



Doug Aitken/MATRIX 185 Into the Sun

July 9 - September 3, 2000

**University of California
Berkeley Art Museum**

Doug Aitken/MATRIX 185

“Speed is a means to celebrate the perfection of stillness.¹ Speed is at the core of the Bombay filmmaking machine.”² —Doug Aitken

“We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is already disappearing.” —R. D. Laing

Doug Aitken is best known for his hypnotic, mural-size video installations, though he also works in film, takes photographs, and makes sound works. The interplay of art and media, image and sound has a primary role in his work: the sources of each cross-pollinate the other. Aitken’s work is distinct from that of his peers in its conceptual process. After engaging in extensive research, he approaches filming with specific guidelines or self-imposed parameters. Then he creates his visuals out of what he encounters. An example is *diamond sea* (1997), a multiscreen installation, shot in the Namibian desert of southwestern Africa, in which landscapes alternate with images of an animated industrial universe devoid of humans. Aitken, inspired by a large black spot on a map, went to Namibia in search of pure light. And for *into the sun* (1999), he outlined that the work would have an open structure with eighty percent of the piece comprised of still photographs that would then be refilmed.³ Aitken thus embarks on a project extremely well prepared but without a guarantee of success. He approaches his work with a fearlessness and resolve that imbue his finished products with an uncanny relevance and freshness.

Aitken works to create something out of what is absent—a monsoon that never occurs, or a culture, such as Jonestown, that has disappeared. He seeks out the not-so-mythic icons that inform contemporary culture and abstractly presents an evocative description of their source, their setting, and their basic existence. Aitken works with a poetic, sublime knowledge informed by an innate understanding of the importance of these seemingly unessential notions. He has only appeared in a few of his pieces, those which can be identified as exploring more personal subjects. *bad animal* (1996) is a tightly structured narrative about the quest for fame in Los Angeles, Aitken’s home base. And *The Longest Sleep: Pacific Ocean-Atlantic Ocean, Swimming the Panama Canal Asleep* (1999), a photographic series “documenting” a seemingly impossible feat, is a reference to when Aitken himself drowned in the Pacific and miraculously was revived.



Inquiries into speed have occupied much of Aitken’s work since his 1995 installation *monsoon*. For example, in *these restless minds* country auctioneers spew an endless litany of words and numbers representing imaginary items, interjected with descriptions of their surroundings (“sun going down”), to an absent audience. Aitken’s interest in speed observes the endless flow of inescapable information that comprises our environment, and the likelihood that reality is out of sync with our perception of it. Another central concern of his oeuvre is time—the real time of the author perceived in the deferred time of the viewer.⁴ Aitken posits how time can slip away, be stretched out, or become condensed. He subversively attempts to break the inherent linearity of film and video, which are based on a conventional notion of time. He also addresses the relationship of the audience to the medium. Approaching the notion of transcendence, he seeks to bring the viewer toward something tangible and provide a sense of discovery and questioning.⁵

into the sun was photographed and filmed on the dusty sound stages and film sets of Bombay. Here Aitken focuses on the frenetic activity of the filmmaking machine that is “Bollywood.” This film is about film, its mechanics and its transcendence. *into the sun* implodes in on itself. Fascinated by the twenty-four-hour-a-day schedule typical of Bollywood, Aitken shot the first half of the work using still photographs which he then refilmed with a motion picture camera. Hence his exploration includes an imposition of his own sense of time. Aitken described this study of frozen moments in time as a way we “find ourselves caught in a space between film and reality, much as Bollywood is.”⁶ His filming technique utilizes the hard cuts and fast zooms associated with Bollywood. His camera captures canisters of film, gigantic advertising posters, publicity photos, extras, groupies, and sets. We see major Bollywood film stars such as Aamir Khan and Amitabh Bachan in their dressing rooms and then on the set, seductive starlets gazing at the camera, and elaborate dance numbers being filmed. Aitken also devotes two projections to the close-up image of a camera lens. A black hole with the hint of sheen, it is like the opaque surface of the film industry, behind which the collective fantasies of Indian society are transformed into a never-ending supply of raw material for entertainment.⁷

The installation of *into the sun* explores the mechanism of accelerated media

into the sun, 1999, video installation with four laser discs, installation view at Victoria Miro Gallery, London, U.K., October 1999. Photo courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.



by creating an immersion narrative in which the viewer achieves a complete and interactive involvement on a multisensory but also emotional level. The setting mirrors the Bombay sound stages: a stage set fills the gallery, the walls are lined with raw canvas, and red earth covers the floor. As the viewer enters the darkened room, five mural-size video projections are seen on three walls. The sound design alternates between the recurrent hum of a running film projector and Bombay street noises, silence, constructed sounds, and both Indian and electronic music.

For Aitken, the Bombay film industry is the “blueprint of the future of communication.”⁸ He describes Bollywood as a place where perfected communication between film and audience is achieved. It was the idea of this system that drew him to the subject.⁹ It should be noted that *into the sun* is not a documentary, nor is the artist interested in exoticism. For millions of Indians, wherever they live, the notion of “India” derives in large part from the movies, a national pastime. The cinema has provided, for the better part of a century, the most readily accessible and sometimes the most inventive forms of mass entertainment.¹⁰ Since 1971, India has been the world’s largest film producing nation, producing more than 800 films per year in several Indian languages. This is more than double the number of films made in the United States. Bombay, or “Bollywood,” as India’s booming film industry is known, has been called by *The New York Times* “a dream factory both seedy and glamorous.”¹¹ Ninety percent of India’s films are rigidly conventionalized musicals and mythological romances based on a formula that has been described as “a star, six songs, and three dances.” Made for consumption by a largely uneducated and impoverished domestic audience, the appeal of Bollywood films is pounding music and gyrating actors who lip-sync to the voices of singers who often have their own huge following. Dominated by a star system similar to that of Hollywood’s early years, cinematic quality matters little to producers or unsophisticated audiences. With filmmaking occurring day and night, most successful actors work on ten to twelve films simultaneously.

In its scale and pervasiveness, film has borne, often unintentionally, several larger burdens, such as the provision of influential paradigms for notions of “Indianness” and “collectivity,” and key terms of reference for the prevailing cultural hegemony.¹² Stark extremes of wealth and poverty exist among Bombay’s population

into the sun, 1999, video installation with four laser discs, installation view at Victoria Miro Gallery, London, U.K., October 1999. Photo courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.



of more than fourteen million. Indians do not want art to imitate life. Cinema is as popular as religion in India. Everyone agrees that films allow an escape from harsh realities. A poor Indian who may not own a television will pay a day's wage to see a film.¹³ Amitabh Bachan, one of Bollywood's greatest stars and an actor featured in *into the sun*, describes the appeal of Bollywood as offering "poetic justice in three hours, which most of us would never achieve in a lifetime."¹⁴ Aitken identifies Bollywood films as mainlines into the collective consciousness of a country, representing the dreams and nightmares of an entire culture.¹⁵ Adding to their allure for him is that these films communicate with an insatiable and addicted audience.

Aitken's use of subversiveness has become increasingly sophisticated. His most recent work explores issues that concern mainstream society: desire for transcendence, the pervasiveness of technology, culture evolving at breakneck speed, and an overall deluge of information. His inquiries, however, are not about these phenomena but rather are an attempt to position the individual self, perhaps even his self. The continuum of subversion in which Aitken has turned his creativity and his camera on lost, forgotten, overlooked, or unacknowledged activities, landscapes, and subcultures has come to rest with the artist. As the ultimate subversive act, Aitken forefronts his individual concerns camouflaged within these larger explorations. By capturing and recording the voices of others, he has carved his own.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson

1 Francesco Bonami, "Liquid Time," *Parkett*, 1999, vol. 57, p. 32.
 2 Doug Aitken, "into the sun," *video cult/ures* (Karlsruhe, Germany: Museum für Neue Kunst, ZKM Karlsruhe, 1999) p. 162.
 3 Telephone conversation between Doug Aitken and the author several days before Aitken left for India in 1999.
 4 Bonami, p. 30.
 5 "Doug Aitken Artist Biography," *Let's Entertain* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2000) p. 300.
 6 Aitken, *video cult/ures*, p. 163.
 7 Reto Krüger, "into the sun," *video cult/ures* (Karlsruhe, Germany: Museum für Neue Kunst, ZKM Karlsruhe, 1999) p. 159.
 8 Aitken, *video cult/ures*, p. 162.
 9 The artist notes, however, that the region in which this phenomenon occurs is not relevant to him.

10 Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 10.
 11 Celia W. Dugger, "Gangs Prey on Bombay's Filmmakers," *The New York Times*, Sunday, February 27, 2000, p. 8.
 12 Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, p. 10.
 13 Few Americans have heard of Bollywood. Indian films, however, are popular in other countries including China and Japan. Seventeen million Indians living abroad have become one of the most lucrative markets for Hindi films. The revenue from India's colorful song and dance extravaganzas and melodramas surpasses \$1 billion a year.
 14 An indicator of Amitabh Bachan's fame is that the protagonist Gireesh Farishta in Salman Rushdie's *Satanstoe Verses* is based on the actor.
 15 Aitken, *video cult/ures*, p. 162.

into the sun, 1999, video installation with four laser discs, installation view at Victoria Miro Gallery, London, U.K., October 1999. Photo courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.

Doug Aitken was born in 1968 in Redondo Beach, California. He attended Marymount College, Palos Verdes, California, from 1986 to 1987 and earned his B.F.A. from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California, in 1991. Aitken lives and works in New York and Los Angeles. **Doug Aitken/MATRIX 185 *Into the Sun*** is the U.S. premiere of this work and the artist's first one-person exhibition on the West Coast.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2000
 Galerie Hauser & Wirth & Presenhuber, Zurich, Switzerland
 Vienna Secession, Vienna, Austria
 Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1999
 Pitti Discovery series, curated by Francesco Bonami, Pitti Immagine, Florence, Italy
 Victoria Miro Gallery, London, U.K.
 "Concentrations 33: Doug Aitken, Diamond Sea," Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
 Doug Lawing Gallery, Houston, TX

1998
 303 Gallery, New York, NY
 Jiri Svestka Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic
 Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
 Gallery Side Two, Tokyo, Japan

1997
 303 Gallery, New York, NY

1996
 Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1994

Selected Group Exhibitions

303 Gallery, New York, NY

2000
 "The 2000 Whitney Biennial," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
 "Biennale of Sydney," Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia

electric earth, 1999, video installation with eight laser discs, production still. Photo courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.

"Flight Patterns," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
 "Let's Entertain," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Miami Art Museum, Miami, FL
 1999
 "dAPERTutto," Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
 "video cult/ures," Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, Germany
 "Regarding Beauty," Smithsonian Institution, Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
 "From Film," Victoria Miro Gallery, London, U.K.
 "EXTRAetORDINAIRE," Le Printemps de Cahors, Saint-Cloud, France
 "Natural Order," Edmonton Art Gallery, Alberta, Canada
 "Clues, An Open Scenario Exhibition," Monte Video, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

1998
 "New Selections from the Permanent Collection," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
 "portrait-human figure," Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich, Switzerland
 "New Visions: Video 1998," Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA
 "Unfinished History," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
 "I Love New York—Crossover of Contemporary Art," Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany
 "Speed," Photographer's Gallery, London, U.K.

1997
 "The 1997 Whitney Biennial," The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
 "film+arc.graz," Third International Biennale, Graz, Austria

Selected Catalogues and Publications

film+arc.graz, Third International Biennale, Graz, Austria, 1997.
One Minute Scenario, Le Printemps de Cahors, Saint-Cloud, France, 1997.
Let's Entertain, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, 2000.
The 1997 Whitney Biennial, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, 1997.
The 2000 Whitney Biennial, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, 2000.
29° 0' East, The New York Kunsthalle, New York, NY, 1997.
Unfinished History, Walker Art Center, MN, 1998.

Selected Bibliography

Anton, Saul. "Doug Aitken's Moment," *tate*, no. 199, Winter 1999, pp. 54–58.
 Bonami, Francesco. "Liquid Time," *Parkett*, no. 57, pp. 29–32.
 Cameron, Dan. "Global Warming," *Artforum*, no. 36, December 1997, pp. 17–20.
 Fogel, Douglas. "No Man's Lands," *frieze*, no. 39, March-April 1999, pp. 56–61.
 Giorgio, Verzotti. "La Biennale dello Culture Emergenti," *Tema Celeste Arte Contemporanea*, September 1999, p. 52.

these restless minds, 1998, three-channel video installation, installation view at 303 Gallery. Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.

Hayt, Elizabeth. "Looking Ahead," *The New York Times*, Sunday, September 12, 1999, p. 93.
 Macel, Christine. "Profile," *Beaux Arts*, December 1999, pp. 78–81.
 Madoff, Steven Henry. "All's Fair," *Artforum*, September 1999, pp. 145–54, 184, 190.
 Martin, Herbert. "Doug Aitken," *Londonart*, October 22, 1999.
 Roberts, James. "Omega Man," *Parkett*, no. 57, pp. 22–23.
 Ryan, Orla. "Review of The 2000 Whitney Biennial," *Circa*, no. 89, pp. 16–17.
 vanAssche, Christina, "The 'Stalker' of the Fin de Siècle," *Parkett*, no. 57, pp. 54–58.

Please Note:

Doug Aitken will give an artist's talk on Sunday, July 9, 3:00 pm

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson will give a curator's walkthrough of the exhibition on Thursday, August 24, 12:15 pm

The Pacific Film Archive will present the film series *Staring at the Sun: India in Film*, Wednesdays in July and August at PFA Theater

Work in MATRIX

Doug Aitken
into the sun, 1999

Director/Cinematographer:	Doug Aitken	Production Coordinators:	Annie Zarloff, Lit Roewe
Executive Producer:	Steve Schofield	Original Sound:	Steve Roden
Editor:	Bipasha Shom	Interviews, Logistics, and Location Sound:	Dean Kuipers
Sound Design:	Jon Huck	B Camera:	Wing Ko
Colorist:	Gino Panaro	Actors:	Aamir Khan, Amitabh Bachchan
Assembly:	Alex Levy		

Video installation with four laser discs
 Courtesy of the artist and 303 Gallery, New York

into the sun Credits

Special Thanks
 The curator would like to thank Brian Doyle, 303 Gallery, New York; Jason Sanders, Film Research Assistant, Pacific Film Archive; and Mark Petr, Assistant Curator, Berkeley Art Museum, for all of their help on this exhibition.

The MATRIX Program at the UC Berkeley Art Museum is made possible by the generous endowment gift of Phyllis Wattis.

Additional donors to the MATRIX Program include the UAM MATRIX Council Endowment, Ann M. Hatch, and the California Arts Council.

The museum also wishes to thank Eric McDougall, American Soil Products,



Inc.,

cover: *into the sun*, 1999, production still. Photo courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.

above: *diamond sea*, 1997, production still. Photo courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.