

Press release
November 2019

Douglas Gordon

November 2 to December 15, 2019
39 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012
Opening on Friday, November 1, 6 to 8 pm

Eva Presenhuber is pleased to announce its fifth solo exhibition by the Scottish artist Douglas Gordon.

Douglas Gordon is known for his interest in cinema and images taken from collective memory and everyday culture. His work encompasses film, performance, sculptural installation, and conceptual text. The exhibition is centered on the ongoing installation *Happy Birthday To Me...*, and features two film installations *Video Diptych* and *Sharpening Fantasy*, alongside text works and burned Andy Warhol skull posters.

In the central installation, viewers find themselves confronted by human skull replicas randomly strewn in a corner. The gallery walls and carpet are red, the light penetrating the red gel-covered windows intensifies the sacred atmosphere evoked by the skulls. Each skull represents one year of the artist's life; engraved into each skull are five-pointed stars representing his age, one star for each year. The stars recall the star-shaped tonsure on the back of Marcel Duchamp's head in a photograph by Man Ray.

Preoccupied with collective and individual memory, pop culture, and history, *Happy Birthday To Me...* encapsulates the artist's oeuvre as well as his life, juxtaposing immortality and transience. The engraved stars not only represent Gordon's age but also allude to movie stars, as do the burned Andy Warhol skull posters and earlier works in which Gordon distorted the faces of stars by slowing-down or otherwise manipulating movies, thereby giving a new dimension to collective memory. In Gordon's work, portraits always serve as a mirror of the viewer who identifies with the portrayed. Elsewhere, Gordon has allowed the viewer to step behind the screen and perceive its verso as a mirror image.

The burned Andy Warhol skull posters highlight the artist's ambivalent relationship to pop art and, in particular, to Andy Warhol. While the latter's immortal icons leave no room for the dark side of human existence, Gordon burns holes into the shiny surface. The replica skulls in *Video Diptych* floating in the flooded garden of the Lambert Collection in Montfavet resemble Monet's *Water Lilies*. This is Gordon's way of working through the genre *memento mori*.

The video installation *Sharpening Fantasy* shows knife grinders in Tangier carrying out the movements needed to sharpen knives and scissors but without an object to work on. The film alludes to muscle memory, i.e. to the way movements can bear and evoke memories. The images are accompanied by the sound of grinding and other background noises from a working day in Tangier. *Sharpening Fantasy* blurs the boundaries between vision, imagination, and memory. The work opens a sometimes contradictory space of mythical logic.

By presenting different, yet related works in a spatial order that creates its own dynamic, the show becomes an installation in and of itself. As in *Happy Birthday To Me...* viewers find themselves not merely in front of a work but rather immersed in art. Their memories are evoked, it is as if they were to find themselves in their own film. The installation's title ironically points to a celebration of life, as the viewer is let into *memento mori*, juxtaposing the mortality of human life and the immortality of art. Each year the artist comes closer to his death, and yet his oeuvre will continue to exist beyond it.

EVA PRESENHUBER

Douglas Gordon, born in 1966 in Glasgow, Scotland, is one of the most influential video artists working today. His œuvre has been exhibited globally, in major solo exhibitions at institutions including Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (1999); Tate Liverpool, Liverpool (2000); MOCA, Los Angeles, CA (2001 and 2012); Hayward Gallery, London (2002); National Galleries Scotland, Edinburgh (2006); Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2006); Tate Britain, London (2010); Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv (2013); Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (2014); Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (2017); and Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen K20, Duesseldorf (2018). A major survey exhibition is currently on view at ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus (until February 15, 2020). Gordon's film works have been invited to the Festival de Cannes; Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF); Venice Film Festival; Edinburgh International Film Festival; BFI London Film Festival; Festival del Film Locarno; New York Film Festival, among many others. Gordon received the 1996 Turner Prize. In 2017, he presented the film piece *I had nowhere to go* at Documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel.

Tillmann Severin

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