *30 seconds text* within the exhibition. Consider the following questions in your discussion:
• Is there a particular symbolism, meaning or message being communicated through the placement of artworks in the exhibition (exhibition and curatorial design)?
• How would you describe your viewing experience of the exhibition? (Consider how you moved within the spaces, how you interacted with the artworks and how they triggered certain emotions, thoughts and associations).

Time and light
• Describe Gordon's use of time and light in *30 seconds text*. What role do these elements play in the communication of meaning and message in this artwork?

[14] Juliana Engberg, "Introduction. Sinner Man…" in Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, *The only way out is the only way in: Douglas Gordon*, Adams Print: Melbourne, 2014. Page 5.

Glossary

Analogue Video: A non-digital video signal containing the luminance (brightness) and chrominance (colour) of an image. Signals can be carried in separate or combined channels.

Celluloid Film: A thin material made from nitrocellulose and camphor that is used in photography, in the manufacture of motion-picture and x-ray film, and in other products.

Dichotomies: Division into two usually contradictory parts or opinions.

Digital Video: Type of digital recording system that works using a digital rather than analogue video signal. First invented commercially in 1986.

Dualities: An instance of opposition or contrast between two concepts or two aspects of something, for example, light and dark.

Readymade: Already made, prepared or available. Artist Marcel Duchamp coined the term in 1915 to refer to ordinary manufactured objects that he selected and slightly modified to make a work of art (eg. Fountain, 1917 and Bicycle wheel, 1913).

Turner Prize: This art prize was named after the painter J. M. W Turner and is presented annually by the Tate Britain to a British visual artist under 50 years. Since its inception in 1984, the Turner Prize has become the United Kingdom's most publicised art award.

Hugo Boss Prize: Is a biennale (every two years) art prize that is awarded to outstanding young artists, in association with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Venice Biennale: A major contemporary art exhibition that takes place every two years (biennially) in Venice, Italy. The first biennale was held in 1895.

Video Art: is named after the videotape and although various technological advances have seen formats including Hard Disk, CD Rom and DVD supersede the videotape as the dominant image and sound carrier, video art is still a very common and developing art form today.

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