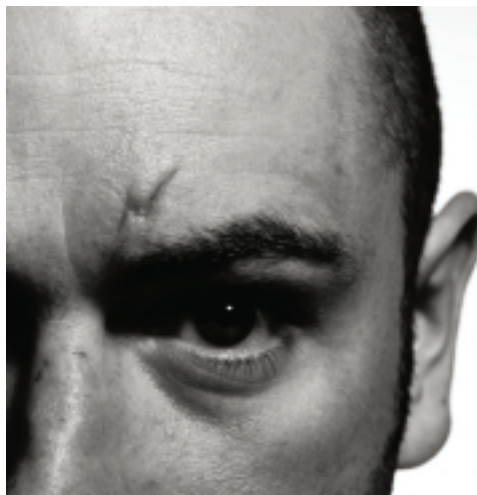


never 2001
inkjet print on
watercolour paper
27 x 32 cm
Courtesy Lisson Gallery,
London



Biography

Douglas Gordon was born in Glasgow in 1966. He studied at Glasgow School of Art (1984–88) and the Slade School of Art, London (1988–90). He has had numerous one-person exhibitions, including most recently at Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris (2000), Tate Liverpool (2000), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2001) and Hayward Gallery, London (2002–03). He has exhibited at the Lisson Gallery, London, since 1994 and the Gagosian Gallery, New York, since 1999. In 1996, he won the Turner Prize and the following year he was awarded the Premio 2000 at the Venice Biennale. He won the Hugo Boss Prize in 1998. He lives and works in New York and Glasgow.

Further reading

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Christine van Assche, Raymond Bellour, Jeremy Millar, Pavel Büchler, 1999, *Douglas Gordon*, Centro Cultural de Belém, exhibition catalogue.
David Sylvester, Michael Darling, Russell Ferguson, Francis McKee, Nancy Spector, 2001, *Douglas Gordon*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, exhibition catalogue.
2002, *Douglas Gordon: what have I done*, Hayward Gallery Publishing, London, artists' book.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Lisson Gallery for their assistance in the organization of this exhibition and to the Gagosian Gallery, New York. We are also grateful to Fiona Bradley, co-curator of the recent Hayward exhibition, *Douglas Gordon: what have I done*, for her thoughtful text.

Douglas Gordon *Croque Mort*

Croque Mort is part of the Arts Council Collection, Hayward Gallery, London.

The exhibition was launched at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, where it was shown from 5 April to 17 May 2003, before touring the UK.

Exhibition organized by Ann Jones, with Jill Constantine, Christie Coutin, Isabel Finch, Henrike Ingenthron, Frances Munk and Richard Nesham.

Education material prepared by Cathy Haynes and Helen Luckett.

Cover: Douglas Gordon, *Croque Mort*, 2000 (installation shot), 6 of 7 C-type photographs; each 91 x 134.5 cm or 134.5 x 91 cm. Arts Council Collection
Photo: Robert McKeever; courtesy Gagosian Gallery

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Artworks by Douglas Gordon © the artist 2003

Designed by the Royal Festival Hall and Hayward Gallery Design Studio
Printed by Sterling Press

ISBN 1 85332 223 4

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Spotlight

Douglas Gordon *Croque Mort*



Douglas Gordon: *Croque Mort*

Douglas Gordon came to prominence in the mid-1990s as part of the generation of internationally successful British artists who have become known as the 'YBAs' or Young British Artists. Born and brought up in Scotland, Gordon trained at the Glasgow School of Art from 1984 to 1988, and then at the Slade School of Art in London. In Glasgow, he studied in the Environmental Art Department, which stressed an artwork's making and presentation as important parts of its meaning. This had an important influence on the development of the artist's work, and remains an intrinsic part of his approach.

Gordon's reputation is based on his large film installations, which use footage from classic Hollywood movies. *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) remains his best-known work. In it, the artist re-presents Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho* on a huge screen suspended over the heads of gallery visitors. The screen is positioned in the middle of the available space so that it can be viewed from both sides. The film is unaltered, except that it is shown using a device that slows it down so that the film takes twenty-four hours to run, each frame appearing on the screen for about two seconds. Intriguing and strangely compelling, the work introduces many of the major themes in the artist's work: the importance of recognition and repetition, time and memory, fact and fiction, darkness and light.

Croque Mort, 2000
1 of 7 C-type photographs
91 x 134.5 cm
Arts Council Collection



Although best known for film, Douglas Gordon has worked in a variety of media throughout his career, preferring to find the right vehicle for a particular idea rather than confining himself to one way of working. *Croque Mort* (2000) is a series of seven photographs, hung as a single installation. The artist specifies the colour of the walls – a blood red, heavily suggestive of the interior of the body – and the height at which the photographs must be hung. The height is unusually low, so that the images have a relationship with the body of the viewer, rather than the head.

The photographs show several views of a baby grabbing at and biting her toes. The use of a baby may at first seem incongruous within the work of Douglas Gordon, an artist known for the bleakness rather than the sentimentality of his subjects. However, the way in which *Croque Mort* scrutinizes the image of the baby renders it not simply unsentimental, but also unsettling, and an encounter with the photographs in the context the artist has made for them elicits the kind of ambivalent response that viewers familiar with the artist's work will recognize.

Croque Mort, 2000
2 of 7 C-type photographs
each 134.5 x 91 cm
Arts Council Collection



Croque Mort begins with something obvious – the fact that babies can, and do, put their feet in their mouths. Gordon twists this common fact of innocent self-exploration, cropping his photographs so that they focus exclusively on the body parts in question, and enlarging them over life-size. The result is unnerving, and even threatening. A situation with which the viewer may have expected to feel comfortable suddenly becomes something very different.

Gordon achieves something similar using his own body in the earlier work *Blue* (1998). A single-screen video work, *Blue* shows only the artist's hands moving idly together. However, the way in which his hands move leaves a shockingly pornographic impression in the mind of the viewer. Unlike the still photographs of *Croque Mort*, this work uses time to first engage and then disturb the viewer, the imagery gathering momentum as the video plays. Another earlier work achieves the same effect using still photography: *Three Inches (Black)* (1997) is, like *Croque Mort*, a photographic series that unfolds over space rather than time, and one that also uses a body other than the artist's to destabilize a given situation. The images show a man's hand, his index finger tattooed completely black. Photographed against a tape measure, the finger is just under eight centimetres long – three inches. Its tattoo makes it sinister, unnatural; the sense of mutilation it engenders completely out of proportion to the actual process to which its owner has submitted.

Arranged around a room, there seems to be a story to the photographs, and indeed the artist has linked their title to an urban myth circulating around Glasgow at the

Blue, 1998 (still)
DVD on monitor (colour)
Private Collection, New York



time of his childhood. According to the tale, the police would confiscate any sharp object more than three inches long, as this distance corresponds to the distance necessary to make a fatal wound in the body; the distance necessary to penetrate the heart.

Installed recently in the Hayward Gallery as part of the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: what have I done*, the photographs of *Three Inches (Black)* were framed in black and hung on black walls to make a complete environment not unlike the red room of *Croque Mort*. Gordon is an artist who thinks architecturally, seeking the right spatial context in which to stage the viewer's encounter with his work. The story behind *Three Inches (Black)* forms part of that context, although it is never spelled out in the space. Rather it sits in the mind – in the specific memory of the artist, of anyone who has similar recollection of that particular time in Glasgow, and of anyone who has read about it in the books that collect and repeat the artist's writings and sayings.

Three Inches (Black), 1997
1 of 11 colour photographs
80.5 x 93.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist
and Yvon Lambert, Paris



The actual images of *Croque Mort* are also complemented by a sequence of secondary images, which may be conjured in the mind of an enlightened or initiated viewer. The work's spatial environment is given an extra charge by its title, which refers to a French term for those who deal with the bodies of the dead – undertakers and gravediggers. Perhaps best translated as 'death eater', the use of the term 'croque mort' still brings to mind an image of those who follow a coffin. It has its roots in the medieval practice of biting the toes of a corpse to check that the person was really dead. Gordon's fascination with this macabre method of verifying death recalls his interest in old medical anecdote and imagery. In his film works *Trigger Finger* (1994), *10ms'* (1994) and *Hysterical* (1994–95) he uses old medical footage as source material, while the installation *30 Seconds Text* (1996) beguiles the viewer with the grisly tale of a doctor in 1905 trying to communicate with the freshly-guillotined head of a condemned man.

The title *Croque Mort* is also a play on words. *Croque*, from the French verb *croquer*, means bite. *Mort* means death or dead person. However, it has the same sound as *mordre*, another word meaning to bite. Ever sensitive to opportunities for ambiguity and linguistic richness,

A Divided Self II, 1996 (still)
DVD on monitor (colour)
Private Collection



Gordon thus insists twice on the activity of biting, and in doing so further shifts the focus of the images from the natural charm of a baby playing with her toes to the more unsettling idea of a body biting itself. The artist has worked before with images of a body turning on itself in a wide range of media. *The Left Hand Doesn't Know What The Right Hand Doesn't Know What...* (1998) is a text work, vinyl lettering applied to a wall, which sets up an imaginary situation involving a body. The conflict embedded in the situation is perhaps similar to that played out in *A Divided Self I* and *II* (1996), two single-screen video works in which the artist wrestles with himself, one arm naturally hairy, one shaved smooth. These works all appear to double and divide the self.

As in *Croque Mort*, in *A Divided Self I* and *II* the artist concentrates only on particular body parts, excluding all other information in his desire to fragment the body and set it against itself. Although hiding it from view, the artist has stated that he is interested in the mental image of the rest of the body implied by these works, in the imagined contortions necessary to produce the photographed or filmed image. Conjuring up these contortions brings a complicity and an intimacy to the role of the viewer, intensified in the case of *Croque Mort* by the presentation of the work. The staging is theatrical yet cosy, the red walls encircling the viewer in an environment of visual warmth within which they may become immersed in the world of the images.

Fiona Bradley

Croque Mort, 2000
1 of 7 C-type photographs
91 x 134.5 cm
Arts Council Collection

