



DOUG AITKEN

Return to the Real

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From September 24, 2023 to April 1, 2024, SCHAUWERK Sindelfingen presents a solo exhibition of the American artist Doug Aitken (*1968). Aitken, a highly acclaimed artist with a career spanning over three decades, actively creates artwork across various mediums such as film, installation, sculpture, and performance. His art explores significant social developments of our time, delving into themes of alienation, isolation, and the complex relationships between humans, nature, and technology.

The exhibition comprises of ten works from the past 15 years and includes installation, sculpture and moving image. Among them is the artwork *Wilderness* (2022), being shown in Europe for the first time. In his critically acclaimed artworks, Aitken often combines different media: film and sound, sculptures, performances to site-specific installations. With these immersive multimedia works, he succeeds in capturing aspects of our present, making them experienceable and perceptible.

Doug Aitken says about today's ever-accelerating society: "We live in a time of upheaval and uncertainty, part of an unprecedented technological and cultural revolution." He is driven by the question of how we find our way in this world and how we look towards the future. With his art, he wants to create tools of deceleration, art that can provide inspiration to reconnect with the idea of the self and the landscape around us.

The exhibition "Return to the Real" offers an experience of exceptional intensity. The viewer can immerse themselves in this multimedia landscape. Doug Aitken states in an interview: "I've always been interested in the idea of breaking the screen and creating a situation where the viewer is in the world of the artwork and really moving and dancing with it, merging and being challenged by it."

The video installation *Wilderness* is a highlight of the exhibition. The installation is designed in a circular format, with a 360-degree projection encompassing four screens. Created over a period of two and a half years on a beach in Los Angeles close to where Aitken lives and works. Geographically bounded by the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the artist went to the edge of the Pacific Ocean every day. He observed a recurring existential energy at sunset with the ebb and flow of people gathering on the beach and the primal ritual of watching the day transform into the darkness of night.

The piece also features a series of song cycles authored by Aitken to narrate and capture the modern landscape as it moves from day into night. The song cycles often consist of single words or short sentences. They are reproduced by AI-generated voices that create a surreal atmosphere. Together the artwork explores the life cycle of the individual, society, and environment, while questioning the inescapable fusion of the real and the digital. Aitken examines this system of continuous change, a yearning to escape a destabilized present and the uncertainty of the future.

The second major installation is *migration (empire)* (2008). The work consists of three steel billboards, each equipped with five-metre-wide screens. Abandoned cities, houses and landscapes pass engaging the viewer in a visual road trip. The artwork was filmed in roadside motel rooms in different cities over thousands of miles across the USA. The work offers a series of vignettes showing North American migratory animals exploring these hotel rooms. The animals engage with the constructed environments according to their primal instincts, reflecting a sense of deep history and ecology. *migration (empire)* focuses on the landscape and animals that existed before human habitation and which remain in contrast to the repetition of the contemporary built landscape.

Also of note are the two installations *3 Modern Figures (don't forget to breathe)* (2018) and *All doors open* (2019) that consist of translucent figures that radiate light from within. Light in different colors pulsates from each figure. In both works, a soundtrack has been composed to flow with the chromatic rhythm of light. Three human figures standing and resting on a raw wooden floor. The figures are crystallized and translucent. Their poses are anti-heroic and non-monumental: they are all caught in the midst of making a call. Where a phone should be clutched in their hands there is instead negative space. In *All doors open*, a woman sits at a table, her head resting on it and a mobile phone lying next to her. In his works, Aitken refers to phenomena of our time: the fusion of the real and the digital, the fragmentation of space and time by the possibility of being simultaneously in the here and now as well as in distant places.

Sculptures, light boxes as well as mirror works complete the presentation and provide an overview of Aitken's work over the past 15 years and feature the recurring themes of the relationship between nature and civilization, between space and time, as well as the perception of everyday objects and the exploration of our present day.

Opening:

Sunday, September 24, 2023, 11.30 a.m.

Admission free!

Thank you for your interest. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. Please find image material in the press section of our website.