

## UC San Diego And The Museum Of Contemporary Art San Diego Select Distinguished Artist Doug Aitken As 2004 Russell Lecturer

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The University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD) have selected internationally acclaimed artist Doug Aitken as the 2004 UCSD/MCASD Russell Lecturer. Aitken will speak at MCASD at 7:00 p.m. on April 29, and will conduct one-on-one studio visits with UCSD graduate students. Aitken will also participate in a round table discussion at UCSD on April 30th.

Steve Fagin, chair of the department of visual arts and Toby Kamps of MCASD made the selection to re-launch the Russell Lecture that was established in 1980. "I am so pleased to extend this honor to Doug Aitken," said Fagin, "and to support the work of such an innovative artist."

"Using architectural elements and projected video," says Kamps, "Aitken creates installation environments in which the experience of moving images, sound, and space are radically new and engulfing. The Russell Lecture allows us to highlight his multi-dimensional work and to continue to foster the appreciation of pioneering contemporary artists."

"Time, perception, memory and an ambiguous, frequently ambivalent evocation of interior life: these are all essential aspects of Mr. Aitken's most recent work, just as they have been throughout the decade-long career in which this California native has become one of his generation's most celebrated artists" says Jeffrey Kastner in a recent review in The New York Times.

Aitken, part of a new era of artists who are inventing new ways to present film and video works, actively engages the viewer allowing them to explore the work rather than simply watching it. His goal is to create a work that is not an installation or a film or a sculpture, but instead is a cradle that holds time.

Of his hypnotic multipart installations, Aitken says, "Film can move into a really open space and represent things in a way that is closer to how the mind works. When I look at a day's experiences, I don't see it as a linear time signature. I see it as a random series of fractals." Aitken's art, as vivid and elusive as a dream, occupies a space he describes as "a twilight of perception where ideas and iconography flicker and reinvent themselves."

Aitken originally focused his work on landscapes whose beauty hid a darker edge - Jonestown, Guyana, the site of a mass suicide by members of the People's Temple; Namibia, Africa, the site of a 75,000 square-foot diamond mine that has been closed off to the world since 1908; the Indian film industry; and vacant urban environments.

In 1998, Aitken hit the road and lived nomadically for two years. It was during this time that he created some of his most memorable works, such as *eraser*. A piece about reductive transformation, *eraser* was filmed on the island of Montserrat (an island devastated by the 1995 eruption of the Soufriere Hills volcano). The film covers a course running seven miles from the lush northern jungles through the signs of abandoned civilizations and on to what was the modern city of Plymouth, which is now covered in a thick layer of ash. The piece finally dissolves into the cloudbanks that hover around the top of the volcano.

More recently Aitken has turned his attention to the desolation of the American urban landscape, equating it with the blur of information that is hallmark of the digital age. Aitken describes *electric earth*, which won the International Prize at the 1999 Venice Biennale and was featured in the 2000 Whitney Biennial, as a "piece about a solitary individual navigating a nocturnal, automated landscape of speed and constant acceleration. At times the traveler struggles with it, other times he is in harmony with it."

In addition to these multi dimensional works, Aitken makes photographs and produces artist books. Most recently Aitken, along with author Dean Kuipers, produced *I Am A Bullet: Scenes From An Accelerating Culture* (Crown, 2000).

Featured in international exhibitions, Aitken's work has been exhibited at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Tate Gallery in Liverpool, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne and in numerous galleries in Europe, Japan, Australia, and Mexico. In the United States his work has been exhibited at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia; the Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Berkeley Art Museum and Dallas Museum of Art. In addition to the International Prize at the 1999 Venice Biennale, Aitken is also the recipient of the Aldrich Award from the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, Ct. Aitken has been represented by 303 Gallery in New York since 1994.

The Russell Lecture was first introduced in 1980 with the support from the Russell Foundation. A long-time supporter of both the university and the museum, Elizabeth W. Russell was the first docent at MCASD and established the Russell Endowment Fund for the acquisition of works of art for the museum's collection. The Russell Lecture fosters the appreciation and study of the modern visual arts and the creativity of young artists. Former recipients include UCSD Faculty Norman Bryson, as well as John Baldessari, Ann Hamilton, Vitaly Komar, Trihn T. Min-ha and Andrew Ross.

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Since its founding in 1959, **University of California, San Diego** has rapidly risen to its status as one of the nation's premier institutions for higher education and attracts scholars seeking a fresh, next-generation approach to education, research and service. The campus supports close to 23,000 students and 21,000 employees, receives the sixth highest amount of federal R&D funding in the nation -- \$627 million last year. UCSD faculty and graduate programs are ranked by the National Research Council as tenth best in the nation; the campus also has one of the nation's highest percentages of faculty elected to the prestigious national academies.

**The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego**, founded in 1941, is a member-supported, private non-profit organization dedicated to the collection, exhibition, and interpretation of contemporary art. MCASD, accredited by the American Association of Museums, is one museum with two locations: in La Jolla and downtown San Diego. All programs and activities are made possible by generous contributions from many individuals, companies, foundations, and government agencies.

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