

# Stan Douglas. Past Imperfect

Works 1986 – 2007

**Staatsgalerie Stuttgart**  
**Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart**

15 September 2007 – 6 January 2008

Press Conference: 13 September 2007, 11 am

Opening: 14 September 2007

Artist's Talk: 15 September, 1 pm

**A Joint Project by**

Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

**Idea and Concept**

Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

**Exhibition Curators**

Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

**In Collaboration with**

Sean Rainbird, Gudrun Inboden



STAATSGALERIE STUTTGART

## Introduction

From September 15, 2007 to January 6, 2008, the **Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and the Württembergischer Kunstverein** are presenting the **first comprehensive show** of Canadian artist Stan Douglas's work, with fourteen video and film installations as well as more than 120 photographs.

Stan Douglas, who was born in Vancouver in 1960, counts among the most important contemporary artists. He has taken part in the Documenta (1992, 1997, 2002) and the Venice Biennale (1990, 2001, 2005) three times and has also been represented at numerous other biennials. Major exhibition venues have devoted solo shows to him. However, it is in Stuttgart that **his key works of the past twenty years will be presented for the first time in a single exhibition**. Being held at two locations, the exhibition does not follow a chronological order but rather takes up different possible interpretations of this complex oeuvre.

As no other artist, Douglas has expanded the experiential spaces of cinema, television, and the museum, both sensorially and intellectually. Time, the key material of his works in many respects, is detached from its familiar order to become a *Past Imperfect*: an imperfect process of that which has always been the past.

Referring back to the intellectual, cultural, and ideological traditions of modernism, his works constitute a critical revision of Western history and contemporary times. It is the failure of modern utopias around which his works repeatedly revolve. All of his film and video installations are preceded by an analysis of a certain place—Potsdam, British Columbia, Havana, Detroit—on whose history Douglas reflects in reference to literary, filmic, or musical sources: for example, E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, the *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Karl Marx's *Capital*, Samuel Beckett's *Film*, or Arnold Schönberg's *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene*. Often, Douglas changes the gender and the skin color of the protagonists that he borrows. Seemingly irreconcilable contexts are brought into relation and, thanks to the unique way in which Douglas appropriates audiovisual media, result in an open, ambiguous narrative.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a **short guide** (ca. 100 pages) as well as by a comprehensive **catalogue** (publishing date: October 2007, 224 pages) published by Hatje Cantz.

## Works

Like **Win, Place or Show** (1998), **Journey into Fear** (2001), **Suspiria** (2002), and **Inconsolable Memories** (2005), Stan Douglas's two most recent video installations—**Klatsassin** (2006) and **Vidéo** (2007)—count among the “recombinant narratives,” as Douglas terms his method. Here, a computer system constantly rearranges the montage of the various film and sound sequences of one and the same work before the viewer's eyes. These works have no beginning or end, nor will the viewer ever see (or hear) the same version repeated as it can take several hours, weeks, or months before a given combination is repeated. The viewer is instead presented with ever new variations of a narrative, ever changing combinations of its fragments. Douglas thus offers an open view of the past and the present, whose possible truths are continually brought into play anew.

**Vidéo** (2007) is a silent video shot in color that combines the oppressive camera work of Beckett's film *Film* with the equally disturbing narrative from Kafka's novel *The Trial*—reading both in the context of current migration issues. The camera incessantly follows a woman through gloomy rooms and a modern high-rise estate. Justice and obscure agents seem to have conspired against her.

In **Klatsassin** (2007), justice and criminology are likewise challenged as reliable instances for the establishment of the truth. Rather, truth becomes a question of interpretation. In the exaggerated style of a Western set in western Canada in the gold rush era, five different time periods framing a murder case are hopelessly entangled, as are the different versions of how the murder may have occurred.

Similarly, Douglas reflects in a number of other works on the consequences of the arrival of European empires in the “New World.” The time frame he covers ranges from early colonialization (**Nu•tka•**, 1996) to the rise and fall of industrialization (**Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe: Ruskin B.C.**, 1993) to the neoliberal present (**Journey into Fear**, 2001).

Douglas tells this story of unbridled, globally expanding capitalism from the vantage point of those ghosts and revenants that—as the reverse side of the repression of all that is “strange”—populate Western culture, from the Gothic novel to the horror film. The fact that Detroit, the once prospering metropolis of the U.S. automobile industry, has come to resemble a “ghost town” is taken literally in **Le Détroit** (1999). By example of Cuba, in turn, he focuses on the failure of Communist utopias (**Inconsolable Memories**, 2005).

Stan Douglas's works are pervaded with motives of the uncanny. His figures haunt between the different times, places, and stories interlaced by Douglas. As such, E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Sandmann* reappears in the abandoned Ufa-Studios in Potsdam-Babelsberg, emerging between the periods of the *Potsdamer Schrebergärten* before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall (**Der Sandmann**, 1995). In Douglas's version, the white protagonist of this Gothic narrative, which is said to have prompted Freud's theory of the uncanny, is a black narrator whose body and voice disengage and drift apart.

In the video installation **Nu·tka·** (1996), the ghostly image—interlocked picture line by picture line—of the idyllic landscape of Nootka Sound (British Columbia) appears as if a double afterimage. Two voices, heard simultaneously from the off, alternately speaking separately or together, induce an intermingling of the emergence of the “New World,” the suppression of the “strange,” and the ghosts of Gothic literature.

**Suspiria** (2002–2003), in turn, interlaces figures and scenarios drawn from the Brothers Grimm, whose fairy tales were to once popularize the idea of the German Nation-State, with Marx’s “specters” of Communism, which were to unify Europe. Furthermore, Douglas makes reference to Dario Argento’s 1977 horror film of the same name by deconstructing the North American color television standard NTSC, whose shadows haunt the labyrinthine corridors of Kassel’s Herkules Oktagon.

In **Le Détroit** (1999), the “haunted castle”—in this case, in its modern variant of a public apartment block—is located in a place that plainly represents the end of both the Industrial Age and the American Dream: Detroit. The plot of **Le Détroit** is set in “Herman Gardens,” a derelict residential district of Detroit, which had previously been inhabited by a predominantly black population. The protagonist, a young black woman, oscillates between her car and the eerie house, discovering, backtracking, and leaving traces in an endless circle.

Obsolete media and their aesthetics are repeatedly explored by Douglas in his works, for irrevocably lost time—of such strong interest to Douglas—reverberates in their images. Thus for **Overture** (1986), for example, he uses footage of a train journey through the Rocky Mountains shot between 1899 and 1901. **Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe: Ruskin B.C.** (1993) is a silent black-and-white film, produced by Douglas for Arnold Schönberg’s score *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene* (1930). The film projection is accompanied in the installation by a computer-controlled piano playing an adaptation of *Begleitmusik*. Again, obsolete television formats are taken up by Douglas in works such as **Hors-champs** (1992), **Monodramas** (1991), **Evening** (1994), or **Win, Place or Show** (1998).

The artist’s **photo series**, always created in the context of his film and video productions, investigate the urban or country scenes to which the cinematic works refer. They show the deserted ruins of once thriving business centers, imposing landscapes marked by industrialization, or architectures that—designed as a promise of modern utopias—now only bear witness to the desolate condition of abandoned suburbs. The fictitious spaces of Douglas’s works—the film studio sets with their reconstructions of *Schrebergärten* (allotment gardens), ship cabins, or apartments—are objects of his photographs as well.

With his ensembles of audiovisual installations, his set and location photographs, Douglas always approaches a certain social phenomenon from multiple, highly different artistic perspectives. His aim is not to get to the heart of the matter but rather to elaborate by means of detours, loops, and ramifications, creating unexpected and surprising perspectives on reality in the process.

## Information

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Works 1986 – 2007

### **15 September 2007 – 6 January 2008**

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### **In Collaboration with**

Sean Rainbird, Gudrun Inboden

### **Press Conference**

Thursday, 13 September, 11 am

Beginning venue: Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

### **Opening**

Friday, 14 September 2007

6 pm: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

8 pm: Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

### **Artist's Talk**

Saturday, 15 September 2007, 1 pm

Venue: Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

### **Guided Tours with the Curators**

Saturday, 6 October 2007

Saturday, 17 November 2007

Saturday, 15 December 2007

Sunday, 6 January 2008

Tour begin: 3 pm at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

## Hours

### **Staatsgalerie Stuttgart**

Tue, Wed, Fri-Sun: 10 am - 6 pm

Thu: 10 am - 9 pm

### **Württembergischer Kunstverein**

Extended hours !!!

Tue, Fri-Sun: 11 am - 6 pm

Wed + Thu: 11 am - 9 pm

## Addresses

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[www.staatsgalerie.de](http://www.staatsgalerie.de)

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### Press Releases and Images

[www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/press](http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/press)  
or [www.staatsgalerie.de/presseverteiler](http://www.staatsgalerie.de/presseverteiler)

## Catalogue

### Stan Douglas – Past Imperfect. Works 1986 – 2007

Edited by Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler  
on behalf of the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart and the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.  
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## Lenders

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Sammlung Ingvild Goetz, Munich  
Sammlung Ringier, Zurich

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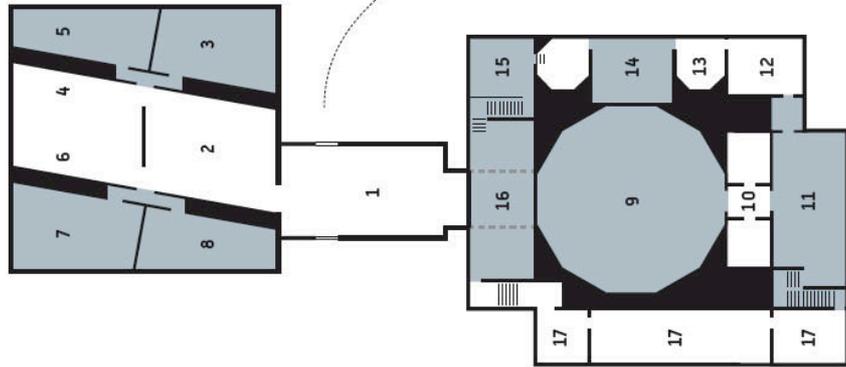
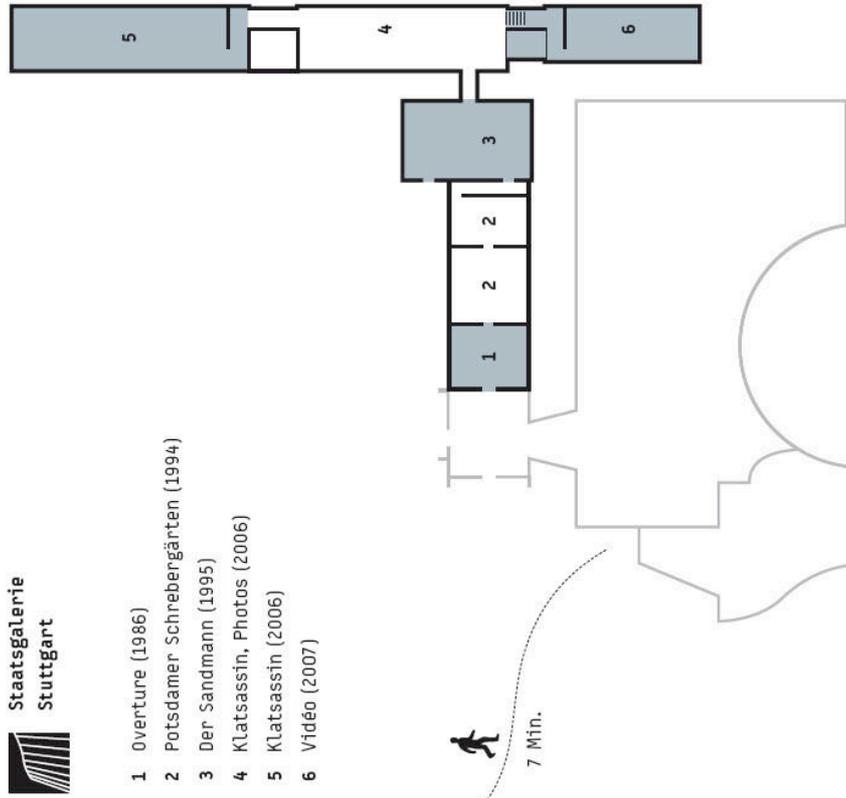
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## Communication Partners

Art Info, [Betacity.de](http://Betacity.de)

## Sponsor

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- 1 Monodramas (1991)
- 2 Journey into Fear, Photos (2001)
- 3 Journey into Fear (2001)
- 4 Nootka Sound (1996)
- 5 Nu•tka• (1996)
- 6 Strathcona (1998)
- 7 Win, Place or Show (1998)
- 8 Evening (1994)
- 9 Le Détroit (1999)
- 10 Detroit Photos (1998-99)
- 11 Pursuit, Fear, Catastrophe:  
Ruskin B.C. (1993)
- 12 Ruskin Photos (1993)
- 13 Suspiria Photos (2002)
- 14 Suspiria (2003)
- 15 Hors-champs (1992)
- 16 Inconsolable Memories (2005)
- 17 Cuba Photographs (2004-05)