

PRESS RELEASE

Doug Aitken

HOWL

June 9 – July 22, 2023

Artist walkthrough and book signing on Saturday, June 10, 6.30 pm

Maag Areal, Zahnradstr. 21, CH-8005 Zurich

Extended opening hours during Zurich Art Weekend:

June 9, 11 am – 9 pm; June 10, 11 am – 8 pm, June 11, 11 am – 6 pm

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present HOWL, a provocative new solo exhibition with Doug Aitken. It is the gallery's sixth show with the artist.

HOWL creates a humanistic statement about society that encourages the viewer to contemplate their relationship with the natural world. It is a journey that confronts the viewer with questions about the 21st century that are as urgent as they are timeless.

This entire series of new artworks investigates and challenges the viewer to reflect on how humans navigate both ideological and physical landscapes as humanity moves into the future. Through a range of media, the exhibition offers a multi-dimensional exploration of our complex and ever-changing world. The sculptural artworks are strategically placed, and act as guideposts leading the viewers through the exhibition space towards a multi-screen film installation.

HOWL includes a new film installation by Aitken and presents a poignant examination of the lives of residents in a forgotten desert town where the primary industry is oil drilling and excavation. The artwork is not a documentary, rather a non-linear narrative that explores life in a town at the edge of the world. In a landscape where life has relied on the extraction of gas and fossil fuels, we follow the lives of different people as they question the possibilities for their future.

It is a portrait of the past, a town built in the early 20th century, where closed storefronts and boarded-up buildings now populate a desolate main street. Throughout the artwork its inhabitants speak of their ideas of the future and their visions of utopia. The artwork uses location as a formal structure to speak about a larger story of the natural landscape and its usage. The work moves from person to person, creating a larger tapestry that draws our attention not only to this specific industrial town, but to a wider set of issues faced by our society.

In the installation, viewers enter a darkened room where sound echoes and images are projected onto a skeletal wooden structure clad in screens, creating a mesmerizing experience. Focusing on this desolate town in the American West, the film weaves a story that reflects a complex relationship with the natural landscape.

A subtle ecological thread runs through HOWL, the arid desert landscape is hammered by machines relentlessly drilling. The mechanized landscape creates a rhythmic musical composition. With each new encounter, each person's words are transformed into the soundscape as the human voices merge with the rhythms of the machine world.

The parched landscape becomes the backdrop to a ragged and restless energy, where the characters are repeatedly transformed into sound and rhythm. Like the movement of the derricks, the repetition is a metaphor for modern life; do we stay in motion, repeating our actions or do we find a way to break a pattern and change?

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

The installation and physical sculptures transform the gallery space into an immersive journey. Among the sculptures is a wall piece made from reclaimed plastic, a rock-like relief with a digitally carved topography of the global ocean floor, featuring deep grooves of negative space.

The walls of the gallery are clad in oversized images of natural landscapes such as jungles, oceans, and deserts, further enveloping the viewer. Aitken's reflective sculptures draw the viewer in, while word sculptures present distilled messages that resemble a modern-day Morse code of information, with words such as HOWL, CONTACT, DRAMA, and UNREAL.

The entirety of the installation creates a postmodern poem, an electric haiku culled from our modern wilderness. In this landscape of film, sculpture, text and reflectivity, there is a constant interplay between the natural landscape and a tactile human presence. The viewer and artworks exist in both harmony and discord with each other. Aitken creates an immersive physical and visual world of information that challenges us to pause and ask: what should our future look like?

Doug Aitken (born 1968 in Redondo Beach, CA) has developed a multimedia oeuvre that both explores and moves into new art forms. His work spans a wide range of media, integrating film, sound, photography, sculpture, performance, happenings, and site-specific installations. He creates immersive multimedia landscapes and disrupts the conventions of the contemporary art world. Aitken's recent solo museum exhibitions include Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, Sydney, AU (2021); Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, FI (2020); Espace Louis Vuitton Tokyo, Fondation Louis Vuitton La Collection, Tokyo, JP (2020); Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, University of California, Davis, CA (2019); Weatherspoon Art Museum University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC (2018); and Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX (2017). Major museum group shows featuring Aitken include 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, JP (2021); Jinan International Biennial, Shandong Art Museum, Jinan, CN (2020); Mudam Luxembourg, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg, LU (2020); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, DE (2019); ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, DK (2019); Museum of Art, Architecture And Technology (MAAT), Lisbon, PT (2019); ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, DK (2018); and Polo Museale Regionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Palermo, Palermo, IT (2018).

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