

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Douglas Gordon first emerged out of the highly fertile 1990s Glasgow art scene but soon made an international name for himself, most notably by using – or in his words “abducting” – the films of others. His art world calling-card was the 1993 work *24 Hour Psycho*, which slowed down the Alfred Hitchcock classic to fill an entire day; and three years later Gordon was the first artist working predominantly with the moving image to win the Turner Prize. Now he tends to make his own films, often in association with high-profile collaborators: *Zidane: A 21st-Century Portrait*, featuring the French footballer and made with fellow artist Philippe Parreno, premiered at Cannes in 2006; and he has also worked with James Franco, James Tiffany and Agnès B.

This month the Berlin-based, but still resolutely Scottish artist (he returned to Glasgow to vote “yes” in the independence referendum), is working with the acclaimed pianist Hélène Grimaud to create a new site-specific work which involves flooding New York’s Park Avenue Armory. The project at the Armory coincides with a round-the-clock display of Gordon’s installation *Phantom*, made with the musician Rufus Wainwright, at Gagosian’s new shop-front space, also on Park Avenue.

The Art Newspaper: What made you decide to fill the Armory with water and piano music?
Douglas Gordon: The whole thing started by accident when I was making a lithographic edition based on the eclipse of the sun in the south of France back in 1999 and [the curator and gallerist] Isabelle Du Moulin, one of the people involved, asked me why I was interested in lunacy. I said, “Well, I like wolves...”. And so we got into this hilarious conversation and she said that I should get Hélène Grimaud involved in my practice because, well, she’s clearly not a lunatic, but she has this condition – synaesthesia – which means that she sees colours when she plays music. And she also loves wolves. But it never happened. Then, years later, Alex Poots [the artistic director of the Park Avenue Armory] asked me if I would like to do something at the Armory and says, “Why don’t you do something with Hélène? She’s very open to challenges and as well as being a top pianist, she runs a wolf sanctuary!” So there were all these connections. I went to one of her concerts and visited the wolf sanctuary that she runs in upstate New York, and we start to talk about what we can do in the Armory. She says that she wants to play all this water music – Debussy, Ravel, and I say, “Well, let’s flood it, I think it’s great to flood New York!”

I wasn’t aware of your wolf obsession: why are you so fascinated by them?
It goes back to the Ladybird books from my early childhood – *The Three Little Pigs*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Peter and the Wolf* – where the wolf was always the central, threatening character. Then, when I was about six, I saw Disney’s “Peter and the Wolf” with [Sergei] Prokofiev’s music, which completely and utterly terrified me – I still have recurring nightmares about it. When I first went to Hélène’s wolf sanctuary, she was inside the fence and I was beyond the pale, and the wolves came up and you realise that they can kill you silently, quickly – it’s quite amazing. A dog will come up and sniff your crotch, a wolf will come up to your face: it’s incredibly different. But what an animal is, is only a reflection of us.

From the beginning, mirrors, doubling and duplicating have featured in your work. In a way the Armory is your largest mirror yet.



Here comes the **MIRROR MAN** MIRROR MAN

The Scottish artist is flooding New York’s Park Avenue Armory to create a giant looking-glass surrounding the pianist Hélène Grimaud. By Louisa Buck

When you see Hélène play the piano, her eyes are looking at the sky. I’ve seen her play many times and she’s always looking up and her hands are playing down and I thought, well, let’s flood the armory so that when she’s looking up we can see what she’s seeing. Hélène comes in and she lights up the mirror – she fills it completely and all I’m doing is reflecting. But it’s really important for me that it’s only two-and-a-half inches of water, but it reflects 55,000 sq. ft of space.

I remember [sculptor] Richard Wilson saying that when people asked him what the depth was of the oil in 20:50 – his famous installation that floods a room with a lake of reflective sump oil – he would always say: “It’s as deep as your imagination.”
I love that piece and what I’m doing in the Armory is certainly a reference to it. I first saw it at the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh in 1987 and again at Charles Saatchi’s gallery in London. I worked with Wilson’s *Bow Gamelan*

Ensemble when I was a student at Glasgow – it was one of my first forays into performance art.

Now others perform in your work but you – or parts of you – used to appear in your early film works.
Most of the stuff I did at art school was performance art, where I was the performer and I was also the accomplice in a whole lot of other people’s projects. My thesis at Glasgow was on the necessity of ritual in contemporary life and most of the performance things I did went way beyond the expectations of the audience in terms of time: in one, I sat with two friends and peeled raw eggs for about 12 hours, trying to keep the membrane on the inside while taking the shell off. Then at the Slade, Stuart Brisley’s durational performances were an influence, as was Susan Hiller.

You seem to have become increasingly collaborative, from your work with Philippe Parreno to the New York works with Hélène

Biography DOUGLAS GORDON

Born: 1966 in Glasgow

Education: BA Glasgow School of Art, 1984-88;
MA Slade School of Fine Art, 1988-90

Lives and works: Berlin

Represented by: Gagosian Gallery; Yvon Lambert, Paris;
Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich; Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv

Selected solo exhibitions: 2014 Musée d'Art Moderne,
Paris; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
2013 Folkwang Museum, Essen; Tel Aviv Museum of Art
2006 Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh; MoMA, New
York; Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona 2002 Hayward Gallery,
London 2001 MoCA, Los Angeles; Tate Liverpool

Selected group exhibitions: 2014 Sydney Biennial
2010 São Paulo Biennial 2008 "theanyspacewhatever",
Guggenheim, New York 2003 Venice Biennale 1997 Skulptur
Projekte Münster 1996 Turner Prize, Tate, London

Grimaud and Rufus Wainwright.

One of the most important people in my life is Philippe Parreno and I used to say to him: "Philippe, you are the most promiscuous man I know!" This was nothing to do with his dick, but he inadvertently taught me, not to necessarily collaborate, but to be open to suggestion. So I don't collaborate – collaborators were always shot after the war, if you remember – but I'm open to suggestion.

How did you and Rufus Wainwright make this mutual suggestibility work on *Phantom*, which combines his music, your film of his eye and two pianos?

It's an animated sculpture. The piece was developed in relationship to the music Rufus was working on for his album, "Songs for Lulu". Rufus talked about [silent film actress] Louise Brooks as his inspiration and his fantasy alter ego, and I spent a lot of time watching her films and concentrating on her amazing eyes. I really wanted the tears from Carl Dreyer's [1928 film] "The Passion of Joan of Arc", but with the make-up of Louise Brooks. Of course, the use of the eye has giant references: from [philosopher] Georges Bataille to the scene from the film "Spellbound", where Gregory Peck is hallucinating and all these eyes start to appear. Then even more than that there are a lot of references to the way women such as Louise Brooks, Lillian Gish or Greta Garbo were cast and the way that the eyes were lit in particular, so that they start to operate as other parts of the body: and this eye is secreting very, very slowly...



The slowness is almost excruciating.

It's called *Phantom* because that's the name of the camera we used – it shoots 2,000 frames a second, so the slow motion you get is actually real time, there is no after-effect. This goes back to 1996, when I was working on the Turner Prize. Channel 4 [the UK TV station which sponsored the prize in the 1990s] sent a film crew to Glasgow, where I was then living. I got talking to one of the cameramen who said his father had shot a film of John Lennon smoking a cigarette at 1,200 frames a second, using one of these big industrial cameras, and that stuck in my head. I always wanted to do something as extreme as that: the drive for me has always been to just push it a little bit more – in any part of life, actually – and when I heard there was this video camera called a Phantom that would shoot at this speed, I thought let's see how slow we can really go and see how much it can still engage people.

Then there are the two pianos, one of which has been burned to a heap of twisted metal and charred splinters.

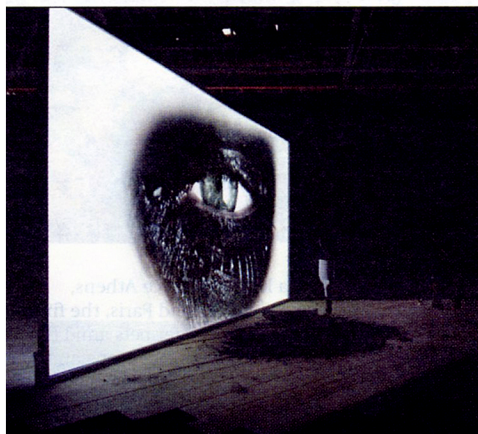
The piano for me is the ultimate sculpture. I've always loved pianos, but in a council house in Glasgow you were lucky if it was even an upright. Of course there is a reference to Joseph Beuys: he silenced the piano with the felt. And what I want is to amplify everything – I come from a punk rock background – and a piano does that, it quadruples everything when you play it. But here is a grand piano, which is mute, and a baby grand, which has been burned alive: it's almost like a mother standing over a dead child. It's a very dark place both physically and metaphorically.

So burning the piano is part homage, part desecration?

Sacrifice is the ultimate homage: kill your gods or – as the Sonic Youth track says – "Kill Your Idols". Working with Hélène, what can I do? She plays the piano and all I can do is flood her.

• "Tears Become ... Streams Become ...",
Douglas Gordon and Hélène Grimaud, Park Avenue
Armory, New York, 9 December-4 January 2015,
www.armoryonpark.org
• *Phantom*, Gagosian Gallery, 821 Park & 75th Street,
New York, 11 December-17 January 2015

GORDON AND GRIMAUD: ROBERT SCHULTZ/MAI; HENNEK/DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON; TEARS BECOME: JAMES EWING



Douglas Gordon's multimedia installation *Phantom* (left), 2011, made with the musician Rufus Wainwright, and an installation view of a mock-up of "Tears Become... Streams Become...", 2014, in Park Avenue Armory's drill hall. Above, the pianist Hélène Grimaud

