

Doug Aitken

(Redondo Beach, California, 1968)

In the early 1990s, Doug Aitken began to use moving images to question traditional ways of enjoying art. Driven by the awareness of how the contemporary era is increasingly shaped by the effects of technological mediation and an unprecedented approach to the moving image, the Californian artist constantly searches for a new aesthetic experience capable of stimulating the viewer's attention and physical involvement. In his works with video – which often encroach on installation, photography and even performative events – the attempt is always to overcome the viewing process conventionally enclosed within the limits of the cinema screen, going beyond it through the use of multi-channel projections running both inside and outside the exhibition space.

A gaze mindful of the influence of the media may be seen in his early works, which stand out thanks to the appropriation and editing of films and TV clips from various sources. The original images are diverse, from John Wayne movies to teen series, up to demonstrations of collective delirium among fans during rock concerts. Progressively, his attention shifted towards the natural and urban landscape and the signs of contamination produced by man: this is the case of *Thaw* (2001), which shows the melting of ice sheets in the silent grandeur of Alaska. Around the same time, Aitken's installations became slowly more complex from the point of view of their composition and technique, deliberately confusing the linear experience of time, space and narrative. The works also seem to be charged with a strong sense of movement, both thanks to the contents of the videos – which often have to do with the idea of the journey and the crossing – and for the way the artist conditions their reception by the audience. The most successful example is *Electric Earth*, an extraordinary eight-channel installation which won a prize at the Venice Biennale in 1999, and which forces the viewer to move between three rooms in order to manage to reconstruct the story of the young protagonist. As time went by and in an entirely natural manner, Aitken's research moved towards the creation of larger-scale projects that dynamically and harmonically bring together moving images, sound and architecture. The main elements in play here are the outside walls of major contemporary art museums, transformed into genuine projection screens that multiply points of view and oblige viewers to walk all the way around the building. With the intention of pushing beyond the mere practice of video, Aitken has also dealt with nomadic projects on board trains and hot-air balloons, which foresee artistic and musical performances at every intermediate stage, thus promoting a new way of enjoying artworks in untraditional spaces and circumstances.

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