

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

BLOUINARTINFO

“There’s half an Ark in there” — Douglas Gordon on his Käthe Kollwitz Prize Exhibition at Berlin’s Akademie der Künste

By Alexander Forbes



Douglas Gordon’s exhibition in honor of his winning the Käthe Kollwitz Prize is something of an overgrown man cave: countless TVs stacked on top of empty cases of beer. That is, if one’s average man cave were to swap football for some of the most influential video art of the past 20 years. From “24 Hour Psycho” (1993) and “Between Darkness and Light (Nach William Blake)” (1997) to new works like 2011’s “Phantom”, the exhibition shows, as the title reveals, pretty much every film and video Gordon has made since he more or less started making films and videos in 1992. The resulting environment is overwhelming to say the least. Sounds mix together in a cacophony that makes one have to exert rather copious effort to focus in on just one of the works. ARTINFO Deutschland’s Alexander Forbes spoke to Gordon while the final installation was taking place about this ever-growing piece, creating an ark out of video art, and kidnapping the work of others.

How many works is it all together?

It sounds a bit precautious to say I can’t remember but I really can’t remember. There are more TVs then there are works. I think there is about ninety-five monitors probably about eighty works which sometimes make me feel like I overproduced, then when I actually look at it, this is

twenty years of work, so if it eighty works for twenty years that's only four pieces a year. I should work harder: Not very Scottish working ethic.

And, it's a piece that's just slowly built up over time?

It was conceived in Berlin twenty years ago. I had been invited to go to Warsaw to do a show with Gallery Foksal. At that time, it was a very celebrated space because during the Cold War years they had been getting a lot of artists from the West in and showing a lot of really great art from Poland so it was a big honor for me to be invited because I was still young, fifteen years ago, I was only 30 or so and when I saw the size of the space and we thought what might be appropriate, rather than give one work that would be properly installed, I thought it would be better instead of one to give everything, a very kind of bizarre gesture actually. In 1998 when I made it there were probably only about less than half of what we have here.

I have to say it is bizarre talking to you and I am looking there and I am seeing me with hair. The piece with the guy reading the newspaper is one of the first video pieces that I made, that must be '92, '93 and the one above that with the guy with the blue shirt on is also me lying on the floor in my flat in Glasgow listening to the Velvet Underground and singing it, and you don't hear the Velvet Underground you just hear my pathetic voice, but that rug that I am on is in my studio now in Berlin which is quite strange actually.

Just the sheer number put together is pretty overwhelming.

It is a bit daunting. And there is also the decision to leave headphones in or out. The full title of the piece is very elaborate. It is "Pretty Much Every Film and Video From About 1992 Until Now, Some With Headphones, Some Without, All Running Simultaneously." A couple of years ago we decided to just take all the headphones out so it just a cacophony of noise and I like that confusion, it reminds me of old flea markets in Glasgow specifically a place called "Paddy's" market and I use to go into these long railway arch spaces, selling TVs all playing different things at the same time and I kind of always loved that.

And the only film that is not in it is the Zidane film?

There are a couple of other films missing. I chose not to put in any film that I made with other people because bit seemed a bit like kidnapping. Maybe I should do a side room with the other films or something.

There is really no logic to how they are arranged?

Maybe there will be in the end. We have done it chronologically before but we have also done it by animal classification because there are a lot of animals in there: snakes, cats, frogs, elephants, scorpions, ravens, donkeys. There's half an ark in there. It is kind of fun to put all the animals together because the sound in that section is insane.

In your other institutional shows it is a bit more clean, big screens and this is maybe a bit more personal. Is the piece that is on at Gagosian right now in this series?

It should be, I haven't spotted it yet, although I am quite happy if it is not, I am still soaking that in. I had been in New York to take my son home and visit friends I then went back here to be best man at a wedding then I flew back to New York and now I am back here all within in two

weeks so I think what we did at Gagosian was extremely intense and it's taking me a bit to get over my jet lag before I go to Tel Aviv for the weekend.

It's exhausting but it is funny to get this Käthe Kollwitz prize, actually. I never knew about it, but I think when I was about 13 or 14 one of the first art books that I bought was the Käthe Kollwitz book. I just phoned my library in Glasgow to send it over so I have something to show at the opening. But it is a bit curious because she represented something to me, she was a big influence to my teachers in high school and I went out and bought this book and read all about her, losing her children, and the wars and how she was a proto-feminist. It's a real honor.