

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to open its 2009 fall season with a solo exhibition by Scottish artist Douglas Gordon. He will be presenting “24 hour psycho back and forth and to and fro”, a video installation projected on two large-format screens, as well as “Looking down with his black, black, ee”, a film shown on three monitors.

In his oeuvre, Douglas Gordon explores antagonisms such as dread and temptation, death and life, innocence and guilt. This may be expressed, as in “Play Dead: Real Time”, by a camera circling a trained elephant that lies down as if facing imminent death, or, as in “B-Movie”, by showing a fly that, after wriggling its legs for a long time, eventually dies. The artist works with various media, such as film, installation, text, and sound, in addition to sculpture (i.e. in his skull pieces). His repertoire and conception revolve heavily around both the images of Christian iconography engraved in the collective mind of our culture and those conveyed by movie classics.

In his video works, Douglas Gordon frequently uses original films that he alters by means of slow motion, repetition, rewind, or dissolve, thereby reinterpreting them. This approach allows him to transfer the myths, images, and projections of cinema to the realm of art. Douglas Gordon is probably best known for his way of dealing with Alfred Hitchcock’s “Psycho”. Gordon’s predilection for the movies of the famous British-American film-maker results from particular childhood memories: “When I was seven or eight years old, I watched movies such as ‘North by Northwest’ and ‘Strangers on a Train’. I didn’t see ‘Psycho’ until I was older, but I already knew quite a few things about the movie by then. I recall that my mother would always say: >You shouldn’t be watching that, you’re too young for it<”. These themes – what is allowed and what is forbidden, the good and evil, as well as his own memories – recur throughout the artist’s oeuvre. His first installation work was his 1993 film projection “24 hours Psycho”, which, according to Lewis Biggs, former director of Tate Liverpool, was “one of the defining icons of contemporary art in the last decade.” The version featured in our gallery, “24 hour psycho back and forth and to and fro”, was produced last year and presented at the Guggenheim Museum. In this piece, the same movie is shown simultaneously on two juxtaposed projection screens. The original movie, with a running time of 110 minutes, is slowed down and extended to 24 hours, which equals about 2 frames per second (as opposed to 24 frames per second in the original length). On one screen, the movie is projected backwards, while it runs forwards on the other. In the middle, the two of them overlap in the famous murder scene. This visual duplication adds a highly monumental and powerful touch to the tragic key scene. The lack of sound also removes part of the suggested sense of space. Thus, the movie appears like a (nightmarish) dream in which time and space do not correspond to our general experience thereof. Furthermore, the viewer may, in contrast to his usual visit to a cinema, move around the screens freely, watching one of the two movies from different angles or in its mirrored

version. The temporal extension has an effect on our perception, too, for every one of the actors' moves, every detail of the equipment catches our attention. "To me", says Douglas Gordon, "the point of '24 Hour Psycho' is that the plot takes place so slowly that you can never anticipate what happens next. The past confuses our memory. Because the images follow one another at such a slow rate, you cannot possibly remember them. The past continues, and the future never happens, so everything remains in the present. The present is where the future and the past converge continuously. As Heidegger said: It doesn't really exist." Through his manipulations, the artist dismantles place, time, and plot, whereas the image is given more importance. In other words, Douglas Gordon has invented a new way of approaching the medium of film.

In his other work, "Looking down with his black, black, ee", a film presented on three monitors, one can see crows looking down from the roofs of a Gothic church. Here, Douglas Gordon refers to the medieval idea of crows as symbols of misfortune. In medieval art, the crow was used to epitomize not only the bad and evil, but also death. The depiction of a crow sitting on a roof, for instance, was a mandatory attribute in the representation of witches. Another example that follows this tradition of associating crows collectively with negative connotations is Hitchcock's 1963 movie "The Birds". It is in literature, more precisely in a Scottish poem about a crow sitting on a treetop and looking down on a group of children, that the artist has found his inspiration for the title. These elements of menace ("looking down with his black... ee") and fascination are central to Douglas Gordon's video, too, resulting in questioning the criteria of good and evil. In the video, one must know, there is no plot that would lead to an unambiguous interpretation.

Douglas Gordon's works are characterized by immediacy and emotional presence. Moreover, with his found and self-shot films, he creates new contexts and challenges our patterns of perception. In 1996, his work won him the Turner Prize. Since then, he has been represented in exhibitions in major public museums in Europe, the US, Canada, and South America. In 2007, he was awarded the Roswitha Haftmann Prize in Zurich.

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