

# MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

## JUN 25 HOWL | DOUG AITKEN



Installation view, Doug Aitken, HOWL, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, Maag Areal, 2023

Text: Max Wiener

The iconic facades of the American West bring about certain motifs and feelings within our psyche. We can quickly imagine: John Wayne, rawhide, cowboys, etc. Perhaps it's our society's fault that we lock ourselves within these common narratives; it takes something monumental to break us out and set us free. Doug Aitken's HOWL is that special something. With the indelible touch of a seasoned artist, Aitken takes us on a journey through the West - and our minds - and shows us sides of the country's psyche that we never thought we'd see. The installation's grand multimedia experience is currently stationed at the Galerie Eva Presenhuber in Zurich, where it opened on June 9. The series is scheduled to run until July 22.



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At the exhibit's onset, we are drawn to the film portion, where a non-linear presentation of 20th-century Western oil workers sets the stage for our emotional and psychological exploration. This is a purposeful move by Aitken, as he does not want us to latch on to a character arc or plot but rather be exposed to the world they live in; we feel invisible in their landscape. We are placed directly in their world to observe, not judge. Here, we get a hearty dollop of truth in Aitken's work, where he shows us what it's like to be a Western worker. It's not all wrangling and a Marlboro Man aesthetic. It's raw, real, and rough.



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As we make our way through the rest of the exhibition, the true genius of Aitken's work is shown, and we dive further down his delicious rabbit hole of artistic seduction. His work is large and projected massively onto the walls of the gallery. By doing this, Aitken brings us into the landscape, and the natural beauty of unhindered nature surrounds us. But he wants us to ask ourselves: is it untouched by the modern man? Every shot of a canyon or landscape is an oil derrick, reminding us that our world cannot keep up with itself. Therefore, we must impede on our most sacred land just to appease the masses. While some artists use landscapes to show off the beauty of our natural world, Aitken uses them to remind us of our morality.



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One of the most jarring pieces of art the installation houses is a wall piece made from reclaimed plastic, with digitally-carved ocean grooves meant to resemble the ocean floor. It's impressive to look at, but it's a haunting metaphor for pollution; many of us take our environment for granted. A piece like this reinstates Aitken's theme of finite life and morality, and he does it brilliantly, almost scaring us while doing it. We only have so much time on this planet, and He wants us to be kind to our world and show that we care. The earth would be much better if we all did our part to make it so.