

## Stan Douglas The Secret Agent

Private View 6 – 8pm, Saturday 30 January 2016

Exhibition runs 2 February – 24 March 2016

Victoria Miro, 16 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW



Victoria Miro is delighted to announce 'The Secret Agent', a solo exhibition by the celebrated Canadian artist Stan Douglas featuring the UK premiere of a new multi-screen film installation along with a series of large-scale photographs. Saturated with information, and yet rejecting easily consumable messages, these works place the viewer within the charged atmospheres and ambiguous political and social intricacies of 1970s Portugal and post-war Vancouver respectively.

Filmed on location in Lisbon with a cast of local actors, the feature-length *The Secret Agent*, 2015, restages the plot of Joseph Conrad's novella – a story of espionage, double-crossing and murky political entanglement – within the aftermath of Portugal's 'carnation revolution', which overthrew Europe's oldest dictatorship in April 1974. The period known as PREC (Revolutionary Process Underway) that followed stood in many ways outside dominant constructions of 'history' itself, which at the time ran firmly along geopolitical contours demarcated by the Cold War.

A tension between revolution's brief suspension of apparently unshakeable historical frameworks, and subsequent attempts to appropriate these moments of potential transformation, lies at the heart of *The Secret Agent*. Characteristic of Douglas' sensitivity to the nuanced dynamics of public and private memory in its subtle blending of historical fact, meticulous reconstruction and fictive source material, this immersive six-screen work implies the latent impact of unresolved past moments

on the present, and even on our sense of futurity. Conclusions are withheld from the viewer, however, even as multiple viewpoints tantalisingly suggest the possibility of privileged access to the truths of a complex situation. Somehow, the work's proliferating images instead prompt a sense of disorientation which perhaps echoes the experiences of the film's protagonists as they weather the throes of revolution.

A sense of social transition is equally present in the photographic work that comprises the second half of the exhibition. Where *The Secret Agent* is made in the mould of the classic Hollywood thriller, these works borrow from film noir, a genre that reflected the tough-talking nihilism and veiled anxieties of a generation traumatised by war and which has served as an enduring source of inspiration for Douglas.

The darkly hyperreal quality of these images is the result of digital rendering – a means of image-making foreign to both the naked eye and the camera lens, which departs from logics of documentary accuracy even as it makes possible an almost hallucinatory sharpness of detail. These panoramic mise-en-scènes first appeared in *Helen Lawrence*, a groundbreaking cinematic theatre production that plunged into the seedy underbelly of the immediate postwar period in North America, before what the artist describes as 'the sudden call to order and morality' of peacetime had fully taken hold. Based on archival photographs of a hotel used to house war veterans (*The Second Hotel Vancouver*, 2014), a decades-established squatting community (*Lazy Bay*, 2015), or a lawless neighbourhood populated by the disenfranchised and rife with gambling, bootlegging and prostitution, where black musicians and corrupt politicians partied in the small hours (*Hogan's Alley*, 2014), these works explore the loaded meeting points of the structural and subjective, directly experienced and mediated, specificities of place.

Stan Douglas was born in 1960 in Vancouver, where he continues to live and work. He has recently staged major solo exhibitions at Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon (2015); Wiels Centre d'Art Contemporain, Brussels (2015); Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2015); Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen (2015); The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (2014 – 2015); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2014); Carré d'Art - Musée d'art Contemporain, Nimes (2013-14); Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota (2012); The Power Plant, Toronto (2011); Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (2007); and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2005). In 2012 he received the Infinity Award by the International Center of Photography, New York.

*Image: Stan Douglas The Secret Agent, 2015, Six-channel video projection with sound  
Courtesy the Artist, David Zwirner, New York / London and Victoria Miro, London  
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