

Stan Douglas

May 23–July 29, 2023
612 North Western Avenue, Los Angeles



Stan Douglas, *ISDN* (2022). Still from two-channel video installation © Stan Douglas
Courtesy of the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to announce an exhibition of Stan Douglas's major two-channel video installation *ISDN* (2022), along with a group of related photographs, which will together inaugurate the gallery's 612 North Western Avenue location in Los Angeles.

This will be Douglas's first solo presentation in more than twenty years in Los Angeles, where he lives (in addition to Vancouver) and serves as the Chair of the Graduate Art program at ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena. Douglas was one of the first artists to be represented by David Zwirner. He had his first American solo exhibition at the gallery in 1993—the second show after David Zwirner opened its doors in New York's SoHo neighborhood earlier that year—and this will be his sixteenth exhibition at the gallery overall.

Since the late 1980s, Douglas has created films and photographs—and more recently theater productions and other multidisciplinary projects—that investigate the parameters of their respective mediums. His ongoing inquiry into technology's role in image-making, and how those mediations infiltrate and shape collective memory, has resulted in works that are at once specific in their historical and cultural references and broadly accessible. Multichannel video installations have been an integral part of Douglas's practice since the early 1990s, allowing for the simultaneous presentation of overlapping narratives or vantage points.

For his solo presentation at the 2022 Venice Biennale representing Canada, Douglas created *ISDN* and four photographs that collectively consider the reverberations of the events of 2011—a year that saw pervasive global unrest, including Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, and uprisings in numerous other cities, including London and Douglas's native Vancouver. Presented across two venues—*ISDN* was on

view at the Magazzini del Sale No. 5, a sixteenth-century salt warehouse on Dorsoduro, and the photographs were exhibited at the Canada Pavilion in the Giardini—this exhibition subtly pointed to the ways in which these events informed what came after them and how we are still feeling their impact over a decade on. This project reflects Douglas’s broader interest in capturing the interpersonal dynamics that arise in such moments of societal fracture—moments, as he notes, “when history could have gone one way or another.”¹

In the two-channel video installation *ISDN*, the viewer finds themselves in the middle of a call-and-response jam session that unfolds across continents, literally positioned between the two screens. Set in 2011, the work pairs MCs in improvised studios, one in London and the other in Cairo, who trade free-styled verses, transmitted between them on ISDN (Integrated Service Digital Network) lines, a technology that has become largely disused as it has been replaced by faster broadband and fiber optic connections. In placing rappers in these two cities in dialogue, Douglas juxtaposes two musical styles that emerged nearly simultaneously in the early 2000s—UK Grime and Mahraganat (or, “festivals”) in Egypt—which, as the artist notes, in 2011, “would literally become the soundtrack for youthful revolt.”² While these genres do share sonic resemblances, both emerging from hip-hop and making use of a range of nontraditional sampled effects, it is primarily their status as a form of social critique that began on the margins and eventually gained wider attention that inspired Douglas to bring them together.

While the London rappers, TrueMendous and Lady Sanity, drop their verses in English, Yousef Joker and Raptor in Cairo respond in Arabic, with subtitles in the opposite language appearing below each. Though their sound is upbeat, both pairs foreground systemic social ills in their verses, directly raising questions of race and class as related to their own particular situations. Layers of sound underneath the vocals rotate in an ever-changing configuration, the permutations of which would take several days to fully experience. Ultimately, as Douglas notes, though the lyrics may cover weighty themes, this form of artistic expression holds “total optimism and joy.” He continues, “the idea of having this endless music is to say that when you do have this cross-fertilization between cultures, the possibilities are endless.”³

The video presentation is complemented by five photographs (the four exhibited in Venice plus an additional, previously realized related work) that recreate specific moments from 2011 in four global cities: London, New York, Tunis, and Vancouver. To create these panoramic mises-en-scènes, Douglas digitally stitched together imagery, utilizing a variety of sources to reconstruct the events as accurately as possible. Though the COVID-19 pandemic prohibited him from traveling, he hired photographers to take location shots from a wide variety of angles and vantage points, from which he painstakingly removed the traces of any elements that did not exist in 2011, such as graffiti or even buildings constructed in the interim. Douglas then staged these scenes locally, using an empty hockey arena as a set, where he photographed dozens of actors in period dress in small groups, and then assiduously inserted them into the image using digital editing technologies. Paradoxically, despite his fealty to the specific circumstances, the resulting images are inherently synthetic, conveying an uncanny sense of the hyperreal while evincing too much information for the naked eye to accommodate.

¹ Scott Watson, Diana Thater, Carol J. Clover, and Stan Douglas, eds., *Stan Douglas* (London: Phaidon, 1998), p. 29.

² Stan Douglas, cited in Reid Shier, “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, p. 48.

³ Stan Douglas in conversation with the gallery, March 15, 2022.

Following its debut at the Venice Biennale, the exhibition *Stan Douglas: 2011 ≠ 1848* is currently traveling around Canada with stops at The Polygon Gallery, Vancouver (Fall 2022); Remai Modern, Saskatoon (February–April 2023); and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (September 2023–August 2024). An edition of *ISDN* is jointly held in the collections of Remai Modern and the National Gallery of Canada.

Stan Douglas was born in 1960 in Vancouver. He studied at Emily Carr College of Art in Vancouver in the early 1980s.

In 2021, the artist's permanent public commission, *Penn Station's Half Century* was unveiled in the Moynihan Train Hall, Penn Station, New York. This body of work, commissioned by Empire State Development in partnership with Public Art Fund on the occasion of the dedication of New York City's new Moynihan Train Hall, is composed of nine vignettes arranged into four thematic panels which explore the rich history of Penn Station.

At the DAS MINSK Kunsthau in Potsdam, Germany, *Stan Douglas: Potsdamer Schrebergärten* is currently on view. The solo presentation *Stan Douglas: Revealing Narratives* was on view at the Phi Foundation, Montreal, in 2022, and later traveled to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax. Douglas's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent institutions worldwide since the 1980s, including the Julia Stoschek Collection, Berlin (2019-2020); Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) (2016); Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg (2016); WIELS Centre d'Art Contemporain, Brussels (2015); and Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon (2015). In 2013, a major survey of the artist's work, *Stan Douglas: Photographs 2008–2013*, was presented at Carré d'Art – Musée d'Art Contemporain in Nîmes, France. It traveled as *Stan Douglas: Mise en scène* through 2015 to Haus der Kunst, Munich, followed by Nikolaj Kunsthall, Copenhagen, and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.

Other major solo presentations of the artist's work include those held at The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (2014); Minneapolis Institute of Arts (2012); Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (2007); The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2005); Serpentine Gallery, London (2002); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (1994); and Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (1987).

The artist's work was featured in the Venice Biennale in 1990, 2001, 2005, and 2019, and in documenta in 1992, 1997, and 2002. At the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019, Douglas debuted his video installation *Doppelgänger* and also presented a selection of photographs from his 2017 series *Blackout*. The artist was selected to represent Canada at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022.

Douglas's first multimedia theater production, *Helen Lawrence*, debuted at The Arts Club Theatre Company, Vancouver, in March 2014 and has subsequently been hosted by the Münchner Kammerspiele, Munich; Edinburgh International Festival; Canadian Stage, Toronto; Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York; deSingel, Antwerp; and Center for the Art of Performance, University of California, Los Angeles (co-organized by Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

Douglas has been the recipient of notable awards, including the Audain Prize for Visual Art (2019); the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography (2016); the third annual Scotiabank Photography Award (2013); and the Infinity Award from the International Center of Photography, New

York (2012). In 2021 Douglas was knighted a Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture.

Work by the artist is held in major museum collections, including the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate, London; Vancouver Art Gallery; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Douglas lives and works in Vancouver and Los Angeles.

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