

Hamish Fulton

(London, UK, 1946)

“No walk, no work,” says Hamish Fulton, who calls himself a “walking artist.” These simple statements encapsulate this artist’s approach, according to which every work he executes can only unfold from direct contact with nature, begun through the simple action of walking. Born and raised in England, rather than being influenced by the romantic tradition and by a concept of nature as “landscape,” as a static and contemplative image, Fulton found a source of inspiration in America, during a trip he took there in 1969, over the course of which he traversed stretches of the states of Wyoming, South Dakota, and Montana. These places made a profound impression on him and, accompanied by camera and notepad, he developed a specific art form through walking, which he never thought of as an athletic gesture, and which he identifies as the purest possible relationship with nature. Compared to other artist contemporaries who have chosen to leave more or less profound traces of their passage on the land, sometimes with results not unlike an epic confrontation between man and the elements, Fulton does not want to leave another sign in the landscape other than his own footprints. Always planning itineraries that last several days, Fulton thus has developed a completely original art form that, over the years, has led him to venture on foot into the most solitary regions of Nepal, India, Bolivia, Canada, Peru, Ireland, England, Scotland, Mexico, Iceland, Australia, France, and Italy—entrusting photography with the task of summarizing his experiences. In addition to images, the artist uses the written word, in the form of very brief captions or insertions of text, to provide the viewer with additional details about the places he has visited, the distances he has covered, the duration of each walk and the weather conditions he has encountered. In recent years the artist has also created works of public art, transforming the experience of the solitary walk into a collective gesture, to be carried out with small groups of people.

In addition to photographs, and then engravings, Fulton also expresses his art through painting, as in the case of *Kailash Kora*, 2007, a wall painting created following a twenty-one day walk on Mount Kailash, in October of that year. Situated behind the Himalayan mountain chain, Kailash rises to an altitude of over six thousand meters above the Tibetan plateau and is recognizable by its characteristic rounded summit, with a dome of perennial white snow that covers a base of gray, striated rock. Considered the most sacred mountain in Asia, it is venerated in India, Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan. Tibetans in particular feel that Kailash stands at the center of a mandala, or sacred circle, and they travel there to acquire wisdom and to free themselves from the servitude of suffering. The pilgrimage to the mountain, during which it is prohibited to climb straight up, is the equivalent of the search for the very center of the universe, of the cosmic point where all things have beginning and end. As the text written on the wall reads, in the context of research into “the global influences of Tibetan Buddhism in the twenty-first

century,” Fulton participated in a *kora*, the circular path that is completed moving clockwise around the mountain. Following a Buddhist nun and her energy, the artist reached the Drölma pass, the crossing located on the mountain’s northeastern slope, placed at an altitude of 5,668 meters. Decorated with prayer flags, the pass symbolizes the spiritual rebirth of the pilgrim who has made the journey. (MB)

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