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EXHIBITION: STAN DOUGLAS
Black-and-white photography and two early installations:
"Deux Devises" and "Onomatopoeia"

DATES: December 11, 1996 - January 25, 1997

Opening on Wednesday, December 11, the gallery will present an exhibition by the Canadian artist Stan Douglas. This will be the artist's third solo show at the gallery.

Stan Douglas has been showing his work steadily since the mid-1980s. He was invited to Documenta IX in 1992 and participated in the 1995 Carnegie International, as well as in the 1995 Whitney Biennial. Recently he was short listed for the Hugo Boss Award; in conjunction with this award, his new project entitled "Nu•tka•" will be on exhibit at the SoHo Guggenheim through January 27, 1997.

The exhibition here in the gallery will include black-and-white photography from three earlier projects: "TV Spots"(1988); "Monodramas" (1991); and "Subject to a Film: Marnie" (1988/96), as well as two installations, "Deux Devises" (1983) and "Onomatopoeia" (1986). These last two works are black-and-white slide projections with audio. Stan Douglas produced these two installations at the age of 23 and 26 respectively. He now considers these two pieces to be his first mature works. "Onomatopoeia" consists of a fragment of Beethoven's Piano Sonata op. 111 (No. 32) rendered on a player piano in a ragtime rhythm. Slide images of automatic looms in a wool mill are projected onto a screen above the piano. The overall tableau of this work evokes the steel and iron constructions of early Industrialism, as well as a cinematic situation: the accompaniment to silent movies by a piano. The absent interpreter, replaced by the player piano, echoes the missing weaver in the mill, establishing a human absence that is almost tangible. The formal similarities between the player piano and the loom - such as the strings, the movement and size - are as striking as the technical similarities: the punch card programming the automatic loom is the direct predecessor of the music rolls in the player piano. These similarities are subverted by the inherent structure of this piece, as it moves in and out of precise synchronization, keeping the audience in a state of anxious anticipation.

The second slide projection in this exhibition, "Deux Devises", creates the same subversion of audience expectation. In "Breath", the first part of this piece, the slides consist of typed translations of the lyrics of an art song by 19th century French composer Charles Gounod, and the soundtrack is a recording of the same song. In the second part, "Mime", a soundtrack of a 1920's song by Blues singer Robert Johnson, is accompanied by slides of photographic self-portraits of the artist's mouth articulating phonemes, only occasionally in sync with the song. The title of this piece refers to the heraldic emblems that were used in the Renaissance to represent the personal aspiration or desire of a soldier or nobleman. Meaning for these emblems were derived from the mutual association between a motto and an image. In both "Onomatopoeia" and "Deux Devises", an association exists between sound and image, as well as between the viewer and the work. However, this association between "self" and the "other" is incomplete, the notion of "absence" prevails--an area which Stan Douglas continues to investigate up to his most recent work.