

Coming from a background of a socially engaged art practice in the 80's and 90's as part of the New York based art collective 'Group Material' (1982–1996), artist Doug Ashford (b. 1958, New York) took up painting in earnest after the collective ended. In the early public projects of Group Material, the art exhibition form itself was challenged for its social and participatory purposes, thereby contesting the terrain of political life. Ashford's current body of work focuses on the consoling role of the artwork itself by depicting foremost tragic events, as well as political ones, through schematic abstract paintings. The forms that manifest themselves in this working process start, for example, with newspaper clippings of political manifestations, often chosen for both their factual reportage and imagistic drift. The protagonists in these moments of strong social upheaval have an aesthetic stance while responding to an emergency; moving as if empathy has taken them into a momentum that overcomes catastrophe. Ashford abstracts the scenarios through cropping and colored schemas, each analyzing the event on a more metaphorical and formal level.

The Grazer Kunstverein presents the first institutional solo show of Doug Ashford by exhibiting an overview of the artist's way of working and thinking, starting with the late 80's as part of the collective 'Group Material' to more recent work, which is mostly embedded in painting.

Ashford is also known as scholar and writer and therefore the Grazer Kunstverein has produced, in collaboration with Mousse Publishing, a publication that is dedicated to a selection of his writings and conversations, which mostly analyze and discuss the collective and the social in art.

Doug Ashford is a teacher, artist and writer. He is Associate Professor at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art where he has taught design, sculpture, and theory for over twenty years and where his collaboratively taught Interdisciplinary Seminar was often a platform for public discussion. Ashford's principle art practice from 1982 to 1996 was as a member of the artists collaborative Group Material, whose internationally produced exhibitions, public projects and publications questioned the role of art in re-imagining democratic life. Since that time he has gone on to make paintings, write, and produce other cross-disciplinary projects. His most recent publication is *Who Cares* (Creative Time, 2006), a book project built from a series of conversations between Ashford and an assembly of other cultural practitioners on public expression, beauty, and ethics. Recent exhibitions of his work involving paintings include: Wilfried Lentz Gallery (2013), Documenta 13 (2012), Sharjah Biennial 10 (2011) and *Abstract Possible*, Malmö Konsthall, Museo Tamayo, Tensta Konsthall, and other locations (2010–11).

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