



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Doug Aitken

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Doug Aitken
Identifier:	AAA.aitken17
Date:	2017 July 22-24
Extent:	8 Items (sound files (6 hrs., 11 min.) Audio; digital, wav) 83 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Aitken, Doug, 1968- Drohojowska-Philp, Hunter
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

This interview is part of the Archives of American Art Oral History Program, started in 1958 to document the history of the visual arts in the United States, primarily through interviews with artists, historians, dealers, critics and administrators.

Available Formats

Transcript is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

Restrictions

Audio: ACCESS RESTRICTED; use requires an appointment.

Biographical / Historical

Interviewee Doug Aitken (1968-) is a multimedia artist based in Venice, California and New York, New York. Interviewer Hunter Drohojowska-Philp is a writer in Los Angeles, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview with Doug Aitken conducted 2017 July 22 and 24, by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, for the Archives of American Art, at Aitken's home in Venice Beach, California.

Scope and Contents

Mr. Aitken discusses growing up and his early schooling in Palos Verdes, California, and his first introductions to making art at a young age; his parents intellectual curiosity and his early visits with them to museums in the Los Angeles area; the family's many travels to the Southwest, Latin America and Europe, as well as his subsequent travels hitchhiking alone as a teenager; the impact of his high school art teacher Chizuko de Queiroz; his time as a young teenager exploring the new wave and punk rock scenes in the Los Angeles area; his time at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California and the mentorship there of the illustrator and artist Phil Hays; his focus on photography and illustration and his work for the magazine Ray Gun in the '90s; his decision to move to New York City after graduating from Art Center and his first artist studio residence there with Lawrence Carroll; his almost monastic life at first in New York City working on art with very little social interaction; his first ideas for an artwork using moving image and his first use of film and video; the impact of the concept of "timecode" from video editing and its application as a construct with which to perceive time and consciousness; and his early art exhibitions in non-commercial spaces with the AC Project Room group in New York. Mr. Aitken also describes his multimedia work Diamond Sea and the filming for it in Namibia; his first commercial art gallery shows at 303 Gallery in New York City; his current MOCA retrospective Electric Earth; his piece Song 1 and the inspiration for it; the ideas behind the performance and exhibition series Station to Station that was realized on trains and train stations with the help of many fellow artists and his studio assistants; his mirrored architectural work Mirage in Palm Springs; the mirrored ocean environmental works Underwater Pavilions; the appeal of the ocean and the story of his drowning and near-death experience; the ideas behind his work Migration using animals and anonymous American hotel rooms; his multiscreen film Eraser shot on the island of Montserrat after the volcanic devastation there; the impact of the work of the musician Terry Riley on his art and their subsequent friendship and collaboration; his romantic relationships; the work done building his current house in Venice, California, and his incorporation of sonic elements and visual interplay in the house's construction; his many conversations with artist friends and colleagues and the subsequent use of them in his book Broken Screen; and the recent work Twilight using abandoned telephone booths as inspiration. Mr. Aitken also recalls Jorge Prado, Mike Kelley, Stephen Prina, Keith Edmier, Matthew Barney, Paul Bloodgood, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Spike Jonze, Philippe Vergne, Harald Szeemann, Francesco Bonami, Okwui Enwezor, as well as Tilda Swinton, John Doe, Donald Sutherland, Werner Herzog, Bruce Conner, Lisa Spellman, Ed Ruscha, Werner Herzog, Eva Presenhuber, Victoria Miro, Robert Altman, and Lars von Trier, among others.

System Details

Recorded on Tascam DR-100MKII R000328.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Artists -- California -- Interviews
Artists -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
Multimedia (Art)

Types of Materials:

Interviews

Sound recordings